

Act 5

Scene 6

Scene Summary

- Malcolm gives instructions for the attack on Macbeth's castle.

Dunsinane. Before Macbeth's castle.

Drum and colours. Enter MALCOLM, SIWARD, MACDUFF, and their Army, with boughs

MALCOLM

Now near enough; your leafy screens¹ throw down,
And show like those you are. You, worthy uncle,
Shall, with my cousin, your right-noble son,
Lead our first battle.² Worthy Macduff and we
Shall take upon's what else remains to do,
According to our order.³

SIWARD

Fare you well.

Do we but find the tyrant's power to-night,
Let us be beaten, if we cannot fight.

MACDUFF

10 Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath,
Those clamorous harbingers⁴ of blood and death.
[Exeunt]

¹ **leafy screens:** the branches from Birnam Wood

² **first battle:** the main army

³ **order:** military strategy

⁴ **clamorous harbingers:** noisy announcers

Questions

1. How is Malcolm portrayed in this scene?
2. Do you agree that Macbeth's enemies appear confident in this scene? Explain your answer.
3. Imagine you are Macbeth watching the soldiers throw their 'leafy screens' down. Write your thoughts.

Act 5

Scene 7

Scene Summary

- Macbeth kills Young Siward.
- Malcolm's forces enter Macbeth's castle.
- Macduff continues his hunt for Macbeth.

*Another part of the Field.
Alarums. Enter MACBETH*

MACBETH

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like,¹ I must fight the course. What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none.
[Enter YOUNG SIWARD]

YOUNG SIWARD

What is thy name?

MACBETH

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.

YOUNG SIWARD

No; though thou call'st thyself a hotter name
Than any is in hell.

MACBETH

My name's Macbeth.

YOUNG SIWARD

The devil himself could not pronounce a title
More hateful to mine ear.

MACBETH

No, nor more fearful.

YOUNG SIWARD

¹⁰ Thou liest, abhorred² tyrant; with my sword
I'll prove the lie thou speak'st.

[They fight and YOUNG SIWARD is slain]

¹ **bear-like:** a reference to bear-baiting. This was the practice of tying a bear to a stake and then setting dogs upon it.

² **abhorred:** hated

MACBETH

Thou wast born of woman
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandished³ by man that's of a woman born.

[Exit]

[Alarums. Enter MACDUFF]

MACDUFF

That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face!
If thou be'st slain and with no stroke of mine,⁴
My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still.
I cannot strike at wretched kerns,⁵ whose arms
Are hired to bear their staves. Either thou, Macbeth,
Or else my sword with an unbattered edge

20 I sheathe again undeeded.⁶ [Alarums] There thou shouldst be;

By this great clatter, one of greatest note
Seems bruted.⁷ Let me find him, Fortune!

And more I beg not.

[Exit. Alarums]

[Enter MALCOLM and SIWARD]

SIWARD

This way, my lord – the castle's gently rendered.⁸
The tyrant's people on both sides do fight;
The noble thanes do bravely in the war;
The day almost itself professes yours,⁹
And little is to do.

MALCOLM

We have met with foes
That strike beside us.¹⁰

SIWARD

30 Enter, sir, the castle.

[Exeunt. Alarums]

³ **Brandished:** waved (a weapon)

⁴ **If thou...of mine:** If you have been killed, and not by my sword

⁵ **kerns:** hired Irish soldiers

⁶ **Or else...undeeded:** or else my undamaged sword will be replaced in its sheath unused

⁷ **By this great...bruted:** By all this noise it seems that someone of importance must be here.

⁸ **rendered:** surrendered

⁹ **The day almost itself professes yours:** You have very nearly won the day.

¹⁰ **foes/That strike beside us:** enemies who fight with us (i.e. deserters from Macbeth's army)

Key Quotations

MACBETH *They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, / But, bear-like, I must fight the course.*

Commentary

- Macbeth recognises he is doomed as his enemies hem him in. He depicts himself as a bear set upon by dogs: 'They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, / But, bear-like, I must fight the course.' Macbeth sees himself as strong (like a bear), but also trapped. Just as a baited bear is worn down and eventually killed by dogs, Macbeth understands that his own death is imminent. Despite this realisation and his mounting desperation, Macbeth is still determined to fight to the end. Macbeth's helplessness in this moment awakens the audience's sympathy. We pity the strong bear set upon by lesser dogs.

- Although Macbeth knows he was misled by the witches' prophecy about Birnam Wood, he still takes some comfort in their other prediction: 'What's he / That was not born of woman? Such a one / Am I to fear, or none.' This confidence is bolstered after he kills Young Siward, 'Thou wast born of woman / But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, / Brandished by man that's of a woman born.' Although his ambition to be King has now deserted him, he still prides himself on his strength and skill in battle.
- Macduff is portrayed as a vengeful character as he furiously searches the castle for Macbeth: 'Tyrant, show thy face! / If thou be'st slain and with no stroke of mine, / My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still.'
- The scene ends with a foreshadowing of the unity Malcolm will bring to Scotland. Macbeth's army has largely deserted him and now fights under Malcolm's banner: 'We have met with foes / That strike beside us.' Shakespeare is keen to reinforce the notion of Malcolm as a goodly king who will heal Scotland's wounds. The pitiful image of Macbeth isolated and alone is also reinforced here.

