

Cruel tyrant – despairing but decisive (final scenes)

- Scotland has become a country “**Almost afraid to know itself**” (4.3.164) & where upstart’s subjects “move only in command, Nothing in love” (5.2.20)
- Decisiveness after second visit to witches means he clings to **false** assurances but in frustration lashes out at fears: “be it thought and done” (4.1.149)
- Under threat, esp. with English army near, reacts brutally: orders soldiers to scour country & “Hang those that talk of fear”; insults messenger “cream-faced loon”
- **Hardened**: “I have supp’d full with **horrors**”, ignores screams of wife & refuses to grieve her “dusty death” as life seems meaningless; wearied repetition of “tomorrow”, note how language itself almost seems pointless (5.5.25)
- Nihilistic attitude: compares his existence to an inexperienced actor trapped by his part, written by someone else - “**Life’s** but a walking shadow, a **poor player** that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more...”
- Realises deception of prophecy: illusions stripped away – sympathy as victim of manipulation, “**equivocation** of a fiend that lies like truth” (misled with riddles)
- **Defiant**: chooses to die in **battle**, “Give me my armour”, recklessly leaving **safe** castle where he could “laugh a siege to scorn” (5.5.3) to directly engage enemies
- Madly self-confident & courageous (“**Yet I will try the last**” – fight to the end) & brief flicker of conscience when confronting Macduff (complexities of character)
- Fall, **ruined reputation**, emphasised by adjectives from “**black**” & “**Devilish**” – “**untitled tyrant**, bloody Scotland”, “**hell-hound**” & “**dead butcher**” (curt insult after head is chopped off & displayed to jubilant people)

Lady Macbeth – ruthless evil & psychological deterioration

- Close relationship, “**nearest partner of greatness**” (1.5): lives **vicariously** through husband as no children, determined to advance his (and her) position
- Understands Macbeth’s concern with honour & his reputation but desperate to “**catch the nearest way**”, achieve her ambitions as quickly as possible
- Her **strength** of purpose contrasts with his tendency to waver: her ambition drives her husband forward & makes decisive contributions to Duncan’s murder
- **Sinister**, without remorse: invokes spirits to “unsex me here” & fill her from top to toe with “direst cruelty”, wedded to powers of darkness “**fiend-like queen**”
- Thoroughly **duplicious**, two-faced, highlighted by dramatic contrast: “look like the **innocent flower** but be the **serpent**” underneath (1.5.65)
- Pressures husband into murder by **mockery**, testing his love, **accusing** him of cowardice, emphasising her determination to complete what she started – “**so much more the man**” & “screw up your courage to the sticking place”
- Assists Macbeth in fixing blame on grooms by painting blood on their faces & tries to calm worries – “**A little water** clears us of this deed” (2.2.68)
- Pretends to faint during discovery of Duncan’s death to deflect attention from Macbeth’s suspicious murder of the grooms, tries to maintain decorum at state feast & shame husband – “**When all’s done, You look but on a stool**” (3.4)
- Rational view of world believing only in what can be physically seen
- Yet increasing unease revealed in private, “**by destruction dwell in doubtful joy**” (alliteration), position never secure, always threat & not “content (3.2.5-7)
- Completely absent from Act 4 & reappearance sleepwalking particularly shocking