

Macbeth a tragic hero or a dead butcher philosophy essay



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A Shakespearean tragic hero is defined as ‘ an exceptional being of high degree’ whom has a fatal flaw. Macbeth’s character is a classic example of a Shakespearean tragic hero. In many of Shakespeare’s tragedies, the main character starts off as a very brave, heroic person whom everyone praises. However as time passes by, the character loses his reputation because he faces a moral dilemma. He also loses reputation due to his fatal flaw.

In Act 1 Scene 2, we know that Macbeth is the main character, because of his brave actions in the battle. A tragic hero’s exceptional nature generally raises him above the average level of humanity.

“ Disdaining fortune with his brandished steel” (Act 1, Scene 2, Line 17)

Macbeth’s heroism can be seen by the way Macbeth rejects ‘ fortune’ that is personified as a glorious warrior. Macbeth is described as ‘ Brave Macbeth’ and also as the servant of the God Valour; he is ‘ Valour’s minion.’ This is hyperbole, because a human being can’t fight as if he was the servant of god Valour. The god Valour is the Greek god of war. Macbeth being the servant of Valour suggests that Macbeth is a brave warrior. Macbeth’s violent nature supports his position as a hero fighting for Scotland.

Macbeth is seen to have ‘ unseamed him from the nave to the chops.’

Shakespeare creates a violent image of Macbeth brutally killing Macdonwald. Macdonwald is the opponent warrior who was as violent as well, but Macbeth overpowers Macdonwald which suggests that Macbeth is very brutal. The use of ‘ unseamed’ is a metaphor from clothing that shows his precision and expertise. Macbeth is seen as a heroic warrior in this act as he is fighting for

Scotland. He is represented as a valiant character who hunts down Scotland's enemies.

‘ Carved out his passage till he faced the slave’

He is an accomplished killing machine, but because he serves Scotland he is not a butcher even though he has the skills of a butcher.

When Macbeth and Banquo return to Scotland, Macbeth is greeted by three witches with three different greetings. The three witches said,

“ All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!”

(Act 1 Scene 3 line 54)

Macbeth did not believe the witches' prophecies at first, but after Ross informs Macbeth that the king has just given him the position of Thane of Cawdor he starts to think that the prophecies could be true. He thinks that he could become the king of Scotland as well. This declines his nobility just by thinking of being the king, which means that he would have to break the chain of being. The chain of being is the status of god, Jesus, angels and kings. The king is believed to be the God's appointed representative, so it would be wrong for Macbeth to be the king. During the Elizabethan era, killing the king meant killing God's chosen one. Therefore, going against God's will was believed to cause chaos. Also, Macbeth knows that if Duncan dies for some reason, it would be the princes who'd be the kings afterwards. Macbeth becomes confused about how he'd be a king when he had no royal

blood. However, he still tries to become king as he is influenced by his fatal flaw; ambition.

In Act 1 Scene 5, Lady Macbeth is informed about the witches' prophecies by a messenger sent by Macbeth. However, once Macbeth arrives home his plans change once again. Lady Macbeth decides to be the push which he needs to go through with the plan. The failing of his decision reflects on her when she taunts his manhood. Lady Macbeth has an enormous impact on Macbeth of murdering Duncan. Macbeth's craving for power and moral weakness lead him to evil suggestion which inevitably lead to his downfall. This is called hamartia one of Macbeth's main tragic hero characteristics according to Aristotle.

The third prophecy comes true after Malcolm and Dolnalbien runs away from Scotland, scared for their lives. Then, Macbeth becomes the King of Scotland. Even though he became the king, he is worried that someone else might murder him trying to take the throne. Now, he is eager to do anything to keep the name of being the king of Scotland. Therefore, he hires assassins to kill Banquo because he knows about the prophecy, and Banquo may suspect him. Macbeth's ambition still rules his actions.

**” Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air:
But now I am cabin’d, cribb’d, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears. But Banquo’s safe?”**

(Act 3 scene 4 lines 21)

At this point, Macbeth’s position declines even more. Killing your best friend to remain as a king is not very heroic. He also, wanted Banquo’s son to be killed, because the prophecy said that Banquo’s sons would be kings. This means that Banquo’s son, Fleance would be a threat to Macbeth or his descendants. However, Fleance escapes and Macbeth becomes irritated. Macbeth’s decline in status is very clear now. Macbeth is a whole different character since the beginning of the play. He was loyal to the king in the beginning, but now he is not afraid of anything. He was not afraid of the consequences of his actions even though he knew what they would be.

Scotland is devastated due to Macbeth’s actions. Act 4 Scene 3 is all about the personification of Scotland who bleeds and suffers due to Macbeth’s actions. This supports and matches with Aristotle’s theories, that a tragic hero is one who causes himself and the whole society to suffer.

**“ I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds.”**

(Act 4, Scene 3, Lines 39-41)

Shakespeare uses imagery and metaphors in order to show that Scotland has been destroyed by Macbeth. Scotland is now passive and is being controlled by Macbeth. This affects the whole of Scotland by worsening the society. Each time Macbeth commits a murder a wound is added to Scotland. Personification is used here to portray Scotland as a person who is being damaged by Macbeth. It is an image which portrays that it is not only Macbeth whom suffers, but his actions have wider effects on Scotland.

In Macbeth’s final soliloquy in Act 5 Scene 5, he tells the readers his true feelings, giving us an insight to his feelings. This differs from his previous soliloquies, because the pace of his soliloquy is much slower which shows his depressed emotions. Macbeth finally realises how all the prophecies have come true and understand his faults. In Aristotle words, this is called Agnorisis. Agnorisis is when the character recognises the wrong deeds, he made throughout the time.

**“ Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;**

(Act 5, Scene 5, Lines 19-21)

Imagery and alliteration is used in this soliloquy to represent life which goes so slowly. Alliteration is the repetition of the first consonant sound in a phrase. Due to the use of alliteration, the soliloquy seems very dull and long.

In Act 5 Scene 8, Macbeth status inclines a little, since he still fights against Macduff, even though he knows that he will lose against him. The forgotten heroic warrior, Macbeth is described again at the end of the play. Macbeth did not want to fight, but after Macduff says,

“ Then yield thee, coward...”

(Act 5, Scene 8, line 23).

Then, Macbeth says,

“ I will not yield...” (Act 5, Scene 8, line 28).

This shows the readers, once again how brave Macbeth is. Macbeth finally realises how all the prophecies have come true and what he has done wrong. In Aristotle words, this is called Agnorisis. Since he fights bravely, like a hero, he gains some sympathy from the readers again. Gaining sympathy from the readers is called catharsis according to Aristotle.

In my opinion, Macbeth is a tragic hero in this Shakespeare play. The Aristotle theory about tragic heroes backs up the play. According to the Aristotle’s theory about tragic heroes, the character must be at a high status

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in the beginning. They should have some virtues and a tragic flaw. One function of tragedy is to arouse a catharsis, which comes from watching the tragic hero's terrible fate. Macbeth fits into all the requirements as a tragic hero. Therefore, Macbeth is a tragic hero.