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Why does macbeth kill duncan's grooms

Question: How do you reconcile Macbeth's prompt murder of the grooms with his horror at the mere thought of killing Duncan, and his refusal to carry the bloody daggers back to the chamber? Answer: Macbeth is restrained from the murder of Duncan by the power of a sensitive conscience, working through imaginary terrors. Notwithstanding the assuring prophecy of the Weird Sisters, he is still haunted by the dreadful fear of the unknown, possible consequence. Immediately after the murder, conscience is still more active, and he cannot bring himself to face the horrors which imagination conjures up, -- he cannot brave that "voice" again, -- he dare not look on the murdered Duncan! It is the natural terror of a man "but young in deed," -- "the initiate fear that wants hard use." His prompt murder of the grooms in the very next scene, though seemingly, is not really at variance with this shrinking which we have just noted. By utmost effort his wife has, in the interval, succeeded in rousing him to a realization of the immediate danger of detection in which they stand. Impressed with this idea, he comes forth to meet the nobles, and to play such a part upon the discovery of the murdered King, as shall entirely disarm suspicion. His whole conduct is governed by this desire, and is just what we should expect from a man whose face is "as a book where men may read things strange." His very language is strained and unnatural, appropriate only in the mouth of a conscious murderer dissembling guilt. He talks to avoid his own thoughts, and to mislead others. Exhibition of great grief for the death of the king and hatred for the perpetrators of the horrible deed seems to him the proper course, and in no way can this pious indignation be so effectually shown as in slaying the supposed culprits. It is possible, too, that he feared the grooms, who had been in the chamber, certainly roused, and may have seen more than he supposed. Back to the Macbeth Examination Questions main page. How to cite this article: Bowman, N. B. Shakespeare Examinations. Ed. William Taylor Thom, M. A. Boston: Ginn and Co., 1888. Shakespeare Online. 10 Aug. 2010. (date when you accessed the information) < > More Resources Daily Life in Shakespeare's London Life in Stratford (structures and guilds) Life in Stratford (trades, laws, furniture, hygiene) Stratford School Days: What Did Shakespeare Read? Games in Shakespeare's England [A-L] Games in Shakespeare's England [M-Z] An Elizabethan Christmas Clothing in Elizabethan England Queen Elizabeth: Shakespeare's Patron King James I of England: Shakespeare's Patron The Earl of Southampton: Shakespeare's Patron Going to a Play in Elizabethan London Ben Jonson and the Decline of the Drama Publishing in Elizabethan England Shakespeare's Audience Religion in Shakespeare's England Alchemy and Astrology in Shakespeare's Day Entertainment in Elizabethan England London's First Public Playhouse Shakespeare Hits the Big Time Act II. Scene I. - Inverness. Court within the Castle. Macbeth: "Is this a dagger which I see before me..." Banquo and son Fleance arrive at Macbeth's castle. Banquo is troubled by the Three Witches' prophecy and tells Macbeth this. Macbeth pretends not to take the Three Witches seriously. Learning from Banquo that King Duncan is asleep, Macbeth, alone, follows an imaginary dagger to King Duncan's bedchamber where he will kill him in his sleep... Banquo and son Fleance are walking in the castle preceded by a servant bearing a torch. Fleance exclaims, "Hold [stop], take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven; / Their candles are all out" (Line 3). Fleance can't sleep, so troubled is he by his own thoughts: "A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, / And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers!" (Line 6). Banquo suspects the presence of danger but can not say exactly what it is. Macbeth meets them and when the question "Who's there?" is asked, replies "A friend" (Lines 9-10). Banquo is surprised Macbeth is not yet asleep and informs Macbeth that the King is asleep having been in "unusual pleasure," (been unusually happy), (Line 13). So pleased is the King with Lady Macbeth's hospitality that a diamond has been given to the generous host (Lady Macbeth). Cryptically, Banquo mentions a dream he had of "the three weird sisters [The Three Witches];" to Macbeth. Macbeth replies that "I think not of them:" (Line 22). Macbeth does however want to discuss the Three Witches with Banquo in the future. Macbeth now alone, sees a dagger, asking himself, "Is this a dagger which I see before me," which later sports "goats of blood," or becomes covered in blood before his eyes (Lines 32, 33 and 46). He worries again and upon hearing a bell ring (Lady Macbeth's signal) proceeds towards King Duncan's chambers: "Hear it not [the bell], Duncan; for it is a knell [calling] / That summons thee [you, King Duncan] to heaven or to hell" (Line 63). Act II. Scene II. - The Same. Macbeth: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" Lady Macbeth has drugged King Duncan's guards, allowing Macbeth to kill King Duncan unchallenged. Lady Macbeth was to have killed the King but his resemblance to her late father means Macbeth does the deed instead. A bell frightens Lady Macbeth and Macbeth too is nervous, but he announces that he did indeed kill King Duncan. Macbeth recounts that the two guards cried out "'Murder'" and later "'God bless us!'", Lady Macbeth telling her husband not to fret over such things and the fact that his conscience prevented him from saying "Amen," when they said "'God bless us!'" Lady Macbeth tells her husband a little