

William Shakespeare

Macbeth & Twelfth Night, or What You Will

We start with some creepy witches cackling about some guy named "Macbeth," and then cut to post-battle, where we learn that this Macbeth has been kicking serious tail in battle—so much that King Duncan has decided to give him the title Thane of Cawdor.

Now it's time to meet Macbeth. He's prancing home on a dark and stormy night after defending King Duncan in battle with some skilled enemy-disemboweling. Understandably, he's feeling pretty good about himself. Just then, he and his good pal Banquo run into three bearded witches (the "weird sisters"), who rhymingly prophesy that Macbeth will be named (guess what?) Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland. Just as Banquo is pouting about being left out, the witches tell him that he'll be father to a long line of future kings of Scotland.

The next thing we know, a guy named Ross shows up to say that, since the old Thane of Cawdor turned out to be a traitor and is about to have his head lopped off and displayed on a pike, Macbeth gets to take his place as Thane of Cawdor. Sweet! That takes care of the first prophecy. At this rate, the play will be over before lunch.

While Macbeth is waiting around for "chance" to come along and make him king, he starts getting restless. His ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, prods him into acting like a "man" and killing King Duncan when the poor guy comes to Macbeth's castle for a friendly visit.

When Macduff (yeah, we know, there are more "Macsomebodies" in this play than an episode of *Grey's Anatomy*) finds the king's dead body, Macbeth kills the guards and conveniently accuses them of murdering the king. King Duncan's kids, Donalbain and Malcolm, find out what's happened, they high tail it out of Scotland so they can't be murdered too.

Macbeth is named king and things are gravy. Prophecies fulfilled! Except, wait. Macbeth starts to worry about the witch's prophecy that Banquo's heirs will be kings. Macbeth's not about to let someone bump him off the throne so, he hires some hit-men to take care of Banquo and his son, the unfortunately named Fleance. Banquo is murdered, but Fleance escapes.

Things go downhill for Macbeth, who's more haunted than an episode of *Ghost Hunters*. He pops in on the Weird Sisters for another prophesy, which comes in three parts: (1) watch out for Macduff; (2) No man born of woman is going to hurt him; and (3) Don't worry until Birnam Wood (a forest) moves to Dunsinane.

Macbeth breathes a sigh of relief with #2 and #3, since those are obviously impossible situations and mean that he's effectively safe. The one about Macduff has him a little worried, though, so he kills off Macduff's family. Naturally.

By now, people are starting to get a little suspicious. Macduff and Malcolm pay a visit to the awesome English king, Edward the Confessor, and start plotting with the English

soldiers how to save Scotland from Macbeth's tyranny. Oh, and Lady Macbeth? She's not doing so hot. In fact, she basically dies of guilt. But Macbeth is safe, right? Not so fast. Macduff and Malcolm show up with their army and order troops to cut the branches from the trees in Birnam Wood for camouflage.

Remember what the weird sisters said about Birnam Wood moving to Dunsinane? Then you know where this is headed. Macduff corners Macbeth; calls him a "hell-hound"; tells him that he, Macduff, was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb, i.e. delivered via C-section rather than being "born; and then cuts off his head. So much for the phony king of Scotland.

Theme

1-**Fate** Is it Macbeth's fate to be a traitor and a king-killer? Or is he alone responsible for his actions, and did he freely choose his choice? The play pits the prophecies of the three weird sisters against its own dramatization of Macbeth's internal conflict—and it's not clear which wins. In fact, fate and free will might just be working together.

Quote #2

First Witch

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of **Glamis**!

Second Witch

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of **Cawdor**!

Third Witch

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be **king hereafter**! (1.3.6)

Million-dollar question: are the witches (1) playing on Macbeth's ambition and planting the idea of murder in his head; (2) really privy to some secret info about the way things are going to go down; or (3) actually controlling fate in some way?

2- **Ambition: Macbeth Theme of Ambition**

You'd think it was enough to be the nation's greatest warrior *and* Thane of Cawdor. What more could a man want? Apparently, a lot. Once Macbeth has had a taste of power, he's willing to kill anyone (men, women, and children) who he thinks might undermine his seat on Scotland's throne. But Macbeth doesn't get to enjoy being a **gansgta** for long. He puts his own desires before the good of his country, and, in the end, is destroyed by that ambition. So, maybe you should lay off that nefarious plot you're cooking up to become class president: according to *Macbeth*, the power and glory just isn't worth it.

Quote #4

LADY MACBETH

[...]

Glamis thou art, and **Cawdor**; and shalt be
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy
nature; It is too full o' the milk of human
kindness To catch the nearest way: thou
wouldst be great; Art not without ambition,
but without The illness should attend it:
(1.5.1)

Here's another count against ambition: After reading the letter from her husband (which recounts the witches' prophesy), Lady Macbeth's thoughts immediately turn to murder. Problem: Macbeth has ambition, but he doesn't have the nerve to see it through. Luckily Lady Macbeth is man enough for both of them.

3. Macbeth Theme of Violence

Do violent TV shows and video games actually make kids more violent? Maybe. But if they do, then you're going to have to lock up Shakespeare with a MA-17+ rating, too, because Macbeth's body count is out of control. And it's not just aliens or zombies being brutally slain: it's women and kids, too. As with all of Shakespeare's tragedies, Macbeth piles on the violence. Just as we ask whether it's necessary or gratuitous in the latest James Bond movie, we can ask the same thing here: is there a good reason for all the violence, or did people in the seventeenth century like to watch blood being spilled just as much as we do?

Quote #6

LADY MACBETH Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood; Stop up the access and passage to remorse, That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between The effect and it! (1.5.3)

Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to make her "cruel," and what's cool is that, where the men in this play are constantly going around bleeding, Lady Macbeth wants her blood to stop. What does this say about the relationship between violence and gender?

Characters:

Macbeth

When Macbeth hears the witches' prophecy, he's super interested in what they have to say—obviously, since they're saying that he's about to become king. But he's also terrified by his "horrible imaginings" —his hair stands on end and his heart races, "knock[ing] at [his] ribs." "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical," says Macbeth, "Shakes so my single state" (1.3.9).

This doesn't sound like a man who's excited to start busting out with the treachery. In fact, he sounds like he's horrified by his own thoughts—and haven't we all had some horrifying thoughts now and then? (Okay, maybe not as horrifying as regicide.) The difference is that most of us don't *act* on those horrifying thoughts. So why does Macbeth?

Maybe he's simply controlled by outside forces. After all, the three witches prophesize that Macbeth will become king (1.3.4) and they also know the exact circumstances of Macbeth's downfall (4.1.8), which suggests that Macbeth has no control over his own fate. What's more, the weird sisters' words clearly prompt Macbeth into action and we often get a sense that Macbeth is acting against his own will, as though he's in a trance. Think about the first time Macbeth encounters the witches —he's twice described as being "rapt" (1.3.2).

Even after this encounter Macbeth, at times, seems to move through the play in a dreamlike state, as when he follows a "dagger of the mind" toward the sleeping king's room just before he commits his first murder (2.1.6). So, maybe Macbeth is nothing more than a victim of fate: his fate made him a murderer. It's similar to saying that your brain tumor made you do it, or the evidence that some criminal behavior has genetic roots.

On the other hand, maybe not. In the play, we clearly see Macbeth deliberate about murder, and the witches, we should point out, never say anything to Macbeth about murdering Duncan. When Macbeth first hears the sisters' prophecy, his thoughts turn to "murder" all on their own. So, perhaps Macbeth has had inside him a murderous ambition all along and the three witches merely a dormant desire.

More proof? Take the moment when he thinks about whether to kill Banquo: "To be thus [king] is nothing;/ But to be safely thus.—Our fears in Banquo/ Stick deep" (3.1). Here, we see him having already accomplished his goal but still deciding to kill more. Again, is this fate? Or is this now his very own choice?

The beauty of literature is that it doesn't have to be black or white. Maybe Macbeth is "fated" to become king, but how he comes to the crown is entirely up to him. Or, maybe Macbeth is simply a figure to dramatize the ambiguity of human will and action. Why do people do the things they do, even when they know their actions are wrong?

On the other hand —maybe Macbeth is propelled by fate, maybe by his own dark desires, or maybe ... just by his nagging wife.

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth treats Lady Macbeth as an equal, if not more dominant partner. In fact, when Macbeth waffles and has second thoughts about killing Duncan, his ambitious wife urges him on by attacking his masculinity. (Apparently, that's a strategy that never gets old.) When Macbeth says "we will proceed no further in this business," Lady Macbeth responds by asking, "Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act of valour / As thou art in desire?" (1.7.3-4).

In other words, Lady Macbeth asks if Macbeth is worried that his performance of the act of murder will be as weak as his "desire" to kill the king. There's also a dig at Macbeth's sexual performance at work here because Lady Macbeth implies that Macbeth is afraid his performance of killing the king will be just as weak as his performance in the bedroom (his sexual "desire").

Either way, Lady Macbeth insists her husband is acting like an impotent "coward" (1.7.3). Killing the king, like satisfying one's wife, says Lady Macbeth, will confirm Macbeth's masculinity: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.4).

Macbeth, as we see, buys into this notion that "valour," however cruel, is synonymous with masculinity. "Prithee peace," he says, "I dare do all that may become a man" (1.7.4). Macbeth clearly associates manhood with the capacity for murder (and the ability to satisfy his wife). Perhaps this is why Macbeth assumes the dominant role in his marriage only after he kills Duncan. (It's also interesting that, when Macbeth plans the murder of Banquo —rejecting his wife's input in the matter altogether —he taunts his henchmen about proving their manhood (3.1.10). We can't help but wonder if Macbeth's ideas about what it means to be a "man" ultimately contribute to his downfall.

Macbeth may be satisfied to be a mighty warrior when the play starts, but, once he murders Duncan, he's willing to do anything necessary in order to secure his position of power. It gets easier and easier for Macbeth to commit heinous crimes. Killing a grown man (or two) is one thing, but then he orders the murders of Macduff's family, including his children. But he's just looking out for his own best interests, right? As he says:

*For mine own good
All causes shall give way. I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.* (3.4.24)

Basically, Macbeth is doubling down: you can't be a half-way murderer. It's all or nothing. But this selfishness, Macbeth's acting for his own good, ultimately makes him a hated "tyrant." He's come a long way from being a beloved thane. As the play progresses, Macbeth's justifications for his actions become increasingly thin. By the end, Macbeth is a hollow shell of the man he once was, and the whole kingdom celebrates his death.

Fate? Or simply an ambitious man destroyed by own ego?

One last thing. Our character analysis wouldn't be complete without a look at Macbeth's super famous Act 5 speech, when he hears that his wife is dead. We're going to quote the whole thing, because it's so awesome:

*She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
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.*

Here, Macbeth is summing up his life's work and concluding that it's nothing. All this struggle—the murder, the plotting, the self-questioning, the eternal damnation—and the world ends up exactly where it began: Malcolm will be king, and no one will remember Macbeth except as an evil, blood-thirsty traitor. Does this make Macbeth into a tragic hero? At end, are we able to feel sympathy for Macbeth, led astray by his ambition and fate? Or is he callously dismissing his wife's death, and saying that we might as well be vicious, since it all doesn't matter in the end?

Here's a final, mind-blowing moment: both Magneto and Professor X have delivered this speech in spectacular but very different ways. One of them seems to fit with the first interpretation, and one with the other. Which do you agree with?

Macbeth Timeline and Summary

- Traveling home from their victory on the battlefield, Macbeth and Banquo just so happen to run into three witches.
- These witches have some fun prophecies to share: Macbeth will be Thane of Glamis, Cawdor, and then King of Scotland. But how? By murder, perhaps? Or simply by waiting for fate to take its course?
- For the time being, he's happy to pledge his loyalty to Duncan. His wife has other ideas, however—ideas like impugning Macbeth's manhood until he finally says he'll think about it. Geez, lady!
- Macbeth philosophizes to himself about the pros and cons of murdering the King, his cousin, whom he is sworn to protect, in his own house. Uh, when you put it like that ...
- And at first, Macbeth agrees. But in the end, Lady Macbeth's taunts are too much, and he gives in.
- After the murder, Macbeth freaks out a little (understandably).
- He still manages to set up a convincing scenario to frame a bunch of other people for the murder, and then moves quickly on to plotting his next evil deed: getting some murders to kill Banquo. You see, Banquo's very own witch-prophecy is that his kids are going to become king, so obviously he can't stay alive if Macbeth is going to stay king.
- Meanwhile, Macbeth is banqueting in celebration of his new title.
- Small problem: Banquo's late. When he finally shows up, he's ... a ghost. And only Macbeth can see him. This causes a small freakout.
- Also freaking out: Lady Macbeth, who's having a bit of a psychotic break about the whole accessory to murder thing.
- Macbeth heads off to consult with his advisors, a.k.a. the witches, and they reassure him with some goofy prophecies.
- Meanwhile, basically everyone in the not-yet-United-Kingdom is plotting to dethrone Macbeth.
- He prepares for battle, confident in the witches' prophecies.
- Things appear to be going okay, until Macduff shows up with a serious grievance: not only is Macbeth a tyrant, he also murdered Macduff's entire family.

- Oh, and Macduff just so happens to be the only one who can kill Macbeth, because he wasn't "born" but delivered via C-section.
- And this is the end of the line for our intrepid, murderous hero.

Lady Macbeth

Character Analysis

The Macbeths are the original power couple: where her husband is a courageous, skillful warrior, she's charming, attractive, and completely devoted to her husband's career.

Murderously devoted.

Witchy Woman

Lady Macbeth is a teensy bit worried that her man isn't quite man enough to do what it takes to be king; he's "too full o' the milk of human kindness" (1.5.15). If her husband's going to be the powerful figure she wants him to be, Lady Macbeth's got to take things into her own hands. Check out this famous speech where she psyches herself up for murder (but make sure the lights are on first):

*The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.36.2-52.1)*

Are you thoroughly creeped out? If not, read it again—and really dwell on the part where she asks the spirits to "fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/ Of direst cruelty" [1.5.40-41]. And note that Shakespeare's leading ladies don't usually go around saying stuff like this. Not even Katherine Minola, who's notorious for having a tongue like a "wasp" in *Taming of the Shrew*, summons "murderous" spirits.

Remind us who the witch(es) are, again?

Woman Up

In fact, Lady Macbeth's whole "unsex me" speech aligns her with witchcraft and the supernatural (calling on spirits and talking about "smoke of hell" and "murdering ministers" sure sounds witchy to us). She also intends to "pour [her own] spirits in [Macbeth's] ear" when he returns home from battle (1.5.24). Literally, she means she's going to fill her husband's "ear" with harsh words that will help convince him to take action against Duncan, but there's also a sense that Lady Macbeth will "fill" her husband's body in the same way that women's bodies are "filled" or, impregnated by men.

All of this is to say that Lady Macbeth is portrayed as masculine and unnatural. It's pretty explicit: she asks the spirits to "unsex" her, stripping her of everything that makes her a reproductive woman. She wants her "passage to remorse" to be stopped up—i.e., her vagina. (What? Well, being a woman and a mother makes her compassionate, so she wants the "passage" of childbirth to be blocked.) She wants her blood to be made thick, meaning both the blood in her veins but also her menstrual blood, the "visitings of nature." Finally? She asks that her breast milk be exchanged for "gall," or poison.

In Lady Macbeth's mind, being a woman —especially a woman with the capacity to give birth and nurture children —interferes with her evil plans. Femininity means compassion and kindness, while masculinity is synonymous with "direst cruelty." When Lady Macbeth says that her husband is "too full o' the milk of human kindness," she's implying that Macbeth is too much like a woman in order to wield a monarch's power (1.5.1). And she uses this notion of Macbeth's "kindness" against her waffling husband when she pushes him to murder the king: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.4).

It sounds to us like Lady Macbeth is man enough for both of them.

Lady Who?

Okay, sounds like Lady Macbeth is a powerful figure and may evoke some fears about dominant women. You know, just maybe. But what happens to her?

Soon after Macbeth proves his "manhood" by killing Duncan and becoming king, Lady Macbeth disappears into the margins of the story and becomes the kind of weak, enfeebled figure she herself would probably despise.

When she learns that the king's dead body has been discovered, she grows faint and must be carried from the room. (Hmm. It's almost as though Lady Macbeth has literally been drained of that "spirit" she said she was going to pour into her husband's "ear.")

Later, when Macbeth decides to murder Banquo in order to secure his position of power, he excludes his wife from the decision making altogether (3.2.45).

And by Act V, Lady Macbeth has been reduced to a figure who sleepwalks, continuously tries to wash the imaginary blood from her hands, and talks in her sleep of murder (5.1.1-6). She's grown so ill that the doctor says there's nothing he can do to help her. "The disease," he says, "is beyond" his "practice," and what Lady Macbeth needs is "the divine" (a priest or, God), not a "physician" (5.1.55,70).

Would could easily read this as a kind of psychological breakdown. Lady Macbeth is so consumed by guilt for her evil acts that she eventually loses her mind. But we could also say that her transformation from a powerful and "unnaturally" masculine figure into an enfeebled woman reestablishes a sense of "natural" gender order in the play. In other words, Lady Macbeth is put in her place, sleepwalking through the palace while her man makes all the decisions.

However we read Lady Macbeth's transformation, one thing's certain. In the end, Lady Macbeth is all but forgotten. When Macbeth learns of her death, he says he has no "time" to think about her — "She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word" (5.5.17-18).

Star Performance

Depending on the production, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a virago (a brazen, war-like woman) and a manipulator, as the seed of Macbeth's evil thoughts, or as his devoted queen. In some productions she weeps incessantly, in some she sneers, and in some no one's really sure what she's doing. In some interpretations, she uses sexuality to convince Macbeth to do the murder the King.

