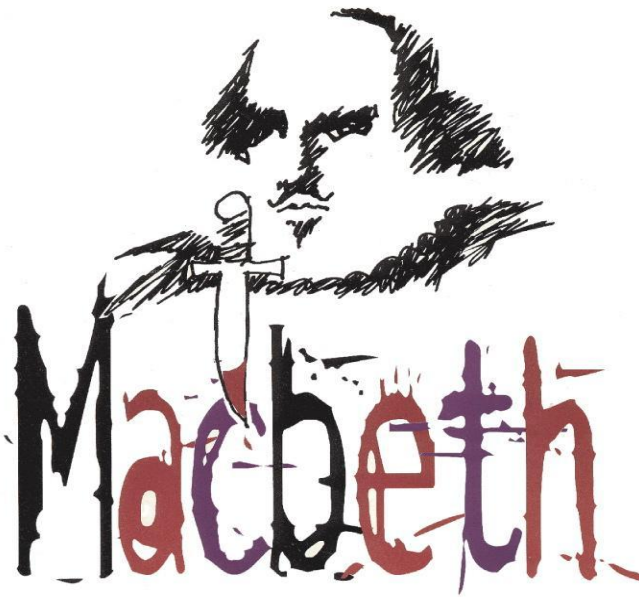




GABLESTAGE AT THE BILTMORE

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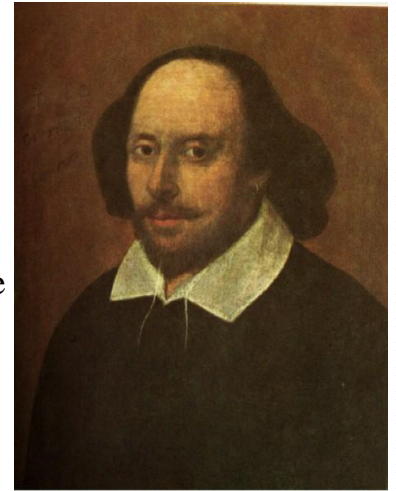
By Willian Shakespeare

John G. Hart

The Life of William Shakespeare

1564 - 1616

William Shakespeare was born in April of 1564. There is no specific date of birth because at that time the only date of importance was the date of baptism, though infants often were baptized when they were three days old. Shakespeare's baptismal date was April 26, 1564.



Shakespeare was born in the village of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. At the time of his birth, the village had a population of 1500 people, and only 200 houses. Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, came from a family of yeomen, and he gained many prestigious positions in the community. Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, came from an ancient family of landed gentry. The whole family was Anglican. The family's financial situation was well off. Not much information is known about Shakespeare's youth, although undoubtedly he was educated in the local school, where he studied Latin and Greek, among other subjects, during a school day that often lasted from dawn to dusk.

Shakespeare's first exposure to the theater probably occurred when he was young. As a child his father probably took him to see plays when traveling troupes of actors came to town, although that was not often.

Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway in 1582, when he was 18; she was 26, eight years his senior. The exact wedding date is uncertain, but the marriage certificate was issued on November 27, 1582. Anne was the daughter of a respected yeoman farmer. William and Anne had their first child, Susanna, in May of 1583. This was followed by the birth of twins, Hamnet and Judith, in January of 1585. Most historians believe that Shakespeare was not often around his family in Stratford after that because historical records show him in London during the following years.

The first written reference to Shakespeare's existence in London occurred in 1592, when Shakespeare was in his late twenties. He seems to have been fairly well established in the theatre by that point, since the reference, written by another playwright, hints of jealousy at Shakespeare's success.

With his two patrons, the Earls of South Hampton and Pembroke, Shakespeare rose quickly in the theater as both an actor and an author. He joined the Lord Chamberlin's Men, an acting company which was protected by the Queen, becoming a shareholder and senior member in 1595. Because of his success in London, he was able to purchase New Place, the largest and most elegant house in his home town of Stratford, when he was in his early thirties (1597).



In addition to his popularity as both an actor and playwright, Shakespeare became joint owner of the famous Globe Theater (*pictured below*) when it opened in 1599. His share of the company's management added heavily to his wealth.

