

The Tragedy of Macbeth, Act IV, by William Shakespeare

Literary Analysis: The Image as Metaphor

Shakespeare uses **imagery** in a number of ways. He uses it to re-create sensory experience. He also uses patterns of imagery to illuminate deeper meanings within his plays. Often, Shakespeare uses images as **metaphors**—figures of speech in which one thing is spoken of as though it were something else. For example, in Act III, Scene iv, Macbeth has just learned that Banquo is dead, but that Fleance has escaped. Macbeth's response contains a vivid image:

There the grown serpent lies; the worm that's fled
 Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
 No teeth for th'present.

Here, the serpent is a metaphor for Banquo. The metaphor suggests that Banquo, with his power to destroy Macbeth, is like a serpent. Fleance, still a youth, is a young serpent or worm. He has no teeth (no power) now, but in time he may destroy Macbeth.

DIRECTIONS: Use the questions to help you analyze the metaphors in the following passages from Act IV of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Write your responses on the lines provided.

MALCOLM. ...I am young; but something
 You may deserve of him through me; and wisdom
 To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb
 T' appease an angry god.

1. What image does Shakespeare use in this passage?

2. How is this image used as a metaphor? Explain.

MACDUFF. Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?
 What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
 At one fell swoop?

3. What image does Shakespeare use in this passage?

4. How is this image used as a metaphor? Explain.

5. How is the metaphorical imagery of these two passages alike?

Unit 2: Celebrating Humanity
 (1485-1625)