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## UNIT 2     *MACBETH: PART-I*

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### 2.0     OBJECTIVES

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This unit will acquaint you with William Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Macbeth*. The play is one of the most widely discussed and oft performed ones. This unit will discuss the important issues raised in Acts I and II of the play. It will also draw attention to the different social spaces outlined in the play—from the court to the heath and Macbeth’s home. The soliloquies of Macbeth will be analysed in detail in this unit.

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### 2.1     INTRODUCTION

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William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is a tragedy. It is believed to have been written around 1606. This is a year after the failure of the Gunpowder Plot against the King. As discussed in the previous unit, the play is based primarily on Raphael Holinshed’s *The Chronicles of England Scotland and Ireland* (1587). Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* explores the issues of kingship against the changing political landscape of England; the transition from Elizabeth’s reign to that of the Scottish King James VI who became King James I of England. The uncertainty of the political context as well as a changing social structure finds expression in Shakespeare’s plays. During this period Shakespeare wrote other famous tragedies such as *Othello* (1603-4) and *King Lear* (1605-6).

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### 2.2     ACT I

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The play is written by an English playwright but is situated in Scotland, not England. We must keep in mind the parallel between the Scottish claim for kingship and its relevance to the political climate of England. The play begins on an ominous note with thunder and lightning. These signal the advent of the witches in an open place. A play that deals with the world of kings and queens begins within a social space that is beyond the purview of normative society. This is the supernatural world of the witches. Instead of the Scottish court we see the witches in an “open space”. The first scene draws attention towards a battle that is both “lost” and “won”. It presents a kind of ambiguity that develops into equivocation; a recurrent theme in the play. The presence of familiars like “Graymalkin” and “Paddock” give an eerie beginning to the play with the constant refrain:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air” (1.1. 11-12)

In this first scene, the witches make their intentions clear—they plan to meet Macbeth on the heath. The second scene presents King Duncan and details about a certain battle are presented to him. There is reference to a rebellion countered by Duncan’s forces—an invasion from forces both inside and outside the country. From within Scotland an uprising has been initiated by Macdonwald. From outside Scotland, there are the Norwegian forces to be countered. The captain, who has returned from the field as a “bloody man” is asked to report to the King. His narrative introduces Macbeth as a “brave character”. The context of the war and rebellion are also provided to the reader/viewer. We are given to imagine the bravery and power wielded by Macbeth who possesses the ability to counter both these uprisings. The hurly-burly of Scene I is presented in the form of a rebellion in Scene II.

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),  
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish’d steel,  
Which smok’d with bloody execution,  
Like Valour’s minion, carv’d out his passage,  
Till he fac’d the slave;  
Which he ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseam’d him from the nave to th’ chops,  
And fix’d his head upon our battlements. (1.2. 16-23)

One must mark the nature of rebellion. In these lines one can see the adulation of the Captain for the “brave” Macbeth. Physical bravery and violence is glorified to reinstate kingly power. Killing is valorised and sanctioned by the Scottish state as it is employed for its defence. The Captain compares Macbeth’s valour to the wounds inflicted at “Golgotha”, the place of Christ’s crucifixion. As the Captain faints due to his wounds, the nobleman Rosse enters the scene to inform the King that the Norwegian powers had been fighting valiantly. But Macbeth, referred to as “Bellona’s bridegroom”, provides “Point against point, rebellious arm ‘gainst arm”. This leads to the victory of the Scottish forces.

The first Act establishes the play not just as a tragedy but a sharply political one in which the methodology used by the state to establish and sustain itself is presented. Duncan’s final statement in this scene, “What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won” gives the sense that more is to follow. Has Macbeth only won the battle instead of Macdonwald or has he somehow stepped into his place and will soon be able to execute a rebellion that the Thane of Cawdor could not achieve?

The third scene is again situated in the heath where the witches meet. This alternation of scenes provides two different worlds. In one the entities that exist outside the margins of society are presented. In the other, the dominant powers that occupy centre stage are presented. In both cases there seem to be ripples of disturbance that destroy and question the sense of normalcy. In fact peace is nowhere in sight, and if so it is only fleetingly present.

