

## There are over 40 references to blood in Macbeth

How?	Who?	Where?
'What <b>bloody</b> man is that?'	After the first battle, the blood-stained Captain reports to King Duncan.	Act 1 Scene 2
'Make thick my <b>blood</b> '	Lady Macbeth calls on spirits to take away any feelings of pity she may have.	Act 1 Scene 5
'And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of <b>blood</b> '	Macbeth sees a vision of a blood-stained dagger before he murders Duncan.	Act 2 Scene 1
'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this <b>blood</b> / Clean from my hand?'	Macbeth feels great guilt about murdering Duncan and realises he is never going to get rid of these feelings.	Act 2 Scene 2
'There's <b>blood</b> upon thy face.'	Macbeth alerts one of Banquo's murderers to the fact that he has his victim's blood on his face.	Act 3 Scene 4
'It will have <b>blood</b> they say: <b>blood</b> will have <b>blood</b> .'	Macbeth recalls an old saying that blood shed through violence seeks more blood in revenge, creating a cycle of bloodshed; he feels trapped in the inevitability of this violence.	Act 3 Scene 4
'I am in <b>blood</b> / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er'	Macbeth realises that he has been responsible for so many acts of violence already that it's impossible to undo them and he may as well keep killing.	Act 3 Scene 4
'Cool it with a baboon's <b>blood</b> , / Then the charm is firm and good.'	The Witches use blood as part of one of their spells.	Act 4 Scene 1
'Here's the smell of the <b>blood</b> still'	Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and imagines she has blood on her hands.	Act 5 Scene 1

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["What bloody man is that?" \(1.2.1\)](#). In these, the opening words of the play's second scene, King Duncan asks about a sergeant. The sergeant then tells the story of Macbeth's heroic victories over Macdonwald and the King of Norway. The sergeant's telling of the story is in itself heroic, because his loss of blood has made him weak. Thus his blood and his heroism seem to enhance the picture of Macbeth as a hero.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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As Lady Macbeth plans to kill King Duncan, she calls upon the spirits of murder to ["make thick my blood; / Stop up the access and passage to remorse" \(1.5.43-44\)](#). Thin blood was considered wholesome, and it was thought that poison made blood thick. Lady Macbeth wants to poison her own soul, so that she can kill without remorse.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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Just before he kills King Duncan, Macbeth is staring at the "dagger of the mind," and as he does so, thick drops of blood appear on the blade and hilt. He says to the knife, [I see thee still, / And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, / Which was not so before" \(2.1.45-47\)](#). However, he's not so far gone that he doesn't know what's happening to him: ["There's no such thing: / It is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes" \(2.1.47-49\)](#). Of course the "bloody business" is the murder he's about to commit.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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["This is a sorry sight" \(2.2.18\)](#), says Macbeth, looking at his bloody hands moments after he has murdered King Duncan. His wife thinks

that's a foolish thing to say, and when she notices that he has brought the bloody daggers from King Duncan's bedchamber, she thinks him even more foolish. She tells him that he must take the daggers back, place them with the King's sleeping grooms, and smear the grooms with blood. Macbeth, however, is so shaken that all he can do is stand and stare at his bloody hands, so Lady Macbeth takes the daggers from him. When she goes to do the job she thinks he should do, Macbeth still stands and stares. He asks himself if all the water in the world can wash away the blood: "[Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?](#)" And he answers his own question: "[No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red](#)" (2.2.57-60).

In contrast, his wife thinks his obsession with blood shows that he's a coward. She dips her hands in the dead King's blood, and smears the grooms with that blood, then tells Macbeth that "[My hands are of your colour; but I shame / To wear a heart so white](#)" (2.2.61-62). She means that now her hands are bloody, like his, but she would be ashamed to have a "white" -- bloodless and cowardly -- heart like his. She leads him away to wash his hands, and she seems quite sure that "[A little water clears us of this deed](#)" (2.2.64). Ironically, when she later goes mad, she sees blood on her hands that she cannot wash away, no matter how much water she uses.