We're partial to Judy Dench's powerful and nuanced performance in Trevor Nunn's 1979 production. What do you think?

Lady Macbeth Timeline and Summary

- 1.5: Lady Macbeth reads the letter Macbeth has sent her announcing the prophecy of the weird sisters and the greatness they promised to her husband. Lady Macbeth worries that Macbeth would like to have that greatness, but isn't strong enough to do what needs to be done to get it. Upon hearing that the King will stay with them that night, Lady Macbeth appeals to dark spirits "that tend on mortal thoughts" and asks to be the mouthpiece of their deeds. She hopes to be able to speak strongly enough to steel Macbeth to their cause. She hails Macbeth as the future king, and tells him to be strong. She'll take care of the details if he just puts a good face on it.
- 1.6: Lady Macbeth greets Duncan, his sons and the noblemen, assuring them that she is pleased to take the worries of hosting them the night. She agrees to take them to Macbeth, and catches him resolving himself to not do the deed. She speaks of his manhood as being augmented by their unnatural action of murdering Duncan, and insists that if he just bounds up his courage, she has enough of a plan put together that they can pull off the murder and framing the guards. She convinces him to go through with the deed.
- 2.2: Lady Macbeth has drugged the guards and claims she is made strong by what weakens the others. She sees Macbeth, who is out of sorts after having done the deed. She is full of reassuring words, and urges him not to think so deeply of what's done, but look to the good that can be gained by it. She urges Macbeth to go wash his hands while she puts Duncan's blood on the sleeping guards. She then takes Macbeth to bed so they don't look suspicious later.
- 2.3: When alarms are sounded about Duncan's death, Lady Macbeth wakes, seemingly innocent. She mostly plays quiet, but becomes faint when she hears that Macbeth has murdered the guards, which was so not a part of the plan. She is carried from the room.
- 3.2: Lady Macbeth had earlier been with Macbeth when he was asking for Banquo's whereabouts before the big dinner party. She goes to Macbeth. He seems occupied by his own thoughts, and probes him enough to learn that he's planning something sinister. He claims Banquo's murder is all that stands between them and peace of mind. Lady Macbeth protests, as she is not so comfortable with the idea of murdering Banquo. Macbeth reassures her by saying she doesn't need to know what she doesn't need to know, but that she'll applaud him later for the courage of this act.
- 3.4: Lady Macbeth plays hostess at the Macbeths' first big dinner party as King and Queen. Her main task over the course of the night becomes stopping Macbeth from looking like a madman while he effectively acts like a madman from seeing Banquo's ghost. She tries to distract their guests, urging them to eat and ignore the King, as he is given to fits of momentary madness, but then she chides him privately for being unmanly. She tells him to chill out and then sends everyone home, as it is clear they are all disturbed by Macbeth's strange behavior. Then Macbeth seems rational again. He is ready to hatch a plan to kill the traitorous Macduff, and promises to visit the weird sisters once more. In private, she does not question his manliness again, nor does she try to reason with him, but tells him he lacks "the season of all natures, sleep." The two go to bed.
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- 5.1: Next time we see Lady Macbeth, she is still sleeping, but seems weary. A doctor and gentlewoman watch her sleepwalking fit, an activity which appears to have been happening a lot lately. She comes out and reenacts bits and pieces of her own plan to murder Duncan with Macbeth, but her sleepy recounting is peppered with her own insecurities, or perhaps guilt. She cannot seem to wash the blood (or its stench) off her hands, and she cries for the wife of the Thane of Fife, perhaps knowing that Macduff, the Thane of Fife, has had his wife recently murdered by Macbeth. She hurries back to bed when she hears a knocking in her dreams, probably remembering the knocking that happened after she and Macbeth saw to Duncan's murder.
- Note: One of the Queen's most important impacts occurs offstage. She commits suicide as announced in 5.5, but we do not see her again. She is not even mourned properly by Macbeth, who at this point is driven to further violence by the same desperation that seems to have killed her.

Duncan

Character Analysis

Duncan is the King of Scotland, but he might as well be your dad. We should all be so lucky: he's kind, generous, benevolent, and just a little weepier than you might expect from a noble warrior and king. Even Lady Macbeth, who says she would murder her own nursing babe, can't kill him because, as she says, he "resembled/ My father as he slept" (2.2). Is this the man who should be king?

Taking Candy from a Baby

Duncan is totally the Early Modern version of a sensitive, New Age guy. Post-battle, when he's chilling with his advisors, he can't contain himself: "O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!"; "So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;/ They smack of honour both"; "worthy thane"; and "Great happiness!" (1.2). But—did he fight at all? Or did he just sit around, waiting for everyone else to do the disemboweling?

And then, later, when he's announcing his heir, he can barely choke the words out:

*My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fulness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow. (1.4.4)*

That's an awfully fancy way of saying, "I'm crying." We're not saying that men (or kings) shouldn't cry; but we *are* suggesting that, just maybe, you want a little backbone from your lord.

On the other hand, making Duncan into such a great guy emphasizes the enormity of killing him. Even Macbeth realizes it, saying that Duncan "Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/ So clear in his great office, that his virtues/ Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against/ The deep damnation of his taking-off" (1.7.1). Translation: Duncan has been such a good, mild king that murdering him would be completely awful. That Macbeth can murder this man shows us just how atrocious the act is. It's also a clear indication that Macbeth is far removed from human kindness and morality.

Daddy Dearest

Duncan also lets us think about the play's treatment of masculinity. Remember how Macbeth is always worried about being a man (thanks to his wife constantly insinuating that he isn't much of one)? Well, if Macbeth thinks that being a man is all about waving a pointy stick around, Duncan doesn't seem like much of a man.

But don't take our word for it. Take the word of Shakespeare scholar Janet Adelman:

Heavily idealized, this ideally protective father is nonetheless largely ineffectual: even when he is alive, he is unable to hold his kingdom together, reliant on a series of bloody men to suppress an increasingly successful series of rebellions...For Duncan's androgyny is the object of enormous ambivalence: idealized for his nurturing paternity, he is nonetheless killed for his womanish softness, his childish trust, his inability to read men's minds in their faces, his reliance on the fighting of sons who can rebel against him. (source)

Translation: Duncan might be a good father, but he's not a very good king. He needs other men to fight his battles, and he can't even tell when those men are about to betray him. Riding up to the Macbeth's castle, he thinks it looks like Club Med: "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/ Nimble and sweetly recommends itself/ Unto our gentle senses" (1.6). Shakespeare may not be saying that Duncan deserved to die, exactly, but *does* seem to be saying that we shouldn't be surprised when he does.

History Snack

King Duncan is a lot like the historical figure Duncane from Shakespeare's main source for the play, Volume II of Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. In the *Chronicles*, Duncane is too "soft and gentle of nature" and is contrasted with Macbeth, who is "cruel of nature." Shakespeare picks up on this contrast in Macbeth. If, on the one hand, King Duncan is too gentle and Macbeth, on the other hand, is a tyrant when he becomes king, then is the play calling for something in between—a king that rules with authority *and* mildness?

And is Shakespeare slyly suggesting that King James I, who traced his lineage back to Banquo, just might be that guy?

Duncan Timeline and Summary

- 1.2: We meet Duncan as he demands that a bloody Captain give him news of how the battle is going. He is full of praises for all that have fought, especially Macbeth and Banquo. He announces that Macbeth has earned the title that the Thane of Cawdor gave up by his treachery.
- 1.4: Duncan asks if Cawdor has been executed, and notes that it's impossible to figure out whom to trust, as a kind face often hides an evil mind. Duncan then meets Macbeth and Banquo, and is full of gushing praises and thanks for everyone, especially Macbeth and Banquo. He names his son the next in line to the kingship, not knowing this will only spur Macbeth to murder him.
- 1.6: Duncan arrives with his sons and noblemen to Macbeth's castle at Inverness, and is full of praises for what a lovely place the castle is. At meeting Lady Macbeth, Duncan says he loves her, citing this love as the only

reason he would trouble her by being her guest tonight. He professes to love Macbeth, too. This is the last we see of Duncan before his death.

Malcolm

Character Analysis

Malcolm is elder son of King Duncan and newly appointed Prince of Cumberland, i.e. next in line to be King of Scotland. But when we first meet him, he's standing around praising a "good and hardy soldier" for saving his life and rescuing him from capture. Is Malcolm just another king who needs saving, or is he going to be a great king?

Growing Up is Hard to Do

Malcolm may not be alternating between [nudity and unfortunate costume choices](#), but he doesn't start out impressing us as king material. When his father is murdered, he doesn't know what to do and so he decides to run, saying "This murderous shaft that's shot/ Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way/ Is to avoid the aim" (2.3). (Translation: let's get out of here until we see how things play out.)

When he meets Macduff, who complements him in courage and experience, he starts to get it together. He comforts Macduff after the man's children and wife are killed, saying "Dispute it like a man," and he helps come up with and carry out the plot that wins the kingdom back from Macbeth.

He also shows himself to be much savvier than his dad. To test Macduff's honor, Malcolm pretends that he's even worst than Macbeth: he says that there's "no bottom, none,/ In my voluptuousness"; that he's so greedy that he'd steal jewels and lands from the nobles; and that he lacks any kingly virtues. What virtues, you ask?

*justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude* (4.3)

Only when Macduff is practically ripping his hair out with despair about "O Scotland, Scotland," and "thy hope ends here" does Malcolm go, "Sike!" Turns out, he's none of those things. Not only is he not interested in all of Scotland's maidens, he's actually a virgin. Since that bit isn't true, we can assume that the rest of it isn't, either. Not only isn't he greedy, he just might have every single one of those great, kingly qualities: all the mercy and lowliness of Duncan, along with the courage, fortitude, and stableness that he lacked.

King-Maker

More proof that King Malcolm is going to be just what Scotland ordered? Let's take a look at the play's last lines, which just so happen to be Malcolm's final speech:

*We shall not spend a large expense of time
Before we reckon with your several loves,*

*And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour named. What's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time,
As calling home our exiled friends abroad
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny;
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life; this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform in measure, time and place:
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone. (5.8)*

Here, Malcolm praises his friends; gives them a little reward by making them earls; calls back all the exiles; and then, finally, says that he'll do everything that needs to be done, "in measure, time and place." He's reuniting the kingdom, surrounding himself with loyal friends, and promising to take care of the to-do list—all without shedding a single tear.

Malcolm Timeline and Summary

- 1.1: Malcolm points out the good, bleeding Captain to his father, because if it weren't for the Captain, Malcolm would've been a captive of the Irish forces. He is full of praise for this good and bleeding man.
- 1.4: Malcolm informs his father that the Thane of Cawdor died nobly, confessing his treason and repenting it deeply. His compliment to Cawdor is backhanded, as he claims "nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it."
- 2.3: Malcolm hears of his father's death that night, and asks who has done it. Macbeth dominates the scene with his woe over their father's death, and Malcolm privately speaks to his little brother, Donalbain, about why Macbeth is giving the speeches that should be theirs. Donalbain is suspicious, and the two are too shocked yet to be grief stricken or vengeful. Malcolm says they won't tarry any longer where the murderer might still be, as foul things are clearly afoot. He goes off to England and Donalbain goes to Ireland. They can tell this definitely isn't over, but safer to deal with from a distance.
- 4.3: Malcolm and Macduff are in England urging the assistance of Siward and King Edward to take arms against Macbeth, who is revealed by this time as a tyrant. Malcolm is still unsteady of Macduff's intentions, and concocts an elaborate story about how he wouldn't be a better ruler than Macbeth, because he is so lusty that he would do lots of evil things to satisfy his lust. He insists how terrible he would be, and as Macduff finally despairs, Malcolm admits that he made up all these lies to test Macduff's purpose.
- Satisfied, he commits to fighting alongside Siward with the English forces to take back Scotland. He then chats with a doctor about King Edward's ability to cure scrofula with his touch. After, Malcolm greets Ross, who has come from Scotland, and assures him they are all eager to fight Macbeth's tyranny. Malcolm, upon hearing of the murder of Macduff's family, encourages Macduff to use that rage in revenge against Macbeth. All are only more firm in their resolve.
- 5.4: Malcolm hatches the plan to cover all the soldiers with boughs to hide their numbers. He announces that they should have hope, as even the men that fight alongside Macbeth do not believe in his cause.
- 5.6: Malcolm leads the charge for the soldiers to throw off their trees and begin the fight. Siward and his son will lead the battle, and Macduff and Malcolm will take care of the rest.
- 5.9: Malcolm misses the friends that have not yet returned from the fray of battle, and hearing that his cousin young Siward is dead, promises he will graciously mourn him his whole worth, taking up where his uncle leaves off. After Macduff returns with Macbeth's head, Malcolm is hailed as King. He declares a new age will be ushered in, where the valiant warriors will be rewarded for their service, and those who helped Macbeth will be called to account. He names all the Scottish thanes as earls, an English title that is new to their country. He promises all other matters that will settle the country to normalcy will come soon, and invites everyone to his coronation at Scone.

Banquo

Character Analysis

Like Macbeth, Banquo was a general in King Duncan's army. Unlike Macbeth, Banquo never committed regicide. But are these the only differences between them?

Macbeth thinks a lot of his friend. (Well, maybe frenemy.) When he's contemplating whether or not to kill him, he says:

*'tis much he dares;
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,
My Genius is rebuked; (3.1)*

In other words, Macbeth admires Banquo's bravery—and fears his wisdom. He's not just the muscle of the operation. In fact, he's wise enough to know that something shady is going on. After Duncan's murder, he's the one to tell the nobles to "meet,/ And question this most bloody piece of work" (2.3); and he's the first one to suspect that Macbeth has play'dst most foully" for the crown (3.1).

Ask No Questions

Banquo's natural suspicion protects him. Okay, it doesn't exactly protect him—he still dies—but he doesn't die damned, like Macbeth. His soul is safe. When he and Macbeth encounter the witches, Macbeth is just like, "durr hurr, talk to me," but Banquo wants to know more:

*What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her chappy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (1.3)*

Sure, Macbeth asks, "What are you?," but Banquo is the one who says, "Um, dude, maybe they're tricking you." (Well, actually, he says, "oftentimes, to us to our harm,/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray's" [1.3], but we thought you might appreciate the short version.)

These questions tell us that Banquo is cautious. Macbeth may dive right into evil without even stopping to pee first, but Banquo takes his time. Even when he wants to know his

future, he does it cautiously, saying that he "neither beg[s] nor fear[s]/ Your favours nor your hate" (1.3).

Fatal Flaw

If Banquo is so cautious and suspicious, then why does he end up dead? Like Macbeth, he may have just a touch of the old ambition. Right before he gets brutally murdered, he has a little imaginary conversation with Macbeth:

*Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for't: yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them —
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine —
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope? But hush! no more. (3.1)*

Banquo tells himself to hush, but it's too late: there's a part of him that *wants* to be the "root and father/ Of many kings." Is that hope what keeps him from snitching on Macbeth? Or did he just not get the chance?

Banquo Timeline and Summary

- 1.3: Banquo is the first to notice the three weird sisters on the ride back from battle with Macbeth. He wonders at their natures, sensing something is foul by the fact that they seem to inhabit the earth, yet they don't look as things of the earth. When the witches hail Macbeth with his accursed good news, Banquo comments what they say seems nice, and he wonders why Macbeth looks so afraid.
- Rather than be afraid himself, he asks the women to look into his future, to say whether it is good or bad. They tell him that he'll bear a line of kings, though he won't be one, and he will at once be greater and lesser than Macbeth, and happier and less happy than Macbeth.
- The witches disappear, and Banquo wonders whether he and Macbeth have eaten "the insane root" since they have seen such fantastical things as these women.
- When Ross enters announcing that Macbeth is now Thane of Cawdor (just as the witches prophesied), Banquo asks if the Devil can speak true.
- While Macbeth is already hatching his nasty plan, Banquo is cautious. He notes that the deepest consequences can come from trifling with evil, which would tell you nice things in order to bring you over to the dark side. Banquo notices Macbeth is distracted, and agrees to speak with him on it later.
- 1.4: Banquo is greeted by Duncan as Macbeth is, and though he is given no specific honor, he is told that he is close to the King's own heart. Banquo humbly insists that any seed of greatness that the King plants in Banquo is the King's to reap.
- 1.6: Banquo goes to Inverness (Macbeth's home) with the King and company. Here, he gives a pretty speech about the home of the martin, judging that if that wonderful bird should make its cradle there, the air must be soft and good. (Banquo, it might be said, is not so astute about how to protect one's family and one's self.)
- 2.1: Banquo and his son Fleance are up late at Macbeth's house. Banquo can't sleep because he is plagued by "cursed thoughts" that he says nature brings to him in sleep. He meets Macbeth walking in the hall, and tells him he dreamt of the weird sisters, which Macbeth brushes off. Cryptically, Macbeth tells Banquo if he will support his cause, it would be an honor to Banquo. Banquo replies that his allegiance is clear (implicitly an allegiance to good and to Duncan) and the two again agree to talk more later.
- 2.3: Banquo wakes with all the others upon hearing of the King's murder, and is horrified. While Macbeth is busy making long talk, it is Macduff and Banquo who attend to his wife, who has grown faint on hearing about Macbeth's murder of the guards.
- 3.1: Banquo already suspects Macbeth of some wrongdoing, as the prophecy has come true but in a most awful way. Instead of ruminating on this, Banquo asks whether his part of the prophecy, that he would sire kings, might come true, too. There is no moral tongue wagging here, as Banquo is interrupted by Macbeth and

Lady Macbeth, who invite him to dinner after inquiring where he will be at a certain hour of the day. He, innocent of any bad intentions on their part, tells them he will be on a horseback ride with his son Fleance, but will be glad to attend dinner with them later.