water will wash away their guilt and the two retire to their bedroom when knocking is later heard... Lady Macbeth enters, remarking that the alcohol that has made the guards drunk has made her bold: "That which hath [has] made them drunk hath made me bold," (Line 1). She has drugged King Duncan's two guards. Macbeth enters and Lady Macbeth fears a bell which has sounded (Line 4) may have awakened the two guards without the murder having taken place. We learn that Lady Macbeth was to have killed the King but the King's resemblance to her father stopped her. Macbeth announces that he has "done the deed" (Line 15) and asking if she heard, she replies only that she heard an owl scream and a cricket cry. Macbeth was nervous and when two men in the adjoining room cried, "'Murder!'" and later "'God bless us!'" (Lines 24-30), Macbeth could not reply "Amen," (Lines 30-32) as the other man did, variously interpreted as symbolic of the fact that Macbeth no longer sees himself as connected to God or on the side of good. Macbeth thought he heard a voice say "'Sleep no more! / 'Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep...". "Glamis hath [has] murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor [Macbeth] / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (Lines 42-44). Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth not to think such things and to get some water to wash away the blood. Lady Macbeth scolds Macbeth for bringing the daggers with him, telling him to return them to the scene of the crime. He won't and scolding Macbeth as "Infirm of purpose!" (Line 54) or weak-willed, she returns the daggers smearing blood on the grooms faces to implicate them. Macbeth wonders if water is enough to clear his conscience: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (Line 61). Both Macbeth and his wife hear knocking. Lady Macbeth suggests that they retire to their chamber, saying "A little water clears us of this deed;" (Line 68). Act II. Scene III. - The Same. Donalbain: "There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody." Macduff and Lennox, the source of the knocking in the last scene, arrive at Macbeth's castle. News of King Duncan's death reaches all at Macbeth's castle. Lady Macbeth faints and Macbeth in rage kills the two drunken guards after claiming that they obviously killed their King. These actions largely free Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from suspicion. King Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain are introduced, both men wisely deciding to flee Macbeth's castle as a precaution against their own murder. Malcolm will head for England, Donalbain for Ireland. At the castle gates we hear knocking. The Porter attending the door exclaims that he is akin to the porter of hell and we soon learn that the earlier knocking was caused by the arrival of Macduff and Lennox. Macduff engaging the Porter in some insightful yet trivial banter (Lines 25-48). Macduff and Lennox enter and are shortly greeted by Macbeth. Macduff asks of the King. Macbeth leads Macduff to the King's chambers. Shortly afterwards, we hear from Macduff. "'O horror! horror! horror! Tongue nor heart / Cannot conceive nor name thee!" (Line 70). Macbeth asks what the problem is, and feigning surprise incredulously asks if the King's life is what he speaks of. Macbeth and Lennox awaken the rest of the castle. Lady Macbeth asks what's going on, Banquo tells Lady Macbeth who later faints. Macbeth says that had he died before this deed, he would have "liv'd [lived] a blessed time; for, from this instant, / There's nothing serious in mortality." (Lines 99-100). Malcolm and Donalbain hear of their father's death from Banquo and Macbeth exclaims that he killed the two bridegrooms in his fury. The two brothers wisely conclude that their lives are now in danger, Malcolm decides to head for England, Donalbain for Ireland. Donalbain famously exclaims "There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (Lines 146-147). Act II. Scene IV. - The Same. Without the Castle. Ross speaks with an Old Man who describes various unnatural acts happening in Scotland, perhaps the single most significant scene for the theme of nature at war with itself, which relates to the idea of a natural order being disturbed by killing a King, a prevalent theme throughout this play. We learn that King Duncan's two sons have fled, leaving Macbeth to be crowned the new King of Scotland. Macduff, who later becomes instrumental in Macbeth's downfall, has significantly snubbed Macbeth's coronation at Scone to go instead to Fife. A tone of increasing despair for Scotland begins in this scene... Ross speaks to an Old Man who discusses nature at war with itself. The Old Man speaks of a falcon killed by an owl last Tuesday and Ross adds that King Duncan's horses "Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out," (Lines 14), the Old Man remarking that "'Tis [it is] said they eat each other" (Line 19). Macduff arrives, commenting that King Duncan's two sons have run away "which puts upon them / Suspicion of the deed" (which puts on them the suspicion that they killed their father, King Duncan), (Line 26). Ross does not accept this explanation: why would the two sons kill their own father whom he refers to as their "own life's means!" or someone they depend upon, adding that such an action is "'Gainst nature still!" or unnatural (Lines 29-31). Ross now remarks that the kingdom will most likely reside with Macbeth and tellingly, we learn that Macduff will head to Fife and not to Scone where Macbeth will be crowned King. The Old Man ends Act II, remarking "That would make good of bad, and friends of foes!" (Line 41).

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