

Cover border taken from the First Folio (1623)

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The Tragedy of
Macbeth

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Introduction

This volume of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* consists of two versions of the play. The first is the original, based on the *Globe* edition of 1860, which was in turn based on the Folio of 1623. The second is a translation of that version into contemporary English. In both versions spelling and punctuation have been updated, and the names of the characters have been spelled out in full for easier reading. Insights from modern scholars have been included in both versions.

The translation of *Macbeth* is not meant to take the place of the original. Instead, it is an alternative to the notes usually included in modern editions. In many cases these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, the notes break the rhythm of reading and frequently force the reader to turn back to an earlier page or jump ahead to a later one. Having a translation that runs parallel to the original, line for line, allows the reader to move easily from Elizabethan to contemporary English and back again. It's simply a better way to introduce Shakespeare.

Also, this translation is suitable for performance, where notes are not available to the audience. Admittedly, a well-directed and well-acted production can do much to clarify Shakespeare's language. And yet, there will be numerous references and lines whose meanings are not accessible on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Banquo mean when he says that he will keep his "bosom franchised"?

Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's language does present problems for modern readers. After all, four centuries separate us from him. During this time, words have acquired new meanings or have dropped from the language altogether, and sentence structures have become less fluid. But these are solvable problems.

First of all, most of the words that Shakespeare used are still current. For those words whose meanings have changed and for those words no longer in the language, modern equivalents are found in this translation. For a small number of words - chiefly names of places, biblical and mythological characters, and formal titles - a glossary can be found on page 183.

The meaning of words is one problem. The position of words is another. Today, the order of words in declarative sentences is almost fixed. The subject comes first, then the verb, and finally, if there is one, the object. In Shakespeare's time, the order of words, particularly in poetic drama, was more fluid. Shakespeare has *Macbeth* say,

Introduction

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.
Whereas we would usually arrange the words in this order,
I have not seen so foul and fair a day.
Later in the play, Macbeth says,
Look on it again, I dare not.
We would probably say,
I dare not look on it again.

This does not mean that Shakespeare never uses words in what we consider normal order. As often as not, he does. Here, for instance, are Macbeth and Banquo in conversation,

MACBETH Your children shall be kings.

BANQUO You shall be king.

When Shakespeare does invert the order of words, he does so for a reason or for a variety of reasons - to create a rhythm, to emphasize a word, to achieve a rhyme. Whether a play is in verse, as most of this play is, or in prose, it is still written in sentences. And that means that, despite the order, all the words needed to make complete sentences are there. If you are puzzled by a sentence, first look for the subject and then try rearranging the words in the order that you would normally use. It takes a little practice, but you will be surprised how quickly you acquire the skill.

Shakespeare sometimes separates sentence parts - subject and verb, for example - that would normally be run together. Here are some lines describing Macbeth in battle,

For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name -
Disdaining Fortune with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like Valor's darling, carved out his path.

Between the subject, Macbeth, and the verb, carved out, come some clauses and phrases that interrupt the normal sequence. Again, look for the subject and then the verb and put the two together. You'll find, however, that your rearranged sentence, while clear, is not as rhythmical as Shakespeare's.

Stage Directions

In drama written for the modern stage, the playwright usually provides detailed directions for the actors - how to move and speak, what emotions to convey to an

Macbeth
Act One

Scene 1 [*Scotland. An open place*]

Thunder and lightning. Enter three WITCHES

FIRST WITCH When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH That will be ere the set of sun. 5

FIRST WITCH Where the place?

SECOND WITCH Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH There to meet Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH I come, Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH Paddock calls. 10

THIRD WITCH Anon.

ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

Exeunt

Scene 2 [*A camp near Forres*]

Alarum within. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, with

ATTENDANTS, meeting a bleeding SERGEANT

DUNCAN What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
the newest state.

MALCOLM This is the sergeant

Who, like a good and hardy soldier fought 5

'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!

Act One, Scene 2

Act One

Scene 1 [*Scotland. An open place*]

Thunder and lightning. Enter three WITCHES

FIRST WITCH When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH When the hurlyburly's done,

When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH That's before the set of sun.

5

FIRST WITCH Where's the place?

SECOND WITCH Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH There to meet Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH I come, my gray cat.

SECOND WITCH The demon toad calls.

10

THIRD WITCH At once, I'm coming.

ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

They exit

Scene 2 [*A camp near Forres*]

Trumpet fanfare off-stage. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN,

LENNOX, with ATTENDANTS, meeting a bleeding CAPTAIN

DUNCAN Who is that wounded man? From the looks of him,

He can report on the current state

Of the revolt.

MALCOLM This is the captain

Who, like a good and hardy soldier, fought

5

Against my captivity. Welcome, brave friend!

Macbeth

Say to the King the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it.

SERGEANT Doubtful it stood,

As two spent swimmers that do cling together 10

And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald

(Worthy to be a rebel, for to that

The multiplying villainies of nature

Do swarm upon him) from the Western Isles

Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied; 15

And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,

Showed like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak;

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),

Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,

Which smoked with bloody execution 20

(Like valor's minion), carved out his passage

Till he faced the slave;

Which ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell to him

Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chops

And fixed his head upon our battlements. 25

DUNCAN O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!

SERGEANT As whence the sun 'gins his reflection

Shipwracking storms and direful thunders break,

So from that spring whence comfort seemed to come

Discomfort swells. Mark, King of Scotland, mark. 30

No sooner justice had, with valor armed,

Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels

But the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage,

With furbished arms and new supplies of men,

Began a fresh assault. 35

Act One, Scene 2

Tell the King what you know of the battle
As you left the field.