- 3.3: Banquo returns to Forres and is about to attend the big dinner when he is accosted by the murderers Macbeth sent. He says it looks like rain, and the murderers have at him. At his dying breath, he denounces what he knows to be Macbeth's treachery, and bids his fleeing son to avenge his honor.
- Note: Banquo's ghost is written into the following banquet scene, and is shown in some productions, while others keep it in the mind's eye of a guilty Macbeth. The ghost does not speak, but gets his haunting on quite effectively anyway.

Macduff

Character Analysis

In a game of Marry, Date, or Dump, we'd dump Macbeth (duh); date Malcolm (nice boy, but too many responsibilities) and marry Macduff. He's a loyal Scottish nobleman, a loving father and wife, and an all-around great guy. So what makes this 17th century #1 Dad tick?

He Has Feels

Macduff isn't a man of many words, which means... everyone listens when he talks. We first hear Macduff as he expresses raw, honest grief at the King's murder: "O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart/ Cannot conceive nor name thee! ... Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope/ The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence/ The life o' the building!" (2.3). (Apparently, even grief can't keep him from busting out elaborate metaphors to describe death.) Even more than the king's own son, Macduff appears to mourn the loss of the king, and the man.

But he's not so overwhelmed by grief that he can't pay attention to what's going on around him. He's the only one who asks why Macbeth killed the guards senselessly. He's also the first to see that Lady Macbeth is fainting. And, instead of prattling on about his suspicions, he decides to leave for England. This isn't a cowardly act, but rather a brave one intended to aid Malcolm in enlisting the English against Macbeth.

Basically, in Macduff we see a guy who can feel *and* act. After his wife and children are killed, Macduff is flailing around a little, saying things like "All my pretty ones? ... all my pretty chickens and their dam/ At one fell swoop?" (4.4). Malcolm tells him to man up (literally), and Macduff says, sure: but he's also going to "feel it as a man" (4.4). In other words, men *feel deeply*. In fact, they just might feel more deeply than women, or unmanly men like Macbeth.

Quick brain snack: we're used to thinking of women as being the emotional ones, but that's actually a fairly recent —say, 300 years or so —invention. For hundreds of years before that, *men* were the emotional ones. Women were too flighty to have any deep feelings, except maybe for their kids.

So, if Duncan has feeling without action, and Macbeth has action without feeling, then Macduff seems to have both. He's a true man. Then why doesn't he become king? Because he accepts his natural place: as a friend to his country and to his true king.

Long Live the King

We see just how much Macduff loves his country in when Malcolm tests his loyalty by pretending that he'd be an even worse king than Macbeth. He finally breaks down, saying "O Scotland, Scotland," telling Malcolm that he's not fit to live, and then decides to leave Scotland forever rather than see her ruled by a man who "By his own interdiction stands accursed" (4.3), a.k.a. Malcolm.

And now Malcolm knows what we do: if you're trying to reclaim your kingdom, you want a guy like Macduff by your side.

Macduff Timeline and Summary

- **1.6:** Macduff first enters the play when the King and noblemen arrive at Inverness to stay with Macbeth. He has no lines in the scene, which is noteworthy only because the scene is filled with the fawning of his fellows. While they go on and on about how wonderful Macbeth's castle is, Macduff is silent.
- **2.3:** Macduff arrives with Lennox to wake the King, and is the one to discover that Duncan has been murdered. He calls it for the horror that it is, no flip-flopping or abstraction like Banquo, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are prone to. He notes that the King is the Lord's anointed temple, indicating he believes that Kings receive their power directly from God. When Lady Macbeth enters with questions, he gently defers telling her the truth, suggesting that her woman's nature is too gentle to bear it. Irony at its best. Macduff cries out to Banquo about what has happened and is clearly stricken with honest grief. As Macbeth makes his speeches about Duncan, Macduff is the one to note his casual line about murdering the guards. He asks why Macbeth would do so; Macbeth prattles on. Macduff is the first to notice that Lady Macbeth is faint at Macbeth's news, and asks someone to tend to her.
- **2.4:** Macduff speaks with Ross and conveys the news that the murderers are dead, slain by Macbeth, and notes that Malcolm and Donalbain have put suspicion on themselves by fleeing. He also informs Ross that Macbeth is thus named the new King. Interestingly, he will go home to Fife and his family instead of going to see the coronation.
- **4.3:** Macduff is in England with Malcolm. We learned earlier that Macbeth had sent for Macduff's aid when he learned that Malcolm meant to gather rebellious forces. Macduff sent a clear "no" back to Macbeth, making his allegiance to Malcolm and his suspicion of Macbeth certain. Malcolm suggests they weep over the state of Scotland, and Macduff comforts him like a father. Macduff says it would be more fitting to take up arms to protect their homeland than to weep over her. Then comes Malcolm's speech where he tests Macduff's honesty to the cause of Scotland. After Malcolm paints a terrible picture of the lurch he is, Macduff doesn't pretend to be OK with it. He says Malcolm is not only unfit to govern, but unfit to live if what he says is true. Malcolm admits he was lying, and Macduff replies simply that "such welcome and unwelcome things at once" are hard to reconcile.
- Ross meets Macduff and Malcolm, and Macduff immediately asks after his family. When Ross admits he has bad news (about ten minutes after saying they are well), Macduff demands to hear it fast. Ross says Macduff's wife and children are murdered, and Macduff, shocked, asks him to repeat the terrible news. He blames himself for their deaths, as it seems they took the ill consequence of his leaving. Malcolm encourages him to use these feelings to storm up revenge. Macduff then gives no pretty speeches, but pledges to fight Macbeth himself.
- **5.4:** Macduff enters Birnam Wood with other noblemen and the army. The others plan and discuss what's going on at Macbeth's house, but Macduff is mostly silent. He only cautions that they should focus on the battle and await its true outcome before thinking they have won.
- **5.7:** Macduff runs around the battle seeking Macbeth. He says his family's ghosts will haunt him if Macbeth is killed by any other. He will not fight any of Macbeth's footmen or their flag bearers, but wishes to kill Macbeth only. He exits with "Let me find him, Fortune! And more I beg not."
- **5.8:** Macbeth and Macduff meet on the battlefield. Macbeth asks Macduff to turn back, as he is already charged with too much of Macduff's blood. Macduff counters that he has no words, that his sword should be his voice. He then laughs at Macbeth's protective prophecy, as he seems fated to kill Macbeth, since he was not of woman-born, but rather torn from his mother's womb. He does brighten up when detailing to Macbeth how they'll impale his head on a pole for being such an un-fun tyrant. Macduff says no more, and slays Macbeth.
- **5.9:** Macduff arrives with Macbeth's head and pronounces Malcolm the rightful king. He imagines that the good crowd surrounding Malcolm shares his good thoughts. Macduff sums up his feelings with a short and sweet, "Hail, King of Scotland!" to Malcolm. You can imagine this is more than the paltry fawning of lesser men, as Macduff cries it out while brandishing the gory head of the former King of Scotland.

Weird Sisters (the Witches)

Character Analysis

Like Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen twins pre-2004, the three weird sisters never appear apart, and they're always talking over and with each other—so we're going to consider them as a single unit. And the question of the day is this: are they simply prophets? or do they actually set the play's events in motion?

Enter Three Witches

When we encounter them in the play's opening scene, we're not sure where they've come from, who/what they are, or what they have in mind when they say they plan to meet Macbeth. What we do know is that they've gathered amidst thunder and lightening and move about the fog and "filthy" air, which seems just as murky and mysterious as they are. Even Banquo and Macbeth are unsure about the sisters' identity when they meet them on the heath:

*[...] What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? (1.3.1)*

In response, weird sisters deliver the infamous lines that set the tone for the play: "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.4). In other words, nothing, including the identity of the weird sisters, is certain in this play.

Witchcraft

The play's subheadings and stage directions refer to the sisters as "witches." Understandably, given that they spend most of their time gathered around a bubbling cauldron, chanting, casting spells, conjuring visions of the future, and goading Macbeth into murder by making accurate predictions of the future (before they vanish into thin air, of course). The witches also do some interesting things with "Eye of newt and toe of frog, / Wool of bat and tongue of dog" (4.1.2).

At the same time, their speech has a sing-song quality to it, so their chanting ends up sounding a lot like a scary nursery rhyme. Depending on how committed you are to believing in witches, that can make them sound super scary—or just a little bit silly. (Check out "Writing Style" for a discussion of how the sisters' speech sets them apart from other characters in the play. We'll wait.) And they can even seem a little petty, like when they cast a spell on a man after his wife refuses to share her chestnuts—ahem — with one of them.

The Sisters and Fate

The sisters are called "witches" only once in the play—but they're called "weird" six. The word "weird" comes from the Old English term "wyrd," meaning "fate," so we're betting that they're in some way associated with the three fates of classical mythology. Since the "fates" are supposed to control man's destiny, calling them "weird" just might suggest that Macbeth doesn't have any control over his actions, and that his choices aren't really his to make.

But remember: in this play, nothing is as it seems.

Macbeth Setting

Where It All Goes Down

Scotland and England in the 11th Century

Get your popcorn: the play opens on a foggy heath amidst a terrible thunder storm, so you know you're in for a laugh-riot of a play.

Not. *Macbeth* is a dark, dreary play with a lot of dark, dreary action taking place under the cover of darkness, whether at Macbeth's first castle, Inverness, or later, at the palace in Dunsinane. Despite these set changes, *Macbeth* doesn't go into a lot of detail about its setting—that's why, like a lot of Shakespeare plays, it can be adapted to pretty much any time period the director fancies. Gangsters in Australia? Been there. Soviet era? Done that.

Though the play is kind of set in the 11th century, based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare isn't into historical accuracy. (Historical accuracy wouldn't be invented for another two hundred or so years.) So, the play is full of allusions to contemporary, 17th century events, like the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in Act II, Scene iii (see "Symbols: The Equivocator" for more on that, and to King James I (see "Symbols: Eight Kings" for our take on that.) Plus, the actors would have been dressed in 17th century clothing; a lot of actors wore.

Symbols: Blood

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Get out the hydrogen peroxide, because this play needs it: there's blood all over. From the bleeding Captain in the beginning to Macbeth's bleeding head at the end, literal blood drips from every page. But in our view, it's the imagined blood that really counts.

When Macbeth considers murdering Duncan, he sees a floating "dagger of the mind" that points him in the direction of the sleeping king's room (2.1.6). As Macbeth wonders if his mind is playing tricks on him, the dagger becomes covered in imaginary blood, which anticipates the way that very real daggers will be soiled when Macbeth murders King Duncan.

But where does this dagger come from? Did the witches conjure it up? Is it a product of Macbeth's imagination? Is Macbeth being tempted to follow or warned not to pursue the hallucination? Given what happens later, we're tempted to say that it's Macbeth's own vision, an externalization of his guilt.

Out, Out, Damned Spot

Eventually, imagined blood comes to symbolize guilt for both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. After he murders Duncan, Macbeth supposes that even "Great Neptune's ocean" could not wash away his stain of guilt (2.2.13) after Lady Macbeth tells him to "go get some water / And wash this filthy witness" from his hands (2.2.10).

Obviously, water isn't going to get these two clean. Lady Macbeth spends most of the play's last acts with the imaginary "spot" of blood she can't seem to wash from her guilty hands (5.1.1). But it's Macbeth who really spells it out for us. Once he kills his friend Banquo, who returns as a ghost, Macbeth tells that "blood will have blood" (3.4). His image of wading in a river of blood sums up the lesson: you might just as well keep on going once you start, because that stuff is *never* going to wash out (3.4.24).

Nature

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

After King Duncan is murdered by Macbeth, we learn from the Old Man and Ross that some strange and "unnatural" things have been going on. Even though it's the middle of the day, the "dark night strangles the traveling lamp," which literally means that darkness fills the sky and chokes out the sun, i.e. an eclipse (2.4.1). Could this be another allusion to the way the king's life has been extinguished (kings are often associated with the sun's power) and his power usurped by "darkness" (Macbeth)?

Probably. And in this case, nature itself becomes a symbol for the political struggle. That makes sense, if you think that kingship in the play is shown to be part of the natural order, something handed down from God. (See our "Power" theme for more about the Divine Right of Kings.)

And that's not all. We also learn that an owl was seen killing a falcon and Duncan's horses went wild and began eating each other (2.4.2-5). Clearly, nature is out of whack, right? Owls are supposed to prey on mice—not go around eating larger birds of prey like falcons. And Duncan's horses? Once tame, they "broke their stalls [...] contending 'gainst obedience" just before they ate each other (2.4.5).

It sounds like all of nature is in a state of rebellion, bucking their natural roles and "contending" against the natural order, just like Macbeth has upset the natural order of things by killing the king.

Dark and Stormy

And don't forget that the play begins with a terrible storm (likely conjured by the witches) that's associated with dark forces and also the rebellion against King Duncan.

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. (1.1.1)

The word "hurlyburly" means "tumult" and can apply to either or both the literal storm and "the battle" that's being waged between the king's forces and the rebels (led by the traitorous Macdonwald and Cawdor). In *Macbeth*, the human world and the natural world are one and the same—and Macbeth's regicide throws both of them topsy-turvy.

Macbeth Writing Style

Blank Verse and Prose

Here's what you should remember about Shakespeare's plays: The nobility tend to speak in "blank verse," which is essentially unrhymed poetry. The commoners tend to speak just like we do, in regular old prose.

OK. Now, let's think about *Macbeth* specifically.

Blank Verse or, Unrhymed Iambic Pentameter (The Nobles)

In *Macbeth* the noble characters mostly speak in unrhymed [iambic pentameter](#), which is a fancy way of saying they talk like this:

ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM.

See, an "iamb" is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. "Penta" means "five," and "meter" refers to a regular rhythmic pattern. So "iambic pentameter" is a kind of rhythmic pattern that consist of five iambs per line. It's the most common rhythm in English poetry. Let's try it out on this line, where Lady Macbeth urges her husband to wash his hands after he has murdered King Duncan:

and WASH this FILthy WITness FROM your HAND.

Every second syllable is accented (stressed) so this is classic iambic pentameter. Since the lines have no regular rhyme scheme we call it unrhymed iambic pentameter, a.k.a. blank verse.

Trochaic Tetrameter with Rhymed Couplets (The Witches)

The witches also speak in verse but it's done in a way that sets them apart from other characters. In fact, they often chant in a sing-song way that sounds a lot like a scary nursery rhyme. Many of their lines are delivered in what's called trochaic tetrameter with rhymed couplets.

That's a mouthful but, again, it's actually pretty simple once you wrap your brain around it. Let's take a closer look at "trochaic tetrameter."

A "**trochee**" is the opposite of an "iamb." It's an accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable that sounds like DUM-da. "Tetra" means "four" and "meter" refers to a regular rhythmic pattern. So "trochaic tetrameter" is a kind of rhythmic pattern that consist of four trochees per line. It sounds like this:

DUM-da, DUM-da, DUM-da, DUM-da.

Here's an example from Macbeth:

DOUble, DOUble, TOIL and TROUble.
Flre BURN and CAULdron BUbble.

Notice the way the endings of these two lines rhyme (trouble and bubble)? That's what's called a rhymed couplet. On the one hand, the meter and the rhyme kind of make the chanting seem a little silly, especially for modern audiences, who don't necessarily believe in witchcraft. At the same time, all the talk about "hell-broth" and "trouble" sounds frightening, especially when what goes into the "hell-broth" consists of disturbing things like "eye of newt" and "finger of birth-strangled babe."

Initial Situation

In the beginning we meet (or hear about) our characters: King Duncan is a nice old man who was going to be taken advantage of by traitors; Macbeth is a courageous war hero who defends his king, his country, and his honor. Sweet! Time for a heroic action flick, right?

Conflict

Enter Three Witches

Not so much. Along come three pesky witches/ sisters/ fates who announce that Macbeth is going to become King of Scotland. He's stoked, but quickly realizes the problem: if he's going to become king, someone else is going to have to *not* be king. Like the current king Duncan, and Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain.

Complication

The King is Dead; Long Live the King

With a little spurring from Lady Macbeth, Macbeth kills the king to secure the kingship. (That must have been quite a "[honey-do](#)" list.) It immediately becomes clear that the only way to hide the murder is to keep murdering, which means that the body count begins to climb.

Climax

Ghost Hunters

A friendly little visit from the ghost of his murdered friend Banquo sends Macbeth into a raving fit, bringing a quick end to the banquet Macbeth has thrown together to celebrate his new kingship. We suspect that things are about to go quickly downhill.

Suspense

Power Hungry

Macbeth visits the weird sisters, who tell him some cryptic things that he interprets as: "It's cool; no one can defeat you." But, what's this? Forces—lots of forces, but King Duncan's son Malcolm—are gathering in England to fight his tyranny.

Denouement

Fool Me Twice, Shame on Me

To the surprise of... no one, it turns out you can't trust witches' tales to help you out in any way. It looks like Macbeth is going to be defeated, and he goes out committed to dying soldierly death.

Conclusion

I Am No Man

The last part of the prophecy fulfilled, Macbeth stands against a man not-of-woman-born. Still he fights, but good prevails over tyranny and madness. He's killed, Malcolm is named the rightful king, and everyone goes off to party at the coronation ceremony.

Macbeth Tone

Take a story's temperature by studying its tone. Is it hopeful? Cynical? Snarky? Playful?

Murky, Somber, Sinister, and Foreboding

Macbeth opens with three witches conjuring on a heath amidst thunder, lightening, "fog and filthy air" and then proceed to throw around sinister prophesies, so, yeah, we're going to go ahead and say that this is one dark and foreboding play.

