**Soliloquies in Shakespeare**

**1.** The dread of something after death,

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles the will

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all

**2.** For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,

The insolence of office and the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus make

With a bare bodkin?

**3.** Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them?

**4.** To die: to sleep;

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd.

**5.** To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause:

Hamlet talks about various things that make life difficult. For example, he mentions

‘the oppressor’s wrong’. Can you give a modern example of this?

Can you match these to the following examples with Hamlet’s descriptions?

**1. The whips and scorns of time**

**2. The proud man's contumely**

**3. The pangs of despised love**

**4. The law's delay**

**5. The insolence of office**

**6. The spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes**

You are going to write some advice for Hamlet. Look at the questions below. What

would you say to him?

• Is it better to ‘**to suffer**

**The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,**

**Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,**

**And by opposing end them?’**

• Is it better to ‘**quietus make**

**With a bare bodkin?’** than to **‘bear the whips and scorns of time’?**

• Is it right to feel **‘The dread of something after death’?**

From MacBeth’s soliloquy:

a. The bell in line 32 is a “summons.” What does it do?

b. What is the significance of the hilt towards MacBeth in lines 33-34?

c. How would it be different if the blade was pointing toward MacBeth instead of the hilt?

d. How can the floating, fantastical dagger in lines 35-39 be understood as a metaphor of the mind?

e. Contrast the meaning of a suspended dagger of the mind and a drawn dagger in the hand (lines 40-41).

f. Compare how the suspended dagger commands MacBeth to act with how he already planned to act (line 42).

g. Can MacBeth trust his vision in lines 44-45 or his other his other four senses (he can’t trust both). If his vision

symbolizes a fantasy, then what do his other senses symbolize (fantasy vs. \_\_\_ )? What can MacBeth not

differentiate between? This creates another *leitmotif*; see question 21.

h. The fantastical blade runs with blood in lines 46-47. What does this foreshadow?

i. *Leitmotif* of sleeplessness (lines 50-51): Why might MacBeth have difficulty sleeping?

j. Explain the literal and metaphorical meanings of, “Thou sure and firm-set earth, / Hear not my steps” II.i.56-57

k. Paraphrase “While I threat, he lives; / Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.” II.i.60-61

l. “Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” A ringing bell is a part of the poetic tradition where a tolling bell

symbolizes death. Ironically, MacBeth says that he doesn’t know whether Heaven or Hell is tolling for King

Duncan. How could the bell be tolling for MacBeth and is the audience unclear of MacBeth’s eternal destination?

What type of irony is this?

m. Does MacBeth choose to commit regicide?

***Macbeth II,i 33-64***

**MACBETH**

Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

I see thee yet, in form as palpable

As this which now I draw.

Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;

And such an instrument I was to use.

Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,

Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,

And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,

Which was not so before. There's no such thing:

It is the bloody business which informs

Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld

Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse

The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates

Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,

Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,

Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.

With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design

Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,

Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear

Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,

And take the present horror from the time,

Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:

Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

*A bell rings*

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.

Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell

That summons thee to heaven or to hell.