

ORDER AND DISORDER



UNIT 4

Introduction

This unit explores one particular aspect of true tragedy, the contrast between order and chaos.

Spiritual and Moral

The reign of Macbeth produces a disordered kingdom and in one sense the play could be seen as endorsing the need for stability and the maintenance of traditional ties and of roles. This is an Elizabethan, not a Christian, interpretation and has far more to do with expediency than justice. The contrast was drawn out by Thomas Nashe...

“ In London, the rich disdain the poor. The courtier the citizen. The citizen the country man. One occupation disdaineth another. The merchant the retailer. The retailer the craftsman. The better sort of craftsman the baser. The shoemaker the cobbler. The cobbler the carman.

One nice dame disdains her next neighbour should have that furniture to her house, or dainty dish or device, which she wants. She will not go to church, because she disdains to mix herself with base company, and cannot have her close pew by herself. She disdains to wear that everyone wears, or hear that preacher which everyone hears.

So did Jerusalem disdain God's prophets, because they came in likeness of poor men. She disdained Amos, because he was a keeper of oxen, as also the rest, for they were of the dregs of the people. But their disdain prospered not with them. Their house, for their disdain, was left desolate unto them. ”

Thomas Nashe, *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* (1593).

The loyalty and patriotism endorsed by the play is a contrast to treason, as in the Gunpowder Plot (see Unit 10, *Historical and Religious Background*, for more about this).

Macbeth's crime in killing Macduff's children is in destroying the future, the symbols of innocence, vulnerability and goodness in a harsh adult world. The disorder and breakdown following the murder of Duncan is like the fall of humankind – one act produces the breakdown of natural order.

'For by one man death came into the world' (Romans chapter 5 verses 12 and 17).

The fate of the land was connected to the fate of the king. Some things, at least, don't seem to change, and murder is a crime that dislocates the state.

Aims

- To explore what causes the breakdown of order in the play.
- To determine how order is restored.
- To consider the underlying causes of disorder in society.

The Introduction to Unit 1, *Relationships in Macbeth*, also includes some comments on the play's representation of relationships.

Rank And Order In The Family

‘How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?’

Troilus and Cressida, I.3.103-108

In the family, wives were to defer to their husbands, and in general, ruled the home. This was endorsed by custom and quotations from the Bible, which seemed to teach that women were intellectually, spiritually and economically subject to men, and lower in the order of society. The difficulty comes in separating Christian ideas from tradition.

You might well have the impression that this pre-twentieth century view of husband, wife and family meant that all women were unspeaking and retiring slaves.

However, this is a stereotype, and if we look at Shakespeare’s experience, the nation’s leader for much of his career had been Queen Elizabeth I, a strong and able leader.

Does Lady Macbeth rely on this firm, real-life queen as her inspiration? Only partly. Lady Macbeth is, after all, evil in her acts. She does, however, represent a firm, resolute image of femininity. Lady Macduff is also outspoken and forthcoming in Act IV scene 2.

The bonds that hold Lady Macbeth to Macbeth are those of mutual dependence – she becomes queen if he secures the monarchy; he needs her strength and determination. Is she acting in his interests, or thinking of her own?

Teacher’s Notes on Activities

In teaching the issue of order, there is the temptation to create a neat and tidy reading of the text...

- Macbeth did wrong
- things fell apart
- Macbeth was punished
- all is restored

However much we want to see goodness rewarded and wrong unequivocally punished, it just doesn’t happen like that: not in the play, not in our own experience – and nor does the Bible show that: see Psalm 73!

Therefore, as far as possible, let the students see what happens in the play for themselves – or be prepared to read regurgitations of study guides, rather than genuine analyses. (See *The Politics of Teaching Shakespeare*, by Sean McEvoy in ‘English in Education’, for some sharp comment on how not to teach Shakespeare!)

4.1 Restoring the Nation

The three activities can be used as the basis for coursework, but really the aim is to reinforce the fact that the play stops at the beginning of a new era. Students could work in small groups and appoint someone to present the speech and plans.

4.2 Making Up

Restoration and forgiveness are difficult and costly, and by acting out contemporary situations students may well see this for themselves. It would be useful to ask students to review the activity and what they learned from it.

4.3 Elect a New King or Queen

In deciding on how to choose the king, students could use one of the activities in Unit 10, *Historical and Religious Background*, especially those which focus on the qualities of a good king. This makes good oral coursework.

4.5 The Natural Order

If you don’t want more than one activity on the end of the play, this series of questions covers a range of issues...