Even the humor is bleak. In Act II, Scene iii, the Porter tells some knock-knock jokes (seriously) about who could be knocking at the doors of Macbeth's castle at such an hour. He goes through an extensive comedy routine as he imagines what it would be like to be the porter at the gates of hell. (Pretty busy, apparently, because there's so much evil in the world. Then again, notes the Porter, Macbeth's castle is much too "cold" to be hell.) The joke, of course, is that Macbeth's castle is a lot like hell, especially since Macbeth has just murdered Duncan while the king was sleeping.

Cue the uncomfortable laughter.

Later in the play, Macduff's young son and his wife crack jokes about how Lady Macduff can just trot off to the market to buy twenty more husbands, since hers has apparently abandoned her (4.2). And just as we're enjoying a few chuckles, a couple of murderers enter and stab Macduff's son in the guts. So there's that.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will

Twelfth Night, or What You Will

is a comedy about a cross-dressing, ship-wreck surviving, poetry-loving girl who finds herself at the center of a not-so-average love triangle.

Written between 1601 and 1602 (right around the same time Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*), the play is most famous today for being a so-called "Transvestite Comedy" (which just means it's a comedy with one or more cross-dressing characters). In Elizabethan London, *all* stage plays were performed by male actors who cross-dressed in order to play the parts of women. *Twelfth Night* is particularly provocative and interesting, since the role of its heroine, Viola, would have been played by a boy actor, who was cross-dressed as a female character, who cross-dresses as a boy. The story line has inspired plenty of remakes and adaptations, including the popular teen flick *She's the Man*, starring Amanda Bynes.

Viola's cross-dressing may be no big moral whoop for audiences today, but, for 16th century Puritans, it was a big no-no. Theater critics argued that cross-dressing was sinful, "wicked," and "monstrous." They argued that it promoted sexual "deviance" and turned women into hermaphrodites. Today, however, *Twelfth Night* is one of the most popular

and beloved of Shakespeare comedies perhaps *because* of its rebellious portrayal of gender ambiguity.

It was popular back in Shakespeare's day, too, but perhaps for different reasons. We know from 17th-century law student John Manningham's diary that *Twelfth Night* was performed at the Middle Temple (a London law school) on February 2, 1602. Check out what he had to say:

At our feast we had a play called "Twelfth Night, or What You Will," much like "[The Comedy of Errors](#)" [...] A good practice in it to make a Steward believe his Lady Widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter [...]

It's interesting that Manningham's diary entry focuses on the Malvolio sub-plot, which isn't necessarily what contemporary readers think of when they reflect on the play.

Manningham's entry suggests that, at least for him, the play's ridicule of the social-climbing Puritan figure, Malvolio, was the most interesting and entertaining part of the performance. Several decades later, King Charles I (b. 1600-1649) may have thought the same thing. In his copy of Shakespeare's works, he crossed out the title *Twelfth Night* and wrote in *Malvolio!* as a replacement. Guess old Charlie didn't like social climbers and Puritans either.

Of course, Queen Elizabeth I sat on the throne when *Twelfth Night* was penned. We wonder what *she* thought of the play. *If* she ever saw it, that is. Critics aren't sure. Check out "What's Up with the Title?" for more on the debate.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Summary

How It All Goes Down

The play opens at the Illyrian court, where the love-sick Duke Orsino enjoys some live tunes while fantasizing about the luscious Countess Olivia. Too bad Olivia can't be bothered with the Duke or any other *living* man. Valentine reports that Olivia's brother has recently died (shortly after her old passed away), so Olivia's decided to lock herself up at home while she mourns for the next seven years. Olivia's grief over her dead bro doesn't bother Orsino one bit. In fact, he tells us that, if Olivia can love a dead sibling this much, just imagine what she'll be like with a living, breathing man.

Meanwhile, Viola and a crew of sailors wash up on the Illyrian shore after their ship sinks, separating Viola from her twin brother Sebastian, who may have drowned. Viola doesn't quite know what to do next. So, she decides, what the heck? Why not dress up like a boy and get a job as one of Duke Orsino's servants? The sea captain is happy to help her transform from Viola to "Cesario," a young "boy" with a great singing voice, luscious lips, and a can-do attitude.

Over at Olivia's pad (where everyone is supposed to be sad since the lady of the house is mourning her dead brother), Olivia's free-loading uncle, Sir Toby Belch, and his drinking buddy, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, party like it's 1599. Olivia's trusty lady in waiting, Maria, gives Toby and Andrew a piece of her mind – they ought to be ashamed of themselves, carousing around at all hours before stumbling home drunk and noisy when Olivia is trying to focus on her love for her dead brother. Aguecheek reveals that he's hoping to get lucky with Olivia, who is, after all, a smokin' hot, single heiress. Even though it's pretty clear that Olivia's not into Aguecheek, her greedy uncle Toby convinces him to stick around and take another run at the Countess. If Aguecheek marries Olivia, Toby can mooch off his drinking buddy and party like a rock star for ever and ever without having to worry that Olivia will kick his sorry self to the curb.

Before we know it, Viola (as "Cesario") has a job at the Duke's court and has become Orsino's favorite page. "Cesario" and the Duke have become *quite* cozy ever since the Duke decided to share all his intimate thoughts with "Cesario" – we're talking secret diary kinds of things. "Cesario's" first task as Orsino's best boy is to march on over to Olivia's house and convince the Countess that the Duke is a really swell guy – if Olivia knows what's good for her, she'll ditch the black mourning veil and get ready for some romance, Orsino-style.

Viola (disguised as "Cesario") confesses to the audience that she is totally into Duke Orsino. Uh-oh. Now Viola has to convince some *other* girl, Olivia, that Orsino's a great guy when *she*, Viola, wants the Duke all to herself. This is getting really juicy.

Over at Olivia's pad, Feste the "licensed Fool" (he's literally licensed to say whatever he wants) entertains Olivia and Maria with his witty word play and clever insults. Malvolio, Olivia's snobby Steward (head servant), bags on Feste and tries to convince Olivia to get rid of him. Olivia tells Malvolio to zip it – he's the fool if he can't appreciate the brilliance of Feste's clowning.

When "Cesario" is granted access to Olivia's pad and tries to deliver the Duke's gooey love message, Olivia doesn't cooperate – the Duke's an OK guy and all, but Olivia's just not into him. Plus, she's super busy wearing her black veil and thinking about her brother. "Cesario," however, keeps talking and, before we know it, Olivia is all interested in Duke Orsino's "boy" servant. When "Cesario" leaves, Olivia admits she's totally crushing on "him." (Olivia has no idea "Cesario" is a girl wearing a disguise.) So, Olivia fibs to Malvolio and says that "Cesario" left behind a ring – Malvolio should return the ring and invite the luscious boy back to Olivia's pad so they can continue their discussion about how she will never love Duke Orsino.

Meanwhile, on a sea coast near Illyria, Viola's twin brother Sebastian (turns out he's alive after all – hooray!) attempts to extract himself from the company of Antonio, a clingy sea captain who fished Sebastian out of the ocean and saved his life. Sebastian's not in the mood to hang out with Antonio any more – he's bummed because he thinks his sister is dead and says he's headed to Duke Orsino's court, *without* Antonio (who doesn't seem to

get the hint).

Back in Illyria, Malvolio catches up with "Cesario" and "returns" Olivia's ring. Viola plays it cool with Malvolio but she's no dummy – she realizes that poor Olivia is in love with "Cesario," which makes Viola feel really bad about all the trouble her "wicked" disguise is causing. Viola calls herself a "monster," but doesn't reveal her true identity.

Later that night, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Feste get rowdy over at Olivia's pad – singing songs and drinking way too much. Malvolio the party-pooper comes in and wags his finger at the rowdy crew. He also criticizes Maria for failing to keep Toby in check.

We interrupt this program for a history snack: Malvolio is compared to a Puritan. Elizabethan Puritans were a radical Protestant sect known for their beef with the Catholic Church and harsh criticisms of the theater, festivals like Twelfth Night, and just about every other form of entertainment. Malvolio is compared to a "Puritan" in the play because he disapproves of everything – Feste's clowning, Toby's partying, etc.

Maria is totally fed up with Malvolio, so she hatches an evil genius plan to punish Malvolio for being so judgmental. The scheme: Maria will forge a love letter and drop it where Malvolio can find it. Malvolio will think that Olivia wrote the letter to him and will make a complete fool out of himself trying to impress Olivia. (By wearing a crazy outfit, being rude to everyone, and smiling constantly.)

Later, over at Orsino's place, the Duke and "Cesario" talk about love. "Cesario" admits "he" is in love, but doesn't reveal the object of "his" desire (Duke Orsino). Orsino doesn't appear to recognize that "Cesario" is talking about him. (At least he doesn't let on.)

Hiding behind a tree in Olivia's garden, Toby, Aguecheek, and Fabian overhear Malvolio fantasizing about hooking up with Olivia (a ludicrous idea since Malvolio is a high-level servant, but a servant nonetheless). When Malvolio finds the forged letter on the ground, he convinces himself that Olivia is madly in love with him and wants him to dress in a crazy costume, be rude to her family and the other servants, and plaster a silly grin to his face even though Olivia is in a sad mood.

"Cesario" returns to Olivia's pad to deliver a love trinket from Orsino. Olivia fesses up that she's totally hot for "Cesario," even though "he" says he's not interested. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is upset about this and says he's going home, but Toby and Fabian convince him that Olivia is just trying to make him jealous – she really wants Aguecheek to pick a fight with "Cesario" to prove that he loves her. The not-so-bright Aguecheek agrees to write a letter to "Cesario," challenging him to a duel.

Meanwhile, Sebastian has arrived in Illyria and Antonio has followed him like a puppy.

Antonio reveals that, if he gets caught in Illyria, he's in deep dog-doo, because he's a pirate who stole from Duke Orsino. Antonio decides to hide out at the motel, but gives Sebastian some money so his friend can go sight-seeing and buy himself something pretty.

Back at Olivia's pad, the Countess encounters Malvolio, who is wearing yellow stockings (Olivia hates yellow stockings) and being snobby with Olivia's people. He also slobbers all over Olivia's hand, grins like a loon, and quotes from the forged letter. Olivia, who has no idea about Maria and Toby's prank, thinks Malvolio is crazy and runs off to find "Cesario." When Olivia catches up with her favorite "boy," she tries once again to seduce "him." "Cesario" says "he" isn't into older women, or any other women for that matter. Olivia acknowledges that Cesario is a little too young for her and says she'll back off.

Soon after, Toby Belch tricks Sir Andrew Aguecheek and "Cesario" into drawing their swords and preparing for a duel, but neither Aguecheek nor "Cesario" want to fight. "Cesario" cracks a joke about not having a penis, but nobody knows what "he" is talking about. Antonio shows up and thinks that "Cesario" is Sebastian. (Remember, Viola and Sebastian are fraternal twins. Apparently, Viola looks just like her bro when she's dressed like a boy.) Antonio threatens to beat up Aguecheek, but, just then, the cops show up and arrest Antonio for being a pirate. Thinking "Cesario" is Sebastian, Antonio asks "him" to return the spending money he gave "him" earlier. "Cesario" has no idea what Antonio is talking about, but, being a nice person, gives Antonio some spare change anyway. Antonio thinks he's been used by his beloved Sebastian.

Now that Sebastian is on the scene in Illyria, *everyone* mistakes him for "Cesario," including Olivia, Toby, and Aguecheek. Aguecheek slaps Sebastian, thinking he is the wimpy "Cesario." But, Sebastian's *not* a wimp and is about to pummel both Toby and Aguecheek when Olivia runs out and breaks up the fight. Olivia fawns over Sebastian, who is stoked to be getting so much attention from the rich, beautiful Countess – he wonders if he's dreaming or has gone batty. Olivia proposes (thinking Sebastian is "Cesario") and Sebastian jumps at the chance.

Inside Olivia's house, Malvolio has been locked up in a dark room and is treated like a madman/victim of demonic possession. Feste, disguised as a clergyman, holds a mock-exorcism while Malvolio begs for help. Feste finally agrees to let Malvolio write a letter to Olivia. Meanwhile, Olivia drags a real clergyman into her garden and tells Sebastian (who she still thinks is "Cesario") she's a jealous woman – they better get married ASAP. Sebastian is happy to oblige.

Later on, Duke Orsino and "Cesario" hang out in front of Olivia's house. When the cops walk by with Antonio, Antonio sees "Cesario" and flips out, ranting and raving about how Sebastian did him wrong. (Antonio still mistakes "Cesario" for Sebastian.) Then, Olivia shows up and yells at "Cesario" because she thinks her new husband is already

neglecting her. She accuses "Cesario" of being a bad husband. Then Aguecheek and Toby Belch run out and say that "Cesario" beat them up. Poor Viola (as "Cesario") is in quite a jam, until Sebastian shows up and everyone realizes that Sebastian is the one who married Olivia and beat up Aguecheek and Toby. Sebastian says he's sorry for beating down Olivia's uncle, but he would most definitely do it again if given the chance.

Then Viola admits that she's not really "Cesario" – she's Sebastian's un-dead sister. Orsino proposes to Viola, but still calls her "boy" and reminds Viola of all the times "Cesario" confessed "his" love to him. Malvolio interrupts when he comes out and yells at Olivia for writing a letter and making him believe that she wanted him to act like an idiot to prove his love for her. Olivia denies writing the letter and explains that Maria must have forged the note to trick Malvolio. Malvolio swears revenge and runs away.

Orsino says that he's going to marry Viola, just as soon as she changes out of her boy clothes. (She can't yet because the sea captain has her dress and Malvolio is holding the captain prisoner.) Oh well, until Viola can get her clothes back, Orsino says she will just have to "be" "Cesario." In the meantime, they should all party inside Olivia's house. Feste is left on stage to sing a song to the audience.

Viola (Cesario)

Character Analysis

Viola is *Twelfth Night's* gender-bending heroine. The survivor of a ship-wreck that separates her from her twin brother, Viola washes up on shore in Illyria, where she decides to cross-dress as a boy and take a job at Duke Orsino's court. As the boy servant, "Cesario," Viola quickly becomes Orsino's favorite page and is given the task of wooing Olivia on Orsino's behalf. As "Cesario," Viola's a little *too* good at her job and she finds herself in the middle of a messy love triangle when Olivia falls in love with "Cesario," who can't return the Countess's favors because Viola is in love with the Duke. Got that? OK, good.

So, why does Viola cross-dress as a boy? She says she wants to disguise her identity as a way to buy some time, to figure some stuff out. But why? What's the motivation here? Well, the answer isn't quite clear. On the one hand, we could say that Viola disguises her identity because she's not capable of facing a world without her brother. This would align Viola with the likes of Olivia, who cloisters herself like a nun to mourn the death of her dead brother. On the other hand, Viola's decision to cross-dress is proactive, which makes her defiant and bold, as she willingly faces whatever comes her way.

While we're asking questions, let's talk about why Viola falls in love with Duke Orsino, because it's a bit baffling. Some critics argue that there's really no good reason for Viola to love Orsino – a guy who is self-absorbed, moody, and obnoxious. This, they argue, makes Viola just as silly as all the other characters that fall for inappropriate partners (Olivia, Malvolio, and so on).

Another answer to this question is that Viola falls for Orsino because he's passionate and poetic. (He may be a bad poet, but he's a poet nonetheless.) Whatever the reason, one thing is certain: Viola's love, unlike the passions of other characters in the play, is *constant* and true. Rather than hop-scotch from one romantic interest to the next (Olivia, we're talking about you), Viola's devotion is rock-steady and perhaps even a bit self-destructive. (Why else would she agree to deliver love letters from the man she loves to another woman? Come on. That's just brutal.)

Anyway, Viola's love for the Duke is the one thing that seems to pull the guy out of his self-absorbed world and into a relationship with another human being (rather than the relationship he seems to have with himself). Similarly, Viola or "Cesario" is also the magnetic figure that draws Olivia from her cloistered state of "mourning" into the land of the living. Even though Olivia doesn't wind up with "Cesario," she does transfer her desire from "Cesario" to Sebastian. Without Viola, then, Olivia and Orsino would remain locked into their self-absorbed states.

OK, so what? We're glad you asked. Let's think about the big picture for a moment. As a comedy that works toward the consummation of heterosexual desire (check out our discussion of "Genre"), *Twelfth Night* uses Viola/"Cesario" as the mechanism that throws the world into temporary chaos (her cross-dressing causes most of the mix-ups in the play) and then as the figure that restores order to the "topsy-turvy" world.

So, what is it that's so appealing about Viola/"Cesario" anyway? Well, let's ask Olivia and Orsino, who are always talking about how luscious and sexy "Cesario's" androgynous features can be. (Androgynous just means "masculine" and "feminine.") Viola/"Cesario" just goes to show that androgynous features can be really attractive. Viola's "Cesario" disguise also does a pretty good job of blurring the boundaries of gender, which just goes to show that gender can be impersonated or acted, like any kind of theatrical or social role.

