

Macbeth commentary; act ii scene i

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



ENGLISH COMMENTARY-MACBETH; ACT II, SCENE I Act II, scene 1 takes place in Macbeth's castle- Castle of Inverness- when Banquo and Fleance encounter Macbeth on their way to bed, who is preparing himself for his grim task. The soliloquy in act II, scene 1 is extremely important because it is the last time we hear Macbeth's thoughts on murdering King Duncan before he actually performs the act. Macbeth is just about to murder King Duncan and is hence about to create an upheaval in the hierarchical state of Scotland.

Here, in this scene, the readers/viewers of the play come to know exactly what Macbeth's motives are and we are able to see how power and ambition have corrupted him and have caused him to do something that he would have otherwise never thought of doing (if the witches hadn't implanted the idea of the evil act in his mind). In this scene Macbeth appears more than preoccupied with the idea of murdering king Duncan and many literary tools and figures of speech in this soliloquy emphasize the state of mind of Macbeth.

In the beginning of the soliloquy itself, there are two alliterations which tell us something about the state of mind of Macbeth: " The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. " Here, the alliteration is on the words: " handle", " hand" and " come", " clutch". Alliteration is used in this context to create an emphasis on the words used. The words " handle" and " hand" are used to create an image of the handle of the dagger being in Macbeth's hand. This tells us that the time when the dagger will be in Macbeth's hand (that is to kill King Duncan), is very close.

The line “ Come, let me clutch thee”, along with having alliteration in it is also an apostrophe. Here, Macbeth addresses the dagger as if it is present at that time and can understand what Macbeth is trying to say. The use of this apostrophe tells us that Macbeth is so “ rapt” with the idea of murdering King Duncan, that he actually imagines a dagger in front of him when there isn’t one. The uses of alliteration on the words “ come” and “ clutch”, indicate the closeness of Macbeth to the dagger (that is how close Macbeth is to killing King Duncan).

An antithesis is used when Macbeth says “ I have thee not, and yet I see thee still”. This tells us that there isn’t a dagger present and yet he sees the image of a dagger. This again tells us that Macbeth is extremely preoccupied with the execution of the evil act, and is hence hallucinating. Here, he even addresses his hallucination (i. e. the dagger) as if it were present at that time, which again emphasizes on how anxious Macbeth is about the act that he is just about to perform.

Later on in the soliloquy, an alliteration is mentioned which further tells us about the state of mind of Macbeth at that time. The alliteration on the words “ marshall’st me” tells us that Macbeth is so drawn to his task that it is almost as if he is being beckoned by the dagger to kill Duncan. Further on, when Macbeth says “ bloody business” in his soliloquy, it is alliteration as well as a euphemism. The word “ blood” has already been used over 30 times so far in the play. The spilling of blood is crucial to the survival of this kingdom as, for them, the more blood one spills, the more heroic one becomes.

But, in this case, Macbeth is threatening to disrupt the hierarchy in the State by the spilling of blood. The use of the alliteration emphasizes the fact that Macbeth is about to disrupt the hierarchical state of Scotland, by the spilling of blood which is otherwise considered heroic. This also acts as a euphemism, as, instead of “murder”, a less strong word is used. The use of a euphemism tells us that Macbeth himself is afraid of the bold task that he is just about to perform even though he seems determined.

Later on, another euphemism is used for the word “murder”, when Macbeth says “curtain’d sleep”. Through this euphemism the same message is conveyed to us. Macbeth’s motives are also better highlighted with the use of similes and metaphors in the soliloquy. When Macbeth says: “The wolf, whose howl’s his watch, thus with his stealthy pace, with Tarquin’s ravishing strides towards his design” Here, the murder is compared to the Roman tyrant Tarquin. The use of this figure of speech helps us to understand Macbeth’s mind.

This also tells us that Macbeth is fixed on his motives and is not going to be deterred by anything. The simile which is used after this also tells us more about Macbeth. When Macbeth says “Moves like a ghost”, it implies that Macbeth’s motives are to be kept a secret. The use of the word “ghost” in this simile has the connotation of underlying dread and possession of one’s body, both of which have significance in this case. There is underlying dread because the king of Scotland is just about to be murdered and this will create a lot of turbulence.

Also, it's almost as if Macbeth has been possessed by ambition and power, because he would not have even thought of committing such an evil deed otherwise. Another figure of speech which is used towards the end of the soliloquy is personification. When Macbeth says "Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts", it is more than evident that Macbeth is extremely secretive of what he is about to do. The use of the figure of speech, tell us that he is probably scared of the consequences he will have to face and hence wants nobody to know of what is going to happen.

Another personification is used when Macbeth says "The bell invites me". This personification is used to convey to us that Macbeth is extremely close to his deed which he is to perform and it almost as if he is being "invited" to murder King Duncan. Many tools and figures of speech have been used to convey to the readers as well as the viewers to the play, the state of Macbeth's mind just before he murders King Duncan. These tools have been used extremely effectively and add to the meaning of the situation.