

Act 1 Scene 3 Analysis

Act 1, Scene 3 marks a return to the witches. The language Shakespeare uses when the witches are speaking is always rude, vulgar and shocking. Animals are referred to frequently, which can be seen as symbolising the witches' links to nature and lower-level animals. The second witch has been 'killing swine'; the first mentions a 'rat without a tail'. This adds to the animal imagery already used by the witches in the play's opening scene, with references to Graymalkin (an old term for grey cat) and Paddock (toad). Shakespeare's use of animal imagery with the witches acts in the same way as their use of trochaic tetrameter – it separates them from humanity.

In this scene we are being shown the power of the witches. It's not as great, however, as we might have been led to believe in Act 1, Scene 1. For example, the audience finds out that one of the witches has been away 'killing swine' while the first witch has been offended by a woman who wouldn't give her chestnuts. These events don't exactly inspire true fear in the audience. The witch who has been offended by the woman with the chestnuts has decided to take it out on the woman's husband who is a sailor. She has control over the winds and uses them to disrupt the ship's journey. It's important to remember, however, that she does not have the power to take his life 'Though his bark cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tost'. Shakespeare's use of structure is key here: he deliberately shows the audience the limits of the witches' power, so that when Macbeth arrives and is captivated by them, we can see that his infatuation tells us more about him than it does about them.

Shakespeare uses **foreshadowing** in this passage about the sailor. The first witch says 'I'll drain him dry as hay' which can be interpreted with a double meaning about the fate of Macbeth who is ultimately drained morally, physically and spiritually by the end of the play. Another important piece of foreshadowing is when the witch says that one of the ways she will torture this sailor is by preventing him from sleeping: 'Sleep shall neither night nor day / Hang upon his penthouse lid'. Sleep is natural and important for people to stay physically and mentally strong. However Macbeth, as a result of his unnatural deeds, will soon be unable to sleep.

When Macbeth arrives, his words are eerily similar to those of the witches. His proclamation 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen' reminds us of the witches' words 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'. It could be suggested that Shakespeare is linking Macbeth with the supernatural and evil element of the play from his very first appearance.

This scene is important for developing the characters of Macbeth and Banquo and especially the differences between them. One of Banquo's functions in the play is to operate as a foil to Macbeth. A foil is a character who contrasts another character, usually the protagonist, to highlight certain things about them.

Banquo responds to the witches with disinterest, scepticism and wariness. He labels himself as 'me, who neither beg, nor fear, / Your favours nor your hate' and asks them for a prophecy. Banquo is surprised by Macbeth's reaction to the witches telling him he will be king. He asks Macbeth 'why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?' Shakespeare intends for his audience to believe that this isn't the first time thoughts of becoming king have entered his head. We can read into this some of Macbeth's guilt. His ambition has clearly led him to think about this before. Otherwise, why would he react to such good news with fear rather than surprise? Also, the thoughts he has afterwards about murder are surely the thoughts of a person who has previously thought about it before: 'Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair, / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs'.

It's interesting to note that Macbeth wants to know more from the witches and to learn from where they get their 'strange intelligence'. Banquo, on the other hand, simply regards their prophecies as 'honest trifles'. He points out that seemingly innocent statements, however, can lead people to do terrible things. Little does he know how right he will be.

Finally, let's return to the question posed in the analysis of Act 1, Scene 1: who (if anyone) persuades Macbeth to kill King Duncan? Shakespeare's use of structure is crucial here. To Macbeth, moments after the witches tell him he will be Thane of Cawdor, Ross arrives and tells him it is so. As Dr Emma Smith explains, the witches 'seem creepily omnipotent to Macbeth...the gap between prophecy and enactment frighteningly slender. But to us, that is actually a gap between command – the king's words in Act 1, Scene 2 – and fulfilment.' (Smith, Emma. (2010). "Macbeth." *Approaching Shakespeare Series*, Oxford University. Available at: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/macbeth>) To Smith, the witches 'seem to interpose in a chain of human actions rather than direct actions themselves'. And so Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony means that the audience is less impressed by the witches than Macbeth is. To us, we already knew about Macbeth's promotion before the witches mentioned it. But to Macbeth, their impact is much greater. In this scene, with the explanation of the witches' limitations, along with the **dramatic irony** of their prophecy (at least the Cawdor element) the witches are presented as lacking power. Having appeared in two of the three scenes so far, the witches will take a much lesser role as the play progresses, which again suggests a lack of power on their part.