- how good the social order was
- the situation at the end of the play
- revenge

‘Most Admired Disorder’

Each of the activities is designed to focus on how this scene reflects the deterioration of Macbeth’s mental state and of the nation.

After *The Charming Host and Hostess*, students could write about how the language reflects the mood of the scene, and this could prepare them for an exam question on a specific scene. So you could go on to the *Looking Closer* activities 4.14 – 4.17 or 4.21.

4.9 The Stormy Party

The questions after the role play are suited to small group or pair work, but you would have to

summarise or hear what the students have discussed. You could try producing a brainstorm or spidergram of ideas on the board, on an OHP sheet or on sugar paper to record students' ideas.

The *Looking Closer* activities 4.15 and 4.16 would make good oral coursework pieces, or you could use 4.21 to focus students' minds on what they feel are the highlights of the scene.

4.11 Mental Disturbance

To help students focus on Macbeth's mental disorder, you could have a choral reading of:

- Act I scene 5, lines 13-28
- Act I scene 5, lines 36-52
- Act I scene 7, lines 1-28
- Act II scene 1, lines 33-64
- Act III scene 1, lines 44-73
- Act III scene 2, lines 13 -26
- Act IV scene 1, lines 143-155;
- Act V scene 1, lines 26-58 (Lady Macbeth's lines)

The group would have to decide on how to show the characters' emotions or ideas.

This work leads into the *Looking Closer* activity 4.17 and is good preparation for Unit 3, *Questions of Responsibility*.

4.12 Disease as Imagery

It is not enough to identify poetic technique without examining its intention or effect. The chart helps in this. Do not let the later questions on specific scenes become a clumsy attempt to make Shakespeare relevant.

If the students seem unable or unwilling to think about the ideas, it might be better to move on to another subject, until they are ready to have the discussion you might want on revenge or power.

For further activities, see Unit 8, *The Imagery in Macbeth*.

4.14-21 Looking Closer

These are a mixture of oral and written tasks for coursework or examination preparation. Some are especially suitable for revising a specific scene – as, for example, 4.14 and 4.15 are for Act III scene 4.

ORDER AND DISORDER



UNIT 4

ORDER IN THE NATION

4.1 Restoring the nation

a) Give a speech as the new King Malcolm. What will you do first? Your first speech to the people should outline your plans.

b) Now choose a cabinet and decide:

- Thanes to replace Macbeth and his followers
- how to punish surviving traitors
- how to prevent future treachery
- how to rebuild the nation

c) Discuss and prepare a three page plan for Scotland.

4.2 Making Up

A contemporary situation – choose either a role play or an advice column which shows how to achieve one of the following aims:

- to heal a broken marriage
- to unite two friends who fell out (over what? You decide!)
- to resolve a boundary dispute

4.3 Elect a New King or Queen

See Act IV scene 3. How would you choose a new king? Who should it be? Malcolm shouldn't automatically become king, as the Scottish thanes elected kings from their own ranks.

Act out a speech from each thane who wants to be king, including:

- decision-making
- why he wants to be king
- the reactions of the other thanes

What did you learn from this?

4.4 Tribal War

See Act V scene 7, line 26. People from Scotland fought on both sides of the battle. The nation is split and suffering.

Act out a scene like that of Ross and the old man (Act II scene 4), where you lament the breakdown in the nation. Focus on how brother is against brother.

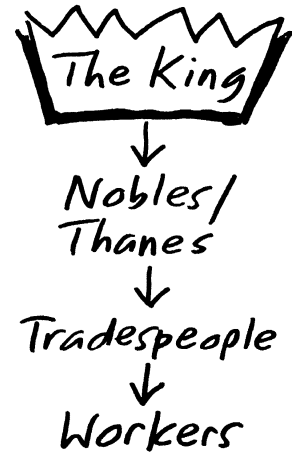
4.5 The 'Natural' Order

The diagram on the right shows the basic class system in Scotland. Is this system fair? Who is the most important in the kingdom?

If the kingdom or nation works well, people are united. Macbeth creates divisions and arguments among those who support him, and those who don't.

In Act II scene 4, Ross (a thane) and Old Man (a commoner) create a verbal survey or summary of the whole nation, a typical conversation showing the nation aghast at events. The Old Man asks for God's blessing on those 'who make good of bad, and friends of foes.'

After the death of Macbeth, Malcolm has to create harmony. Who should he choose as Prime Minister / chief thane? Is making 'good of bad' the main thing in Malcolm's mind at the end of the play?



