

***Macbeth*: Speak Now: Examples from Act I**

One section of the *Macbeth* exam requires you to choose answers that best capture the meaning of a given quote. No context will be given for the quote except who says it; you'll then choose the best "translated" meaning from the list provided.

In order to prepare for that section, I suggest doing the following with key quotes from the play. First, identify who's speaking; this information will be given to you on the test, but it'll help you keep things straight. (Lady Macbeth, for example, almost always speaks either to Macbeth or to herself; this knowledge allows you to skip certain options.) To that end, I'd also identify who's being spoken to in the scene, and in what context. Is the quote from an aside or soliloquy, or does it belong to a larger conversation? Finally, I'd translate the meaning of the quote as best I could, then compare my response to a Shakespeare "translation" online.

I've provided some examples from Act I, as well as quotes from the other Acts if you'd like to practice on your own.

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair..."

The witches are chanting, and not to anyone in particular, shortly after hinting that they plan to meet Macbeth.

"Let the good turn bad, let everything reverse itself..."

"No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive/Our bosom interest. Go, pronounce his present death,/And with his former title greet Macbeth."

The speaker is Duncan. He's speaking to Ross after listening to the wounded officer's report on Macbeth's and Banquo's victories over the rebel/Norwegian armies.

"The Thane of Cawdor will never trick us again. Go find Macbeth and tell him that the Thane will be executed – and that he can take his honored place."

"Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more./By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis./But how of Cawdor?"

The speaker is Macbeth. He's speaking to the three witches (the "imperfect speakers") just before they vanish, and shortly after Macbeth and Banquo hear both sets of prophecies for the first time.

"Stop and explain yourselves. I'm already the Thane of Glamis because Sinel, my father, gave me his rank when he died. But how could I be the Thane of Cawdor when he is still alive?"

"Sons, kinsmen, thanes,/And you whose places are the nearest, know/We will establish our estate upon/Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter/The Prince of Cumberland..."

The speaker is Duncan. He's speaking to the Scottish nobles and fighters who have gathered there, and he has just announced that Malcolm will succeed him when the time is right.

"Everyone should know that I plan to pass the crown to Malcolm."

"The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step/On which I must fall down or else o'erleap,/For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;/Let not light see my black and deep desires."

The speaker is Macbeth. He's speaking to himself, just after Duncan has announced that Malcolm (not Donalbain) will succeed him when the time is right.

"I have to defeat/kill Malcolm if I ever want to be king, because he's standing in my way. I hope no one can tell what I'm planning to do to Duncan..."

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be/What thou art promised. Yet I do fear thy nature;/It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness/To catch the nearest way."

The speaker is Lady Macbeth. She's soliloquizing after receiving the "witch prophecy" letter from Macbeth.

"My husband, you've already achieved what they said you would, and will become king if you want to do what is necessary. But I fear you won't want to go that far; you're too kind at heart to be so ruthless."

"Come, you spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,/And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/Of direst cruelty."

The speaker is Lady Macbeth, and she's continuing her soliloquy.

"Come, gods, and rid me of all traces of feminine sweetness – fill my soul with enough evil and steely courage to plan what must be done."

"To beguile the time,/Look like the time. Bear welcome in your eye,/Your hand, your tongue. Look like th' innocent flower,/But be the serpent under 't."

The speaker is Lady Macbeth. She's trying to convince Macbeth, who has just returned to his castle, that he needs to kill Duncan and seize his destiny.

"Look normal if you want to fool the others. Act friendly, say friendly things, and look innocent – but be cunning and ruthless underneath it all."

"Give me your hand./Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly/And shall continue our graces towards him./By your leave, hostess."

The speaker is Duncan. He's thanking Lady Macbeth for her hospitality after arriving at the castle; she replies that her family is deeply indebted to him, and is therefore happy to help him.

"Let's find Macbeth, who we both love so much; I'd like to thank him in person. Shall we go?"

"He's here in double trust:/First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,/Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,/Who should against his murderer shut the door,/Not bear the knife myself."

The speaker is Macbeth. He's soliloquizing during an aside, grappling with his tentative decision to kill Duncan; the king has recently gone to bed, and Lady Macbeth is coming to meet with him.

"Duncan trusts me for two reasons tonight – not only am I his friend and subject, but I am also his host. The host should protect his guests from danger, not kill them."

"We will proceed no further in this business./He hath honored me of late, and I have bought/Golden opinions from all sorts of people,/Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,/Not cast aside so soon."

The speaker is Macbeth. He's just begun speaking to Lady Macbeth in order to tell her he's abandoning the murder plot.

"We're not doing this. He just promoted me, and I'm already respected by many. We should enjoy what we've just received instead of tossing it away in pursuit of something new."

"Bring forth men-children only./For thy undaunted mettle should compose/Nothing but males."

The speaker is Macbeth. He's speaking to Lady Macbeth, who has just convinced him anew to kill Duncan – and that their plot cannot fail.

"Let's hope you only have sons, for your masculine spirit will never fit a daughter!"

Macbeth: Speak Now: Quotes from Acts II-V

Act II

"So I lose none/In seeking to augment it, but still keep/My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,/I shall be counselled."

