

## Scene 4 (I iv)

(I iv 2-3) Enter ... Malcolm, Donalbain, ... Wrong again. The king's sons ought not to appear in this scene. Malcolm is only there because of a bungled interpolation (see below). Donalbain is only there because of Malcolm's being there. As in scene 2, the lines which Folio gives to Malcolm belong properly to Macduff.

(I iv 20) Enter ... Ross and Angus. Ross and Angus are only there to accompany Macbeth and Banquo: neither has anything to say. They bow to the king and retire to the back of the stage.

(I iv 20) O worthiest cousin! The irony, perhaps, is laid on a touch too thick. The king trusted the old thane of Cawdor, but got betrayed. Now he makes the same mistake again. He trusts the new thane of Cawdor.

(I iv 38) Noble Banquo, ... To which Banquo might reply, "If I have no less deserved, why does Macbeth get to be made thane of Cawdor and I just get a hug?" But of course he does not say that: he is a man who knows when to keep his thoughts to himself. The witches, always looking for a weakness, hoped that Banquo might be secretly envious of Macbeth; but they seem to have mistaken their man. As far as we can tell, Banquo does genuinely admire Macbeth and does not resent his promotion.

(I iv 46-53) Sons, kinsmen, thanes, ... This is the interpolation which justifies Malcolm's presence. It needs to be deleted.

If this were an integral part of the play, the sequel would all be different. In scene 5, when Macbeth returned home, he would immediately tell his wife what had happened. There would no longer be any point in their murdering Duncan because that would just put Malcolm on the throne. He says nothing, neither then, nor in scene 7, when he is thinking of reasons for not committing the murder. In scene 10, once the murder had been discovered, everyone would know that Malcolm was now the king. But that thought does not occur to anyone. The fact that Malcolm has been made prince of Cumberland is never mentioned again, neither by Malcolm nor by anyone else. One might think that it had never happened -- and one would (almost) be right.

This interpolation is the clearest hint we get that the play was being reshaped to bring it into line with King James's

theory of kingship. According to that theory, there were no circumstances in which it was permissible for a king to be deposed, still less to be killed by his own subjects. Once he had been anointed, a king was answerable only to God. If he turned into a tyrant, his people just had to put up with it. This was God's judgment on them: they should mend their ways and pray.

For the play to conform with that theory, it had to be made out that Macbeth was never truly a king: he was, from the start, a usurper. Duncan had to have a son who was old enough to succeed him -- whom he had in fact already (just in time!) recognized as his successor, by making him prince of Cumberland.\* When his father is killed, Malcolm makes a tactical retreat, seeks for help from the king of England, returns to Scotland with an army at his back, defeats the usurper and takes the throne -- which ought to have been his from the moment of Duncan's death. In this version of the play, the action is all over within a matter of weeks -- "two or three weeks at the utmost" (Daniel 1879:206).

\* The audience are being invited to assume -- wrongly -- that "prince of Cumberland" was the Scottish equivalent of "prince of Wales", a title which a king would regularly confer upon his oldest son. King James's oldest son, Henry, was created Prince of Wales on 4 Jun 1610 (he was 16 years old at the time); he died unexpectedly on 6 Nov 1612. I would be willing to guess that the present interpolation was made during that interval, 1610-12, when the audience could be relied on to jump to the wrong conclusion.

In the play as Shakespeare first wrote it, no respect was shown for King James's theory of kingship. When Duncan was found dead in his bed, his two sons were not much more than children, not very different in age. At that time, neither of them was fit to rule a kingdom. Nobody cared about them. Their only safe option was to run away and hide. Macbeth was the obvious choice as Duncan's successor. He was crowned, invested, anointed -- whatever needed to be done was done: he became king. But then, over time -- over some long period of time -- he turned into a tyrant. One of Duncan's sons, exiled in England, began to get ambitious. If he were to wait for Macbeth to die, he would stand a good chance of being chosen to replace him; but he did not intend to wait. He invaded Scotland at the head of an English army; the people rose up in rebellion against the tyrant; and Macbeth was finally overthrown, to be killed and beheaded by one of his own subjects. If Shakespeare ever thought that King James would be gratified by seeing the chopped-off head of a king of Scotland being exhibited to the audience, he was mightily mistaken.

(I iv 53) **From hence ...** The interpolation seems to have caused the loss of some lines here -- lines which would explain what happens next. On the spur of the moment, the king decides to honour Macbeth by visiting him at home. This one line is all that remains: somehow or other, the actors need to get the meaning across.

(I iv 60-2) **The prince ...** These lines belong with the interpolation at lines 46-53. These, like those, should be deleted. Macbeth comes to the front of the stage, with an ecstatic expression of his face. The king has just arranged his own murder. "Stars, hide your fires!"

(I iv 66) **True, worthy Banquo, ...** The king and Banquo, meanwhile, have been conversing at the back of the stage. Banquo has said something complimentary about Macbeth. We do not hear what it was: we just hear the king's reply.

(I iv 70) **Flourish. Exeunt.** The scene ends with the usual "Flourish". Macbeth is already on his way to Inverness; the king and Banquo prepare to follow him.

C.F. Jan 2026