

Shakespeare's Macbeth.

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INTRODUCTION

1

'Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave'(5,1,59/60). Lady Macbeth's comment, being out of context, can be read two ways. It is a rational statement because the dead cannot leave their graves, yet it is also irrational, because it is something she says after she has gone mad. The dichotomy: the rational and the irrational, is at the heart of *Macbeth*.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the play and students are assumed to have a working knowledge of *Macbeth*. Clearly, it is most important to have a good understanding of the play. After reading it, the aim of the guide is to aid your revision and your reflection, not simply to determine your opinions. It is necessary to realise that it is a study aid, assisting you to reach your own conclusions as to the important aspects of the play. There are various sections, which cover the following: character, themes, structure, imagery and language. Most of these sections end with a brief summary, which can be used for revision. All sections have questions, which will help you to revise by providing a focus for your thoughts on the play.

The best preparation for an exam is to ensure that your ideas are structured. Instead of thinking about guilt, violence, insanity, ambition and repression individually, setting out a plan of your ideas and revision could be done as follows:

Ambition > Violence > Guilt > Repression > Insanity.

This gives room for overlapping thought: how ambition leads to insanity or how violence and guilt are connected. Structuring your ideas in this way is similar to the way that you would write an essay. It is important, therefore, to see the connections between the various aspects of the guide. At the end of the conclusion are essay questions, which should be used as revision aids only, not simply as a means of answering the final exam. However, you could write answers to them to help structure your ideas into the form of an essay. All these suggestions are valuable methods of assisting you with your revision.

It is important to consider what the influencing factors are on a text. The author, clearly, is the greatest influencing factor since these are his words, yet there are also influences on the writer which may manifest themselves in the text. Such a factor is the author's culture.

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford upon Avon in April 1564. He died on April 23, 1616. It is fair to say that little is known about his life and what we do know is usually directly concerned with his work. We know that in March 1592, The Rose Theatre staged a performance of 'Harry the Sixth', the first part of *Henry VI*. By the close of that year, Shakespeare had gained notoriety but the following year saw an outbreak of the plague, causing the theatre company to disband. They re-formed in 1594, with Shakespeare having a share in the Lord Chamberlain's theatre company, which acted in a theatre in Shoreditch. This period saw him pass from his early plays to his mark of maturity with *Romeo and Juliet*, followed by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

INTRODUCTION

2

The theatre the company used was demolished and a new theatre built on the south bank of the Thames - The Globe. It was in or around this period that Shakespeare was first recognized as the greatest of dramatists, an opinion that has never changed. It was also around the opening of The Globe that Shakespeare wrote his first mature tragedy, *Julius Caesar*. This would be followed three years later by *Hamlet*.

On the 24th of March, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died and was succeeded by James I. A more enthusiastic patron of the theatre, he took over the company, making all the members King's Men. It was shortly after this that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*. James I was also James VI of Scotland, which united the two countries. *Macbeth* would have been of interest for James since it features many of his ancestors; in the pageant of the kings in Act Four, Scene One, the final king is James.

Macbeth is influenced by the social structure of the time, and its themes support this structure, the feudal system, which was based on land ownership - the more land a person owned, the more power he possessed. It was a very strict form of stratification, with little room for social mobility, and people usually stayed in the class into which they were born. The head of all classes was the King or Queen, the most powerful person in the land, who, at this time in history, had the most control over the country. The stratification was linked to religion: the King was the mortal closest to God and was to be revered as a religious figure. On the whole, the King's behaviour, like that of a God, was never questioned. James I was the last King to have this advantage; he caused great conflict in England, but died before it reflected on him. His son and successor, Charles I, caused the situation to deteriorate until it resulted in a revolt and his execution. England, for the only time in its history, became a republic, ruled solely by a government, until the Restoration, the return from exile of Charles II. His ascension of the throne was made on condition that Parliament could have more influence and power. Thus the feudal society began to shift towards the democratic society of today.

These are important aspects to consider, showing a better understanding of the historical context when discussed with reference to *Macbeth*. Similarly, the studies of characters and themes can be understood further in the light of the social order of the time. In studying *Macbeth*, the various factors should be related to each other.

CHARACTER STUDY - MACBETH

3

The main character is not introduced into the play until the third scene. Shakespeare builds up the entrance of the protagonist in his tragedies; neither Hamlet nor Othello appear until the second scene. This dramatic ploy ensures that the audience (or reader) becomes intrigued. The witches have already incurred mystery and tension by mentioning Macbeth in the brief opening scene so that we want to know what their involvement is with him. Tension increases with the Captain's report in Scene Two: "Brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)"(1,2,16), making the link between such a man and three malevolent witches even more improbable. Macbeth is shown as a brave, noble warrior defending his country against a mass of enemies. Although true at this stage, once he encounters the witches, we are made aware of his most prominent character trait: ambition. When greeted by the witches with the news of his approaching kingship, Banquo states "Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear things that sound so fair?"(1,3,52). Macbeth is so taken aback because the witches have uttered out loud what he has always secretly wished. Lady Macbeth acknowledges that her husband: "Art not without ambition"(1,5,19).

The witches' prophecy is a catalyst, turning his wishes into actions. Without the idea that he might be King coming from outsiders, he would not regard Malcolm, The Prince of Cumberland, as "a step on which I must fall down, or else o'erleap"(1,4,48-49). Macbeth is startled by the realisation of his ambitions and violent impulses and he wishes for darkness to hide these feelings: "Stars hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires!"(1,4,50-51).

Macbeth is weak and easily influenced; left to himself, he would not have killed Duncan. Having been swayed by the words of the witches, the second, and greater influence is his wife, whose ideas are even more overtly horrific. She decided on Duncan's death minutes after reading her husband's letter: "The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan"(1,5,38-39). She is determined to convince Macbeth, cunningly attacking him on grounds of gender. His belief in himself is steadily undermined by his wife, which reveals both her manipulative powers and his insecurities. He may claim: "I dare do all that may become a man, who dares more is none"(1,7,46-47) yet his self image is disturbed by Lady Macbeth's continual references to his weakness and cowardice. It could even be argued that Macbeth murders Duncan to prove his masculinity. If this is the case, there cannot be a better example of his weakness. The irony of Macbeth's plight is that he maintains a belief in his own free will. The best illustration of this is when the illusory dagger points towards Duncan's chambers, which Macbeth takes as an omen: "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going"(2,1,42). He believes he is master of his own destiny, but in reality, he is influenced by others to such a degree that he commits the most heinous crime.