Shakespeare's financial success in the London theatre enabled him to retire and return to his home in Stratford around 1610. He lived there comfortably until his death on April 23, 1616 (it is popularly believed that he died on his birthday). He is buried in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.



Though Shakespeare is most closely associated with the Elizabethan period, his career can be categorized as both Elizabethan and Jacobean, as several works were completed after James I became king in 1603.

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AN APPROXIMATE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

1588-1595

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, First, Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI, Titus Andronicus, King Richard III, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, King Richard II

1596-1599

King John, The Merchant of Venice, First and Second Parts of King Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, King Henry V, Julius Caesar

1600-1605

As You Like It, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure, Othello, All's Well That Ends Well, Timon of Athens, King Lear

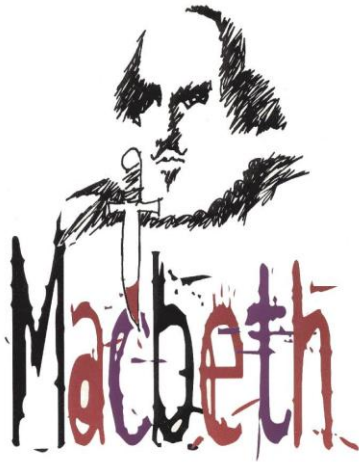
1606-1611

Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Pericles, Coriolanus, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, The Tempest

1613

King Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen

Source: *The Cambridge School Shakespeare*. Ed. Rex Gibson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.



Macbeth is a play that explores the nature of evil, ambition, and the qualities of kingship. The play's pace allows us to become caught up in the series of actions that led from Macbeth the ambitious Thane of Glamis to Macbeth the murderous King of Scotland.

Lady Macbeth is the catalyst in Macbeth's downfall, urging him on to further monstrosities at all times. Lady Macbeth can be seen as the representation of evil, taking Macbeth's qualities: *ambition* (he is striving to carry out his duties to the best of his abilities) and *bloodthirstiness* (he wants to destroy the enemies of the country he loves), and turning them into instruments of wild passion and wickedness.

It is said that evil cannot exist without *will* behind it.

Lady Macbeth is the force which allows Macbeth to act without will. The famous 'dagger' scene (Act II, Scene i) allows us to see the effect of his wife's will upon him. We are unsure whether he speaks out of madness, sleep or mere passion. His inactivity is turned into action in seconds as the image of the phantom dagger - representing his wife's urging hand or the allure of murder itself - makes the theoretical act a reality.

Macbeth is a tragic hero, his 'tragic flaw' being pride, although his susceptibility to the influence of the evil cannot be ignored. Macbeth's flaw leads him to carry out the most heinous of crimes. We know that Macbeth finds the deeds that he commits vile.

When valiant Macbeth dies, beheaded by his enemy Macduff, we feel somehow that one who raised himself so high should not die so low, no matter how much he might have deserved the fate. Of course, this is the essence of successful tragedy.

Shakespeare's skill in this play is in demonstrating that it is how passions are used, rather than the passions themselves, which determine whether they are good or bad.