The scene begins once again on an ominous note. The witches’ scenes and the space in which they meet to plot and prophesy is presented in an eerie manner. They recount how they played truant with a sailor who had gone to Aleppo. This reference is important as Aleppo was an important trading city in Syria. Like the many people who sought the sea route to trade and make money, the sailor too goes to Aleppo to realise his dreams of making money. Take a look at these prophetic lines, “Sleep shall neither night nor day/ Hang upon his penthouse lid:/ He shall live a man forbid” (1.3 19-21). The witches’ conversation indicates that the sailor will no longer be able to rest peacefully. These lines predict the course of events to follow. The pathetic condition of the ambitious sailor who has left for Aleppo to make money is symptomatic of what is soon going to happen to Macbeth. It is interesting to mark two important changes emerging from two different spatial zones. In court, Macbeth has acquired the title of Thane of Cawdor and will soon step into the rebel’s place. In their space, the witches’ too want to play “truant” and soon enough Macbeth will be like the sailor who travelled to Aleppo with dreams of acquiring wealth and power but was eventually left bereft of sleep. The sailor’s “bark” might not be lost but will surely be

“tempest-tost”. Similarly the reference to the “pilot’s thumb” is an indication that the witches have had fun at the expense of the pilot. It is interesting to mark that the witches attack both the sailor and the pilot, people who move outwards to journey for mercenary purposes. In a sense they are people who pursue their ambition. Macbeth too will seek his heart’s yearning for power and pursue “vaulting ambition”. The witches cast a spell:

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,  
And thrice again to make up nine  
Peace!—the charm’s wound up. (1.3. 35-37)

In this scene the two worlds—of the witches and the nobility come together. On their way back from the war, Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches on the heath. The spell has already been cast. The two men see them as strange creatures. They look like old women even as they sport a beard. Banquo asks,

What are these,  
So wither’d and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth,  
And yet are on’t? (1.3. 39-42)

The duo finds it difficult to rationalise the witches in human form. Macbeth urges them to speak and they refer to him as:

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!  
All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!  
All hail, Macbeth! thou shalt be king hereafter! (1.3. 48-50)

These prophecies are indeed “fantastical”. They voice Macbeth’s as yet concealed desire to be the King of Scotland. Banquo too is predicted to be “Lesser than Macbeth and greater” (1.3. 66-68). The witches’ predictions create an alternative structure as Macbeth and Banquo wonder at how these can be realised. Macbeth’s bewilderment is well captured in the following lines:

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. (1.3. 70-78)

Macbeth’s curiosity has been stirred. He wonders as to his proposed rapid ascent to the top. In a system of primogeniture it is the King’s eldest son who inherits the throne. The plausibility of Macbeth becoming King is therefore remote as Duncan is succeeded by Malcolm and Donalbain. The realisation of this prophesy seems quite impossible. In the next part of this scene, a part of the witches’ prophesy is realised, as Macbeth is made the Thane of Cawdor. This reward is an acceptance and ratification of the gruesome violence perpetrated by Macbeth on the battlefield. Mark how violence is being celebrated as it is used to defend the Scottish state. Macbeth has created “strange images of death” that have won him the title of the Thane of Cawdor. His fierceness and bravery is enmeshed in a masculine aggression that finds no equal at this juncture. However, he has inherited the title from one who was a rebel. Macbeth is perplexed at this new position. Angus, a nobleman, clarifies,

Who was the Thane, lives yet;  
But under heavy judgement bears that life

Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was combin'd  
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 wrack, I know not;  
But treasons capital, confess'd and prov'd,  
Have overthrown him. (1.3. 109-116)

It is clear from the above lines that any energy channelized against the state is to be curbed. Macbeth in defeating the rebel has earned the title of the Thane of Cawdor. State politik works towards the reinforcement of the dominant powers as vested in the king. The monarchical powers hold ground. Macbeth is disturbed by the predictions of the witches. But, on the other hand, when asked about the witches' prophecies, Banquo gives a very balanced answer—"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 consequences" (1.3. 123-125). Faith in the monarchical organization that privileges inheritance through birth leads Banquo to believe that the dark powers [witches] might win them over with "honest trifles". He deploys a more balanced and rational approach rooted in the existing social framework. However Macbeth who nurtures these secret ambitions, ponders over the goings on:

Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.—  
[*Aside.*] 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. (1.3 128-142)