It is this crime and the ones that follow which lead to his mental decline. Soon after he kills Duncan, he says: "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep' - the innocent sleep"(2,2,34-35). Later, at the banquet, he sees a vision of blood soaked Banquo. He can never be secure in his position because of his mental uneasiness. After the slaughter of Duncan, the subsequent murders are due to his insecurities, which, in turn, have arisen from the former king's death. Macbeth is trapped in a vicious circle and it takes its toll on his mind.

CHARACTER STUDY - MACBETH

4

Referring to his kingship, he believes "To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus" (3,1,47-48). Despite his mental uneasiness, he always attempts to give the impression of being the bold warrior that he once was. When Lady Macbeth asks "Are you a man?" he replies, "Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that which might appal the devil"(3,4,59-60). He is infused with artificial courage after the apparently bizarre prophecies of the witches in Act Four. This artificiality is one of the reasons for the stoical indifference which has consumed him by the end of the play. Macbeth's feigned friendliness which he greets the king with in Act One is a good example, but the best comparison is the way in which he speaks of Duncan's death and, later, his wife's. He caused Duncan's death, therefore his exclamation "Had I but died an hour before this chance I had lived a blessed time"(2,3,89-90), is outrageously spurious. By Act Five, his spirit has been dowsed by the events he has instigated, thus the only response he has towards his wife's death is the indifferent remark: "She should have died hereafter"(5,5,17). The earlier artificiality has caused an emotional void. He has lived dishonestly, and now that he faces a situation where he must confront honest emotion, is incapable of doing so. This is the result of the emotionless tyranny he induced in himself, caused by his ambition, influenced by his wife and the witches. It leaves him empty and indifferent.

POINTS TO NOTE

Brave: "Brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)"(1,2,16). Just as we never see Hamlet happy, we do not see Macbeth's bravery.

Ambitious: "The prince of Cumberland! - That is a step on which I must fall down or else o'erleap"(1,4,48-49). The first signs that his ambition may manifest itself in a violent act.

Belief in his own free will: "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going"(2,1,42). Ironic, since we are aware that he is influenced by others.

Insanity: "O! Full of scorpions is my mind"(3,2,36). Macbeth's mental downfall is well documented throughout.

Artificiality: "From this instant there's nothing serious in mortality"(2,3,90-91). His spurious response to Duncan's death.

Indifference: "Out, out, brief candle!"(5,5,23). Read this with reference to language, imagery and Macbeth's stoical attitude.

When dead: "This dead butcher"(5,9,35). The final description of Macbeth; his epitaph.

Questions.

- 1) To what degree are Macbeth's actions influenced by others?
- 2) At certain points, Macbeth is obviously mad. Is this so by the end of the play?
- 3) What do his varying responses to death tell us about Macbeth?

CHARACTER STUDY - LADY MACBETH

5

It is ironic that Lady Macbeth's first words are those of Macbeth, as she reads his letter, since from that point onward, his actions are determined, to a degree, by her will. For the rest of that scene she is maliciously decisive. She begins by summoning "Spirits that tend on mortal thought" to "Unsex me here"(1,5,40), which provides insight into two aspects of her character, so that she appears innately evil and lacks femininity. She leaps from hearing about the witches' prophecy to determining the death of Duncan, to which she alludes in her first meeting with her husband. After Macbeth states that Duncan intends to leave their castle, she responds: "O! Never shall sun that morrow see!"(1,5,60-61). Another example of her horrifyingly unscrupulous attitude is her comment concerning a child "I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, and dashed the brains out"(1,7,56-58).

The second insight into Lady Macbeth's character comes in her soliloquy. The theme of gender is explicit throughout the play and she is its main focus. She asks to be unsexed, to be rid of her femininity, which, at the time, would be seen as a hindrance to decisiveness and to cold blooded malice. Macbeth's comment "Bring forth men- children only! For thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males"(1,7,72-74), highlights his belief that his wife's traits would be best passed on to men. Parallel to her masculine persona are the effeminate traits which she ascribes to Macbeth. This is one instant of her manipulative behaviour: by attacking Macbeth on grounds of his gender, it provokes him into acting out her wishes. For example, when she is persuading him to murder Duncan: "When you durst do it, then you are a man; and to be more than what you were, you would be so much more the man"(1,7,49-51). The reason for her manipulative and malicious behaviour, a direct comparison with that of the witches, is her own ambition. She wants to be Queen of Scotland, and for the kingship to be in her family. This is obvious, although it is never explicitly mentioned.

After the first murder, Lady Macbeth appears to remain unaffected by the violence she had instigated, due to the repression of her reactions. She states "These deeds must not be thought. After these ways: So, it all make us mad"(2,2,32-33), a sign of what will follow. She does not consider the actions or consequences deeply because her ambition blinds her. Her glib attitude is revealed in two ways at the banquet. Firstly, Macbeth's mind is beginning to decay at this point while she still appears cool and rational. This is signified by his hallucinations. Secondly, her excuse for Macbeth's odd behaviour comes very smoothly, she states in an instant that "My lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth". Nevertheless, Lady Macbeth is artificially phlegmatic and her conscience is, in actuality, racked with guilt. In a brief display of guilt over the killing of Duncan, she states "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't"(2,2,12-13). This memory prevents her from killing and although possibly an excuse, it is still a sign of conscience. Guilt moves from being implicit to explicit with the deterioration of Lady Macbeth's mind

Her decline, which is from one mental extreme to another is not portrayed. At the end of Act three, she is in control and does not feature in Act four. However, by the start of Act five, her mental condition is such that the doctor called upon to cure her notes "This disease is beyond my practise"(5,1,55).

CHARACTER STUDY - LADY MACBETH

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Lady Macbeth's actions illustrate her state of mind: an obsession with illusory blood stained hands, and a compulsion with washing them, though the comment "Out, damned spot!"(5,1,33) signifies these imaginary stains will never wash out, just as her guilt stained conscience can never be cleansed. She cries "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"(5,1,41). The doctor notes what may occur and states "Remove from her the means of all annoyance"(5,1,72), meaning instruments that may ensure Lady Macbeth's suicide. Though now insane, Lady Macbeth has, conversely, become more feminine, as in the comment "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"(5,1,47-48). Shakespeare is possibly attributing the cause of some of her madness to the psychological departure from femininity.