Act 1 Scene 3 Translation

ORIGINAL TEXT	MODERN TRANSLATION
A heath near Forres.	An open place near Forres.
<i>Thunder. Enter the three Witches</i>	<i>Thunder. Enter the three Witches</i>
First Witch Where hast thou been, sister?	First Witch Where have you been sister?
Second Witch Killing swine.	Second Witch Killing pigs.
Third Witch Sister, where thou?	Third Witch Sister, where were you?
First Witch A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap, And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd:-- 'Give me,' quoth I: 'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries. Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger: But in a sieve I'll thither sail, And, like a rat without a tail, I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.	First Witch A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap, And ate, and ate and ate: 'Give me them' I said to her: 'Go away, witch!' the fat bottomed lady said. Her husband's gone to Aleppo in Syria, he's the master of the ship The Tiger: But I'll sail in a sieve, And, like a rat without a tail, I'll cause lots of mischief and harm.
Second Witch I'll give thee a wind.	Second Witch

First Witch

Thou'rt kind.

Third Witch

And I another.

First Witch

I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' the shipman's card.
I'll drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;

He shall live a man forbid:
Weary se'nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
Look what I have.

Second Witch

Show me, show me.

First Witch

Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wreck'd as homeward he did come.

Drum within

Third Witch

A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

ALL

The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Enter MACBETH and BANQUO

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

I'll give you some wind to help cause damage to the ship.

First Witch

You are kind.

Third Witch

And I'll give you some wind, too.

First Witch

I control all the other winds,
In all the ports where they blow,
Every place where they can reach
On a sailor's compass.
With this wind, I will prevent him from getting to port and taking on fresh water:
He won't get any sleep at night or during the day;
He will live like a cursed man:
For 567 days
Shall he get thin and miserable:
Although his ship cannot be sunk,
It will experience storms at sea.
Look what I have here.

Second Witch

Show me, show me.

First Witch

Here I have a sailor's thumb
Shipwrecked and drowned as he made his way home.

Drum within

Third Witch

A drum, a drum!
Macbeth is coming.

ALL

The supernatural sisters, hand in hand,
Fast travellers of the sea and land,
They go around the world:
Three to you and three to me
And three again to make up nine.
Quiet! The spell is ready.

Enter MACBETH and BANQUO

MACBETH

BANQUO

How far is't call'd to Forres? What are these

So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to
understand me,
By each at once her chappy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

MACBETH

Speak, if you can: what are you?

First Witch

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

Second Witch

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of
Cawdor!

Third Witch

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

BANQUO

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of
truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great
prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak
not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will
not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

First Witch

Hail!

Second Witch

Hail!

Third Witch

I've not seen a day like this before where the
weather has been so bad but also so good.

BANQUO

How far is it to Forres? What are these things
with clothes so dirty and shabby,
They look like they don't belong here on earth
but yet they are here? Are you alive? Or are
you something that a man might question
whether you are alive or dead? You seem to
understand me,
Looking at your withered finger on
your lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards stop me from
believing that you are.

MACBETH

Speak, if you can: what are you?

First Witch

All hail, Macbeth! Hail to you, Lord of Glamis!

Second Witch

All hail Macbeth, hail to you, Lord of Cawdor!

Third Witch

All hail Macbeth! You will be king in the future!