The witches' predictions have been realised to some degree. Macbeth was Thane of Glamis and has now become the Thane of Cawdor. These are the "two truths" that move towards the "imperial theme". He is indeed tempted to neutralise it as neither good nor bad. It has brought success to Macbeth without any use of violence. He believes if "chance" has given him this title it will crown him king. However Macbeth is cognizant of the fact that the final prediction cannot come through without bloodshed and this creates disturbing images. The scene also brings in the idea of equivocation. For instance, "Cannot be ill, cannot be good" or "And nothing is, but what is not" introduces the idea of equivocation. In a world governed by rigid rules and regulations the idea of equivocation introduces a rupture. This break/ rupture indicates that whatever was held to be true can be otherwise and vice versa. Therefore the subject's allegiance towards the King becomes weak. The possibilities are manifold. Whether it is his heart's innermost desire or the witches' prophecy, Macbeth begins to head in the direction of realising the final prophesy of the witches—"If chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,/ Without my stir" (1.3. 144). Macbeth dispenses with these troublesome thoughts leaving all to "chance" and tells Banquo that they must speak freely to each other.

Meanwhile, Duncan questions the nobles on the execution of Cawdor. It draws attention to the punishment meted out to traitors in those days. Malcolm's reporting of Cawdor's execution shows him as one who was repentant. His rebellion and consequent defeat and execution becomes a point of reference

as we know that Macbeth too might be headed the same way. Macbeth has now taken Cawdor's place and in a sense the events that are to follow are already being predicted. As Duncan says,

There's no art  
To find the mind's construction in the face:  
He was a gentlemen on whom I built  
An absolute trust— (1.4 11-13)

Duncan refers to Macbeth as "worthiest cousin" and praises him for his loyalty. This confounds the reader as one wonders if Macbeth has any valid claim to the throne. Ostensibly the bond between Duncan and Macbeth is feudal as king towards his subject. It is bound by "service and loyalty". But Shakespeare's focus draws attention to a fast changing world in which feudal bonds were gradually giving way to a world driven by competition. The flip side of loyalty was treason and it did not take very long for either Cawdor or Macbeth to follow the path. In professing loyalty to the king, even if momentarily, Macbeth reinforces the idea of the divine right of kingship. According to this the king is divinely ordained and all owe allegiance to the monarch. In early seventeenth century, as the rule of the Queen had given way to the control of King James I in England, there was a conflict of allegiances. Will the English subject pay the same kind of obeisance to its new King as it did to the Queen during her reign? These were turbulent times as Queen Elizabeth's reign was marked by the famous Earl of Essex rebellion just as King James's rule that was witness to the Gunpowder Plot. It appeared as if rebellion had become the norm. The play points towards a world fast changing and the traditional footholds were giving way to a more mercantile disposition marked by competitiveness.

These conflicts are effectively summarised in this scene where the play on loyalty and treason takes place. The idea of nurture and growth that Duncan brings in is no longer a viable one. As Duncan names his eldest as the Prince of Cumberland, one who will become the King after him, conflict ensues. As the witches' prophesy is belied, Macbeth wonders and thinks to himself in an aside:

*(Aside)* 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 eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,  
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.  
(1.4 46-53)

The aside well explains Macbeth's psychological predicament. He knows that Duncan has declared his son as the heir. Yet Macbeth nurtures ambition; he is the brave one. The witches' prophesies have been partially fulfilled. And he wonders why they can't be realised completely. Macbeth's thoughts express his understanding of the dangers that beset him in this endeavour. Such thoughts impede his path and make his desire appear unnatural.

In the next scene Lady Macbeth enters reading a letter sent to her by Macbeth, about his meeting with the weird sisters. It mentions prophesies by these weird creatures who soon vanished into thin air. He tells Lady Macbeth, "This have I thought good to deliver thee (my dearest partner of greatness) that thou might'st not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promis'd thee" (1.5. 10-13). She assesses the letter and is circumspect about Macbeth's essential character. Lady Macbeth finds him too full of the "milk of human kindness". According to her, Macbeth has the ambition but not the "illness" that should attend it. She takes it upon herself to work towards making real the witches' prophesy. She says:

Hie thee hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
And chastise with the valour of my tongue

All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crown'd withal. (1.525-29)