**LOOK LIKE THE INNOCENT FLOWER,
BUT BE THE SERPENT UNDER IT.**

--LADY MACBETH, ACT I, SCENE V

MACBETH CHARACTERS

The Three Witches	Introduced to us in the opening scene, the Three Witches set Macbeth upon his murderous path. They tell Macbeth that he will be Thane (Lord) of Cawdor and later the King. Later by use of the Three Apparitions, they foretell his doom. Symbolic of both the underworld and the mysticism of the 1500s, they are synonymous with the theme of evil in this play.
Macbeth	The tragic focus of this play. Originally a loyal and honest man, his descent into murder and betrayal is the tale of how ambition can tarnish even the purest of souls. Driven by loyalty to King Duncan, his own "Vaulting ambition," leads to him killing King Duncan to secure his own destiny. The man at the end of play is one we would barely recognize from the loyal Macbeth we meet at the beginning.
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth's wife. Her ambition for Macbeth's future rivals and arguably exceeds that of Macbeth's. She goads Macbeth to kill King Duncan when Macbeth hesitates. Later despite the appearance of calm, she becomes increasingly obsessed with the blood on her hands which no one else can see. A study of the apparent falsehood of denying ones conscience and feelings.
Banquo	Loyal friend of Macbeth. He bares witness to the initial prophecies made by the Three Witches. Though eager to learn his own destiny, Banquo serves as a counterpoint to how one deals with fate. Macbeth kills to reach his. Banquo is content to let destiny carve it's own path. Later killed to preserve Macbeth's status, he reappears as a ghost.
Fleance	Son of Banquo and the first in a line of kings prophesied by the Three Witches. Escaping when his father was killed, Fleance represents a future Macbeth cannot bear; a line of kings following Banquo and not his own sons.
Duncan, King of Scotland	The loyal but naïve, trusting King. At the beginning of the play when Duncan is betrayed by the original Thane of Cawdor, he grants this title upon the loyal Macbeth who secured the King victory in battle against this Thane of Cawdor. Ironically, King Duncan later dies at the sword of the trusted Macbeth, the new Thane of Cawdor. His death sets up the theme of the natural order being disturbed, later alluded to by the Old Man.
Malcolm & Donalbain	The two sons of King Duncan. Upon their father's death, they flee to avoid a similar fate. Donalbain heads to Ireland, whilst Malcolm heads to England where he hopes to build an army to take back the kingdom from the evil Macbeth.
Hecate	A shadowy character of the underworld, she commands and demands the loyalty and respect of the Three Witches. We first meet her when she belittles the Three Witches for helping an ungrateful Macbeth. She later commands them to tell Macbeth his future according to her will, when next the Three Witches and Macbeth meet.
Macduff	Born unnaturally by caesarian section, this nobleman of Scotland restores Malcolm to his rightful place as king. Alluded to by The Second Apparition as an agent of Macbeth's downfall, he loses his wife and children to Macbeth who had them murdered.
Siward	Leader of the English army, some ten thousand strong which defeats Macbeth at the end of the play. He loses his son, Young Siward to Macbeth.
Young Siward	The son of Siward, he dies fighting Macbeth. Being of natural birth, his death at Macbeth's hands strengthens Macbeth's belief of invincibility.
Lennox, Ross, Menteith, Angus, Caithness	Noblemen of Scotland fighting Macbeth.
An Old Man	Though a peripheral character, he is an important one for the play's theme of order. He tells us about the storms in Scotland during Macbeth's reign. This represents nature being disrupted by King Duncan's untimely. An important character to the theme that <i>Macbeth</i> is an example of royalist propaganda.

PLOT SUMMARY

ACT I.

THE THREE WITCHES' PROPHECY



Also known as "The Scottish play", Shakespeare's dark, grim tragedy begins with Three Witches in Scotland deciding to meet again after a battle being fought nearby. Thunder, storms and the desolate heath paint a gloomy picture, setting the tone of this play and defining an imagery of nature at war with itself, a recurring theme in this play...

Macbeth is introduced as the brave man who led King Duncan's forces to victory against the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, Macdonwald and The King of Norway, in a battle that could have gone either way were it not for Macbeth's leadership. We learn that Macbeth killed Macdonwald himself in battle. King Duncan, overjoyed, decides to make Macbeth his new Thane of Cawdor. The previous Thane of Cawdor will be executed.

The Three Witches establish their malicious nature before meeting Macbeth and Banquo. The Three Witches tell Macbeth that he will be "Thane of Glamis!", "Thane of Cawdor!" and "king hereafter" or become the King of Scotland.

Banquo learns that his descendants shall be kings. Banquo is suspicious of the Three Witches, remembering that they often trick men. Macbeth initially agrees but when Ross and Angus tell him he has been made the new Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth in a very important aside (soliloquy), remarks, "Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor: / The greatest is behind."

Macbeth starts thinking of killing King Duncan to make prophecy fact but later hopes fate alone will spare him the need to kill...

King Duncan announces that his son, Malcolm will be the new Prince of Cumberland. Macbeth sees Malcolm as a threat to what he now takes seriously as his destiny to be king, a major turning point in Macbeth's changing morality. Macbeth makes this clear by famously asking in an aside (private speech) for the stars to hide their fires lest they reveal his dark and deadly purpose or intention to kill King Duncan.