CAPTAIN Doubtful it stood,
Like two spent swimmers that cling together 10
And hinder each other's skill. The merciless Macdonwald -
The perfect rebel to whom
The vices of human nature
Do breed and swarm - had from the Western Isles
With infantry and cavalry been supplied; 15
And Fortune, like a tease, seemed to smile
On his damned cause. But all to no avail,
For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name -
Disdaining Fortune with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution, 20
Like Valor's darling, carved out his path
Till he faced the foe;
Then never shook hands nor bid farewell to him
Till he ripped him open from the belly to the jaw,
And stuck his head upon our battlements. 25

DUNCAN O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!

CAPTAIN From the east, where the sun begins the day,
And shipwrecking storms and terrifying thunders break,
So from that spring where comfort seemed to come,
Pain swelled forth. Listen, King of Scotland: 30
No sooner had Justice, armed with Valor,
Compelled these fleeing troops to take to their heels,
But the Norwegian lord, seeing his chance,
With strengthened arms and new supplies of men,
Began a fresh assault. 35

Macbeth

Act Two

Scene 1 [*Inverness. The courtyard of Macbeth's castle*]

Enter BANQUO, preceded by FLEANCE carrying a torch

BANQUO How goes the night, boy?

FLEANCE The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.

BANQUO And she goes down at twelve.

FLEANCE I take it, 'tis later, sir.

BANQUO Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven; 5
Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose! 10

Enter MACBETH and a SERVANT with a torch

Give me my sword.

Who's there?

MACBETH A friend.

BANQUO What sir, not yet at rest? The King's abed. 15
He hath been in an unusual pleasure and
Sent forth great largess to your offices.
This diamond he greets your wife withal
By the name of the most kind hostess, and shut up
In measureless content.

MACBETH Being unprepared 20
Our will became the servant to defect,
Which else should free have wrought.

BANQUO All's well.

Act Two, Scene 1

Act Two

Scene 1 [*Inverness. The courtyard of Macbeth's castle*]

Enter BANQUO, preceded by FLEANCE carrying a torch

BANQUO What time is it, my boy?

FLEANCE The moon is down, but I have not heard the clock.

BANQUO And the moon goes down at twelve.

FLEANCE Then it must be later, sir.

BANQUO Here, take my sword. Heaven's stingy tonight; 5
All her candles are out. Take this too.
Sleep lies heavy upon me like lead,
And yet I cannot close my eyes. Merciful powers,
Restrain in me those evil thoughts that nature
Releases in repose! 10

Enter MACBETH and a SERVANT with a torch

Give me my sword.

Who's there?

MACBETH A friend.

BANQUO What sir, not yet at rest? The King's in bed. 15
He has been well pleased and has
Sent many gifts to all your servants.
This diamond he sends your wife, our
Kind hostess, and ends his day
In immeasurable contentment.

MACBETH Being unprepared 20
Our wish to please the King fell short of what
We would have done had we the time.

BANQUO Everything went well.

Macbeth

I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters.

To you they have showed some truth. 25

MACBETH I think not of them.

Yet when we can entreat an hour to serve,

We would spend it in some words upon that business,

If you would grant the time.

BANQUO At your kindest leisure. 30

MACBETH If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,

It shall make honor for you.

BANQUO So I lose none

In seeking to augment it but still keep

My bosom franchised and allegiance clear, 35

I shall be counseled.

MACBETH Good repose the while!

BANQUO Thanks, sir. The like to you!

Exeunt BANQUO and FLEANCE

MACBETH Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,

She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed. 40

Exit SERVANT

Is this dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee!

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but 45

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

I see thee yet, in form as palpable

As this which now I draw.

Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going, 50

And such an instrument I was to use.

Act Two, Scene 1

I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters.

They have shown some truth to you. 25

MACBETH I haven't thought of them at all.

Yet, when we can find an hour's free time,
We should talk a little more about that business,
If you would grant me the time.

BANQUO Whenever it suits you. 30

MACBETH If you support me when the hour comes,
It will bring you honor.

BANQUO If I lose none
In seeking to enlarge it, and keep
My conscience free and my allegiance clear, 35
I shall listen to your counsel.

MACBETH Good rest till then!

BANQUO Thanks, sir. The same to you!

Exeunt BANQUO and FLEANCE

MACBETH Go ask your mistress, when my drink is ready,
To strike the bell. And then, go to bed. 40

Exit SERVANT

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
Its handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch you!
I have you not, and yet I see you still.
Deadly vision, are you not as real
To feeling as to sight? Or are you but 45

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from my feverish brain?
I see you still, in a form as palpable
As this which I now draw.
You direct me the way that I was going, 50
And the weapon I was to use.

NOTES

Glossary

The following terms are taken from the translation of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. The scene and line numbers are given in parentheses after the terms, which are listed in the order they first occur.

Act One

hurlyburly (scene 1, line 3): uproar, tumult - of the battle described in the next scene

gray cat, demon toad (scene 1, lines 9-10): spirits embodied in animals that attend and serve a person

Forres (scene 2, stage direction): site of the royal palace of Duncan, 11 miles southwest of Elgin, Scotland

Western Isles (scene 2, line 14): Ireland and the Hebrides, off the western coast of Scotland

Golgotha (scene 2, line 43): “place of the skull,” where Christ was crucified

thane (scene 2, line 49): a title of Scottish nobility, roughly that of an earl in England

Fife (scene 2, line 54): area in eastern Scotland; site of Macduff’s castle

Saint Colme’s Isle (scene 2, line 69): an island in the Firth of Forth, a tidal mouth on the eastern coast of Scotland

Aleppo (scene 3, line 7): city in northern Syria

Weird Sisters (scene 3, line 32): sisters of fate or destiny; the three witches

blasted heath (scene 3, line 78): a flat, bare tract of wasteland, withered by storms and lightning

Inverness (scene 4, line 48): site of Macbeth’s castle in northwest Scotland