Lady Macbeth decides to lead and show the way. In this game of power, Lady Macbeth's access to the throne can only be through her husband and she decides to realise his ambition by making it her own. The active role and support provided by Lady Macbeth has led to varied interpretations of her character by critics. She has been considered an ally of the witches. Mark the use of the supernatural in these lines—"pour my spirits in thine ear" or the "valour of my tongue". Such phraseology connects her to the supernatural world of the witches. It seems as if she has access to a totally different world where the rule of order does not prevail. There is also speculation about her as being another aspect of Macbeth's personality. She is willing to be the poison that will lead Macbeth to the "golden round". Lady Macbeth's belief that some sort of "metaphysical aid" has decided that Macbeth be crowned reaffirms her faith in Macbeth's ambition and her own. In this fulfilment of ambition Lady Macbeth sheds her 'natural' appearance. She says:

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! make thick my blood,  
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse;  
That no compunctious visitings of Nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on Nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,  
And pall thee in the dunest smoke of Hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry, 'Hold, hold!' (1.5 40-53)

This is one of the most oft-quoted speeches of Lady Macbeth as she renounces her feminine qualities. Lady Macbeth's demand to be 'unsexed' is taken to be an instance of her proximity to the world of the witches. She demands the milk in her breasts be turned to poison. She calls upon the "murth'ring ministers" to act on her and give the strength to make true the witches' prophesy. Femininity, as part of the patriarchal system is the cornerstone of the feudal world. As loyalties towards the king gradually crumble, the femininity needed to support feudal values also falls apart. A new order seems to be at work and would therefore be seen as unnatural. The deed has to be executed in the dark, at night—"Heaven" itself must not peep. Lady Macbeth's reference to "every point twice done, and then done double" echoes the witches' "Double, double toil and trouble".

The tension between the different worlds of the kings and the witches is poignantly created. The former is a feudal world where order based on the premise of loyalty and honour prevails and the other is marked by disorder and anarchy. The latter disturbs and ruptures the premises of order. In this sense Lady Macbeth belongs to the world of disorder and brings it in to disturb the entrenched loyalties towards the King. She tells him, "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" (1.5. 63-66). A woman who leaves no stone unturned to see her husband wear the kingly crown poses a challenge. We shall take up these aspects of Lady Macbeth's character for discussion in Unit-IV.

As Macbeth enters, in this scene, it is as if the stage has been set for Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth takes charge of the situation personally and decides to execute the killing. She is certain of the act of

murder, even as, Macbeth seems unsure of himself. Take a look at these lines. In his soliloquy, Macbeth states:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly: If th'assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come. —But in these cases  
We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredience of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips. 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. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.—I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on th' other—

(1.7. 1-26)

Macbeth's soliloquy expresses his state of mind. He is beset with confusion and finds it difficult to sort out his thoughts. He reasons with himself and weighs the odds. Macbeth senses the enormity of the act. He understands that in becoming king he will have to flout the feudal order as he is in the position of the "kinsman", "subject", and "host" and is bound to the king. These relationships demand allegiance. As the king is supposed to be divinely ordained the position of the subject is one of subservience. In this soliloquy, Macbeth also points towards the king's virtuous nature. Any attack on this virtuous king will evince a reaction equally horrific. He realises, it is only "vaulting ambition" that pushes him forward towards this dreadful deed. Macbeth becomes the site on which the clash between the two discourses can be seen—the feudal monarchical and the Machiavellian usurper.

In the above quoted speech, the dominant monarchical discourse, prevails leading Macbeth to stall any such act. Lady Macbeth condemns this change in action. She goads him to take on this task and carve out his future. She calls him a "coward" and applauds her own mettle—"I have given suck, and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:/ I would while it was smiling in my face,/ Have pluck'd the nipple from his boneless gums,/ And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn/ As you had done to this" (1.7. 55-59). Lady Macbeth evokes a violent and gruesome image. In this moment she has given up her role as a woman.

Macbeth's vacillation and Lady Macbeth's firm stance draws attention to the beginnings of a new world in which self-interest is going to be the norm. But this is also a world that gives a chance to people who

are otherwise not entitled to the same. In keeping with this spirit, Macbeth applauds Lady Macbeth and tells her to bring forth “male-children” only.