Lady Macbeth learns by letter from Macbeth of the Three Witches' prophecies for her husband, eagerly embracing them as fact. Fearing Macbeth is too compassionate and weak-willed to do what needs to be done (killing King Duncan), she famously asks the gods to remove from her all signs of compassion and femininity, replacing these with cold remorseless ruthlessness.

A guilt-ridden Macbeth wrestles with his conscience, certain that he should not kill King Duncan yet guiltily having to remind himself of all the reasons why it would be wrong. Macbeth decides against murdering his King but Lady Macbeth belittles him for not being able to murder, threatening to take away her love for him if he does not. This threat wins Macbeth over and Lady Macbeth outlines her plan to kill King Duncan in his sleep while he is a guest at their castle.

ACT II.



A NEW KING FOR SCOTLAND

Banquo and son Fleance arrive at Macbeth's castle. Banquo is troubled by the Three Witches' prophecy and tells Macbeth this. Macbeth pretends not to take the Three Witches seriously.

Learning from Banquo that King Duncan is asleep, Macbeth, alone, follows an imaginary dagger to King Duncan's bedchamber where he will kill him in his sleep... Lady Macbeth has drugged King Duncan's guards, allowing Macbeth to kill King Duncan unchallenged.

Lady Macbeth was to have killed the King but his resemblance to her late father means Macbeth does the deed instead. A bell frightens Lady Macbeth and Macbeth too is nervous, but he announces that he did indeed kill King Duncan.

Macbeth recounts that the two guards cried out "Murder!" and later "God bless us!", Lady Macbeth telling her husband not to fret over such things and the fact that his conscience prevented him from saying "Amen," as one of the guards had done...

Lady Macbeth tells her husband a little water will wash away their guilt and the two retire to their bedroom when knocking is later heard...

Macduff, Lennox, the source of the knocking in the last scene, arrive at Macbeth's castle. News of King Duncan's death reaches all at Macbeth's castle. Lady Macbeth faints and Macbeth in rage kills the two drunken guards after claiming that they obviously killed their King.

These actions largely free Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from suspicion. King Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain are introduced, both men wisely deciding to flee Macbeth's castle as a precaution against their own murder. Malcolm will head for England, Donalbain for Ireland.

Ross speaks with an Old Man who describes various unnatural acts happening in Scotland, perhaps the single most significant scene for the theme of nature at war with itself, which relates to the idea of a natural order being disturbed by the death of a king, a prevalent theme throughout this play.

We learn that King Duncan's two sons have fled, leaving Macbeth to be crowned the new King of Scotland. Macduff, who later becomes instrumental in Macbeth's downfall, has significantly snubbed Macbeth's coronation at Scone to go to Fife instead. A tone of increasing despair for Scotland begins in this scene...

THE ATTEMPT AND NOT THE DEED
CONFOUNDS US.

-MACBETH. ACT II SCENE 2.

ACT III.

DESIRE WITHOUT CONTENT



Banquo is fearful that the Three Witches' prophecies are becoming true, questioning whether Macbeth played most foully for it, or killed King Duncan to make prophecy, fact.

Meeting with Macbeth, Macbeth continuously asks Banquo of his travel plans and those of his son. Alone, Macbeth fears that Banquo's sons will mean his dynasty will be short-lived; only he will become King of Scotland and not his sons who will be replaced by those of Banquo's lineage.

Macbeth arranges for several Murderers to discreetly kill Banquo and Fleance to ensure his sons and not Banquo's become future kings...

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth speak in private. Macbeth is again plagued by a guilt we thought may have vanished. Lady Macbeth attempts to strengthen Macbeth's resolve.

The Murderers kill Banquo but his son Fleance escapes and survives. The Three Witches' prophecy of Banquo's sons becoming kings has not been thwarted by Macbeth...

Macbeth and a lady are entertaining at their castle. The First Murderer arrives, announcing that Banquo is dead but Fleance has lived. Macbeth immediately realizes the consequences of this (his descendants may not become kings).

Macbeth famously sees Banquo's Ghost at his party, causing Lady Macbeth to finish their party early to prevent further suspicions about Macbeth's sanity and about their role in recent events (King Duncan's death whilst a guest at their castle). Macbeth makes his famous speech about being too covered in blood to stop killing...