She is given two notable epithets, the first being the unfeeling comment by Macbeth "She should have died hereafter"(5,5,17). More vividly: "His fiend-like Queen"(5,9,35) as Malcolm calls her, is the last reference to Lady Macbeth. It reduces her to Macbeth's property, a dubious conclusion, since the audience has witnessed her dominance throughout.

POINTS TO NOTE

Malicious: "Plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, and dashed the brains out"(1,7, 57-58). An explicitly horrific and anti-feminine image.

Manipulative: "When you durst do it then you are a man"(1,7,49). By continually attacking Macbeth's self image of bravery and masculinity, it causes him to feel he must prove himself.

Masculine: "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall"(1,5,47-48). This soliloquy is full of Lady Macbeth's desire to be unsexed.

Repressed: "Consider it not so deeply"(2,2,29). Emotional repression is what leads to her insanity.

Artificial glibness: "What's done is done"(3,2,12). Similarly, this trait is a result of her repressed feelings.

Guilt: "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't"(2,2,12-13). This may be an excuse, but it is probably a sign of guilt.

Insane: "What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed"(5,1,63-64). A direct inversion of the complacency of her earlier artificial attitude.

When dead: "Fiend-like Queen"(5,9,35). This final reference depicts what she had become.

Questions.

- 1) Do we pity Lady Macbeth by the end of the play?
- 2) How is Lady Macbeth similar to the witches?
- 3) Who is in control; Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, or supernatural forces?

Banquo

Banquo is depicted as being as brave and as noble as Macbeth: "They smack of honour both"(1,2,45). The difference is, as the play unfolds, Banquo's honour does not falter. He is openly intrigued by the witches, not suspiciously reserved like Macbeth. This highlights Banquo's clear conscience, he wishes to hear what the witches have to say, but simply because he is intrigued, not because of malicious ambition. He is a rational man and when the witches disappear, he wonders "Have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?"(1,3,84-85). The contrasting reaction to their prophecy leads to Banquo's suspicions of Macbeth and his belief in the evil intentions of the witches. He says "To win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths"(1,3,123-124). This is a warning to Macbeth from a friend with great insight.

After the death of Duncan, he suspects Macbeth, commenting in a soliloquy "I fear Thou played'st most foully for't"(3,1,2-3). He therefore decides to leave Macbeth's castle, but is murdered on his journey. His death is as noble as his life because he sacrifices his chance of escape in order to save his son: "Fly good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! Then mayest revenge"(3,3,17-18).

POINTS TO NOTE

Rational: "Have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner"(1,3,84-85). He gradually realises that Macbeth's reason has been taken prisoner by the prophecy.

Suspicious: "I fear thou played'st most foully for't"(3,1,2-3). He is suspicious both of the witches and Macbeth.

Noble: "Noble Banquo, that has't no less deserved, nor must be known, no less to have done so"(1,4,29-31). Banquo's honour is unassailable throughout, in contrast to Macbeth's.

Duncan

Duncan is seen as a good king. He is judicious, which is demonstrated by his execution of the original Thane of Cawdor and his decision to give the title to Macbeth: "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won"(1,2,70). He is trusting, for example when referring to the former Thane: "He was a gentleman on whom I built the absolute trust"(1,4,13-14). This is dramatic irony, as he equally builds an absolute trust in Macbeth, the man who will kill him.

After the battle, Duncan greets him: "O worthiest cousin! The sin of my ingratitude even now was heavy on me"(1,4,14-16). His trust can be interpreted as naive, but trust is a quality which secures his reputation as a good king, a reputation that fuels the revenge sought by Malcolm and Macduff; as the latter comments "Thy royal father was a most sainted king"(4,3,108-109). It is this reverence of Duncan's memory which animates Macbeth's enemies, determining them to destroy him.

POINTS TO NOTE

Judicious: "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won"(1,2,70). He deals fairly with all the people in his kingdom.

Trusting: "Our honoured hostess - The love that follows us sometimes is our trouble, which we still thank as love"(1,6,10-12). His affection towards Lady Macbeth is probably the ultimate display of trust, hence her betrayal is even greater.

When dead: "Thy royal father was a most sainted king"(4,3,108-109). Duncan's memory requires to be avenged and instigates the battle against Macbeth.

OTHER CHARACTER STUDIES



Macduff.

Macduff is a loyal subject. He is one of the main protagonists in avenging the killings, which include his own family. He is shaken to the soul by the impious murder of Duncan; to see the slain king's body is to "destroy your sight with a new gorgon"(2,3,69-70). Lady Macduff is unconvincing when she names Macduff a traitor but the son is wise and can see through his mother's pretences. The messenger, Rosse, tells her: "You know not whether it was his wisdom or his fear"(4,2,4-5), as he suspects Macbeth of plotting Macduff's murder.

Macduff is an ardent patriot, as can be seen with his attempts to convince Malcolm to rid Scotland of the tyrant. He also adds a new dimension to the gender theme when receiving news of his family's death: "I must also feel it as a man"(4,3,220), the first time in the play that to admit to emotions is the correct behaviour for a man. Macduff is the avenger, he that was not of woman born kills Macbeth "Th' usurper's cursed head: the time is free"(5,9,21). Macduff is a character of restoration, bringing events full circle.

POINTS TO NOTE

Remorseful: "O horror! horror! horror! Tongue, nor heart, cannot conceive, nor name thee!"(2,3,62-63). His remorse contrasts with Macbeth's artificial reaction.

Patriotic: "Bleed, bleed poor country!"(4,3,31). One reason for Macduff's vengeance is his love of his country.

Avenging: "I have no words; my voice is in my sword"(5,8,6-7). Macduff is a man of action and slays Macbeth.

Character study: Malcolm.

Malcolm is the king's loyal son and successor to the throne. Malcolm is disturbed by the death of his father, but does not display it because: "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy"(2,3,135-136). He suspects Macbeth, who is the false man showing unfelt sorrow. Wisely, Malcolm moves to England. The scene between Malcolm and Macduff opens: "Let us seek out some desolate shade and there weep our sad bosoms empty"(4,3,1-2), highlighting his remorse. The veracity of Macduff's pleas for vengeance is tested by Malcolm because he needs to ensure that Macduff's motives are honourable. Macbeth should not be replaced with anyone; it must be a noble king. And Malcolm's nobility is shown here: "What I am truly is thine, and my poor country's to command"(4,3,131-132). He is another figure of renewal, the new king fully aware that there is "More to do, which would be planted newly with time"(5,9,30-31).

