

Plot Structure of Macbeth

Following the brief appearance of three witches at the start of the play, the action shifts to a military camp where the Scottish King Duncan is informed that two distinct invading armies—one from Norway and one from Ireland under the command of the rebel Macdonwald—have been routed by Macbeth and Banquo. As Macbeth and Banquo travel a moor after their fierce struggle with these enemy forces, they come across the witches. According to the witches' predictions, Macbeth will ascend to the position of thane, or Scottish nobility, in Cawdor and eventually become King of Scotland. In addition, they predict that Banquo, Macbeth's friend, will produce a line of Scottish kings even though he will never rule as king.

Before some of Macbeth and Banquo believe the witches' prophecies, the witches disappear. Lady Macbeth does not experience her husband's doubts. She wants him to kill Duncan to become king, and she wants that to happen. Upon arriving in Inverness, Macbeth overcomes her husband's concerns and convinces him to assassinate the king on that same evening. In order for Duncan's two chamberlains to go completely unconscious and become blameless for the murder the following morning, he and Lady Macbeth intend to get them both intoxicated. Macbeth stabs Duncan while he is sleeping, disobeying his reservations and several paranormal warnings, including a vision of a bloodied dagger. The following morning, when Duncan's body is found, Macbeth kills the chamberlains with ease, presumably in a fit of wrath over their transgression.