Hecate, clearly in a position of command over the Three Witches, scolds her subordinates for helping an unappreciative Macbeth.

Hecate instructs the Three Witches to make preparations for her plan to use illusion and the Three Witches' prophecies against Macbeth. The Three Witches, eager to placate (please) their master, eagerly make preparations, doing as they are told...

We see Lennox and a Lord discuss affairs in their kingdom. We learn from their conversation that an army is being formed in England to fight Macbeth.

WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

--LADY MACBETH, ACT III, SCENE II

ACT IV.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES



A major turning point in the play. Just as the Three Witches prophesied Macbeth's ascendancy to become King in Act I, Scene III, here they prophesies his downfall with the Three Apparitions (visions / ghosts). The first Apparition tells an eager Macbeth that he should fear Macduff, saying "beware Macduff; / Beware the Thane of Fife." The Second Apparition reassures Macbeth that "none of women born / Shall harm Macbeth" and the Third Apparition tells Macbeth he has nothing to fear until "Great Birnam wood" moves to "high Dunsinane hill" near his castle.

Macbeth decides to kill Macduff to protect himself from him and takes the Apparition's words to mean he is safe from all men since they are all born naturally and that only the moving of a nearby forest to his castle, an unlikely event will spell his doom.

Next Macbeth demands to know about Banquo's descendants , learning to his anger that they will still rule Scotland rather than Macbeth's descendants. Macbeth learns that he cannot kill Macduff so instead has his entire family murdered...

Lady Macduff is greeted by Ross, Lady Macduff expressing her anger at being abandoned by Macduff for little reason when in her eyes, Macduff has done nothing requiring him to flee.

Ross leaves and after Lady Macduff tells her son that his father is dead and was a traitor, a Messenger warns Lady Macduff to flee but Macbeth's Murderers succeed in killing Lady Macduff's son. The scene ends with Lady Macduff fleeing for her life...

Malcolm and Macduff discuss how Scotland under Macbeth's rule has been plunged into despair. Malcolm tests Macduff's integrity by describing himself as unfit to rule.

After Malcolm disgusts Macduff with increasingly sordid descriptions of his lust and greed, Macduff tells Malcolm that like Macbeth, he too is not fit to rule Scotland. This delights Malcolm who explains that he was lying; he described himself so negatively to test Macduff's integrity. We learn that a large army is gathering to defeat Macbeth.

**BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS,
SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES.**

--SECOND WITCH, ACT IV, SCENE I

ACT V.

THE TASTE OF FEAR



Lady Macbeth's insanity becomes clear... First her Doctor and a Gentlewoman discuss Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and talking to herself and then we, the audience see this for ourselves.

Lady Macbeth makes her famous speech that she cannot wipe away the blood on her hands (or her guilt), indicating that her battle to suppress her guilty conscience has failed completely...

Macbeth's enemies gather near his castle at Dunsinane as Macbeth strongly fortifies his castle. We learn that Macbeth's hold on Scotland is less than absolute...

Macbeth prepares to defiantly fight his enemies armed with the prophecy that he will only be defeated when the nearby Birnam Wood moves on his castle. Macbeth now learns of the ten thousand strong army against him. Seyton confirms this bad news and Macbeth donning his armor, prepares to fight his enemies recalling the Birnam Wood prophecy once more as a source of comfort...

With his troops loyally around him, Malcolm orders each man to cut down a branch from the nearby Birnam Wood as his army now camouflaged under an umbrella of Birnam Wood, head towards Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane.

We hear a women's cry later learning that Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth coldly shrugs the news that his once "dearest chuck," is dead with complete apathy. Macbeth learns that Birnam Wood or rather Malcolm's forces are moving on his castle. Realizing what this means, Macbeth nonetheless defiantly sets off to meet his destiny...

Macbeth fights, Siward killing him. Macbeth is now confronted by Macduff, a man he has consciously avoided and one, he refuses to fight.

Macbeth famously exclaims that he has lived a charmed life and is unable to be killed by a man, naturally born.