"I go, and it is done. The bell invites me./Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell/That summons thee to heaven or to hell."

"Still it cried, 'Sleep no more!' to all the house./'Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more.'"

"Infirm of purpose!/Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead/ Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood/ That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,/I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,/For it must seem their guilt."

"Knock, knock! Never at quiet. What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further. I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire."

"The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood/Is stopped; the very source of it is stopped."

"Who can be wise, amazed, temp'rate, and furious,/Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man./Th' expedition of my violent love/Outrun the pauser, reason."

"This murderous shaft that's shot/Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way/Is to avoid the aim. Therefore, to horse,/And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,/But shift away. There's warrant in that theft/Which steals itself when there's no mercy left."

"...Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,/Threatens his bloody stage. By th' clock 'tis day,/And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp./Is 't night's predominance or the day's shame/That darkness does the face of Earth entomb/When living light should kiss it?"

"'Gainst nature still!/Thriftless ambition, that will raven up/Thine own lives' means!"

Act III

"Thou hast it now – King, Cawdor, Glamis, all/As the Weïrd Women promised, and I fear/Thou played'st most foully for 't."

"We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed/In England and in Ireland, not confessing/Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers/With strange invention."

"I will advise you where to plant yourselves,/Acquaint you with the perfect spy o' th' time,/The moment on 't; for 't must be done tonight,/And something from the palace; always thought/That I require a clearness. And with him –/To leave no rubs nor botches in the work –/Fleance, his son, that keeps him company,/Whose absence is no less material to me/Than is his father's, must embrace the fate/Of that dark hour."

"To be thus is nothing,/But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo/Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature/Reigns that which would be feared."

"Better be with the dead,/Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,/Than on the torture of the mind to lie/In restless ecstasy."

"Thou art the best o' th' cutthroats:/Yet he's good that did the like for Fleance./If thou didst it, thou art the nonpareil."

"Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,/Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,/As broad and general as the casing air./But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in/To saucy doubts and fears. – But Banquo's safe?"

"The time has been/That, when the brains were out, the man would die,/And there an end. But now they rise again/With twenty mortal murders on their crowns/And push us from our stools."

"O, proper stuff!/This is the very painting of your fear./This is the air-drawn dagger which you said/Led you to Duncan."

"I am in blood/Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

Act IV

"I conjure you by that which you profess –/Howe'er you come to know it – answer me./Though you untie the winds and let them fight/Against the churches, though the yeasty waves/Confound and swallow navigation up,/Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,/Though castles topple on their warders' heads,/Though palaces and pyramids do slope/Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure/Of nature's germens tumble all together,/Even till destruction sicken, answer me/To what I ask you."

"Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn/The power of man, for none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth."

"Then live, Macduff. What need I fear of thee?/But yet I'll make assurance double sure,/And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live,/That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,/And sleep in spite of thunder."

"Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care/Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are./Macbeth shall never vanquished be until/Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill/Shall come against him."

"No boasting like a fool./This deed I'll do before this purpose cool."

"Wisdom! To leave his wife, to leave his babes,/His mansion and his titles in a place/From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;/He wants the natural touch. For the poor wren,/The most diminutive of birds, will fight,/Her young ones in her nest, against the owl./All is the fear and nothing is the love,/As little is the wisdom, where the flight/So runs against all reason."

"Then the liars and swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang up them."

"Why in that rawness left you wife and child,/Those precious motives, those strong knots of love,/Without leave-taking?"

"It is myself I mean, in whom I know/All the particulars of vice so grafted/That, when they shall be opened, black Macbeth/Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state/Esteem him as a lamb, being compared/With my confineless harms."

“Fit to govern?/No, not to live. – O nation miserable,/With an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptered,/When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again,/Since that the truest issue of thy throne/By his own interdiction stands accursed,/And does blaspheme his breed?”

Act V

“A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching! In this slumbry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what (at any time) have you heard her say?”

“Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One; two. Why, then, ’tis time to do ’t. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow’r to accompt? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”

“The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne’er be clean?”

“Now does he feel/His secret murders sticking on his hands./Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach./Those he commands move only in command,/Nothing in love. Now does he feel his title/Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe/Upon a dwarfish thief.”

“Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,/Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,/Raze out the written troubles of the brain/And with some sweet oblivious antidote/Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff/Which weighs upon the heart?”

“I have almost forgot the taste of fears./The time has been my senses would have cooled/To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair/Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir/As life were in ’t. I have supped full with horrors./Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts/Cannot once start me.”

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,/Creeps in this petty pace from day to day/To the last syllable of recorded time,/And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!/Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more. It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing.”

“Despair thy charm,/And let the angel whom thou still hast served/Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother’s womb/Untimely ripped.”

“I will not yield,/To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet,/And to be baited with the rabble’s curse./Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,/And thou opposed, being of no woman born,/Yet I will try the last. Before my body/I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,/And damned be him that first cries, ‘Hold, enough!’”

“What’s more to do,/Which would be planted newly with the time,/As calling home our exiled friends abroad/That fled the snares of watchful tyranny,/Producing forth the cruel ministers/Of this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen,/Who, as ’tis thought, by self and violent hands/Took off her life; this, and what needful else/That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,/We will perform in measure, time, and place.”