POINTS TO NOTE

Suspicious: "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy"(2,3,135-136).

Malcolm is one of the first to suspect a deeper mystery surrounding his father's death.

Remorseful: "What I believe, I'll wail;"(4,3,8). In this scene Malcolm pretends he has given up, yet he becomes a man of action.

Patriotic: "What I am truly is thine, and my poor country's to command"(4,3,131-132). As the new king, he symbolises hope for Scotland's future.

Questions:

- 1) How is the trait of loyalty portrayed by the characters?
- 2) What is said about kingship by the characters?
- 3) How is suspicion portrayed by the characters?

Ambition

The strongest theme in *Macbeth* and the main characteristic of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, it leads to deception, insanity and death.

Macbeth displays ambition right from the beginning, in his reaction to the witches' prophecy. There are signs before the introduction of Lady Macbeth that ambition may manifest itself in violence; as Macbeth states "The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be. Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see"(1,4,52/53). His subconscious is transmitting thoughts of murder, fuelled by his ambitious desires. The idea that this may culminate in violence is finalised by Lady Macbeth's actions and reactions. She determines Duncan's death, a decision which springs from her own ambition.

Importantly, ambition is embodied only in these two characters: "This dead butcher and his fiend-like Queen"(5,9,35). Furthermore, it is portrayed only as an extremely negative characteristic. It is also seen as treachery, the opposite of loyalty, since ambition means a need for social mobility. At that time, people were expected to respect those on a higher level and not hope to displace them, which amounted to treason. This disloyalty is depicted by Lady Macbeth's emotionless calculation to murder the king to propel her own social standing, for Duncan "Never shall sun that morrow see!"(1,5,61). What should prevent ambition from breeding in a subject's mind is their conscience. In Elizabethan times, the King ruled by Divine Right; the 16th century was strongly religious and the King was therefore as revered as God. Religion was the source of conscience and would determine a person's honest loyal behaviour. The killing of Duncan is also the metaphorical killing of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's conscience. Their ambition has overtaken any positive characteristics they may have had. When Macbeth attains kingship, his ambition can take him no further. This is true also for Lady Macbeth, and without ambition propelling them blindly on, then conscience returns, manifested as extreme guilt, paranoia and insanity.

Ambition is portrayed very negatively in *Macbeth* because it goes against the idea behind feudal social order.

POINTS TO NOTE

Negative: "This dead butcher and his fiend like Queen"(5,9,35) are the only people who are ambitious.

Violent: "That is a step on which I must fall down or else o'erleap"(1,4,49/50). To be ambitious implies a degree of ruthlessness, usually manifesting itself as violence.

Conscienceless: "Never shall sun that morrow see"(1,5,60-61). Ambition causes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to sacrifice their conscience.

Questions

- 1) Today, ambition is seen as a positive trait; how is it portrayed in *Macbeth* and what does this say about the 16th century?
- 2) What are the implications of ambition in *Macbeth*?

Kingship

In the 16th century, the King was seen as the closest person to God because of the feudal system which formed the social classification in this era. The King was the highest rank in the social structure, which was deemed to have been granted him by God and therefore known as rule by *Divine Right*.

Duncan embodies the idea of the good King: judicious, honest, trusting his subjects. He is balanced in his judgement, for example, the execution of the former Thane of Cawdor: "Go, pronounce his present death, and with his former title greet Macbeth"(1,2,67/68). By contrast, Macbeth is a mutation of the divine chain of order. Kingship was not bestowed on him by God, he takes on that rank himself by his own acts. He is a tyrant and, due to his own corrupt mind, his actions affect all of Scotland. "Those he commands move only in command, nothing in love"(5,2,19/20) comments Angus. Since kingship is created by God, Macbeth is the unnatural king, whereas Malcolm is the natural successor to the throne: "We will establish our estate upon our eldest, Malcolm"(1,4,37/38). He is a symbol of restoration, of the new born hope for Scotland. With Macbeth's destruction, the natural lineage is restored with Malcolm.

The link between the King and God is stressed throughout the play in various images; good kings are linked to God and religion. Macduff comments to Malcolm: "Thy royal father was a most sainted King"(4,3,108/109) while the latter's comment: "Devilish Macbeth", links the tyrant with Hell and the Devil, a view endorsed by Macduff: "Not in the legions of horrid Hell can come a devil more damned in evils to top Macbeth"(4,3,55/57).

With the natural lineage restored, the play is resolved; Macbeth's being an unnatural king is the cause of the action of the play. When Malcolm is pronounced King, this marks the return of rationality. In his speech closing the play, he appears as a rational King, with balanced judgement, just as his father was: "we will perform in measure, time and place"(5,9,38/39). These are the views necessary for a good ruler: pious, rational and balanced. This blueprint was corrupted by Macbeth, a king placed on the throne by his own actions but restored by Malcolm, the rightful king of Scotland.

POINTS TO NOTE

Godliness: "Thy royal father was a most sainted king"(4,3,108/109). Duncan is symbolic of the good king, as shown by this implicit linking of him with God.

Tyranny: "Not in the legions of horrid hell can come a devil more damned in evils to top Macbeth"(4,3,55/57). Macbeth is an unnatural king, therefore linked with the Devil.

Lineage: "We will establish our estate upon our eldest"(1,4,37/38). Lineage is a natural link between father and son. It is destroyed by Macbeth.

Questions

- 1) What is said about kingship and religion in Macbeth; what does this say about the society?
- 2) How is kingship natural and unnatural in Macbeth?

The Supernatural

The play opens in a disturbingly supernatural context, with the three witches mysteriously commenting that they will next meet "When the hurly-burly's done when the battles lost and won!"(1,1,3/4). The weird sisters are the main focus for the supernatural, passing in and out of the play, yet seeming to direct its action. Since the witches represent the supernatural, they are also seen as unnatural, Banquo states they "Look not like th' inhabitants o' the earth and yet are on't"(1,3,41/42).

