The main idea

The witches create temptation and uncertainty. Their partial truths become dangerous when Macbeth turns them into guarantees.

Character development

Speak in paradox

Offer advancement

Supply equivocal assurances

Leave Macbeth overconfident

Deception announced

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair” — Witches, 1.1

“So foul and fair a day I have not seen” — Macbeth, 1.3

The opening paradox unsettles moral distinctions. Macbeth’s echo connects his language to theirs before he hears the prediction, creating unease rather than proving total supernatural control.

An assurance misread

“none of woman born” — Second apparition, 4.1

“Macduff was from his mother’s womb untimely ripped” — Macduff, 5.8

The first fragment sounds universal when Macbeth interprets it; the later disclosure exposes the limit hidden in its wording. Equivocation works through a hearer’s assumptions.

Develop the interpretation

The apparitions speak the later promises. Macbeth’s interpretations are more absolute than the words warrant. He remains responsible for decisions that go beyond any prediction.

Recall question

Which murders does Macbeth choose without being instructed by the witches?

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