Viola (Cesario) Timeline and Summary

- 1.2.1: Viola washes up on the coast of Illyria after surviving a shipwreck and being separated from her brother.
- 1.2.7: Viola learns about Duke Orsino and Olivia and decides to dress as a boy and get a job at the Duke's court.
- 1.4.1: After only a few days at Orsino's court, Viola (now disguised as "Cesario") is Orsino's favorite page.
- 1.4.7: After Orsino gives an erotic description of "Cesario," "Cesario" agrees to woo the Countess on Orsino's behalf.
- 1.4.7: Viola confesses to the audience that she is in love with Duke Orsino.
- 1.5.1: "Cesario" gains access to Olivia after being saucy with Olivia's servants. "He" tries to deliver Orsino's love message but Olivia interrupts several times.
- 1.5.19: After being bullied by Olivia, "Cesario" spontaneously describes how "he" would woo Olivia if "he" was Duke Orsino. Olivia is very impressed by all this.
- 2.2.3 After leaving Olivia's house, Malvolio catches up with "Cesario" and gives "him" a ring from Olivia.
- 2.2.3 "Cesario" now knows Olivia has a crush on "him" and feels bad for tricking the Countess.
- 2.4.3: When Duke Orsino asks "Cesario" if "he" is in love, "Cesario" admits that "he" is in love with someone who looks like the Duke and is about the same age.
- 2.4.5: "Cesario" is crushed when Duke Orsino says that women's beauty fades fast.
- 2.4.9: After the Duke says women are incapable of love, "Cesario" disagrees and says women can love just as much as men do. Then "Cesario" tells the story of how his "father's daughter" kept her great love for a man a secret for so long she pined away. "Cesario" cryptically says that "he" is "all the daughters" and "all the sons" of his father's house.
- 3.1.1: "Cesario" returns to Olivia's and meets Feste, after which "Cesario" says Feste is wise.

- 3.1.22: When "Cesario" has a private meeting with Olivia, who tries to seduce "him," "Cesario" rejects the Countess's love.
- 3.1.32: "Cesario" says "I am not what I am" and assures Olivia "he" doesn't love her or any other woman.
- 3.4.2: "Cesario" receives a jewel from Olivia, but reminds the Countess of the Duke's love.
- 3.4.5: "Cesario" is confronted by Toby, who says "Cesario" is about to get beat up. "Cesario" tries to run away, but it's too late.
- 3.4.13: "Cesario" draws "his" sword against Sir Andrew Aguecheek against "his" will. Before anything happens, Antonio shows up and mistakes "Cesario" for Sebastian.
- 3.4.15: The cops show up and arrest Antonio for being a pirate and, when Antonio asks "Cesario" for the money he supposedly loaned "him," "Cesario" is confused.
- 3.4.17: "Cesario" suspects that Antonio has mistaken "him" for Sebastian but doesn't say anything about it.
- 5.1.1: "Cesario" is standing outside Olivia's place with Orsino when Antonio and the cops walk by. Antonio accuses "Cesario" of being a disloyal friend and pretending not to know him. "Cesario" has no idea what Antonio is talking about.
- 5.1.4: Olivia shows up and yells at "Cesario" for being a neglectful husband so soon after their marriage vows. "Cesario" doesn't know what Olivia's talking about and professes "his" love for the Duke.
- 5.1.11: Aguecheek and Toby Belch run out and say that "Cesario" just beat them up.
- 5.1.12: Sebastian shows up and "Cesario" comes face to face with him. Everybody figures out that they have mistaken Sebastian for "Cesario." Finally, "Cesario" reveals that "he" is really Viola, Sebastian's lost twin sister.
- 5.1.17: Viola agrees to marry the Duke when he proposes but says she can't change her dress because the sea captain has it. The Duke says they'll get married when Viola changes her clothes. In the meantime, Viola and the Duke go inside Olivia's house to celebrate.

Duke Orsino

Character Analysis

Orsino is the powerful Duke of Illyria – he's a bachelor and the object of Viola's affection but he's trying to woo the inaccessible Olivia. The play's opening scene gives us our first gander at the Duke and we think this opening passage tells us a whole lot about his character. It's a bit lengthy, but hang in there because it's worth it:

*If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before. (1.1.1)*

Orsino's Moodiness

Here, Orsino commands his musicians to "play on" because music feeds his desires. But, he never lets the musicians finish as he interrupts by proclaiming, "Enough; no more; / 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before." What does this suggest about the Duke? Well, he's powerful, passionate, self-centered, and just a tad moody. (Notice how the nifty end-rhyme, "no more" / "before," works to highlight Orsino's fickleness.)

Later in the play Feste pretty much nails Orsino's erratic moods when he says the Duke's "mind is very opal" (2.4.4). An opal gemstone, as we know, shimmers and shifts colors. This is *not* a compliment – Feste implies that Orsino is temperamental and unstable. This reminds us of the tone of the overall play, which swings from highs to lows and everything else in between. (For more, see our discussion of "[Tone](#)," but come right

back, or else.) So, if the Duke's moody and kind of silly and the play's mood shifts around a lot, does that make the play kind of silly too? You bet.

Fool for Love

We know from the opening scene (above) that Orsino is a passionate guy and we soon learn that he's set his sights on Olivia. But, when Orsino says he's in love with the Countess, should we believe him? There's lots of evidence that says we shouldn't. For example, when Duke Orsino shares one of his erotic fantasies with us, we can see that it really has nothing to do with the Countess. Here's the Duke's description of the first time he saw Olivia:

*That instant was I turn'd into a hart;
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.* (1.1.3, our emphasis)

Orsino says he was turned into a "hart" (a male deer and also a play on the word "heart") and that he was chased or hunted by his own desires, which were like "hounds." So, Orsino doesn't imagine his pursuit of Olivia so much as he fixates on his pursuit of *himself* in a fantasy that is all about him. (Shakespeare all but invites us to imagine Orsino alone in his bed – or on a bed of Violets, which he is also fond of – "pursuing.") Notice the repeated use of personal pronouns, "me," "my," and "I." Orsino is all about *Orsino*, not Olivia.

Orsino and Poetry

Like we said, Orsino likes his metaphors and similes, which makes him a kind of poet. To be fair, the cadence or rhythm of the guy's language is pretty nice, musical even, as we can see from the opening passage. So, props for that, but Orsino really needs to work on the *content* of his love musings, which consist of lots and lots of clichés. (Love is like insatiable hunger, music is the food that fuels passion, love is like the ocean, etc. We better stop there because our gag reflexes are kicking in.) We're not the only ones who think the Duke's a little over the top – when "Cesario" tries to deliver the Duke's love message to the Countess, Olivia mockingly refers to the Duke's "hideous matter," a "heresy" that she's heard and "read" many times before (1.5.10).

It's fun to make fun of Orsino (trust us, Shakespeare wants us to), but there's at least one character who takes him seriously and that's Viola. We often wonder what it is Viola sees in Orsino. As we've said before, our best guess is that she digs his fiery passion and poetic musings. (Feel free to disagree.) When Orsino reminds "Cesario" (Viola in disguise) that he has "unclasp'd [...] the book even of [his] secret soul," the audience knows that Orsino has shared with Viola/"Cesario" very intimate details of his oh-so-steamy passion.

The fact that he compares his intimate thoughts to a "book" aligns Orsino with a volume of love poetry, which Viola is totally into. But wait! Isn't Shakespeare also a love poet? Why would he bag on love poetry when he's written an entire volume of it (*The Sonnets*)? What can we tell you? The guy's got a great sense of humor and isn't afraid to make fun

of himself and his profession. He also seems interested in separating the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to poetry. You can check out more details about this by going to "[Language and Communication](#)," but be sure to get back here because we're not done.

Orsino and "Cesario"

When Orsino learns that his trusty boy page "Cesario" is really a girl, Viola, he jumps at the chance to get engaged. Where did that come from? We thought he wanted to marry Olivia. The easy answer is that *Twelfth Night* is a comedy (see our discussion of "[Genre](#)"), so everybody has to get married at the end. OK, sure, but we think we can do better than that.

There's evidence in the play that Orsino has been attracted to "Cesario" all along, so it's not so surprising that he would want to marry Viola when her identity is revealed. Remember how we said earlier that "Cesario" and Orsino share some pretty intimate moments that seem to cause Viola to fall for the Duke? Well, these moments also trigger Orsino's fondness for "Cesario," a figure he can confide in and trust. Also, the Duke thinks "Cesario" is pretty attractive. When "Cesario" says "aw, shucks" after the Duke says "Cesario" is youthful and attractive, here's what Orsino says:

*Dear lad, believe it;
[...] Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part. (1.4.5)*

Orsino's description of "Cesario's" luscious mouth and sweet voice is pretty steamy. (You can check out a more detailed discussion of this quote by going to "[Love](#).") Even though Orsino thinks "Cesario" is a boy, he's clearly attracted to his page's "girlish" features. Does this mean that Orsino is only attracted to "Cesario" because "he" is girly looking? Not necessarily. Even after Orsino knows the truth about Viola, he still calls her "boy" and "Cesario," as the two get cozy and prepare to celebrate their upcoming nuptials. This suggests that the Duke is also attracted to Viola's "boyish" charm. Part of Duke Orsino's function in the play, it seems, is to demonstrate how a person can be attracted to another's "feminine" and "masculine" features.

Duke Orsino Timeline and Summary

- 1.1.1: Duke Orsino listens to music and talks about love.
- 1.1.2: When Curio asks Orsino if he's like to go hunting, Orsino tells us how he felt the first time he laid eyes on Olivia.
- 1.1.3: When Valentine informs the Duke that Olivia is mourning for her dead brother, Orsino says Olivia will be a great lover once she falls in love.
- 1.4.2: Orsino says that since he's shared secrets with "Cesario," his boy page should be the one to woo Olivia on his behalf.
- 1.4.5: Orsino describes "Cesario's" luscious mouth, voice, and throat before sending "him" off to Olivia's.
- 2.4.1: The Duke discusses love with "Cesario." He warns "Cesario" to marry a younger woman and says that women's beauty fades, just like men's interest in them. Then he says that women are incapable of love and listens to "Cesario" tell a story about a woman who kept her great love a secret. He sends "Cesario" back to Olivia's house.
- 5.1.1: Duke Orsino talks with Feste in front of Olivia's house.

- 5.1.12: When Antonio is brought by in handcuffs and accuses "Cesario" of being deceitful, Orsino defends "Cesario. Orsino recognizes Antonio as a pirate who stole from him.
- 5.1.15: When Olivia returns home, Orsino hits on her but is rebuffed.
- 5.1.17: Orsino blows up when he thinks that "Cesario" has hooked up with Olivia. He storms off and "Cesario" chases him.
- 5.1.19: When Olivia claims to have married "Cesario," Orsino is devastated.
- 5.1.24: When Orsino sees Sebastian and "Cesario" together, he's amazed and can't believe his eyes.
- 5.1.26: Orsino is excited to see Viola in her dress once he learns that she has been disguising herself as "Cesario."
- 5.1.30: Viola can't change into her dress just yet – the sea captain has her clothes. So, Duke Orsino says he'll marry Viola after she changes. Until then, he'll call her "Cesario."

Countess Olivia

Character Analysis

Countess Olivia is the gorgeous heiress with no father, brother (they're both dead), or husband to tell her what to do or how to balance her checkbook. Characters like Duke Orsino, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and the social climbing Malvolio are thinking that we can't have beautiful, rich, single women running around the play with all that power and wealth. Olivia needs to be married off, ASAP. These guys are all looking to bag Olivia, not because they love her, but because she's a target who seems to have been made just for them to wed and bed. If she can make them rich and/or increase their social status along the way, so much the better. Even Olivia's opportunistic uncle, Sir Toby Belch, is *really* concerned about whether or not his niece's future marriage will be advantageous for him.

(Tasty inter-textual tidbit: In this way, Olivia's a lot like the heiress, **Portia**, in *The Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio initially goes after her for her money and it's *really* important that she marries a suitable man instead of remaining single, especially since her father is dead. So important, in fact, that Portia's father arranges her marriage *from beyond the grave*. Want more? You'll have to read about it in Shmoop's *The Merchant of Venice* analysis. But save that for later because we're not done here.)

The point we're trying to make is that Olivia's status as a potential meal ticket for men places her at the center of the play's concern with the relationship between marriage and social status. (Check out more on this by going to "**Society and Class**.")

Pickle-Making and Mourning

When the play opens, Olivia is in deep mourning for her dead brother. How does she grieve? By cloistering herself like a nun, wearing a black veil, and sloshing her salty tears all over the ground. In the real world (or even a tragedy), we would probably feel sorry for Olivia, but Shakespeare makes it pretty clear that her behavior is just a smidge ridiculous. Not because she won't give Orsino, Aguecheek, or Malvolio the time of day, but because she's locked herself into a very silly lifestyle. In fact, when we first hear about her from Valentine, Olivia's tears are compared to a "brine" that "seasons" her "brother's dead love" (1.1.1). Cue the uncomfortable laughter – Olivia's tears are compared to *pickle juice*, folks – that's the salty stuff that preserves cucumbers. This makes her something like a pickle-maker, which in turn makes her dead brother something like a pickled cucumber. Pretty gross and pretty absurd, right?

Even Feste the Clown, who we happen to think is the wisest cat in the whole play, goes out of his way to demonstrate the folly of Olivia's behavior when he says that she, not Feste, is the real "fool" for spending all her time mourning instead of living her life. Her somber demeanor is also jarring in contrast to play's festive atmosphere, which is pretty conspicuous in light of the fact that Olivia's house guests (Toby and Aguecheek) party all night while she traipses around her chamber weeping.

OK, Olivia's ridiculous. So what? Critics point out that her excessive mourning is not so different from Duke Orsino's self-absorbed ways. (Remember, Orsino claims that he's in love with Olivia, but we learn that he spends most of his time daydreaming about himself and the idea of love as he wallows around his couch all day.) Olivia, like the Duke, spends all of her time at home instead of engaging with the world around her. She's also preoccupied with her own feelings of grief, which makes her just as self-involved as Orsino. The play's point? Love (when it's directed at living, breathing beings that can reciprocate or want to reciprocate) is great. Being self-involved? Not so much.

Olivia in Love

Olivia, however, is not completely hopeless. She's sassy, wry, and smart enough to recognize Orsino's ridiculous love messages for what they are – a series of insincere clichés. In fact, Olivia becomes the play's mouthpiece for critiquing the conventions of love poetry when she bags on the Duke's attempts to woo her with the kind of cheesy lines that have been around for centuries.

It seems that Olivia just needs the right person to bring her out of her bad mood. Enter "Cesario," the Duke's boy page who is really a girl, Viola, in disguise. When "Cesario" delivers a message from the Duke, Olivia turns from a pickle-making mourner into an obsessed woman who wants to sink her claws into "Cesario." So, what is it, exactly, that makes Olivia go for "Cesario"? Let's ask Olivia:

*Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit,
Do give thee five-fold blazon* (1.5.48)

From the sound of it, Olivia thinks that *everything* about Cesario is attractive. Let's start with looks. "Cesario's" "face" and "limbs" are so delicious that "he" seems to be a walking, talking "blazon" (a love poem that describes women by comparing them to yummy things in nature – lips like cherries, hair like silk, eyes like stars, and so on).

"Cesario," it seems, is attractive to Olivia because "he's" both masculine and feminine looking. Olivia's also attracted to "Cesario's" "spirit" and "tongue," meaning she likes "Cesario's" saucy demeanor and way with words (Cesario turns out to be quite the love poet). We can see from this passage that Olivia's desire for "Cesario" does some pretty important work in *Twelfth Night*. In a play that's obsessed with showing us that gender is a slippery concept, Olivia's attraction to "Cesario" demonstrates that androgyny can be attractive. We're also reminded that Olivia acts as the play's built-in barometer for good love poetry – Orsino's scripted verses are lame, but "Cesario's" off-the-cuff musings are sincere and alluring.

Rebellious Olivia

Rather than sit around dreaming of sexy "Cesario," Olivia goes after "him." Now seems like a good time to remember that, according to traditional Elizabethan notions of gender, the "ideal" woman is supposed to be silent, chaste, and obedient. Olivia not only breaks out of the stereotypical role she's been assigned to when she proposes to the man she thinks is "Cesario" (Sebastian), but she also breaks from the idea that she should marry a man of the same age and social status when she pursues a young servant. All of this makes Olivia just as unruly and rebellious as figures like Toby Belch and Feste. Her behavior, then, is a significant part of the play's "topsy-turvy" spirit. We don't know about you, but we think this is pretty cool.

Marriage to Sebastian

OK, we know what you're thinking. Olivia's still pretty silly because she's easily able to transfer all of her passion for "Cesario" into a relationship with Sebastian when she marries Viola's look-alike brother. We admit that this is a little too convenient. But we also happen to think that there's something important to take away from the situation. Olivia's marriage to Sebastian points to the conventions of Shakespearean comedy, a genre that *always, always, always* ends in marriage and heterosexual couplings as a way to reestablish order in the world. For all of Olivia's unruliness, her marriage to a man ultimately helps to restore order in a chaotic and topsy-turvy world. For all of Olivia's unruliness and unconventional behavior, her marriage to Sebastian helps to reestablish the play's sense of social order. You're thinking this is a total drag, right? Check out "[What's Up with the Ending?](#)" if you want to know how Shakespeare resists conforming to social and generic conventions by leaving Viola on stage in her "Cesario" get-up. Trust us. You'll like it.

Countess Olivia Timeline and Summary

- 1.1.1: We learn that Olivia has sent word to Orsino that she's not interested in marriage – she's too busy mourning the death of her brother, which will go on for seven years.
- 1.5.1: Olivia pretends to be mad at her hired fool, Feste, but allows him to cheer her up by insulting her. Olivia tells Malvolio that he's a jerk if he doesn't love Feste.
- 1.5.32: Olivia meets with "Cesario" and bags on Orsino's lame attempts at love poetry, but finds herself smitten with the messenger.
- 1.5.48: Olivia sends "Cesario" a ring (by way of Malvolio) to let the page know she's in love with "him."
- 3.1.1: Olivia meets with "Cesario" in her garden and professes her love. Her seduction attempt fails.
- 3.4.15: Olivia thinks Malvolio has lost his mind when he capers around her place in yellow stockings and speaks nonsense.
- 3.4.18: Olivia tries again to seduce "Cesario," who rejects her. She gives "Cesario" a piece of jewelry with her tiny portrait painted on it.
- 4.1.1: Olivia interrupts a fight between Toby and Sebastian, who she believes is "Cesario."
- 4.1.3: Olivia seduces Sebastian, thinking he's "Cesario."
- 4.3.1: Olivia brings a priest to her garden and proposes to Sebastian (who she still believes is "Cesario.") They run off to get hitched.
- 5.1.1: Olivia yells at "Cesario" for being a neglectful husband so soon after their marriage vows.
- 5.1.7: Olivia thinks her husband is in love with Duke Orsino when "Cesario" chases after the Duke.
- 5.1.16: Olivia is psyched when Sebastian shows up and she realizes that she has married Viola's twin brother and not "Cesario."
- 5.1.27: Olivia learns that Maria and Toby have been playing a joke on Malvolio. She explains to Malvolio that she never wrote him a love letter. When Malvolio runs off and swears revenge, Olivia is the only one to express

regret for what has happened to her steward. Still, she parties with the others because she's newly married and Viola is engaged.