### [\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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Telling Malcolm and Donalbain of their father's murder, Macbeth says, "[The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd](#)" (2.3.98-99). Here, the primary meaning of "your blood" is "your family," but Macbeth's metaphors also picture blood as a life-giving essence. A second later, blood is spoken of as a sign of guilt. Lennox says that it appears that the King was murdered by his grooms, because "[Their hands and faces were all badged \[spotted, marked\] with blood](#)" (2.3.102). In another second, blood appears as the precious clothing of a precious body, when Macbeth, justifying his killing of the grooms, describes the King's corpse: "[Here lay Duncan, / His silver skin laced with his golden blood](#)" (2.3.112). (It was common in Shakespeare's time for blood to be spoken of as "golden," although it was probably just as red then as it is now.)

In this scene, the last mention of blood comes from Donalbain, who says to his brother, ["the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" \(2.3.140-141\)](#), meaning that as the murdered King's sons, they are likely to be murdered themselves.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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It's strangely dark on the morning after the night of King Duncan's murder, and Ross says to an Old Man, ["Ah, good father, / Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act, / Threaten his bloody stage" \(2.4.4-6\)](#). The "stage" is this earth, where we humans play out our lives. Because of Duncan's murder, the stage is bloody and the heavens are angry.

Moments later, Macduff enters and Ross asks him, ["Is't known who did this more than bloody deed?" \(2.4.22\)](#). The deed is "more than bloody" because it is unnatural. King Duncan was a good and kind man whose life naturally should have been cherished by everyone.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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In the first scene in which Macbeth appears as King of Scotland, he mentions to Banquo, in a seemingly casual way, that Malcolm and Donalbain, ["our bloody cousins" \(3.1.29\)](#), are in England and Ireland, where they are denying that they killed their father. By referring to them as "bloody," Macbeth wants to emphasize their guilt. After Banquo leaves, Macbeth arranges for his murder.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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Macbeth tells his wife that by nightfall a deed will be done which will release them from their fear of Banquo. Then he calls upon night to

come and ["with thy bloody and invisible hand / Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond / Which keeps me pale!"](#) (3.2.48-50). The "great bond" is Banquo's lease on life. A man becomes pale with fear or worry because the blood drains away from his face. Macbeth believes that if Banquo's blood is shed, his own blood will return, and he won't be pale anymore.

### [\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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After he has become king, Macbeth gives a banquet for his noblemen. The banquet has barely begun when Macbeth has to go to the door to speak with First Murderer. ["There's blood on thy face"](#) (3.4.13), he says, and the murderer proudly tells him it's Banquo's blood, and that he left Banquo in a ditch with ["twenty trenched gashes on his head"](#) (3.4.26), all mortal.

A bit later in the scene, just as Macbeth is talking about how much he wishes that Banquo were at the banquet, Banquo's Ghost enters. Macbeth says to the ghost, ["Thou canst not say I did it: never shake / Thy gory locks at me"](#) (3.4.49-50). The ghost's "gory locks" are the locks of his hair, covered with clotted blood. After the ghost has gone, Macbeth tells himself that it's not his fault that the ghost showed up. He says that men have been killing men for a long time, since before there were even laws against it: ["Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time, / Ere human statute purged the gentle weal"](#) (3.4.74-75). It's a natural thing to shed blood; what's not natural is that now the dead ["rise again, / With twenty mortal murders \[deadly wounds\] on their crowns \[heads\], / And push us from our stools"](#) (3.4.81). After saying this, Macbeth recovers himself, returns to his guests, and proposes a toast in honor of Banquo. At that, the Ghost of Banquo re-enters. This time, Macbeth tries to drive it away with words: ["Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee! / Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold"](#) (3.4.92-94). Macbeth is making sure that the Ghost knows that it belongs in the grave because it is very, very dead. Perhaps the ghost actually listens to Macbeth, because it soon leaves again. Macbeth then wonders why the sight of the ghost hasn't driven the blood from everyone's face. He asks them how ["you can behold such sights, / And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks, / When mine is blanched with](#)