This unnatural aspect is echoed in Lady Macbeth, who calls on "Spirits that tend on mortal thoughts"(1,5,40/41) to make her remorseless. From that moment on, until she becomes insane, she is depicted as masculine, an unnatural female. There are many parallels between Lady Macbeth and the witches, whose gender is also questionable, as Banquo says "You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so"(1,3,45/47). The supernatural powers which seem to determine the actions of the play are opposed to God, the natural power who directs the righteous characters.

The witches are also linked with mythology and superstition, hence the ingredients of their potion: "Scale of dragon" and the "Slips of yew silvered in the moon's eclipse"(4,1,27/28). All these factors: the supernatural, myths and superstitions are opposed to rationality. Macbeth's behaviour becomes irrational, beginning with the hallucinatory dagger and ending in Caithness stating "Some say he's mad"(5,2,13). He has become trapped by the supernatural, which also causes the downfall of Lady Macbeth. The 16th and 17th centuries were a conscious move towards rationality, with people trying to escape the superstitions of the middle ages and progressing towards controlling themselves and their environment. Supernatural belief is a regression and the play is a warning against this, as can be seen in its structure since it opens with the witches and closes with Malcolm, king and symbol of rationality and balance.

In this era, witchcraft was punishable by death, and the last witch was not executed until the next century. *Macbeth* is a manifesto against the supernatural and the marginal groups of a society pushing forward towards enlightenment. It is portrayed as sinister, dangerous and opposed to the natural ruling forces of life.

POINTS TO NOTE

Predetermining: "None of woman born shall harm Macbeth"(4,1,80/81). All the witches' prophecies come true, although they are misinterpreted by Macbeth.

Irrational: "Have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?"(1,3,84/84). Banquo believes the sight of the witches is a bout of insanity.

Unnatural: "Look not like th' inhabitants o' the earth"(1,3,41). Both the witches and Lady Macbeth are portrayed as unnatural

Evil: "Be bloody, bold and resolute"(4,1,79) is what the witches instruct Macbeth, as they do most of his actions.

Questions.

- 1) The supernatural is portrayed as evil. What does this reveal about the play and of the society of the era?
- 2) What parallels are drawn between the witches and Lady Macbeth due to the supernatural?

Loyalty

Loyalty, as has been discussed, is seen as a trait which is in opposition to ambition. The first example is the original Thane of Cawdor, "That most disloyal traitor"(1,2,54), who assists the Norwegians in a battle against Scotland. His demise means the title is transferred to Macbeth, the first step upwards in rank. In the battle, Macbeth and Banquo demonstrate great loyalty to their King and country by apparently defeating the invading hordes single handedly.

Macbeth is obviously the most disloyal of all the characters. Duncan stays at his castle "In double trust"(1,7,12), as Macbeth is both the king's relative and his subject. He is also the host and his duty is to defend Duncan. Yet, despite all these calls on his loyalty, Macbeth murders the king.

Similarly, patriotism is loyalty to a country, and best demonstrated by Malcolm and Macduff; according to the latter, they should "Like good men bestride our down-fell birthdom"(4,3,3/4). Here, righteousness is linked with loyalty because all good men would willingly defend their country and when Malcolm states "What I am truly is thine, and my poor country's to command"(4,3,131/132), this connects the two: loyalty to people and to place. Macbeth is disloyal to the King, and thus disloyal to Scotland; the country suffers because of his actions. Rosse states that, because of Macbeth's tyranny, Scotland "Cannot be called our mother but our grave"(4,3,165/166).

Disloyalty is portrayed throughout as wrong, immoral and a precursor to violence and guilt. Loyalty, however, is neither good nor bad, but rather, amoral because the most evil people can remain loyal to each other. That loyalty can be in support of wrong is best portrayed by the witches, one of whom is not given any chestnuts by a sailor's wife and because of this, the other two create a wind to shipwreck the sailor. To this act, the first witch's response is: "Th' art kind"(1,3,12) because they are being loyal to her. In reality, it is not a kind act at all because it will cause the death of an innocent man. Loyalty can inspire evil deeds.

As is apparent from the start, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are loyal to each other. Not only are they fellow conspirators, there are countless examples of Lady Macbeth protecting Macbeth by lying, most notably at the banquet scene. Though they are the ultimate characters of evil in the play, nevertheless, one of their characteristics is loyalty.

POINTS TO NOTE

Disloyalty: "That most disloyal traitor"(1,2,54). The Thane of Cawdor's treachery is a parallel to Macbeth's.

Patriotism: "Like good men bestride our downfell birthdom"(4,3,3/4). Macduff's loyalty is directed towards his country.

Amoral: "Th' art kind"(1,3,12). The witches' brief comment shows that loyalty can also relate to evil.

Questions.

- 1) Show how loyalty can be expressed towards person and place.
- 2) What is said about loyalty and disloyalty in respect to good and bad?

Violence

Violence is a result of a collection of other themes in *Macbeth*. The violent acts Macbeth commits are due to his ambition. However, other violent acts, such as the war with Norway and the slaying of Macbeth, are the result of loyalty.

Duncan is the victim of Macbeth's violent actions and the murder is what dislodges Macbeth's mind. In the dagger hallucination, he sees: "On thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood"(2,1,46), a horrific mental image, which suggests that violence is already on his mind. After the murder, Macbeth is so shocked that he will not go back to the chamber where the slaughtered corpse lies, saying "I am afraid to think what I have done; Look on't again I dare not"(2,2,50/51). The reality of violence has deeply affected him.

The violent acts which follow are instigated by Macbeth, although he employs murderers to commit them. The slaying of Banquo, who "Safe in a ditch he bides, with twenty trenched gashes on his head"(3,4,26/27), is horrific and shows how deluded Macbeth has become. Banquo had been his best friend, yet Macbeth's ambition causes him to have him murdered; this betrayal is sometimes overlooked in *Macbeth*.

The most horrifying act of violence is the murder of Lady Macduff and her son. The stage directions read: "Exit Lady Macduff crying 'murder', and pursued by the murderers"(Close of 4,2). Her slaying is left to our imagination. The murder of the defenceless woman and her child is also the most cowardly because Macbeth orders others to carry it out for him.