BANQUO

Macbeth, why are you so startled;
and afraid of things that sound so good? In the
name of truth,
Are you witches imaginary or are you as real as
you appear to be?
You greet Macbeth with his present title but
also predict
that he will have another noble title and will
soon become the king,
He seems completely fascinated by it: You have
not said anything to me.
If you can look into the future and say which
crops will grow and which will not,
Speak to me about my future, I don't beg for
good things from you nor fear bad things.

First Witch

Hail!

Second Witch

Hail!

Hail!

First Witch

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch

Not so happy, yet much happier.

Third Witch

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:

So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

First Witch

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

MACBETH

Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:

By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis;

But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives,

A prosperous gentleman; and to be king
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge
you.

Witches vanish

BANQUO

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,

And these are of them. Whither are they
vanish'd?

MACBETH

Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted

As breath into the wind. Would they had stay'd!

BANQUO

Were such things here as we do speak about?

Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?

Third Witch

Hail!

First Witch

You are less than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch

Not as happy as him, but much happier.

Third Witch

You shall be the father of kings but not be one
yourself:

So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

First Witch

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

MACBETH

Stay, you incomplete speakers, tell me more:

Because Sinel (Macbeth's father) died, I
became the Lord of Glamis;

But how am I Lord of Cawdor? The Lord of
Cawdor is alive,

A wealthy gentleman; and that I could be king is
something not even worth believing,
No more than it is worth believing I'm the
Lord of Cawdor. Tell me from where you got
this strange information? Or why, upon this
damned field, you stop us on our journey with
such a greeting about the future? Speak, I
command you.

Witches vanish

BANQUO

The earth, like the water, has bubbles that
spirits
like these can disappear in. Where did they
disappear to?

MACBETH

Into the air; and what seemed to be made of
flesh and blood melted
as if it were breath on the wind. I wish they had
stayed!

BANQUO

Were they even here, these creatures that
we're talking about?

MACBETH

Your children shall be kings.

BANQUO

You shall be king.

MACBETH

And thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?

BANQUO

To the selfsame tune and words. Who's here?

Enter ROSS and ANGUS

ROSS

The king hath happily received, Macbeth,

The news of thy success; and when he reads

Thy personal venture in the rebels' fight,

His wonders and his praises do contend
Which should be thine or his: silenced with
that,

In viewing o'er the rest o' the selfsame day,
He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,

Nothing afeard of what thyself didst make,

Strange images of death. As thick as hail
Came post with post; and every one did bear
Thy praises in his kingdom's great defence,
And pour'd them down before him.

ANGUS

We are sent

To give thee from our royal master thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight,
Not pay thee.

ROSS

And, for an earnest of a greater honour,

He bade me, from him, call thee thane of
Cawdor:

In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!
For it is thine.

Or have we eaten something that has made us
go mad?

MACBETH

Your children shall be kings.

BANQUO

You shall be king.

MACBETH

And Lord of Cawdor too: was that not what
they said?

BANQUO

Those exact words.
Who's coming now?

Enter ROSS and ANGUS

ROSS

The king has happily heard,
Macbeth,

The news of your success in battle; and when
he reads

About your personal involvement in the fight
against the rebels,

He doesn't know whether to praise you or
express his amazement: Speechless with
admiration,

He looks through the day's events

And finds that you also fought against the
Norwegians,

Unafraid of the hideous and barbaric scene that
you created yourself with your killings. Thick
and fast

Came messengers with messages; and
everyone was very complimentary
about you for defending Scotland and they
passed these messages on to the king.

ANGUS

We have been sent

To give you a message of thanks from the King;
Only this is not the only payment that you will
receive.

ROSS

And, as a token of the honour you are
going to receive,

The king told me, from him, to call you lord of
Cawdor:

BANQUO

What, can the devil speak true?

MACBETH

The thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me
In borrow'd robes?