[fear" \(3.4.113-115\)](#). Apparently he doesn't realize that only he has seen the ghost.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

Finally, after all the guests are gone, Macbeth reflects that ["they say, blood will have blood" \(3.4.121\)](#). The saying means that the blood of a murder victim will seek out the blood of his killer, and so a murder will always be discovered. Macbeth knows that stones have moved, trees have spoken, birds have told secrets. All of these things have ["brought forth / The secret'st man of blood" \(3.4.124-125\)](#). Macbeth himself is a secret man of blood, and the bloody Ghost confronted him. His guilt was almost "brought forth" in front of his guests. None of this makes him feel remorse, or anything but a determination to see things through to the bitter end, because he is ["in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" \(3.4.135-137\)](#).

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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After he comes to understand that Macbeth is a murderous tyrant, Lennox learns from another Scottish Lord that Macduff has gone to the English court to ask for help. Macduff wants to overthrow Macbeth, so that King Duncan's son, Malcolm, can be King of Scotland. Once that is done, the Scottish Lord says, Scotland will enjoy the blessing of peace, so that ["we may again / Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights / Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives" \(3.6.33-35\)](#).

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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As they wait for Macbeth, the witches stir up a sickening stew in a cauldron. After they have put in all the other ingredients, they ["Cool it with a baboon's blood" \(4.1.37\)](#).

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

A little later, just before they call up the first apparition, the witches put

two more ingredients in the cauldron -- grease from a murderer's gibbet, and ["sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow"](#) (4.1.64-65). When the apparitions appear, we see blood on two of them. First comes an armed head, then a bloody child that tells Macbeth to ["Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth"](#) (4.1.79-81). The final apparition is a parade of eight kings, escorted by the spirit of Banquo. Macbeth cries out, ["the blood-bolter'd Banquo smiles upon me, / And points at them for his"](#) (4.1.123-124). Macbeth refers to Banquo as "blood-boltered" because Banquo's hair is matted with blood.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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The son of Macduff, struggling in the hands of one of Macbeth's hired assassins, cries out, ["He has kill'd me, mother: / Run away, I pray you!"](#) (4.2.85). Because we don't use the words "mother" and "pray" exactly as they were used in Shakespeare's time, the boy's cry may sound a bit unrealistic, and we may miss the full horror of what we're seeing. A child is being murdered in front of our eyes, and although blood is never mentioned, we almost certainly see it.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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When Macduff comes to believe that Malcolm won't support him in a war against Macbeth, he cries out to his beloved Scotland, ["Bleed, bleed, poor country!"](#) (4.3.30). Malcolm then reassures him that all is not lost, and that he, too, feels strongly for Scotland: ["I think our country sinks beneath the yoke; / It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash / Is added to her wounds"](#) (4.3.39-41).

After this, Malcolm proceeds to test Macduff's honor by telling a big lie about himself. First, he says of Macbeth, ["I grant him bloody, / Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, / Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin / That has a name"](#) (4.3.57-60), but then he goes on to say that he will be an even worse king. By going on and on about all the horrible things he will do when he is king, Malcolm drives Macduff to despair.