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## 2.3 ACT II

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The second act begins with Banquo and Fleance who are soon joined by Macbeth. The stage has been set for the murder which will fully realise the witches’ prophecies. But the weird sisters had also made a prediction for Banquo, that his children will wear the crown. In contrast to Macbeth, Banquo is clear about his allegiances and is not driven by the predictive charms of the witches. Macbeth continues to imagine and hallucinate in his famous soliloquy, “Is this a dagger...”. The soliloquy is as follows:

Is this a dagger, which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:--  
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.  
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible  
To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.  
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;  
And such an instrument I was to use.—  
Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,  
Or else worth all the rest: I see thee still;  
And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,  
Which was not so before.—There's no such thing.  
It is the bloody business which informs  
Thus to mine eyes.—Now o'er the one half-world  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtain'd sleep: Witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murder,  
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,  
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost.—Thou sure and firm-set earth,  
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear  
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,  
And take the present horror from the time,  
Which now suits with it.— Whiles I threat, he lives:  
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

[A bell rings]

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.

(2.1. 33-64)

In this soliloquy Macbeth is hallucinating. Having been through a series of doubts and uncertainties, Macbeth visualises the instrument required to execute the deed, the dagger. Its exact position, “handle towards my hand” has been clearly described. This indicates both the temptation and his willingness to succumb to it. He wonders if it is a real dagger or a figment of his imagination. Macbeth’s hallucinations bring him a step closer to the execution of the act. The reference to the unreality of the act, described as “bloody business” prepares the reader/ viewer for what is to follow. The act in imagination is ratified by

bringing in Hecate's world. This soliloquy also seals his intentions and expresses the finality of the act—"Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell/ That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell".

The next scene begins with signals that presage the "unnatural" nature of the murder about to be committed. Lady Macbeth prepares for the act as she drugs the grooms and keeps their "daggers ready". But at the moment the deed is to be executed, she is unable to commit the gory act and says, "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't.—My husband!"(2.2. 12-13). It is Macbeth who murders the king. Having committed the act, his inability to say 'Amen' indicates his loss of sanity. He hears a voice saying, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murther Sleep,—the innocent Sleep." One is reminded of the Captain who can sleep no more. Each successive moment reveals Macbeth's psychological schism as he is unable to deal with the enormity of the act committed by him. He continues to hear voices, "'Glamis hath murther'd Sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" The magnitude of the murder must be placed in the context of feudal loyalties governed by laws that forbade such crimes and considered them to be against the divine order. We must remember that the king was considered to be divinely ordained so any act that went against the king was therefore considered "unnatural". Placed in this context, Macbeth is bound to feel disturbed. Like the Thane of Cawdor he too can no longer fit into the structure of existence as he now stands outside of it. Vivid imagery describes these conflicts as Macbeth thinks that "great Neptune's ocean" will not wash the blood from his hands.

Act II, Scene III is known famously for what is called the Porter scene in the play. It has been considered by critics like S.T. Coleridge to be a later "interpolation of the actors". On the other hand, Thomas de Quincey focussed on the "knocking at the gate" and its relevance to the play. The Porter scene works at various levels. It provides a suitable interruption to a very tense moment in the play and also reiterates the theme of equivocation in the play. Word-play indicates the layered connotations in this play. Be it Macbeth and the witches prophecies, or Lady Macbeth and Macbeth there is action behind the words. The Porter scene must be analysed in this context.

In keeping with the medieval tradition, the scene offers comic relief. The 'hell-porter' was a recognisable figure in the medieval plays. The first character to enter the hell-gate is the farmer—"Here's a farmer that hang'd/ himself on th'expectation of plenty" (2.3 4). It reflects the tendency of the farmer to hoard grains and wait for a rise in prices, failing which he is ruined. There is a pun on the word farmer as it also refers to the trial of a Jesuit priest, Father Garnet who "went under the name farmer" (Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984. 59). Mark how the peasant, otherwise the humblest has now taken to hoarding and making money. The next one to enter is the equivocator. Literally speaking, he is a person who does not make meaning clear—"that could swear in both the scales/ against either scale" (2.3 9). This is a reference to the Jesuits. This is also a central theme in the play. The witches' "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" is an enforcement of the theme of equivocation. The next one to enter is the tailor—"Faith here's an English tailor/ come hither for stealing out of a French hose" (2.3. 14). There are many ways of interpreting this. Critics have interpreted it variously to mean a joke about the tailors, a sexual innuendo, and reference to urinating or even the disease, syphilis. This scene brings in characters from society who are trying to make money. The tailor, farmer, equivocator try to further their interests. This indicates a society gradually changing. These are people, who as the Porter points out have taken the "primrose way". In the biblical sense they have taken the easy way. One can mark the beginnings of a new social structure, where like Macbeth, people are driven by self-interest and the profit-motive.