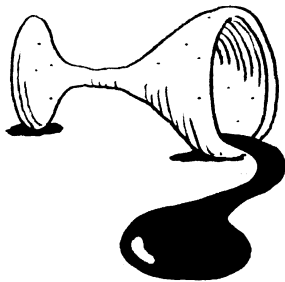
'MOST ADMIRABLE DISORDER'

In Act III scene 4, Macbeth describes Banquo as a 'grown serpent', and his son as 'the worm' – he then decides to end Banquo's life.

4.6 The Charming Host and Hostess

Use the worksheet below to make notes on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. ‘The Stormy Party’ activity (4.9 below) might help you decide who is in control, if anyone is. Compare the beginning and end of the scene. Notice:

	Beginning	End
The rhythm of the words		
Long or short, formal or casual words?		
Quiet or shouting?		
Organisation of banquet		
Mood of characters		



4.7 Internal and External

Create a series of tableaux or freeze frames to show the internal state of...

- Macbeth
- Macduff
- Lady Macbeth
- Malcolm

and the external state of...

- Scotland
- England

... at the beginning and end of the play and at any other points which seem appropriate to you.



Question 4.8:

Question 1.9 in Unit 1 suggests another way of exploring this.

4.8 Retelling the Banquet

Retell the events of the banquet in Act III scene 4 to the absent Macduff as a dialogue. You can use language, tone of voice and body movements to make it seem tragic, terrifying, or a laugh at Macbeth's expense.

4.9 The Stormy Party

Lady Macbeth is left to cope with public duties at the banquet, and to lie for Macbeth (lines 53-58, 96-98, 107-120). She is angry at Macbeth.

- You are Lady Macbeth. As the others mime the events at the banquet, you speak out your thoughts.
- ‘Are you a man?’ (line 58). Well, is he? What do you think?
- Act: Have Lady Macbeth and Macbeth swap situations. Now what happens?
- Write: What does this tell you? Have you noticed that Macbeth and his wife never meet again in the play? Their relationship seems to end. (See Unit 1, *Relationships in Macbeth*.)
- Look at Lady Macbeth's first and last lines. Notice the differences – her

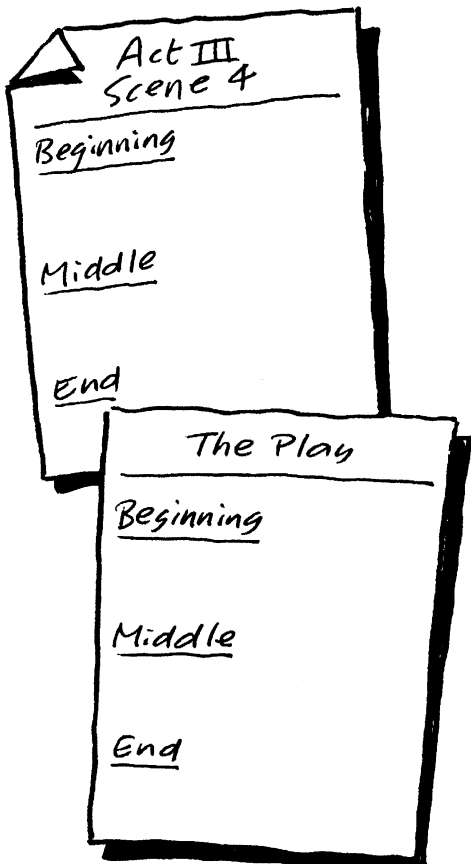
feelings, the situation, the mood?
What else has changed?

f) Most meals are times of sharing, friendship, coming together. At this meal, events mean that all is confusion, noise and chaos. How would the thanes look back on the meal?

g) Why did Shakespeare include the ghost?

4.10 Microcosm

a) The banquet’s events are like the plot of the play in miniature form. At the end of the scene, everything has fallen apart in the same way as Macbeth’s kingdom will disintegrate later in the play. Compare the structure of the events in Act III scene 4 with the basic structure of the whole play. Make two lists to do your comparison, like this...



b) The guests don’t leave in order of rank, the social order is falling apart. What do you think Shakespeare is trying to show?

DISEASE AND DISASTER

4.11 Mental Disturbance

In the minds of Macbeth and his wife there is guilt which leads to mental/spiritual disturbance. At first, Lady Macbeth is impatient with Macbeth’s feelings.

a) Find the words she uses to show this and fill in the blanks:

Act II scene 2, lines 47-49...

In Act II scene 2, line 55 – she calls him...

Later on, she hides how unhappy she is.

b) Macbeth describes himself as suffering from (Act III scene 2, line 21)...