Macduff now explains that he has born by Caesarian section and the two men fight, Macbeth dying and order being restored when Malcolm is hailed as the new King of Scotland...

**LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW, A POOR PLAYER
THAT STRUTS AND FRETS HIS HOUR UPON THE STAGE,
AND THEN IS HEARD NO MORE. IT IS A TALE
TOLD BY AN IDIOT, FULL OF SOUND AND FURY,
SIGNIFYING NOTHING.**

--MACBETH, ACT V, SCENE V

ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

English Renaissance theatre is sometimes called "Elizabethan Theatre." The term "Elizabethan Theatre", however, covers only the plays written and performed publicly in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). As such, "Elizabethan Theatre" is distinguished from Jacobean theatre (associated with the reign of King James I, 1603–1625), and Caroline theatre (associated with King Charles I, 1625 until the closure of the theatres in 1642).

Before the reign of Elizabeth I, companies of players were attached to the households of leading noblemen and performed seasonally in various locations. These companies became the foundation for the professional players that performed on the Elizabethan stage.

English Renaissance theatre derived from several medieval theatre traditions, such as the mystery plays that formed a part of religious festivals in England and other parts of Europe during the Middle Ages. The mystery plays were complex retellings of legends based on biblical themes, originally performed in churches but later becoming more common around religious festivals. Other sources include the morality plays that evolved out of the mysteries, and the "University Drama" that attempted to recreate Greek tragedy. The Italian tradition of Commedia dell'arte frequently presented at court came to play roles in the shaping of public theatre.

The men who wrote these plays were primarily self-made men from modest backgrounds. Some of them were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge, but many were not. Although William Shakespeare was an actor, the majority do not seem to have been performers. There were no major playwrights who came on the scene after 1600. No women were professional dramatists in this era. Prior to 1660, men and boys played women onstage.

POPULAR GENRES

Popular genres of the Elizabethan period included the history play, which depicted English or European history. Well-known playwrights, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, belong to this category. Shakespeare's plays about the lives of kings, such as *Richard III* (1591) and *Henry V* (1599), and Marlowe's *Edward II* (1594) and George Peele's *Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First* (1593) dramatized preceding events of the era.

Tragedy was a common genre. Marlowe's tragedies were exceptionally popular, such as *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590) and *The Jew of Malta* (1598). The audiences particularly liked revenge dramas, such as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582). John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) offers a parade of bloody cruelties, as did Shakespeare's *MacBeth* (1603).

Comedies were common as well. A sub-genre developed in this period was the city comedy, which deals satirically with life in London after the fashion of Roman New Comedy. Examples are Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.

THE END OF AN ERA

The rising Puritan movement was hostile to the theatres, which the Puritans considered to be sinful for several reasons. The most commonly cited reason was that young men dressed up in female costume to play female roles. Theatres were located in the same parts of the city in which brothels and other forms of vice proliferated. When the Puritan faction of Parliament gained control over the city of London at the beginning of the English Civil War, it ordered the closing of all theatres on Sept. 2, 1642—though this was largely because the stage was being used to promote opposing political views. After the monarchy was restored in 1660 the theatres reopened.



STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) The supernatural plays an important role in *Macbeth*. To what extent does it motivate Macbeth's actions?
- 2) Discuss King Duncan and examine what contribution he makes to the play.
- 3) In constructing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare dramatically altered historical characters to enhance certain themes. Examine Shakespeare's sources and discuss why he made these radical changes.
- 4) Is Lady Macbeth more responsible than Macbeth for the murder of King Duncan? Is Lady Macbeth a more evil character than her husband and, if so, why?
- 5) The sleepwalking scene in Act V is one of the most memorable in all of drama. Relate this scene to the overall play and examine what makes Lady Macbeth's revelation so provoking.
- 6) Choose two of the minor characters in *Macbeth* and examine how they contribute to the play's action.
- 7) The witches tell Banquo that he will be the father of future kings. How does Banquo's reaction reveal his true character?
- 8) Examine Macbeth's mental deterioration throughout the play.
- 9) Discuss the speech Macbeth gives upon hearing that his wife is dead in Act V, Scene V. How do his words capture one of the major themes in the drama?

