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# BANQUO

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His role in the play

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# PAIRED WITH / FOIL TO MACBETH

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- Like Macbeth, we hear of Banquo before we meet him. He and Macbeth are comrades in arms, and Shakespeare's audience would have considered their friendship to be indissoluble. (Thus, Macbeth's arranging to have Banquo murdered would be an abhorrent act.)
  - Duncan links the two: 'Dismayed not this / Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?'
  - They smack of honour, both'.
  - 'noble Banquo, thou has no less deserved...'
  - However, Macbeth is rewarded more than Banquo. Neither do the witches take any notice of Banquo until he asks them to do so.
  - 'Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear / Your favours nor your hate.'
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# 'LESSER THAN MACBETH, AND GREATER'

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- The witches' equivocate when they tell Banquo this, and also when they tell him that he is 'Not so happy, yet much happier'.
  - Banquo's response to the prophecies prove that he is more sceptical and cynical than Macbeth. Is he less easily won over because he has not harboured the same dark thoughts as Macbeth?
  - However, their prophecy 'Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none' strikes a chord with him. He does not react as quickly as Macbeth, but it gradually has an impact on him.
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# PERCEPTIVE AND INTELLIGENT

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- Banquo notices Macbeth's reaction to the witches' prophecies. He wonders why his friend seems startled and fearful on hearing 'Things that do sound so fair'. (Here we remember the witches' comment about foul being fair and vice versa.)
  - Banquo urges caution. He is conscious of the ability of evil spirits to tempt men with 'honest trifles'.
  - 'And oftentimes to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence'.
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# OPEN NATURE

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- Banquo speaks simply and honestly, unlike Macbeth.
  - When Macbeth asks him if they can talk about the witches' prophecy some time, Banquo says he would be happy to do so.
  - On receiving praise from Duncan, Banquo accepts it with a genuine and brief 'There if I grow, / The harvest is your own', which contrasts with Macbeth's wordier speech of thanks.
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# HONOURABLE AND RESPECTED BUT NOT PERFECT

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- Duncan praises Banquo in the highest terms: 'worthy Banquo! He is full so valiant/... a peerless kinsman'.
  - Banquo does not appear to react to the witches' words the way Macbeth does. They have not the same effect on him, but - as we noted earlier - they do affect him.
  - Sleep (or lack of it) is used as a symbol to show Banquo's wrestling with disturbing thoughts.
  - 'A heavy summons lies like lead upon me / And yet I would not sleep.'
  - 'Merciful powers, / Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose!'
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# COMPARE BANQUO'S RESPONSE TO MACBETH'S

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- Unlike Macbeth, Banquo does not leap straight to thoughts of murder in order to fulfil the prophecies.
  - Is it understandable that he should wish for his children to be kings?
  - Banquo is not ambitious for himself, but for his children.
  - Unlike Macbeth, who lies about the effect the witches' prophecies have on him, Banquo admits to temptation.
  - Banquo prays to the 'merciful powers' to help him resist temptation, while Macbeth is associated with the powers of darkness.
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# RESPECTED AND FEARED BY MACBETH

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- 'tis much he dares;  
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,  
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour  
To act in safety. There is none but he  
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,  
My Genius is rebuked;
  - Macbeth acknowledges Banquo's intelligence and ability and yet, because of that, he feels he must kill him.
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# FLAW

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- Banquo suspects Macbeth is responsible for murdering Duncan, but says nothing.
  - He has few lines after the murder, but if we contrast his reaction to Macduff's we see how he may be considered somewhat complicit by his inaction.
  - In Act III Scene i, Banquo says 'Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all / As the weird women promised, and I fear / Thous play'dst most foully for't.'
  - Banquo's remaining silent shows a lack in his morality. If he suspects Macbeth of the murder, should he not do something?
  - Macduff refuses to attend the banquet, and flees to England to get help, but Banquo tries to stay on Macbeth's side.
  - Do you think he does this in the hope that Fleance might yet be king?
  - 'May they not be my oracles as well / And set me up in hope?'
  - We see, through Banquo, that even good men may fall prey to temptation and ambition. The insidious power of evil is beginning to seep into Banquo.
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# THE GHOST

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- Macbeth's response to the sight of Banquo's ghost puts paid to any pretence that he is a good king. His guilt and mental anguish are plain for all to see.
  - Only Macbeth can see the ghost. It is, as Lady Macbeth says, 'the very painting of your fear'.
  - This is Macbeth's last struggle with his conscience. Through a supreme effort of will, he banishes the ghost: 'Unreal mockery, hence'.
  - From this moment on, Macbeth becomes a desperate, ruthless tyrant.
  - 'I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er'.
  - Macbeth is now determined to make his thought the deed: 'Strange things I have in head that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd'.
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