Nonetheless, certain violent acts in *Macbeth* can be seen as noble, or motivated by justifiable revenge. Scene II describes the war between Scotland and Norway. It is in the battlefield where Macbeth "Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe: Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds"(1,2,39/40). Here, violence is adjudged to be bravery because Macbeth uses violence to destroy the enemy, regarded as a noble action which earns him the title of Thane of Cawdor. Later, his death at the hands of Macduff is extremely violent, but this is justified because it is the death of a tyrant: "Behold, where stands th' usurper's cursed head"(5,9,20/21). Generally, violence is used in the play to increase our repulsion to Macbeth.

The examples are very gory, yet they can also be considered noble deeds, such as the destruction of the tyrant at the hands of Macduff.

POINTS TO NOTE

Vivid description: "Twenty trenched gashes on his head"(3,4,26/27). All the acts of violence are described in horrific detail.

Repulsive: "Look on't again I dare not"(2,2,50/51). It is the violent murder of Duncan that causes Macbeth's insanity.

Noble: "Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe"(1,2,39). The war with Norway is a violent, but heroic battle for Macbeth.

Questions.

- 1) What causes Macbeth's violence, and in turn, what does the violent acts cause?
- 2) Is violence always portrayed as wrong in *Macbeth*?

Guilt

Guilt is a manifestation of a conscience convinced of its wrong doing. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth at different stages of the play subvert their guilt by sacrificing their conscience. He is racked with guilt after the murder of Duncan, "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'sleep no more!' Macbeth does murder sleep."(2,2,34). As a result of his wife's insistence and his own inability to confront his guilt, he represses his guilt, hiding it from himself by artificial means, such as lying to himself and others. He attempts to convince the two murderers of the guilt of Banquo: "Both of you know Banquo was your enemy"(3,1,113/114) and also accuses Malcolm and Donalbain of their father's death, "We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed in England and in Ireland; not confessing their cruel parricide"(3,1,29/31).

These are all examples of Macbeth transferring his guilt on to other people, which he does for two reasons. Firstly, to escape suspicion from other people and, secondly, as artifice, in an attempt to hide his guilt from his conscience because it is something with which it cannot cope. The first reaction against this is the vision of the ghost of Banquo at the banquet, where Macbeth's immediate reaction is an expression of guilt "Thou canst not say I did it"(3,4,50). Here, he is trying to evade guilt by stating he did not literally commit the murder. Nevertheless, he is guilty since he plotted the murder. The result of Macbeth's guilt is the complete destruction of all emotions he once had. He ends the play stoical and indifferent, which is highlighted by his unfeeling reaction to the death of Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth appears to be able to avoid feeling guilty, although there is evidence that she may feel a hint of conscience early in the play when she states she would have murdered Duncan, though "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't"(2,2,12/13). This may just be an excuse.

She seems to escape guilt more effectively than her husband in the earlier stages because she lives by the advice she has given him: "These deeds must not be thought after these ways: so, it will make us mad"(2,2,32/33). Thus, she does not consider these deeds too deeply, until the unconscious guilt engulfs her mind, resulting in madness.

Guilt is what destroys Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It leads to his stoical indifference and her insanity and death.

POINTS TO NOTE

Immediate: "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more.'"(2,2,34). Macbeth is instantly consumed with guilt.

Repressed: "These deeds must not be thought after"(2,2,32/33). Macbeth takes the advice of his wife and represses his guilt; he puts it out of his mind.

Consuming: "Who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him"(5,5,37/38). This comment shows how Lady Macbeth's guilt is preying on her mind.

Questions.

- 1) How does Macbeth deal with his guilt?
- 2) What are the results of Lady Macbeth having repressed her guilt?

STRUCTURE AND IMAGERY

The structure of the first two scenes provides an extremely tense build-up to the entrance of Macbeth, created by the opposing views of this character. We know that the witches are planning to meet with him, yet we are told that this man is "Brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)"(1,2,16). The tension here is produced by the structure of the scene. From Macbeth's meeting with the witches, there is a considerable tension in relation to the 'will he/ won't he' dichotomy, resolved by the ending of Act I with his decision: "I am settled, and bend up each corporal agent to this terrible feat"(1,7,79/80).

Act Two has a structural parallel, with Banquo commenting "There's husbandry in heaven; Their candles are all out"(2,1,4/5). The stars have hidden their fires, an act which Macbeth had commanded. The murder scene of Act Two, Scene Two is followed by a scene which is an example of black comedy and provides relief from the preceding scenes, yet produces sinister parallels, one example being the porter's comparison with Macbeth's gate and the gate of Hell.

Act Three opens with Macbeth as the established King and is concerned with the continuing destruction, both in the deeds committed by him and in their effects on his mental state, causing its deterioration. Another structural ploy is used with juxtaposition, by placing side by side, the scene of Banquo's murder and that of the banquet. The murder is a horrifying act, an expression of Macbeth's tyranny and paranoia. A banquet, by contrast, is usually a symbol of order and harmony and thus furthers the tension. Macbeth begins this scene with a reference to order: "You know your own degrees, sit down; at first and last"(3,4,1). He is instructing his subjects to seat themselves according to rank. Scene Five is a brief interjection of the supernatural, preceded at the close of Scene Four by Macbeth's decision to seek out the witches: "I will tomorrow (And betimes I will) to the weird sisters"(3,4,132/133). This scene reminds us of the powers of the witches and reveals that Macbeth is, to a degree, being controlled by their decisions and since Act One, Scene Three, he has descended from a brave, loyal subject to a treacherous, murdering tyrant. The act ends with a summary of what has happened and also a prophecy of what is to happen, when the Lord, referring to Macduff, states: "I'll send my prayers with him"(3,6,49). Prayers his wife and child will need.

Act Four is relatively brief, beginning with Macbeth's meeting with the witches and the prophecies they make. It is important to notice that he appears only briefly in this act and Lady Macbeth is not seen at all, which adds considerable impact to her re-appearance in Act Five, when she has gone insane. Now the scenes switch frantically, flashing back and forth between Macbeth and his adversaries, and provide considerable tension, building up to the battle. In Scene Eight, Macbeth is slain. Scene Nine is an important one structurally, which begins with uncertainty "I would the friends we miss were safe arrived"(5,9,1,). The end of the scene, and of the play, is the banishment of both uncertainty and irrationality, by the re-establishment of the true king. The play began with the supernatural, the witches, yet comes to a conclusion with the rational king installed on the throne.

