

BANQUO 2017

notes taken from HARVARD ENGL E-129 and other sources

A VIRTUOUS GENERAL

The play begins with a battle

- But by the time we meet Macbeth and Banquo, the battle is over
 - Banquo and Macbeth represent 2 virtuous generals

BANQUO'S ROLE AND THE AUDIENCE

- In act 1, scene 3, he verifies for the audience that the witches are not simply a figment of Macbeth's imagination as the dagger and Banquo's ghost later demonstrate
- Banquo can be seen as a kind of foil for Macbeth
 - While Macbeth chooses to give in to temptation, Banquo resists it
 - We could see him as an indication of what Macbeth could have been if he had stayed in the right path
- He can also be seen as a conscience figure for Macbeth
 - When we first see them together, both are presented with the same temptation
 - But Banquo is the one who doesn't yield to temptation
 - As the play goes on, Banquo retains this symbolic function as a counterpoint to Macbeth
 - Macbeth has to kill Banquo, which could illustrate the idea that he has to kill his conscience before he can go on to commit the crimes of the rest of the play

BANQUO REPRESENTING THE CONSCIENCE

However, it could be said that it is not possible to completely kill conscience

- therefore Macbeth retains within himself, the capacity to be moved by Banquo even after he has died
 - this is why Shakespeare invested so much power and emotion into the Banquet scene

HOW BANQUO TAKES THE AUDIENCE INTO THE MIND OF MACBETH

In act 3, scene 1, Banquo says:

- 'Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for 't.'
 - At this point, we have no idea that Macbeth is going to move against Banquo because he has said nothing about his ambitions to the audience at all
 - But immediately upon hearing these words from the Banquo, the audience understands that he is a threat to Macbeth

- And to some degree, we have taken Macbeth into our confidence
 - Here, the audience has thought of the idea of killing Banquo before we know that Macbeth has thought of it

QUESTION MARKS ABOUT BANQUO

(2.1.6 - 9)

BANQUO: Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;
Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose.

- Why can Banquo 'not sleep'?
 - The word 'sleep' appears about 34 times throughout *Macbeth* as an indicator of the characters state of conscience
 - Disturbed sleep, such as Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene implies that there is a problem with the character's conscience
- What are 'the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose'?
 - What does the adjective 'cursed' suggest about his thoughts?
 - 'cursed' may imply that there is some kind of supernatural influence on his 'thoughts'
 - Does this mean he is also affected by the witches' 'prophecies'?

(2.1.19)

BANQUO: I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:

- Why does Banquo dream of the 'weird sisters'?