Malvolio

Character Analysis

Malvolio is the steward (head servant) to Lady Olivia. He's a big time hater and criticizes just about everything – Toby's partying lifestyle, Feste's licensed fooling, and all other forms of fun. His party-pooper ways and constant tattletale telling place a big giant bulls-eye on his back – he's just asking for trouble. And that's exactly what he gets when he's duped into behaving like a "madman" to win the favor of Lady Olivia.

Maria says that "sometimes he is a kind of puritan" (2.3.6), which aligns Malvolio with the religious group despised for its opposition to the theater, winter festivals, and other forms of entertainment (just about everything *Twelfth Night* celebrates). Malvolio's not a Puritan, per se, but the fact that the play aligns him with the sect and goes out of its way to stage his humiliation makes Malvolio's disgrace an important part of the play's rebellious, nose-thumbing spirit.

Puritans were also accused of being power hungry and Malvolio's secret social ambitions fit the bill. When we catch Malvolio daydreaming about marrying Countess Olivia, we learn that his desire has less to do with love than it has to do with his aspirations for social power. What does Malvolio's power fantasy look like? Well, it involves wearing fancy clothes, bossing around the servants, and playing moral cop to Sir Toby's bad guy. Malvolio seems to be punished as much for his moral haughtiness as for his social climbing fantasies, which makes him central to the play's concern with the dangers of social ambition.

Modern audiences often find Malvolio to be a sympathetic figure. Sure, he's annoying and he gets what he deserves when Toby and company lock him up in a dark room and perform a mock exorcism, but Malvolio's circumstances make us uncomfortably aware of the sheer cruelty of treating a person like a madman for a few laughs. In fact, the play raises the point that the trick is like a bear-baiting, an Elizabethan blood-sport that involved chaining a bear to a post and setting a pack of dogs on it. In this sense, Malvolio's comeuppance is a bit like what happens to **Christopher Sly** in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Malvolio and Sly are both abused for the entertainment of others – including Shakespeare's audience, which finds itself in cahoots with the pranksters.

Sir Toby Belch

Character Analysis

Toby Belch is Olivia's free-loading uncle and the ring leader of a raucous little crew of party animals. He whoops it up 24/7, drinking, eating, *belching*, singing, dancing, and trash-talking his way through *Twelfth Night*. The only thing Toby doesn't do is sleep. Toby Belch, like his name, is pretty disgusting. But, his obnoxious ways are what make him such a significant figure in the play. His gluttony and rebellious attitude embody the spirit of Twelfth Night festivities, which were all about over-indulgence and the inversion of

social order. For more on this, go to "[What's Up with the Title?](#)" and come right back.

Sure, Toby's lots of fun to hang out with at parties, but he's also kind of a jerk. He totally uses his drinking buddy, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who supports Toby's extravagant lifestyle. He even plays a mean trick on Aguecheek when he convinces him to pick a fight with "Cesario" and then calls Aguecheek a wimp behind his back. He also doesn't give a flying rat if his late night carousing disturbs his niece while she grieves for her dead brother.

Toby thinks it's time for Olivia to snap out of it and get married. (In a way, he's right, but he's still a jerk.) In fact, Toby tries his best to broker a marriage between Olivia and Aguecheek so he can secure his extravagant lifestyle. His (failed) attempts at playing match-maker reveal his selfishness, sure, but Toby's attempts to marry Olivia to someone from the same social rank also gives voice to the play's concern with social ambition. For Toby, the thought of Olivia marrying a man outside of her "class" is pretty threatening. (Check out more on this by going to "[Society and Class](#).") This is part of the reason why Toby goes berserk when he learns that Malvolio is a social climber with fantasies of marrying Olivia. Of course, Toby mostly hates Malvolio because he's a major party-pooper who disapproves of Toby's lifestyle.

Maria

Character Analysis

Maria is Olivia's lady in waiting or, her "chambermaid" (but *not* the kind of chambermaid who scrubs toilets and changes sheets). Though we never see Olivia and Maria giggling about boys and painting each other's toenails, we know that Maria is *very* close to Olivia – close enough to know her lady's handwriting and close enough to forge it convincingly. That's exactly what Maria does when she writes a letter that brings about Malvolio's downfall.

Why does she do it? As Olivia's lady in waiting, it's her job to keep Toby Belch and company from being too rowdy while Olivia mourns for her dead brother. At the same time, Maria's a girl who likes to have a bit of fun herself. She's saucy, sharp-tongued, witty, and knows how to put the drunken noblemen in their places. She also knows how to tell a dirty joke. So, when she gets fed up with Malvolio's constant criticism, nagging, and judgmental ways, she masterminds a plot to teach him a lesson.

Her scheme to humiliate and punish Malvolio is so clever that Toby Belch falls in love with her and the two get hitched (off-stage) by the play's end. We sort of see this coming, since Toby's always bragging to his drinking buddies that he's got a little *someethin'* going on the side with Maria. There's some debate about whether or not Maria is a social climber. Some study guides will tell you that Maria's got her sights set on marrying up in the world. We're not sure if that's true, but the idea likely has to do with the fact that Toby says, "I could marry this wench for this device [...] And ask no other dowry with her but such another jest" (2.5.23). In other words, Toby suggests he'd marry Maria in a heartbeat and would forgo a dowry if she could come up with another great prank. OK, this may suggest that Maria doesn't have much of a dowry, and we know she's not as high ranking as Toby, but that doesn't really make her a gold-digger now does it? That

said, we *do* think the play is awfully concerned with social ambition, which you can read more about by going to "[Society and Class](#)."

Maria's not a big drinker or a rowdy party girl but she *is* one of the play's unruliest figures. Along with the rest of the zany crew (Toby, Aguecheek, Fabian, and Feste), Maria helps establish the play's festive and rebellious spirit.

Sebastian

Character Analysis

Sebastian is Viola's twin brother who has been lost at sea. Off-stage, he's separated from Viola at but survives the ship wreck by clinging to the ship's mast. Eventually, he's fished out of the ocean by a sailor, Antonio, who falls in love with him.

We don't see much of Sebastian in the play, but his character is significant in *Twelfth Night*. Once Sebastian travels to Illyria, he's mistaken by all for "Cesario" and quickly hooks up with the Countess. Sebastian's unlikely marriage to Olivia allows her to redirect her desire for "Cesario" into a sanctioned heterosexual relationship. As we've seen before, *Twelfth Night* is a comedy and, as such, it works its way toward marriage and the reunification of families.

That said, Sebastian clearly has a close relationship with Antonio, who may or may not be a lover. In this way, Sebastian's relationship allows the play to study, briefly, the erotics of male bonds. (You can go to "Quotes" for the theme of "Love" if you want to read about this in more detail.) Antonio's relationship with Sebastian recalls that of Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, where homoerotics and male friendship are explored in much more depth and detail.

Antonio

Character Analysis

Antonio is the sea captain who fishes Sebastian out of the ocean and saves his life. He's a relatively minor character in the play, but his relationship with Sebastian is fascinating for the way it dramatizes male bonds. Critics argue about whether or not Antonio is a close friend to Sebastian or a lover (it's possible that he's both). There's no way to know for sure, but we explore Antonio's erotic desire for Sebastian in detail in our discussion of the theme of "Love," which you can read more about under "Quotes."

Symbols:

Letters

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Somebody forgot to tell the characters in *Twelfth Night* that it's rude to pass notes in class. Yes, we're aware this joke may not hold the same meaning for you as it does for those of us who experienced junior high without unlimited text-messaging. But seriously, what's up with all the love letters? Duke Orsino makes "Cesario" memorize one so "he" can recite it to Olivia, Maria forges a love note in order to convince Malvolio that Olivia is in love with him, and Malvolio writes one to the Countess when he's imprisoned in the dark room. (OK, that last one is less a love letter than it is a hate note accusing Olivia of being a tease, but you get what we're saying here.)

So what? Well, it seems to us that all of these letters have one thing in common. Aside from their status as messages of love, they're all associated with deception and dishonesty. First, Olivia totally rejects Orsino's love note as a contrived and insincere declaration of passion, and she's absolutely right. Orsino doesn't mean any of it (not about *her* anyway). The letter Maria forges to trick Malvolio, of course, is *completely* deceptive, and Malvolio's letter to Olivia is utterly misinformed. Written words, it seems, are just not to be trusted, especially when they're contrived. Hmm. That's an awfully funny message for a wordsmith like Shakespeare to send his audience.

Coins

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

This one gives theater prop departments everywhere a run for their money (silly pun intended). Seriously, we dare you to count the number of times coins are exchanged in the play, because it seems like everyone is always passing around the scrilla. So, what's up with that? Well, let's think about this in terms of who has money, who hands out money, who loses or doesn't have money.

The first time we see coinage circulating on the stage is when Viola gives the sea captain a few coins for cheering her up about her (possibly dead) brother in Act 1. For Viola, who also gives money to Feste and poor Antonio as he's carted off to jail, money is a symbol of her generous spirit.

For someone like Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who burns through money like there's no tomorrow, excessive spending and the wasting of ducats is a symbol of his foolishness and excess. (Come on. The guy's got to write home for more money before we're halfway through the play.)

For Antonio, who gives Sebastian his purse (don't laugh, every guy had one back then), money seems to represent Antonio's willingness to give himself (in friendship, love, etc.) to Sebastian, who thinks nothing of taking it but gives nothing back in return. This is made even more apparent when Antonio is carted off to jail and desperately needs his

cash to buy his way out of the jam. Meanwhile, Sebastian is off spending Antonio's money and hooking up with Olivia.

We know what you're thinking: what about Feste? Someone is *always* giving that guy money in the play. You're right. Feste is a professional performer who works hard for his money. (Unlike Sir Toby, who sponges off everyone else.) Feste's really clever (a bit of a con man, actually) when it comes to getting people to empty their pockets for a few jokes. At other times, Feste is paid to run errands, which reduces him to the status of a menial servant. In these moments, the exchange of coins between Feste and the upper-class characters seems to highlight the class difference between "lowly" entertainers and those with power and wealth.

Insanity

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Characters are always accusing others of being crazy. "You're a lunatic!" "No, *you're* a nutcase!" and so forth. Madness or insanity is mostly code for wacky, silly, or zany, which is exactly how one can describe the hard partying of Toby and Aguecheek, the elaborate prank Maria devises to punish Malvolio, and the various misguided pursuits of love in *Twelfth Night*. We discuss this in more detail under "**Foolishness and Folly**," so be sure to check that out.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Setting

Where It All Goes Down

Illyria

Twelfth Night is set in the imaginary Dukedom of Illyria. Illyria happens to correspond to a place on the Adriatic coast, a place most Elizabethans knew nothing about and where most Londoners had never been. This distant and mysterious sounding place makes it a perfect setting for Shakespeare to stage his play.

In some ways, Illyria sounds a lot like Hollywood – it's full of celebrities (like the famous bachelor, Duke Orsino, and the beautiful and single heiress, Lady Olivia) whose personal tragedies and love lives are aired like dirty laundry for all the world to see. In fact, some juicy bits of gossip about these local celebs prompt Viola to cross-dress and head to the court where she gets a job as a boy servant – sounds like the ultimate acting gig if you ask us.

Our point? The thing that draws Viola to Illyria is the same thing that draws in the audience – the promise of mystery, romance, and all that good stuff we associate with dreamy, far-off places.

So, what do we actually find when we follow Viola to Illyria? Well, a world that's kind of out of whack. Over at Olivia's, Toby and Sir Andrew have turned the Countess's pad into something like an English "alehouse," where Toby and his crew party 24/7. Even though we're in the land of the nobility, Olivia's place often looks more like the streets of New

Orleans during Mardi Gras than it does the household of a Countess. In this unlikely setting, the mood is festive, zany, and rebellious – like the streets of London would have been during Twelfth Night festivities. (For more on the festive spirit of the play, go to "[What's Up with the Title?](#)")

Meanwhile, on the other side of the house, Olivia locks herself up in a room (like a cloistered nun) to somberly mourn the death of her brother. We've never been in the home of a Countess, but we're pretty sure it's not supposed to look like a rowdy Elizabethan tavern *or* a nunnery.

That's just the point, right? The wonky setting helps to convey that the world has been "turned upside down." Toby and his crew are out of control and Olivia's behavior is ridiculous.

When we swing over to Duke Orsino's pad, we find another strange setting. Duke Orsino's live band plays at Orsino's whim while the Duke lolls around on the couch daydreaming about being in love.

As we follow Viola from the sea coast to the Illyrian court at the play's outset, we might expect something out of our favorite book of fairy tales. When we get there, the furniture looks right, but the characters and their behavior are just a tad off.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Plot Analysis

Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients: the initial situation, conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion. Great writers sometimes shake up the recipe and add some spice.

Initial Situation

Viola survives a shipwreck and disguises herself as "Cesario."

When Viola arrives on the shores of Illyria after her ship sinks and she is separated from her twin brother (Sebastian), she decides to dress as a boy and get a job working for Duke Orsino, who thinks he's in love with the Countess Olivia. We don't know if Sebastian is alive or dead, especially given the fact that Olivia, too, is mourning the loss of *her* brother, who is most definitely dead.

Conflict

Viola loves Orsino, who loves Olivia, who loves "Cesario" (Viola in disguise).

This ain't your everyday, run-of-the-mill love triangle. Since Viola is secretly cross-dressed as a boy, "Cesario," and is supposed to be wooing Olivia on behalf of "his" boss, Duke Orsino, things get a bit messy. Poor Viola's life gets super-complicated when she realizes she's totally smitten with Orsino, who thinks she's just a pretty boy who happens to have luscious lips and a girly voice. To make matters worse, Olivia falls in love with "Cesario" and has no idea that she's trying to sink her claws into the disguised Viola.

Complication

Sebastian is alive! Too bad everybody thinks he's "Cesario."

We're glad Sebastian's not dead, but when he decides to head over to Illyria, he causes a few problems because everybody thinks he's "Cesario" (who is actually his sister, Viola). In Illyria, Sebastian gets in a little dust up with Toby and Aguecheek and also marries Olivia, who is under the impression that she has successfully seduced Orsino's young page. When Viola (disguised as "Cesario") is confronted about Sebastian's actions, "he" denies everything, which makes Orsino and Olivia very unhappy.

Climax

Viola (dressed as "Cesario") comes face to face with Sebastian.

Just when we think Viola is up a creek without a paddle, she comes face to face with her un-dead brother, Sebastian. This is awesome because the confusion about the whole "Cesario"/Sebastian mix-up becomes clear to everyone. But, Viola takes her sweet time revealing that she's not really "Cesario," which makes the climactic moment seem to drag on *forever*. When Viola finally reveals who she is, Sebastian is happy that his twin sister isn't at the bottom of the ocean. It's also now OK for Olivia to have been chasing "Cesario" because she can channel all of her passion into a relationship with Sebastian. Orsino is also free to hook up with the girl he thought was his pretty-boy page. Orsino and Viola will marry – just as soon as Viola changes out of her "Cesario" get-up.

Suspense

Malvolio is let loose from the dark room.

Uh-oh. Things were going so well that we almost forgot about Malvolio, who has been locked up in a dark room and treated as though he's a lunatic and possessed by demons. (He's not – he's really just an annoying and judgmental party-pooper who has been tricked by Maria and Toby.) Malvolio, however, is *not* a happy camper and fails to see the humor of the situation.

Denouement

Fabian fesses up.

Fabian confesses to Olivia that he, Toby, and Maria are responsible for the elaborate prank on Malvolio that tricked him into acting like a madman. This isn't really news for the audience, but it clears things up for Olivia and Malvolio. When Malvolio vows to seek revenge on the whole lot of characters, we begin to worry and feel kind of bad for the poor guy...but only for a couple of seconds.

Conclusion

Time to party, but Viola is still dressed as a boy.

OK, we know for sure that Viola and Orsino will eventually get married and consummate their love. In the meantime, Shakespeare leaves the ending a little ambiguous (kind of like "Cesario's" gender). You see, Viola can't change out of her boy clothes just yet, because her dress is being held for her by the sea captain, who is temporarily unavailable. (Malvolio is holding him captive somewhere.) Orsino says that, as long as Viola is dressed as a boy, she'll "be" "Cesario." It's not entirely clear what he means by this, but Shakespeare seems to invite us to make of it "what we will." You can check out "[What's Up with the Ending?](#)" and "[What's Up with the Title?](#)" if you want to read more about this.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Writing Style

Poetic, Musical, Sometimes Bawdy

Critics like to say that *Twelfth Night* is one of Shakespeare's most poetical and musical plays. What the heck does that mean? Well, it means that Big Willy puts some gorgeous lines in the mouths of characters like Viola, Olivia, and Orsino, who often sound more like skillful poets than the average lovelorn character.

