

MACBETH

Character Notes

DUNCAN

The good king of Scotland murdered by Macbeth. Duncan is the model of a virtuous, benevolent and farsighted ruler.

MALCOLM

Duncan's eldest son, who flees in fear with his brother Donalbain after their father's murder. Malcolm becomes a serious challenge to Macbeth with Macduff's aid (and the support of England). We can presume he would rule fairly like his father and end Macbeth's tyranny.

DONALBAIN

Duncan's son and Malcolm's younger brother.

MACBETH

Macbeth is a brave and powerful general, and the thane of Glamis, whose ambition for the crown drives him to commit murder. Macbeth is more at home on the battlefield than in politics because his response to every problem is violence and murder. However, Macbeth is never comfortable in his role as a criminal. He is unable to bear the psychological consequences of his atrocities, especially after the death of his beloved wife.

LADY MACBETH

Macbeth's wife, a deeply ambitious woman who lusts for power and position. Early in the play she seems to be the stronger and more ruthless of the two, as she urges her husband to kill Duncan and seize the crown. However, after the bloodshed begins Lady Macbeth's guilt leads to madness. Her conscience affects her to such an extent that she eventually commits suicide. She and Macbeth are deeply in love and their partnership in crime seems to strengthen the attachment that they feel to each other.

BANQUO

The brave and noble general who does not let his ambition lead to treason and violence. According to the witches' prophecy Banquo's children will inherit the Scottish throne but he does not act upon it, unlike Macbeth. Banquo's ghost haunts Macbeth reminding him of his guilt.

MACDUFF

A Scottish nobleman who opposes Macbeth's kingship and becomes a leader of the crusade to unseat Macbeth. The crusade's mission is to place the rightful king, Malcolm, on the throne, but Macduff also desires vengeance for Macbeth's murder of his wife and young son whilst he was in England drumming up an army. He never forgives himself for leaving his family and servants unprotected. All were killed.

FLEANCE

Banquo's son, who survives Macbeth's attempt to murder him. At the end of the play, Fleance's whereabouts are unknown. He may return to rule Scotland, fulfilling the witches' prophecy that Banquo's sons will sit on the Scottish throne.

SIWARD

Earl of Northumberland, an Englishman who supports the crusade to replace Macbeth with Malcolm as king of Scotland.

A PORTER

The drunken doorman of Macbeth's castle.

SETON

Macbeth's manservant

THREE MURDERERS

A group of ruffians conscripted by Macbeth to murder Banquo, Fleance (whom they fail to kill), and Macduff's wife and children.

THREE WITCHES

Three mystical beings who plot mischief against Macbeth using charms, spells, and prophecies. Their predictions prompt him to murder Duncan, to order the deaths of Banquo and his son, and to blindly believe in his own immortality. They clearly take a perverse delight in using their knowledge of the future to toy with and destroy human beings. They acknowledge that they themselves have masters who sanction the apparitions.

APPARITIONS

Three visions conjured by the witches for Macbeth. The first Apparition is an armed head and tells Macbeth that he should fear Macduff. The Second Apparition appears as a bloody child and reassures Macbeth that "none of woman born" can harm him. The Third Apparition is a child wearing a crown with a tree in his hand and tells Macbeth he has nothing to fear until "Great Birnam wood" moves to "high Dunsinane hill" near his castle.

Scottish Noblemen

LENNOX

ROSS

ANGUS

MENTIETH

Scottish noblemen who join Macduff's crusade against Macbeth.