Macduff believes that Scotland is a "[nation miserable, / With an untitled tyrant bloody-scepter'd](#)" (4.3.103-104), and with a worse king to come in Malcolm. This is just what Malcolm was looking for, because it shows that Macduff truly loves Scotland, and doesn't just want to be on the winning side.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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As Lady Macbeth's waiting gentlewoman and a doctor observe, the lady walks and talks in her sleep. She rubs her hands together, as though she is trying to wash them. As it turns out, it is King Duncan's blood she is trying to wash away. She continues to "wash" her hands until she is interrupted by the memory of the bell that she herself rang to summon her husband to the murder of King Duncan:

[Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? \(5.1.35-40\)](#)

Lady Macbeth had thought that once her husband was king, it wouldn't matter who knew that they murdered King Duncan, because no one would be able to challenge Macbeth's power as king, to "call our power to account." Yet the old man had a lot of blood, and she can still see it on her hands, reminding her of her guilt. His blood is pursuing her in another way, too, although she may not know it. A man's "blood" is his family, and Malcolm, who is of King Duncan's blood, is now marching with ten thousand English soldiers to call Macbeth to account.

As the sleepwalking scene continues, Lady Macbeth twice more complains that she can't get the blood off of her hands. "[What, will these hands ne'er be clean?](#)" (5.1.44), she asks, and then she is devastated when she realizes that the blood will never come out: "[Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!](#)" (5.1.50-52).

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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Menteith and Caithness are among those in the Scottish forces marching to join the English army at Birnam wood. Menteth says of Malcolm and Macduff, "[Revenge burn in them; for their dear causes / Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm / Excite the mortified man](#)" (5.2.3-5). Their "dear causes" are their motivations -- Macbeth's murder of Malcolm's father and of Macduff's wife and children. An "alarm" is a battle, a "mortified man" is one who is half-dead, and "excite" was used the way "incite" is used now. Menteth is saying even a man who was half-dead would rush into the most bloody battle if that man had the reasons to fight that Malcolm and Macduff have.

At the end of the same scene, Caithness pledges "each drop of us" to cure Scotland's sickness. Lennox replies, "[Or so much as it needs, / To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds. / Make we our march towards Birnam](#)" (5.2.29-31). To "dew the sovereign flower" is to make it grow, and the sovereign flower is Malcolm. Macbeth and his supporters are the weeds that will be drowned in the blood of these soldiers.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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When a frightened servant comes to tell Macbeth of the approach of ten thousand English soldiers, Macbeth is enraged by the servant's face, which is pale with fear. He tells the servant, "[Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear, / Thou lily-liver'd boy](#)" (5.3.14-15). Macbeth is mocking the servant; he means that the only way the boy can even **look** courageous is by pricking it to make it bleed. Also, the liver was thought to be the seat of courage, but courage requires blood, and Macbeth's opinion is that this boy is a coward whose liver is white as a lily.

[\[Scene Summary\]](#)

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At the walls of Dunsinane, after the soldiers throw down their

concealing boughs, Macduff calls out the battle-charge: "[Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath, / Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death](#)" (5.6.9-10). A "harbinger" is someone or something that foretells what is about to happen; in this case, the trumpets announce that blood will flow and people will die.

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In the last scene of the play, Macbeth knows that he is in an impossible situation, but he is determined to do as much damage as possible before he dies. He says, "[Whiles I see lives](#) [living men], [the gashes / Do better upon them](#)" (5.8.2-3). In other words, he just likes to see the blood flow.

A moment later, Macduff catches up with Macbeth and challenges him, calling out, "[Turn, hell-hound, turn!](#)" (5.8.3). Macbeth answers, "[Of all men else I have avoided thee: / But get thee back; my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine](#)" (5.8.5-7). "Charged" means full, overburdened, and the "blood" to which Macbeth refers is the blood that was shed in the slaughter of Macduff's wife and children. In short, Macbeth is saying that those murders are on his conscience, so he doesn't want to shed Macduff's blood. Macduff is not appeased, and says that he will let his sword do his talking: "[My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain / Than terms can give thee out!](#)" (5.8.7-8).

Blood is not mentioned again in the scene, but -- unless the director of the play is too squeamish -- it is certainly seen, both when Macbeth dies, and when Macduff carries in his head on a pole. It would be a matter of poetic justice if Macbeth were killed with a blow to the head, so that the blood flowed down over his face, as it did over Banquo's face.