Don't be put off or intimidated by this. Some of the most eloquent moments in the play are often the places where Shakespeare makes fun of the shallowness of love poetry, even as he knocks our socks off with his own skill as a writer. Consider the nice little rhymed couplet that marks the end of one of Duke Orsino's musings on love.

Note: a "couplet" is simply two (a couple) lines of verse with the same "meter" (rhythm). A "rhymed couplet," then, is two lines of verse with *rhymed* endings – like *flowers* and *bowers* below:

*Away before me to sweet beds of flowers:
Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers.* (1.1.4)

Sounds nice, right? It sure is. But, there's also something kind of silly about the whole thing. Duke Orsino announces he's off to loll around on a "sweet bed" of flowers, which, apparently, is more comfortable than a couch and more conducive to day-dreaming about love. Of course, Shakespeare knows this is silly and cliché and he invites the audience to laugh at Orsino's over-the-top musings even while they enjoy the *sound* of his poetry.

There's also plenty of singing in the play. It's difficult to tell which song lyrics are original to Shakespeare and which are borrowed or adapted from popular tunes. Most critics agree that "O Mistress Mine," performed by Feste is Shakespeare's invention:

*O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know. (2.3.4)*

Of course, not all songs are this complete or coherent. Toby and Andrew often belt out little bits and pieces of popular tunes during their drunken carousing. In a nod to "The Twelve Days of Christmas," Toby's rowdy singing is interrupted when Maria tells him to pipe down:

*SIR TOBY BELCH
[Sings] 'O, the twelfth day of December,'--
MARIA
For the love o' God, peace!*

Of course, *Twelfth Night* wouldn't be a Shakespeare play if it wasn't full of dirty jokes and bawdy word play. Check out this clever conversation between Maria and Feste:

*MARIA
my lady will hang thee for thy absence.
FESTE
Let her hang me: he that is well hanged in this
world needs to fear no colours.*

*[...]
MARIA
Yet you will be hanged for being so long absent; or,
to be turned away, is not that as good as a hanging to you?
FESTE
Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage; and,
for turning away, let summer bear it out. (1.5.1)*

When Maria warns Feste that Olivia will "hang" him with a noose or fire him for playing hooky from work, Feste turns the comment into a joke about the size of his penis. His quip that "many a hanging prevents a bad marriage," has a double meaning. First, he suggests that in romantic relationships, it's often a good thing when a woman "turns away" a man because it prevents couples from entering into lousy marriages. Shakespeare's second implication is that a "well-hung" man can "prevent" a bad marriage by pleasing his wife in bed.

Feste's word play is definitely entertaining, but it also reveals something important about the play's ideas about language and authority. Feste is rebellious and makes a joke out of a warning that he's in trouble with his "lady" (the woman he serves). Besides being fun, language plays an important role in subverting (overturning) authority, which is what the "festive" play is all about.

Themes:

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Theme of Love

"Love" is a term that characters in *Twelfth Night* like to bandy about, and the play takes them to task for it as it exposes and explores the folly of misdirected desire. Characters that claim to be in the throes of passion are often exposed as self-absorbed, foolish, and/or misguided, as they fall victim to the trappings found in bad love poetry. *Twelfth Night*, of course, is famous for its consideration of the relationship between erotic desire and gender, as both male and female characters find themselves drawn to the androgynous "Cesario." Even as it steadily works its way toward an ending of sanctioned heterosexual couplings and marriage, the play also examines more overt same-sex desire in the Sebastian/Antonio sub-plot.

Quote #1

ORSINO

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die. (1.1.1)

When Orsino speaks of feeding his "love" for Olivia with music in the play's famous opening lines, the Duke aligns erotic desire with a kind of gluttonous craving for food. Desire isn't something to be fulfilled or satiated in a healthy, loving way. Rather, the Duke says he must kill off his "appetite" for love by bingeing and "sickening." Yuck. This not only alerts us to Orsino's disturbing (and somewhat ridiculous) ideas about love, but also shows us how erotic desire is linked to violence and self-indulgence in *Twelfth Night*.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Theme of Language and Communication

Letters and love poetry circulate throughout *Twelfth Night* as the play reflects on the value and hidden dangers of written words. Shakespeare exposes the way poetry can lose all meaning and credibility when it follows formulaic patterns. There are plenty of self-conscious moments where Shakespeare reminds us of his position as a writer, especially when he draws our attention to the follies of conventional poetry even as he participates in the tradition. Yet, at various moments, *Twelfth Night* reminds us that, when verse is composed spontaneously and sincerely, poetry can have more power over human beings than anything else. Letters, too, can be both deceptive and freeing, depending on the writer. Even when words are "corrupted" by figures like Feste, they very often prove to be the best tools for revealing truth and wisdom.

Quote #2

VIOLA

Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical.

OLIVIA

It is the more like to be feigned: I pray you, keep it in. (1.5.6)

Olivia quickly shoots down "Cesario's" attempts to recite Orsino's love musings, but why? Viola is certainly impressed by the Duke's passion so why doesn't Olivia think Orsino's great? The obvious answer is that Olivia's just not attracted to the Duke. But, here, we also see that Olivia thinks that carefully written or studied poetry is fake and insincere.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will Theme of Society and Class

For modern audiences, it's easy to forget about issues of "class" in Shakespeare's famously gender-bending play. Yet, crossing gender boundaries is not the only kind of social transgression at work in *Twelfth Night*. The play is very much concerned with social ambition, especially as it relates to marrying above or below one's "estate" (rank). The issue is largely explored in the Malvolio plot, where the play takes particular pleasure in ridiculing Malvolio's social-climbing fantasies. Of course, Shakespeare himself was not born into a noble or even wealthy family, and famously purchased his "Gentleman" title after a lucrative theater career, which may be of interest in relation to Feste's status. While drunken fools like Sir Toby Belch eat, drink, and spend their way through life, the brilliant performer and "licensed fool," Feste, works for spare change and is often treated like a common servant.

Quote #1

VIOLA

O that I served that lady
And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is! (1.2.9)

This passage reminds us that it's not just her gender that Viola hides when she cross-dresses as "Cesario." She also disguises her "estate" (meaning her "general condition" and also her "social rank"). Viola's assumed identity as "Cesario," then, suggests that both gender and class are not stable identities. Rather, they can be performed, disguised, and impersonated by just about anyone.

ملخص مسرحية ماكبث

وليم شكسبير

عن النص

خلال حكم الملك العظيم دنكان ، ملك اسكتلندا ، كان يعيش لورد عظيم اسمه ماكبث. وكان من رجال الملك المقربين ، لما يتمتع به من شرف وشجاعة في القتال. وعندما كان القائد ماكبث وزميله القائد بانكو ، عائدتين منتصرين من موقعة كبيرة ، استوقفتهم ثلاثة اشباح ، اقرب الى شكل النساء ، فيما عدا ان لهم ذقونا ، كما أن جلودهم الشاحبة وملابسهم الغريبة جعلتهم لا يبدوون مثل المخلوقات الأرضية .. وبادرهم ماكبث بالحديث ، لكن كل واحدة منهن وضعت اصابعها على فمها طالبة السكوت ؛ ونادته الأولى بأسمه (ماكبث) وبلقبه الرسمي لورد جلاميس . واندesh القائد كثيرا عندما وجد نفسه معروفا من قبل تلك المخلوقات ؛ لكن دهشته ازدادت عندما نادته الثانية بلقب لورد كاودور ، هذا اللقب الذي لم يكن يستحقه .. أما الثالثة فقد نادته قائلة : "مرحبا ؛ بالملك القادم ! " ولقد ادهشته هذه النبوءة لأنه كان يعرف ، أنه طالما أن أبناء الملك أحياء ، فلا يستطيع أن يأمل في الوصول الى العرش ، ثم التفتن الى القائد بانكو وتعرفن عليه ، وقلن له بكلمات غامضة : " ستكون أقل شأنا من ماكبث ، ولن تكون سعيدا فقط ، بل موفور السعادة ! وتنبأن له ، بأنه لن يتولى العرش أبدا ، الا أن أبناءه من بعده سيكونون ملوكا لاسكتلندا .. ثم استدرن في الهواء واختفين ، وهنا تأكد القائدان أنهن ساحرات.. وبينما هما واقفتين يفكران في هذه الأمور الغريبة وصل رسول خاص من قبل الملك . ليخلع على ماكبث لقب واسم دوقية كاودور. وكان لهذا الحدث الغريب أثره على نفس ماكبث ، لأنه تطابق مع ما قالت الساحرات ، الأمر الذي ملأه بالحيرة فوقف مذهولا ، غير قادر حتى على الرد على الرسول .. ومنذ تلك اللحظة ، بدأت الآمال الضخمة تداعب ذهنه ، في امكانية تحقيق النبوءة الثالثة ، وبالتالي فقد يصبح ذات يوم ملكا لاسكتلندا.

فالتفت الى بانكو ، وقال: ألا تتمنى أن يكون أولادك ملوكا ، خاصة وأن ما وعدتني به الساحرات قد تحقق؟ فأجاب بانكو : ان هذه الأمل قد يدفعك للتطلع الى العرش ، لكن رسل الظلام قد يصدقون معنا في أشياء صغيرة ، حتى تقودنا الى ارتكاب أفعال شريرة. " لكن كلمات الساحرات ، كانت قد استقرت في أعماق تفكير ماكبث ، حتى أنه أعرض عن تحذيرات بانكو الطيب . ومنذ ذلك الوقت وجه كل تفكيره في كيفية الفوز بعرش اسكتلندا..

الخط الدرامي عندما قص ماكبث لزوجته تلك النبوءة الغريبة للساحرات ، وما تلى ذلك من أحداث . وكانت الليدى ماكبث سيدة شريرة تطمح في مكانة عالية لنفسها ولزوجها ، وتتمنى لو أنها هى وزوجها يصلان الى هذه المرتبة العظيمة بأية وسيلة كانت . وأخذت تناقش ماكبث في ذلك الأمر ، ولم تتورع في أن تقول له ان قتل الملك أمر ضرورى جدا لتحقيق النبوءة. وحدث في تلك الفترة أن قام الملك بزيارة ماكبث في قلعته ، بصحبة ولديه مالكولم ، ودونالدين ، ومجموعة من اللوردات والمستشارين لتهنئة ماكبث بانتصاره في الحرب. كانت قلعة ماكبث مبنية في مكان لطيف ، والهواء هناك منعش وصحى ، حيث أقامت طيور السنونو أعشاشها على الجدران ، ذلك أن هذه الطيور ، لا تقيم أعشاشها الا في الأماكن المعروفة بجوها الطيب وعندما دخل الملك ، سعد جدا بالمكان ، وسعد كذلك بنفس القدر لذلك الاهتمام

والاحترام والتبجيل الذى لاقت به السيدة المضيضة ليدى ماكبث ، التى كانت تجيد فن تغطية أهدافها الشريرة ، وراء ابتسامتها ؛ وتبدو كالزهرة البرية ، التى تخفى حية تحتها! وازاء تعب الملك من الرحلة ، فقد ذهب مبكرا الى الفراش ، وبصحبه اثنان من الخدم (كما جرت العادة) ينامان بالقرب منه .. كانت سعادته بهذا الاستقبال غير عادية ، حتى أنه قام بتوزيع بعض المنح والهدايا على الضباط الكبار ، قبل أن يذهب الى النوم ، ومن ضمن هذه الهدايا ، أرسل ماسة غالية الى الليدى ماكبث ، تحية لها لما أبدته من كرم الضيافة والترحيب وفى منتصف الليل كانت الليدى ماكبث مستيقظة تخطط لقتل الملك . وهى لم تكن تفعل ذلك خروجاً عن المألوف بطبيعة كونها امرأة ، لكنها كانت متخوفة من طبيعة زوجها ؛ من أن تكون مشبعة بلين العاطفة الانسانية ، للقيام بعملية القتل . ورغم أنها كانت تعرف رغباته الطموحة ؛ لكنه كان يخشى ارتكاب الأخطاء الفاحشة ، ذلك أنه لم يعد لارتكاب مثل هذا الجرم العظيم . صحيح أنها نجحت فى اقناعه بالجريمة ، لكنها كانت تشك فى ارادته بالتنفيذ ، ولتلك الرقة التى كان يتميز بها قلبه (اذ كان أكثر منها كرماً ولطفاً) والتى قد تعوق تنفيذ المهمة . لذلك قامت هى نفسها بالذهاب الى حجرة نوم الملك وببيدها سكين حادة ، واقتربت من سرير الملك ، وقد عملت حسابها أن يكون الخادمان فى حالة سكر وغافلين عن الحراسة . كان دنكان يرقد نائماً يشخر من أثر تعب الرحلة ؛ وعندما نظرت اليه عن قرب ، وجدت فى وجهه وهو نائم شيئاً ما ، جعلها تفكر فى والدها . ولم يطاوعها قلبها أن تهم بقتله! وعادت لتحدث مع زوجها ، الذى بدا متراجعا حيال ذلك الأمر . فهناك عدة اعتبارات تقف الآن ضد هذه الفعلة . ففى المقام الأول هو ليس شخصا عاديا ، بل من المقربين الى الملك ؛ كما أن الملك يحل فى ضيافته اليوم ، ومن واجب المضيف أن يمنع أية محاولة لقتل ضيفه لا أن يحمل هو سكين الجريمة ، بل ورأى أن الملك دنكان ملك رحيم ، واضح فى خصومته مع أعدائه ، ومحب لأعوانه من النبلاء ، وبالنسبة له بصفة خاصة .. ان مثل هؤلاء الملوك هم رسل العناية الالهية ، وسوف يلقي كل من يؤذيهم العقاب مضاعفاً من أعوانهم . هذا بالاضافة الى أن الملك كان يخصه دون الرجال جميعاً لرجاحة فكره ، فكيف يلوث كل هذا التكريم ، بدماء جريمة بشعة كهذه ؟! واكتشفت الليدى ماكبث أن زوجها بدأ يتحول تجاه الخير ، وقرر ألا يتمادى فى ذلك الأمر أكثر من ذلك .. لكنها كانت امرأة من ذلك النوع الذى لا يتراجع عن هدفه الشرير بسهولة .. فبدأت تصب فى أذنيه كلمات تشحن رأسه بوجهة نظرها .. وأخذت تقدم له المبرر تلو المبرر لكى لا يتراجع عن تحقيق ما وعدته به الساحرات ؛ وكم سيكون التنفيذ سهلاً ؛ وكيف أن فعله مثل هذه ذات ليلة قصيرة ، ستسعد باقى لياليهم وأيامهم القادمة ، وتوصلهم الى العرش والسلطة الملكية ! .وأخذت تسخر من تراجعها عن قصده ووصفته بأنه متردد وجبان . وهكذا ، تناول الخنجر فى يده ، وتسلسل بخفة الى الحجرة التى يرقد فيها دنكان ! ولكن بينما كان فى طريقه ، تخيل أنه رأى خنجراً آخر فى الهواء مقبضه يتجه ناحيته ، ونصله يقطر دماً . وعندما حاول أن يمسكه ، لم يكن هناك شئ غير الهواء ، وأن الأمر ليس الا مجرد خيالات ، نتيجة لما يدور فى رأسه المحموم والمهمة التى ينبغى عليه أن ينفذها.. ونفض عنه خوفه ، ودخل غرفة الملك ، وقتله بضربة واحدة من خنجره .. وبمجرد اقتراف الجريمة ، ابتسم أحد الخدم المرافقين للملك ، وهو نائم ، بينما صاح الآخر : " جريمة " واستيقظ الاثنان . وشرعا فى تلاوة صلاة قصيرة ، وقال أحدهما ، " فليغفر لنا الله ! " فأجاب الآخر ؛ " آمين ! " ثم عاودا النوم مرة ثانية . وحاول ماكبث الذى كان يقف مصغياً اليهما ، أن يقول : " آمين " . عندما قال أحدهما ، " فليغفر لنا الله ! " ، الا أن الكلمة وقفت فى

حلقة ، ولم يستطع أن يقولها ، رغم أنه كان في حاجة ملحة للمغفرة! .. وتخيل أنه سمع صوتاً يصيح " : لن يذوق ماكبث طعم النوم بعد الآن : لأنه قتل نائماً ، نائماً بريئاً ، وهذه سنة الحياة " . وظل الصوت يردد صيحاته في أرجاء البيت : " لن يذوق طعم النوم بعد الآن ، فلقد قتل لورد جلاميس رجلاً نائماً ، لذا فلن يذوق لورد كاودور طعم النوم ؛ لن ينام ماكبث بعد الآن.. ! ومع طلوع الصباح ، اكتشفت الجريمة التي لا يمكن اخفاؤها . وأظهر ماكبث وزوجته حزناً كبيراً ، وكانت الأدلة ضد الخدم من القوة بما فيه الكفاية لا دانتهم . رغم أن كل الاتهامات الخفية كانت تشير إلى أن ماكبث هو الذي فعلها ، لأن لديه من الدوافع القوية أكثر مما لدى الخدم المسكين للقيام بذلك ؛ وهرب ابنا دنكان مالكوم ، الأكبر ، إلى إنجلترا ، ودونالدين الأصغر ، إلى أيرلندا.. وبهروب ابني الملك ، اللذين كانا من المفروض أن يخلفاه في الملك ، أصبح العرش خالياً ، وتوج ماكبث ملكاً ، وهكذا تحققت نبوءة الساحرات تماماً.

ملخص مسرحية مكبث

الفصل الأول : المشهد الأول (مكان بالعرا) ء

ثلاث ساحرات يتحدثون ويواعدن أنفسهن باللقاء ثانية عندما يأتي مكبث

الفصل الأول : المشهد الثاني (معسكر للجيش قرب فورييس)

يُهزم الجيش النرويجي من قوات الجيش الإنجليزي والفضل لقائد الجند مكبث وبراوته وبسالته وينوي دانكان ملك إنجلترا مكافأته بلقب سيد كودور وأن يعدم صاحب ذلك اللقب لتواطؤه مع الجيش النرويجي وخيانتة.

