

English Honours BA Part II

Macbeth opens in "an open place," which is a location devoid of any structures or landmarks. It is here that the three "weird sisters," as they would later refer to themselves, first appear. The word "wyrd," which translates as "weird" from Old English, originally meant "Fate." This is precisely where these Witches got their start—they are the Fates from classical mythology, one of whom spun, one of whom measured, and one of whom severed a person's life thread. The scene's desolation serves as a dramatic portrayal of both the more general desert of human existence and the untamed Scottish terrain in which the play is situated. The speech of the Three Witches is written in brief rhymes that mimic the uttering of a spell. The women's vocabulary is also rife with references to witchcraft and erratic weather conditions, such as rain, fog, thunder, and lightning, as well as "filthy air." The two most important lines in the scene are "When the battle's lost and won" and "Fair is foul and foul is fair". These contradicting assertions imply a contradiction that runs throughout the play: Life often gives a muddled picture of events in which it is impossible to differentiate truth from lie. On the one hand, these comments are the kind of riddles we would expect from witches.