His mind has been invaded by (Act III scene 2, line 36)...

c) Lady Macbeth ultimately succumbs to mental tortures of her own which overturn nature – ‘a great perturbation in nature’ (Act V scene 1, line 8) which the doctor cannot cure. Think:

- Do ‘unnatural deeds’ always ‘breed unnatural troubles’? What about those who seem untroubled by their actions? (Act V scene 1, line 22f).
- The doctor claims that the patient herself must cure her mental disease: ‘Raze out the written troubles of the brain.’ Does this mean that Lady Macbeth cannot be helped at all? What would clear her conscience?
- ‘More needs she the divine than the physician’, says the doctor (Act V scene 1, line 64). Macbeth cries: ‘Throw physic to the dogs’ (Act V scene 3, line 48). When are medicine and technology of no help to a person? Is Shakespeare suggesting that there are some things that medicine can’t cure?

4.12 Disease as Imagery

Scotland is pictured as diseased – a sick body. The metaphor is continued through the play, to reflect the harm that Macbeth has done to the state and the anguish of the onlookers.

a) Act I scene 5, lines 16-18; and Act IV scene 3, lines 31, 39-41. What is being said about Macbeth and Scotland in these two extracts? The cure for Scotland’s sickness comes from England, which is where Malcolm and Macduff have fled.

b) Act IV scene 3, lines 216-217:

- Does revenge cure grief?
- Is Malcolm just trying to keep Macduff interested in war?
- What does a purgative do?

c) Act V scene 2, lines 27-29. Malcolm is seen here as a doctor. Is Malcolm the cure? Does a king have that much power? The state is a passive patient.

d) Act V scene 2, line 30:

- What does a weed do? (literally) Has Macbeth done this?
- Who is the weed?
- Who is the sovereign power?

The Elizabethans saw a connection between nature and human actions. In Genesis chapter 3, thorns and thistles were the result of human wrongdoing. So Macbeth is being described as evil.

4.13 Edward’s Healing Power

Act IV scene 3, lines 140-161.

a) Summarise what Edward is said to have done. His healing power and gift of prophecy mean that he is a contrast to Macbeth; England is being contrasted with Scotland.

b) List the differences between the two kings and the two nations.

c) What do you feel about this contrast? Why did Shakespeare write it in this way?

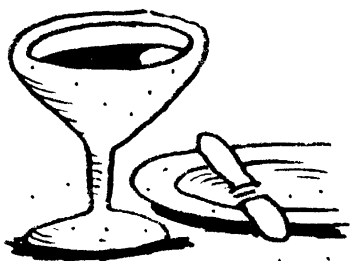
d) Is this true to life, then or now? Are political leaders wholly good, or wholly bad?

LOOKING CLOSER

4.14 Analysing the Scene

Write out sections of Act III scene 4, for example, lines 1-16, 32-52, 84-121 Underline the images of disease/disorder/order; Shade areas where order breaks down.

4.15 The Banquet



a) Some of the class or group can act out the banquet, while extras can slowly clap whenever order is breaking down in the scene.

b) Perhaps a student can act as TV commentator, while the rest act out the banquet scene, for a live TV news programme.

c) How else could you stage this scene to show (dis)order?

4.16 Director's Notes

Make a set of director's notes. Either...

a) to highlight and demonstrate the changing state of the nation/court in Act III scene 1. Or...

b) to contrast England and Scotland in Act IV scene 3 as on a TV documentary, or a slide show. Or...

c) to stage Acts III and IV in a modern setting. For example:

- a posh directors' celebration dinner
- the local football club's annual bash
- gran and grandad's fortieth wedding anniversary

4.17 Freeze Frame

Use tableaux vivants / freeze frames to show the most dramatic moments in Act II scene 4 or Act IV scene 3.

4.18 States of Mind

Write about Macbeth's States of Mind. Consider the following:

- How does Macbeth behave at the beginning of the play?
- How the Witches' prophecies affected his decisions.
- What he thinks of himself as a king and as a man at various points in the play.
- How his mood changes as events unfold.
- In Act V – was he mad, bad or brave?

Remember to refer to the text!

4.19 Interview Macduff

Interview Macduff to obtain his views of the events of the play, especially about the breakdown of Scotland and the destruction of his family. What will he say?

You can act this out and/or write it as a script.

4.20 Newspaper Report

Look at the events of...

- Act II scene 4
- Act III scene 6
- Act IV scene 3, lines 39-41

Now create a newspaper/magazine feature which tells what has happened since Macbeth took the throne. You need a headline and should write about events as if you are in Scotland, perhaps concerned about the future of the nation.

4.21 Into Poetry

Rewrite the events of Act III scene 4 as a poem. You could choose to use the ballad form, or some other rhythm or rhyme scheme which appeals to you.