الفصل الأول : المشهد الثالث (أحد المروج)

تلتقي الساحرات بمكبث وبانكو ويتنبئن لمكبث بألقاب سيد كودور وسيد جلاميس ثم ملك إنجلترا كما يتنبئن لبانكو بأن أولاده سيصبحون ملوكاً . الساحرات يقلن لبانكو (أقل شأنًا من مكبث وأعظم مكانة ، أقل سعادة منه وأسعد حالاً بكثير) . ثم يأتي روس وأنجوس رسولاً الملك يبشران مكبث بأنه أنعم عليه بلقب سيد كودور. يقول مكبث لنفسه بعد سماعه هذا الخبر (هذا التشجيع من قوى ما وراء الطبيعة لا يمكن أن يكون خيراً ولا يمكن أن يكون شراً .. فإن كان شراً فلماذا وعدتني بالنجاح بادئة بذكر ما هو صحيح وهو أنني سأصبح سيد كودور؟ وإن كان خيراً فلماذا أستسلم لإغراء بشع يقف له شعر رأسي ويجعل قلبي الثابت يخرج عن طبيعته حتى يكاد يصطدم بضلوعي) ...

الفصل الأول : المشهد الرابع (فورييس - غرفة بقصر الملك)

يتم إعدام سيد كودور ويمنح الملك دانكان لمكبث هذا اللقب وأنه سيأتي إلى منزله تكريماً له على شجاعته، ويعلن للجمع أن أبنة الأكبر سيكون خليفته للعرش ثم يعلنه أمير كمبرلاند الأمر الذي يزعج مكبث فنراه يقول جانباً (أمير كمبرلاند هذا لعمرى عقبة في طريقني إما أن أعثر بها أو أقفز من فوقها ... فلتخفي أيها النجوم ضوءك حتى لا يكشف مطامعي السوداء الدفينة .. ولترخ عيني جفنيهما حتى لا يريان ما تصنعه يداي)

الفصل الأول : المشهد الخامس (إينفرنيس - غرفة في قلعة مكبث)

يحكى ماكبث لزوجته ما حدث من الساحرات وأن الملك سيأتي لزيارته الليلة في قصرة وتبدأ الزوجة غواية مكبث لكي يقتل الملك في منزله . تقول له (أنت سيد جلاميس وسيد كودور ، وسيكون ما وعدت به غير أن طبيعة شخصيتك تقلقني فأنت أكثر رحمة وإنسانية مما ينبغي مما سيحول بينك وبين أقصر الطرق لنيل مرامك ، إنك تريد المجد ولست بالخالي من الطموح غير أنك ترفض الشرور الملازمة للرغبة في المجد ... تريد نيل المعالي دون أن ترتكب ما يخل بالشرف .. تريد أن تكسب ما ليس من حقك ولكن دون غش أو خداع) وأثناء الحوار يأتي رسول يخبر ماكبث أن الملك دانكان قادم إلى منزله. تقول له الليدي ماكبث والذي يتضح من كلامها هذا مدى نقاء شخصية ماكبث (إن وجهك يا مولاي كتاب مفتوح بوسع الناس أن يقرأوا فيه أمور عجيبة .. فإن شئت خداع الزمان فأسلك سلوك أهل الزمان ... لتكن علامات الترحيب في عينك وكفك ولسانك ... ولتبدُ كالزهرة البريئة وإن كنت كالتعبان تحتها...)

الفصل الأول : المشهد السادس (نفس المنظر السابق أمام القلعة)

يأتي الملك وأتباعه إلى قلعة مكبث وتظهر له الليدي ماكبث ترحيب جم ويسأل عن ماكبث ويطلب من الليدي ماكبث أن تأخذه إليه فهو ينوي إكرامه أيما إكرام.

الفصل الأول : المشهد السابع (نفس الموقع – غرفة القلعة)

تعتقد نية الزوجة تماماً على الغدر بدانكان بينما مكبث متردد . يقول ماكبث (إنه ما من حافز لي على تحقيق مرامي غير مطامحي وآمالي ... وهو طموح إذ يحاول القفز لامتطاء الفرس قد يجاوز الفرس فيقع على الجانب الآخر منه) ولكن الليدي ماكبث تزيد من طموحه الحافز الوحيد لديه على إتمام فعلته فنراها تقول له (أتخشى أن تكون في فعالك وبسالتك ما انت في رغبتك ؟ أم أراك تريد نيل ما تعتبره أثمن ما في الحياة وتقتنع رغم هذا بحياة الجبناء ؟ تردد في أن واحد أريد ولا أجرؤ ، شأن القط الذي يريد اصطياد السمكة ويخشى أن تبطل قدمه) ونراها تصل لذروتها في إغواء الرجل بتلك الكلمات (لقد أرضعت طفلي وخُبرت حنان الأم تجاه رضيعها . غير أني لعلني استعداد لأن أنتزع حلمة ثدي من فمه الذي لا أسنان فيه حتى وإن كان يبتسم في وجهي ، بل وأن أهشم له رأسه لو أني كنت أقسمت أن أفعل ذلك كما أقسمت أنت أن تقتل الملك) تضع الليدي ماكبث خطة قتل الملك بأن تُسكر حارسي الملك ومن ثم يقتل ماكبث الملك وهو نائم بخنجرها فُيتهما في قتله.

الفصل الثاني: المشهد الأول (فناء داخل القلعة)

حوار بين بانكو وماكبث يقول ماكبث أنه قصر في واجبه نحو الملك لأنه فاجأة بالزيارة . يُقدم ماكبث على تنفيذ فعلته الشنيعة التي رتبها الليدي ماكبث.

الفصل الثاني : المشهد الثاني (نفس المكان)

ينفذ ماكبث فعلته ومن ثم يصيبه بعض القلق والخوف ولا يستطيع أن يضع الخنجرين على الحارسين الذي قد قتلها أيضا فتأخذ الليدي ماكبث الخنجرين بعد أن تلطخهم بدماء الملك وتضعهما عند الحارسين كما لو كانا قتلاه.

الفصل الثاني : المشهد الثالث (نفس المكان)

يأتي مكدف أحد قادة جند الملك إلى قلعة ماكبث ويطرق الباب كثيرا قبل أن يفتح له البواب . يذهب ما كدف لروية الملك فيكتشف أمر قتل الملك ولا يرى الحارسين المقتولين يعود صارخا ويكتشف الجميع الأمر فيفرع الجميع وتتظاهر ليدي ماكبث وماكبث بما ليس في قلوبهما حيث تتظاهر الليدي ماكبث بالإغماء . يذهب لينوكس وماكبث ويتظاهر ماكبث أنه قتل الحارسين لأنه وجد خنجرهما ملطخ بالدماء وأنه نادم على قتلهم ، ويقرر الجميع الاجتماع للتحقيق في هذا الخطب الجلل.

الفصل الثاني : المشهد الرابع (خارج القلعة)

يُتهم ملكوم ودو لنبان بقتل أبيهم حيث لاذوا بالفرار ويُصف ماكبث بالحكمة لقتله الحارسين ومن ثم يمضي مكبث إلى **مدينة سكون** (عاصمة اسكتلندا) ليتوج فيها ملكاً على اسكتلندا ، ويحمل جثمان دانكان إلى جزيرة **كولمكيل** حيث ذلك المدفن المقدس لعظام أجداده.

الفصل الثالث : المشهد الأول (فورييس – غرفة بالقصر)

ينوى ماكبث التخلص من بانكو خوفاً من نبوءة الساحرات بأن أولاده سيصيرون ملوكا فقد تنبأ له بالملك وقد كان ولذا يُكلف إثنان من القتلة للفتك به وبإبنه.

الفصل الثالث : المشهد الثاني (نفس المكان – غرفة أخرى)

حوار بين ماكبث والليدي ماكبث نرى من خلاله الخوف والقلق الذي اعترى ماكبث واعتزامه على قتل بانكو ، نراه يقول لها (لقد أصبنا الأفعى بجراح دون أن نقتلها ، وستندمل هذه الجراح وتعود الأفعى كما كانت فتظل قوانا الواهنة في خطر من أنيابها . ولكني أفضل أن تنطبق السماء على الأرض وأن يفنى الكون على أن يغشانا الخوف كلما جلسنا إلى طعامنا .. ولأن نكون مع الموتى الذين قتلناهم لنشغل مكانهم أفضل من أن يظل العقل في عذابه وقلقه)

الفصل الثالث : المشهد الثالث (نفس المكان – حديقة يشقها مكان مؤد إلى القصر)

يقتل الرجلان بانكو ويلوذ أبنة فليانس بالفرار.

الفصل الثالث : المشهد الرابع (صالة واسعة في القصر يتم بها الإعداد لمأدبة)

الأشراف على مائدة ماكبث وتعترى ماكبث مخاوف وهلاوس حيث يرى شبح دانكان وتُطمئن الليدي ماكبث ضيوفه بحجة أن هذه الحالة كانت تعتريه منذ فترة طويلة وأن ليس ثمة خوف على الملك .

الفصل الثالث : المشهد الخامس (أحد المروج)

مشهد الساحرات الثلاثة مع كبيرة الساحرات هيكاتي توبخهن للتعامل مع ماكبث بالألغاز وشئون الموت دون الرجوع إليها

الفصل الثالث : المشهد السادس (مكان في سكوتلندا)

لينوكس يتكلم مع أحد النبلاء عن الطاغية ماكبث وخطته التي أحكمها للقضاء على دانكان وهروب مالكوم الذي حرمه ماكبث من حقه في حكم أبيه وأنه يعيش في البلاط الإنجليزي ويحظى من الملك إدوارد بكل تكريم وحفاوة وإحترام . ثم إن ماكبث قد أرسل في طلب ماكدف الذي لاذ بالفرار.

الفصل الرابع : المشهد الأول (كهف مظلم في وسطه قدر تغلى)
الساحرات الثلاث يستمرون في تعاويذهن الشيطانية لماكبث وظهور شبح يحذره من ما كدف.

الفصل الرابع : المشهد الثاني (فايف – قلعة ماكدف)

روس يخبر الليدى ماكدف بهروب ماكدف وتغضب لذلك أن تركهما ثم يبرر روس موقفه ويطلب منها الحيلة والحذر وينصرف روس . يأتى قتلة من قبل ماكبث ويقتلوا الليدى ماكدف وإبنها.

الفصل الرابع : إنجلترا (أمام قصر الملك إدوارد)

حوار بين ماكولم وماكدف الذى فرا إلى إنجلترا عن طغيان ماكبث الذى تجاوز كل الحدود ويجئ إليهما روس قادماً من أسكوتلندا ويخبر ماكدف بما حدث لأهله وقتل ماكبث لزوجته وأولاده جميعاً ومدى طغيانه وظلمه . يقول روس عن مدى كثرة جرائم ماكبث (ما حدث منها منذ ساعة هو الآن قديم لا يأبه السامعون به . فكل دقيقة تحمل أخباراً جديدة) . يثور ما كدف أيما ثورة ويقرر هو ومالكوم تعبئة الجيش للقاء الطاغية.

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الأول (دانسينين – غرفة بالقلعة)

حوار بين طبيب ووصيفة الليدى ماكبث عن مرض الليدى ماكبث وهلا وسها المرضية جرّاء ما ارتكبته مع زوجها . وتبدو الليدى ماكبث كما لو كانت تغسل يديه من بقعة دم لا تزول عنها أبداً وهى تخاطب هذه البقعة أن تذهب عنها.

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الثانى (فى الريف – قرب دانسينين)

حوار عن قدوم الجيش الإنجليزي

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الثالث (قلعة ماكبث فى دانسينين)

حوار بين الطبيب وماكبث عن مرض الليدى ماكبث . وموت الليدى ماكبث . وتقارير عن إقتراب الجيش الإنجليزي

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الرابع (فى الريف قرب دانسينين وعلى البعد غابة بيرنام)

قدوم الجيش الإنجليزي فى مسيرة عسكرية بقيادة مالكوم ومكدف .

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الخامس (قلعة ماكبث فى دانسينين)

رسول يأتى إلى ماكبث معلناً تحرك غابة بيرنام كناية عن كثرة أعداد الجيش الإنجليزي القادم . وتعبئة ماكبث لجيشه.

الفصل الخامس : المشهد السادس (نفس المكان – سهل قبالة القلعة)

تقدم الجيش الإنجليزي معلناً أبواب الحرب

الفصل الخامس : المشهد السابع (نفس المكان – فى موقع آخر من السهل)

يلتقى الجيشان ويقتل ماكبث سيوارد الابن الذى يعلن أن لن يقتله رجل ولدته امرأة مصدقا ما قالتها الساحرات.

الفصل الخامس : المشهد الثامن (مكان آخر فى ساحة القتال)

يلتقى ماكبث ومكدف ويعلن ما كدف ساخراً من ماكبث أنه أنتزع من بطن أمه قبل انتزاعا لبيث فى قلبه الرهبة . يُقتل ماكبث.

الفصل الخامس : المشهد التاسع (داخل القلعة)

أبواق تعلن انتهاء المعركة وفرحة سيوارد لموت إبنه البطل وتنصيب ماكولم ملكاً على اسكوتلندا.

Twelfth night by Willim shakespeare

طبعاً. تبدأ أحداث المسرحية من خلال السفينة التي كانت في البحر... وكان فيها **Sebastian** وأخته **Viola** ومعهم الكابتن ومجموعه من البحارة... السفينة جتها عاصفة قوية جدا حتى دمرتها. طبعاً **Viola** قامت ووجدت نفسها ملقاة على الشاطئ ومعها الكابتن وكم واحد... المهم تسأل **Viola** الكابتن أين نحن؟؟ وأين أخي؟؟.. فقال لها نحن في جزيرة **Illyria** وأخوك آخر مره رايتة عندما غاصت السفينة... حزنت **Viola** على هذا.... وأرادت ان تذهب للجزيرة وكان في ذلك الوقت النساء لا يستطيعون الخروج لوحدهم لانهم قد يتعرضوا لاغتصاب او سرقة أو خطف... الخ. المهم قررت **Viola** انها "تتكر" في زي رجال وتسمى نفسها (**Cesario**).. ساعدها الكابتن في هذا الشيء. ثم ذهبت لحاكم.. هذه المدينة الا وهو (**Orsino**) وما أن لبثت 3 أيام الا وقد نالت أعجاب الامير.. طبعاً.. اورسينو يحب الأميرة (**Olivia**) وشوي يموت عليها من الحب (المهم ارسل لها رسول من عنده قبل ما تجي **Viola** اسمه **فالينتونيو**.. وقال له ان الأميرة **Olivia** لن تكلم أي شخص لمدة 7 سنوات بسبب وفاة اخوها هذا الشيء يجعل الامير يعيش في حالة من التفكير العميق ومن التعب النفسي بسبب حبه للأميرة. الأمير **Orsino**

أعجب بـ **Cesario** وقال. له. انت شكلك يشبه الحريم ويمكن توافق **Olivia** انها تتكلم معك وتوصل لها اني احبها واموت عليها... ومن هذا الكلام (**Viola**).. **Cesario**... بدأت تحب الامير.... **Orsino** ولكنها ما تقدر تقوله هذا الشيء لانها متتكرة في زي رجال.. المهم راحت **Viola** الى بيت **Olivia** وأصرت ان تقابل الأميرة طبعاً مين حصلت قدامها ولد عم الأميرة (**Sir Tody** هذا الآدمي 24 ساعه يشرب).. وبعد الاصرار سمح الخدم لها بالدخول... ودار بينهم حديث.. وقالت لها انها ما راح تلقى بالاً للأمير. **Orsino**

وكانت **Viola** تستخدم ارق العبارات وأحلى الجمل... في الكلام مما جعل الأميرة **Olivia** تعجب (**Viola**) **Cesario** المهم يوم جت بتطلع.. **Viola** قالت.. **Olivia** لازم تقولين لي وش راح يقول الامير لمن يسمع وش قلت له.... (مو من حب لكن ودها ان (**Viola**) **Cesario** ترجع. المهم راحت عند الامير وقالت له ما حصل. وقد حزين الامير.. ويقول ليش تسوي كذا المفروض انها تحبني. ومن هذا القبيل **Sebastian**... اللي هو أخو **Viola** رجع مع **Antonio** من رحله (وعلى فكره **Sebastian** و.. **Viola** توأم يعني نسخه من بعض..) المهم عندما دخل **Sebastian** قصر.. الأميرة **Olivia** وجد ان بعض الخدم

(يمونون يعني يمزحون عليه وكأنهم يعرفونه من فتره وهو أول مره يجي هذه الديرة) لانهم توقعوا ان (**Cesario** رجع من شدة الشبه) و **Sebastian** ما يدري وش السالفة (مستغرب) المهم الاميرة توقعت ان **Cesario** رجع وقالت له معلش ما عليكم منهم... اسفه حقك علي. وهو مستغرب يقول لا عادي. المهم الأميرة عرضت عليه الزواج. تحسب انه **Cesario** ووافق (يعني بنت جمال ودلال وملكه وش يبغى بعد)

المهم تزوجت.. **Sebastian** ولما علمت **Viola** ان خوها قدم اخبرت الامير **Orsino** انها أمراه وليست رجل وان اسمها **Viola**.. وعندها وافق الامير **Orsino** على الزواج منها. وكل أخذ نصيبه ..

وانتهت المسرحية..

طبعا. مثل ما تعرفوا ان **Viola** تنكرت في زي رجال وسمت اسمها **Cesario** علشان ما احد يلخبط بس..

وتمت بحمد الله والله يوفق الجميع

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