Where a metaphor or a simile is used in order to produce a mental picture, this is referred to as 'imagery'. In *Macbeth* the use of imagery highlights certain themes, adds to tension, produces dark irony and creates vivid poetry.

Blood is an important image in *Macbeth*. It is also real, the blood he spills in order to become King. The account of the battle where Macbeth: "With his brandished steel, which smoked bloody execution"(1,2,17/18), is full of violent imagery and yet this is being employed to establish his heroism. The blood image is also prophetic, for example when Macbeth sees the hallucinatory dagger: "On thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood"(2,1,46) which powerfully foretells the slaying of Duncan. Macbeth also uses the image of blood to describe his position: "I am in blood steeped in so far, that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as going o'er"(3,4,136/138). Blood is a valuable image because it relates to the violence which appears throughout the play.

Darkness is another common image, used to provide a focus for what is unseen; the witches are described as "The instruments of darkness"(1,3,124). Macbeth commands: "Stars, hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires"(1,5,50/51), a desire which comes true the night he murders Duncan. Impulses which cannot be acknowledged are hidden by a metaphorical darkness which enables Macbeth to hide his guilt from himself, to cover his conscience with darkness. It is this repression which destroys him.

Animal imagery appears throughout, being part of nature, yet sometimes sinister and also parallels the unnatural. It is used as irony when the Captain is questioned if the enemy dismayed Macbeth in the battle: "Yes; As sparrows eagles"(1,2,34/35). Lady Macbeth invokes this imagery as a symbol of death "The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan"(1,5,38/39) while animals are used to describe the unnatural murder of Duncan: "A falcon, towering, in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawked at, and killed"(2,4,12/13). Macbeth himself uses animal imagery to describe the mental violence he is suffering: "Full of scorpions is my mind"(3,2,36).

Clothes are an important image since they portray the important theme of appearance and reality, which can be linked to many aspects of *Macbeth*. Angus comments that Macbeth's title fits him: "Like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief"(5,2,21/22).

POINTS TO NOTE

Blood: "Out, damned spot!"(5,1,33). Lady Macbeth's hallucination of blood is a vivid manifestation of her guilt. Blood is used throughout to highlight the violence of the play.

Darkness: "Stars hide your fires!"(1,4,50). Macbeth wishes for darkness, metaphorically, to hide his guilt.

Animals: "Full of scorpions is my mind"(3,2,36). Animals are used to demonstrate the natural, the sinister and the unnatural

Clothes: "Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?"(1,3,108/109). Clothes highlight the difference between appearance and reality in *Macbeth*.

Questions.

- 1) How does imagery link with the themes of *Macbeth*?
- 2) How can imagery produce irony, evoke violence and highlight the unnatural?

In this section, there is a written example of an analysis of Macbeth's soliloquy beginning "Is this a dagger which I see before me", and ending "That summons thee to heaven or to Hell"(2,2,33-64), studied in relation to character, theme and language.

Structurally, the soliloquy is positioned prior to the murder of Duncan and these are the last words of Macbeth before the act itself. Previous to this point, Macbeth has been unsure whether to kill the King and this indecision is apparent in the monologue, since it begins with an imprecise "Is". He wonders "Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight?". The passage could be seen to be Macbeth wrestling with his indecision, ending with the conclusion to murder Duncan. Indecision is followed by rationalisation, a trait of Macbeth's that is strongly portrayed throughout the play. He realises that the dagger is only "A dagger of the mind", rationalising this by believing it to be: "A false creation proceeding from the heat oppressed brain". Similarly, his attempt to make the murderers believe that Banquo is their enemy is in order to rationalise his need to have the man who is his best friend killed.

Another instance is Macbeth's assertion of his free will. He addresses the dagger, defensively, "Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going". It is marking out his path, but he asserts that he was going there anyway. Macbeth throughout believes he is in control of his own actions and that he is responsible for them all. This is not the case, as we can see how he is influenced by the witches and his wife into slaying Duncan. There is a degree of predestiny in the soliloquy, as the dagger is a "fatal vision", not only of the King's fate, but of Macbeth himself, as his plight, from that point onwards, seems doomed. He also comments: "wicked dreams abuse the curtained sleep". Dreams and sleep will haunt him from then on: "Sleep no more - Macbeth does murder sleep".

When he wishes: "Thou sure and firm-set earth hear not my steps", on the surface, this is due to his fear of being discovered. And yet, he wants his act to be removed from reality: "Take the present horror from the time". He is making an active attempt to repress this act, both from others and from himself - even from reality. This is apparent through all the play, as Macbeth strives to repress all the guilt that he feels, for example, in his wish for the stars to hide their fires, because he wants no illumination to reveal his darkened conscience.

All the factors mentioned have demonstrated how the character of Macbeth, and the themes connected with him, are exemplified in the extract. Various aspects of nature are also alluded to. When he comments: "Nature seems dead", it is true that in this scene, the unnatural has taken over from nature and is in control, because to kill a king is an unnatural act, since the ruler is a part of a natural order of rule. Other references to the supernatural mention that it is at this time of night when: "witchcraft celebrates pale Hecate's offerings". Macbeth's reference to witchcraft seems like a passing remark without any underlining motives, yet it is an unconscious reference to the supernatural powers that are controlling him. It is interesting to note that although the witches only appear briefly in the play, there are many allusions to them and to the supernatural.

Typical of Shakespearean blank verse, the soliloquy is in iambic pentameter: the lines usually break down into ten syllables, five groups of two syllables or *feet*. Feet are composed by an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (iamb). 'Iambic' is, therefore, the style wherein an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable, while 'pentameter' is where the meter, or rhyme, is in ten parts (pentameter), or five feet. It creates a poetic feel without constricting it to a more rigorous form, such as rhyming couplets.

The tone begins as one of indecision and ends in decision, moving from uncertainty to certainty. This sinister mood is created in part by the gory imagery, apparent in the statement "On thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, which was not so before". With this imagery, Macbeth's changing state of mind is apparent, since he can see the blood has now appeared. Yet he goes on to realise that the dagger is, in fact, unreal, that "It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes". That the thought of murder is creating the hallucination becomes obvious; the introduction of blood confirms Macbeth's decision to kill. Animal imagery is also used: "The wolf ... with his stealthy pace ... strides towards his design" to make an analogy stressing the savagery of the deed, with Macbeth going to commit the murder, and the wolf stalking his prey. Another allusion is to Tarquin, a cruel Roman king, which is prophetic in reference to Macbeth, as he ends up a cruel tyrant. This sequence of references and imagery ends with the comment that everything: "Moves like a ghost", another allusion to the supernatural.