ANGUS

Who was the thane lives yet;
But under heavy judgment bears that life

Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was
combined

With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
With hidden help and vantage, or that with
both

He labour'd in his country's wreck, I know not;
But treasons capital, confess'd and proved,
Have overthrown him.

MACBETH

[Aside] Glamis, and thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind.

To ROSS and ANGUS

Thanks for your pains.

To BANQUO

Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the thane of Cawdor to
me
Promised no less to them?

BANQUO

That trusted home
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.

Cousins, a word, I pray you.

So, because of this, hail, most worthy lord!
For it is yours.

BANQUO

Can these witches have been right?

MACBETH

The Lord of Cawdor is alive: why do you give
me another man's title?

ANGUS

The old Lord of Cawdor is still alive;
But he won't be for long. There is a case against
him

Which he deserves to be killed for. Whether he
was helping the Norwegian forces or helped the
rebels

By strengthening them and giving them
information or he helped both of them to
weaken our country and destroy it,
I do not know;

But he has been destroyed by these
treacherous acts which carry the death penalty,
to which he has confessed and they've been
proved.

MACBETH

[Aside] I'm Lord of Glamis and Lord of Cawdor!
The best is yet to come.

To ROSS and ANGUS

Thanks for all the trouble you've gone to.

To BANQUO

Do you not now hope that your children will be
kings,
Because the witches, who have made me Lord
of Cawdor
Promised that they would be?

BANQUO

If you accepted that completely it would
encourage your hopes of being king as well as
Lord of Cawdor. It's strange:
Agents of evil will often tell us simple things
that are true so they can
Win us over and make us trust them,

MACBETH

[*Aside*] Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.--I thank you, gentlemen.

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,

Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:

My thought, whose murder yet is but
fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.

BANQUO

Look, how our partner's rapt.

MACBETH

[*Aside*] If chance will have me king, why, chance
may crown me,
Without my stir.

BANQUO

New horrors come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their
mould
But with the aid of use.

MACBETH

[*Aside*] Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest
day.

BANQUO

Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

MACBETH

Give me your favour: my dull brain was
wrought

But they will betray us and tell us lies about
something much more important.
Friends, can I have a word with you.

MACBETH

[*Aside*] Two of the witches' prophecies have
come true, like two promising introductions to
the great story of me becoming king. I thank
you gentlemen.

The witches' prophecies
Can't be bad (he will become king), can't be
good (Duncan is already king): if bad, why does
it promise me great success,

By first making me lord of Cawdor?
If it's a good thing, why do I feel uncomfortable
with it

And why do they make my hair stand on end
and make my heart beat against my ribs,
In an unnatural way? Frightening things
happening now are less terrifying than what we
can imagine:

My mind, which thinks of murder as a fantasy
at the moment,
Is shaking me to my core so that I can't do
anything except think about the future, and
noting is real to me except the fantasy of being
king.

BANQUO

Look, how Macbeth is lost in his own thoughts.

MACBETH

[*Aside*] If fate will make me king,
then, I may become king without having to do
anything.

BANQUO

His new title does not fit him yet,
Like new clothes that don't fit properly but that
we get used to over time.

MACBETH

[*Aside*] Whatever happens will happen,
Even the worst days come to an end.

BANQUO

Good Macbeth, we are ready to go if it suits
you.

With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your
pains
Are register'd where every day I turn
The leaf to read them. Let us toward the king.
Think upon what hath chanced, and, at more
time,
The interim having weigh'd it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

BANQUO

Very gladly.

MACBETH

Till then, enough. Come, friends.

Exeunt

MACBETH

My apologies: my brain was
taken over
by memories of old. Kind gentlemen,
I will remember
All you have done and I will think about them
every day. Let us go to the king.
We should think about what has happened,
and, once we've had time to do that,
We can speak openly about it.

BANQUO

I'd be glad to.

MACBETH

Until then, we've said enough. Come, friends.

Exeunt

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