The theme of equivocation is carried further in the Porter's conversation with Macduff. He tells him that drink provokes, "nose-painting, sleep and urine". Drink is seen as an "equivocator with lechery". It "provokes/ the desire, but it takes away the performance" (2.3 28-29).

The nobleman, Lennox draws attention to how the weather was "unruly"—"Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,/ Lamentings heard i'th' air, strange screams of death" (2.3 55-56). The unruly, anarchic, the unnatural has finally made its way to disturb the order of things. Violence unacceptable to the state has finally made its way. Macduff voices it as he discovers the crime:

Most sacriligious Murther hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed Temple, and stole thence  
The life o' th building! (2.3. 65-67)

The murder is "sacriligious" and the "Lord's anointed temple" has been violated. The sight is akin to a "Gorgon" or the female monster in Greek mythology, one that turned any onlooker to stone. To sum up this idea one can state that the divinely sanctioned order has been violated. Macbeth admits to having murdered the grooms. He justifies his act as arising out of his sense of loyalty. Malcolm and Donalbain are quick to realise what has happened and sense that they might soon be implicated and decide to run away. As Donalbain says, "Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland." In the final scene of the second act, the exchange between Rosse and the Old man point towards the unnatural nature of the act. The Old Man tells Rosse,

Old Man: 'Tis unnatural,  
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,  
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,  
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

Rosse: And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and  
certain)  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make  
War with mankind

Old Man: 'Tis said, they eat each other. (2.4. 10-18)

Things are no longer going to be governed by the norm. It is believed that Duncan's horses ate each other up. The predatory motif has become significant. In this new world the idea of the kill will have to be reconsidered. The image of the falcon and the "mousing owl" inverts hierarchy signalling rule by the usurper. The second act also ends with the investiture of Macbeth as King at Scone and the shifting of the mortal remains of Duncan to Colme-kill.

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## 2.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this chapter you have studied Acts I and II of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Act I introduces the idea of rebellion and violence and its contradictory relationship to the kingly powers. Where the first act presents the Thane of Cawdor as a traitor, Macbeth is positioned in Act II as a murderer of the King. This unit on *Macbeth* also draws attention to the different spaces in the play. There is the "Heath" where Macbeth meets the witches. And then there is the space of the court. The first two acts also bring forth Lady Macbeth's character and her renunciation of femininity. She seeks power and dares to challenge order. Act I leads to the finalisation of Macbeth's intention to murder. It is in the second act that the execution takes place. By the end of this act the witches' prophecies have been fulfilled and order disrupted.

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## 2.5 GLOSSARY

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- Soliloquy:** A soliloquy is addressed by a character, alone on stage, directly to the audience. (Sean McEvoy 65)
- Aside:** An aside is a remark or speech directed at the audience *unheard* by the other characters on stage at the time, and is usually quite short. (Sean McEvoy 65)
- Divine right of kinship:** According to this idea in the sixteenth century, especially during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the king was considered to be divinely

<b>Nobility:</b>	ordained. He was the representative of god on earth. This was in contrast to an earlier period where the king worked with support from the lords. The Tudor monarchy too believed in power vested in the monarch. They were a group of people who by virtue of their birth belonged to the aristocracy.
<b>Feudal:</b>	The society was structured in a way that allegiances were clearly defined. In a feudal, land based system, where the King held absolute power people were expected to be loyal to the king.
<b>Subject:</b>	The ordinary people governed by the aristocracy.
<b>Familiars:</b>	Animals such as cat and toads were considered to be the “familiars” of the witches.
<b>Gunpowder Plot:</b>	Catholic rebellion against King James I in 1605.

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## 2.6 QUESTIONS

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1. Critically analyse any one soliloquy by Macbeth.
2. What are the different critical approaches to Lady Macbeth’s character?
3. Describe the interaction between the witches and Macbeth.
4. What is the significance of the porter scene?
5. What is ‘unnatural’ about Duncan’s murder?

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## 2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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1. McEvoy, Sean. *Shakespeare: the Basics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
2. Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984.
3. Nagpal Payal. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Worldview P, 2016.