The passage encapsulates many themes of the play: violence, guilt and repression, which are highlighted by the poetic use of language and vivid imagery.

Questions.

- 1) Though the hallucinatory dagger soliloquy is the most popular, choose an alternative passage from the play and consider it in terms of character, themes and language.
- 2) How does the language of the passage, as represented by the poetic style, wording, imagery and tone, create a sinister atmosphere suitable for the tension created by the contemplation of murder?

Macbeth is a play which affects us as readers because of its tragedy. When studying *Macbeth*, it is important to consider each character and every theme in its overall context as a Shakespearean tragedy: how do certain characters oppose or aid the tragic progress? As with all the major tragedies, the conclusion of the play does represent, to a degree, a positive conclusion with the tyrant slain and order restored. Yet we do not term this a 'happy ending' and this is an important question: although the play is positively resolved, why do we still feel it is still a tragic ending? It is a tragedy because all the violence, madness and death could have been avoided. If Macbeth had ignored the malignant witches, a different play would have evolved. Despite this, as a work of fiction, would we change it? Would we opt for a happy ending? The brilliance of *Macbeth* arises from its tragedy.

One important aspect in revision is considering how all the characters and the themes relate to each other. It has been explained how there are parallels between the witches and Lady Macbeth, between the original Thane of Cawdor and Macbeth; the connections between ambition, violence and guilt. These parallels are not simply a clever literary device, they add depth to certain characters and themes.

No guide to any of the works of Shakespeare can be regarded as the final authority. Certain themes such as appearance and reality, free will and predestination, although implicitly covered, can, of course, be considered in greater detail. Similarly, how these themes could relate to the other characters. Consider the theme of guilt and Malcolm, which can be illustrated with reference to Shakespeare's equally poignant tragedy, *Hamlet*. Here, it is Hamlet's father, the King of Denmark, who is murdered and must be avenged by his son. The play's action hinges on Hamlet's inability to seek immediate revenge, which consumes him with guilt. In *Macbeth*, Malcolm's father, the king, is murdered, which provokes exactly the same dilemma. There is evidence to support the belief that Malcolm suspects Macbeth, when he refers to: "The false man"(2,3,136). Shouldn't he immediately slay Macbeth? If this is so, then we can see how he must feel guilty because of his inability to avenge his father's death.

Nevertheless, it is up to you to consider the text in depth, in order to produce your own ideas and meanings. Keep in mind the fact that the examiners look for a degree of originality, since this is inspired by literature and is evidence of wide reading.

One aspect which must be taken into account is the language of *Macbeth*. Language is an elusive concept, but can be understood as the *choice* of words. It is possible to rewrite *Macbeth* using completely different words; instead of "Is this a dagger which I see before me", you could have "What's this knife doing here?". This example demonstrates that each word, phrase and sentence has been produced to evoke a certain feeling or atmosphere.

Language can also be understood through imagery, which can result only when a certain collection of words is crafted together in a particular way. Macbeth's phrase: "The blood-boltered Banquo" would not be such a vivid and violent image if the thought were expressed using different words.

The poetic style is referred to as blank verse, a technique which is explained fully in the contextual analysis section, and the factor to note here is that iambic pentameter produces *blank verse*. This poetic style allows a degree of freedom whilst retaining the atmospheric presence of the traditional style, all of which contributes to the tone of the certain passage. We can speak of tone as sinister, humorous, indifferent or vengeful and all of these can be found in *Macbeth*. The problem is in associating tone with content and not form, that is to say, to *what* is being said, not *how* it is being said. The sinister tone of *Macbeth*'s hallucinatory dagger soliloquy is not because he is about to murder Duncan, in other words, from the atmosphere, but as a result of the language, imagery and poetic technique of the passage.

You should also consider the overall structure of the play, in relation to the action that occurs in the individual scenes, and what effect is produced.

The best revision technique in studying *Macbeth* is to study it. Read it. Then read it again. Everybody studying Shakespeare has to read it for the first time, which is not an easy task; approaching a play that is nearly 400 years old is a challenge. But as your understanding increases, so does your appreciation. To help your understanding, go and watch *Macbeth*. I was able to attend two local productions, which was of considerable assistance when writing this guide... *Macbeth* is a play, it was meant to be acted, so going to watch it can reveal many aspects liable to be overlooked by simply reading it. A good substitute for this is to watch the video or to borrow the audio tape of *Macbeth* (Harper Collins Audio Books) from your local library. This way you can hear it being acted as many times as you want.

Use this guide, but do not overuse it; success ultimately comes from your own efforts. Nevertheless, the intention is to provide ideas and encouragement so that you will come to the end of *Macbeth* with a deep appreciation of the play. As with all literature, this is one of the greatest gifts you can attain.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1) With reference to *Macbeth* or Lady *Macbeth*, write a character study in relation to their actions, wishes, mental states and tragic end.
- 2) "Language is the most important aspect of a work of fiction. Without its skilful craftsmanship, plot is nothing". Discuss this in reference to *Macbeth*.
- 3) Discuss the structure of *Macbeth* in relation to the parallels and paradoxes it produces.
- 4) "A work of fiction cannot be created without influence from the culture and history from which it is born". How far is this true in reference to *Macbeth*?
- 5) To what degree is it correct to say that each of the characters encapsulate all the themes in *Macbeth*?

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

AL.LU.SION An implied or indirect reference

ANAL.O.GY Inference that if two or more things agree with one another in some respects they will probably agree in others: resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike: similarity b: comparison based on such resemblance.

DI.CHOT.O.MY A division or the process of dividing into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities.

IM.AG.ERY The art of making images; pictures produced by an imaging system; figurative language; the products of imagination

IRO.NY Incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play--called also dramatic irony, tragic irony.

JUX.TA.PO.SI.TION The act or an instance of placing two or more things side by side; also: the state of being so placed.

MET.A.PHOR A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in drowning in money).

SIM.I.LE A figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by like (as in cheeks like roses).

SO.LIL.O.QUY The act of talking to oneself: a dramatic monologue that gives the illusion of being a series of unspoken reflections.

