

Macbeth: Act IV Summary and Questions

Scene i: The three witches are creating a potion. Macbeth enters and demands the witches listen to him. The witches then conjure different apparitions to speak to Macbeth, giving him further prophesies of the future. Not totally satisfied, Macbeth asks about the original prophesy to Banquo – and gets an unwanted answer. Lennox enters with the news that Macduff has indeed gone to England – Macbeth plots to kill his (Macduff's) wife and children, then.

Scene ii: At Macduff's castle. Lady Macduff isn't sure why her husband has fled – she is afraid that he has turned traitor. This she discusses with her son. A messenger enters to warn her that she is in danger. Murderers enter asking the whereabouts of Macduff and call him a traitor. The son defends his father's name and is stabbed. Lady Macduff is chased out by the murderers and killed off stage.

Scene iii: Malcolm and Macduff discuss the situation and test each other's loyalty regarding challenging Macbeth and trustworthiness in their meeting. Macduff wants Malcolm to rule, but Malcolm thinks he is too evil himself – worse even than Macbeth. He then tells Macduff the reason for revealing these “sins.” Malcolm then tells Macduff about the King of England's special gift of curing illnesses. Ross then enters all the way from Scotland to give Macduff the news of Scotland. He tells them that all of Scotland would fight against Macbeth's troops if someone would only come and lead them against Macbeth. Then he gives the sorry news of Macduff's family's death and Macduff is devastated. They ready themselves to go to fight.

Questions:

1. Why does Macbeth list all sorts of destruction when he first speaks to the witches?
2. What must the witches add to conjure their “masters”?
3. Does Macbeth speak to the apparitions? What is your evidence?
4. What are the three prophesies from the apparitions, and Macbeth's response to each?
5. What question does Macbeth push to get an answer to? What IS the answer?
6. What is ironic about Macbeth's statement that any be damned who trust the witches?
7. What is the point of Lady Macduff's comparison of herself to a bird?
8. What is the gist of the definition of a traitor by Lady Macduff to her son? What is his response?
9. What does Malcolm reveal as his “horrid” sins? What is his purpose in so revealing these sins to Macduff?
10. What is Macduff's response to the news that his wife and children are dead? What is Malcolm's council?