Questions

1. Even though Macbeth's army is deserting him and his castle is being stormed, he is still determined to fight on. Why do you think this is?
2. Increasingly throughout the play Macbeth is associated with hell and the devil. Find examples of this in this scene.
3. Describe Macduff's attitude in this scene.
4. Rewrite Macbeth's final lines in this scene using modern English: 'But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, / Brandished by man that's of a woman born.'

Act 5

Scene 8

Scene Summary

- Macduff confronts Macbeth.
- Macbeth tells Macduff that he cannot be harmed by any man born of woman.
- Macduff reveals that he was delivered by caesarean section.
- Macbeth fights him regardless and is killed.

Another part of the Field.

Enter MACBETH

MACBETH

Why should I play the Roman fool,¹ and die
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives,² the gashes
Do better upon them!

[Enter MACDUFF]

MACDUFF

Turn, hell-hound, Turn!

MACBETH

Of all men else I have avoided thee. –
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged³
With blood of thine already.

MACDUFF

I have no words:

My voice is in my sword – thou bloodier villain
Than terms can give thee out!⁴

[They fight]

MACBETH

Thou lovest labour:⁵

As easy may'st thou the intrenchant air

¹⁰ With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed:⁶

Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;⁷

I bear a charmed⁸ life, which must not yield,

To one of woman born.

MACDUFF

Despair thy charm! –

And let the angel whom thou still hast served

Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb

Untimely ripped.⁹

¹ **Roman fool:** Roman warriors often committed suicide after defeat.

² **lives:** living enemies

³ **charged:** weighed down/burdened

⁴ **thou bloodier villain...thee out:** You are a bloodier villain than words can express.

⁵ **Thou lovest labour:** You are wasting effort.

⁶ **As easy may'st...me bleed:** It would be easier to wound the uncuttable air with your sword than make me bleed.

⁷ **crests:** heads

⁸ **charmed:** protected by supernatural powers

⁹ **Macduff...Untimely ripped:** i.e. Macduff was delivered by caesarean section and therefore not 'born' of woman.

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
 For it hath cowed my better part of man!¹⁰
 And be these juggling fiends¹¹ no more believed,
 20 That palter with us in a double sense;¹²
 That keep the word of promise to our ear,
 And break it to our hope!¹³ – I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,
 And live to be the show and gaze o' the time.¹⁴
 We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
 Painted upon a pole,¹⁵ and underwrit,¹⁶
 'Here may you see the tyrant.'

MACBETH

I will not yield,
 To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
 And to be baited with the rabble's curse.¹⁷
 30 Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,
 And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
 Yet I will try the last.¹⁸ Before my body
 I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
 And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold,¹⁹ enough!'
*[Exeunt, fighting. Alarums. Re-enter fighting, and MACBETH
 is killed. Exit MACDUFF, dragging Macbeth's body]*

¹⁰ **For it...part of man!:** as it has overawed the best part of me, i.e. it has stripped me of my confidence.
¹¹ **juggling fiends:** deceiving devils
¹² **That palter...sense:** that trick us with double meanings
¹³ **That keep...our hope!:** that whisper promises in our ear but then destroy our hopes

¹⁴ **show and gaze o' the time:** a spectacle of the age

¹⁵ **Painted upon a pole:** Macbeth's image painted on a banner

¹⁶ **underwrit:** written underneath

¹⁷ **baited with the rabble's curse:** mocked and teased by the mob

¹⁸ **try the last:** fight to the end

¹⁹ **Hold:** Stop

Key Quotations

MACBETH *But get thee back; my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already.*

MACBETH *For it hath cowed my better part of man!
 And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
 That palter with us in a double sense;
 That keep the word of promise to our ear,
 And break it to our hope!*

MACBETH *I will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, / And to be baited with the rabble's curse.*

Commentary

- Macbeth's final moments are as bloody and violent as his life was. However, as Macbeth encounters Macduff he seems reluctant to fight him: 'But get thee back; my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already'. Some commentators argue that Macbeth has the first of the apparition's warning in mind: 'Beware Macduff!' and is therefore eager to avoid a battle with Macduff. However this does not fit neatly with Macbeth's later boast to Macduff that he can only be hurt by 'one of woman born'. Many commentators see Macbeth's reluctance to fight Macduff as an expression of guilt for murdering Macduff's family.
- Macbeth attempts to hold onto his pride in his final moments: 'I will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, / And to be baited with the rabble's curse.' Rather than be mocked and tortured, Macbeth chooses to 'try the last' and fight to the death. Considering Macbeth's hopelessness in Scene 5 and his moral collapse throughout the play, it is perhaps unsurprising that he embraces death at the end. This arouses great sympathy in the audience.

Questions

1. Why does Macbeth refer to the witches as '*juggling fiends*'?
2. What evidence is there in this scene that Macbeth feels guilt for the murder of Macduff's family?
3. Why does Macbeth fight to the death rather than give up?
4. Macbeth has changed throughout the course of the play. However, are there any similarities between Macbeth in this final scene and the Macbeth that is discussed in Act 1, Scene 2?
5. Do you feel pity for Macbeth at the end of this scene? Explain your answer by referring to the play.
6. Some productions have Macbeth killed offstage and Macduff returning to the stage with Macbeth's severed head in Scene 9. What is the advantage of this?