

Macbeth

by William Shakespeare *from Macbeth*

This passage is from Act V, Scene 5 of Shakespeare's tragedy Macbeth. The title character Macbeth is a Scottish general who receives a prophecy that he would one day be King of Scotland. He becomes ambitious and eager to make the prophecy come true. He is encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth. He kills the reigning king and becomes king, but the resulting wars lead to more murders and death. The power that Macbeth and his wife desire eventually leads to their destruction.

In this speech, Macbeth is reacting to the news that his wife has died.

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
— To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

Questions

1. What is the main theme of Macbeth's speech?
2. Shakespeare uses several metaphors in this speech. Identify one and explain it.
3. Explain the contradiction, "full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing."
4. What is one alliteration in the speech?