

Macbeth's corruption

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Throughout *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, we see Macbeth change from a noble and brave soldier into a mere shadow of his former self. We meet Macbeth after a battle, the result of which has him named Thane of Cawdor. From this position, he falls to a paranoid man willing to do anything to remain in power. We can see his deterioration from the murders of Duncan and Banquo, Macbeth's second meeting with the witches, his treatment of Macduff's castle and his mental condition just before he is murdered. In the beginning, Macbeth is a strong, brave and noble soldier. He is considered brave by all the people he was fighting around. When the captain is relaying the events of the battle, we find him saying to the king " For brave Macbeth- well he deserves that name" (1. 2. 16). As a result of Macbeth's actions on the battlefield, Duncan names him Thane of Cawdor in Act one Scene two. From this, we can see that Macbeth is a good soldier. He has no intention of doing anything other than serving the king. Following the meeting with the witches, Macbeth begins to think about killing Duncan and taking the throne by force. Macbeth becomes concerned with the witches prophecies and wants to learn more, as we can see from what he says after they leave, " Would they have stayed!" (1. 3. 82). After this, he begins thinking about his desire to be king. We can see that he is thinking about murdering Duncan from his soliloquy, " Stars, hide your fires, /Let not light see my black and deep desires;" (1. 5. 50-51). Macbeth has begun his path to corruption. After murdering Duncan, Macbeth feels that he needs to kill Banquo. He is afraid that Banquo is going to be a problem for him. He is suspicious that Banquo believes Macbeth had something to do with Duncan's murder, " Our fears in Banquo/ Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature/ Reigns that which would be

feared" (3. 1. 47-49). He plans to kill him, though Banquo has made no direct threat against Macbeth. He speaks of feeling inferior to Banquo, even though he is king. " There is none but he/ Whose being I do fear; and under him/ My genius is rebuked" (3. 1. 53-55). Banquo is Macbeth's closest friend, he is starting to lose trust in everyone around him. Following this murder, Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet. He is filled with feelings of regret and, as a result of his troubled mind, sees Banquo's ghost. He cannot tell the difference between this ghost and reality, " If I stand here, I saw him" (3. 4. 74). He is starting to lose his mind. At this stage, he has not yet reached complete deterioration. He is going between a state of madness and back into the real world, as we can see from this quote, " I am a man again" (3. 4. 105). Macbeth may be deteriorating, but it is possible to lead people to believe that nothing is wrong. Lady Macbeth is able to fool all of the guests into believing that Macbeth has always been like that. However, the banquet is still cut short because of Macbeth's outburst. Macbeth meets with the witches again to hear what they have to say. He relies on their words, though he knows they are evil, because of what they have done for him before. We see him using their powers, " I conjure you" (4. 1. 50), this shows that he has sunk to their level of evil. Also, he is at the point where he would prefer that the whole world fall into chaos, than not have his questions answered by the witches, " Howe'er you come to know it—answer me./ Though you untie the winds and let them fight/ Against the churches, though the yeasty waves/ Confound and swallow navigation up,/ Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,/ Though castles topple on their warders' heads,/ Though palaces and pyramids do slope/ Their heads to their

foundations, though the treasure/ Of nature's germens tumble all together,/ Even till destruction sicken, answer me/ To what I ask you." (4. 1. 51-61). We can see from this speech that Macbeth is no longer part of this world. He is speaking as if he was one of the witches, he is now evil. He also shows that he has lost all rationality as he thinks of their words as being more important than the world being destroyed. Macduff chooses to leave for England, as a result Macbeth decides that he is going to get revenge against Macduff's castle. He makes the decision to kill many innocent people to get revenge, including Macduff's wife and young son. We can see here that he knows exactly what he is about to do: " The castle of Macduff I will surprise, /Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword/ His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls"(4. 1. 150-152). He knows that all people inside are completely innocent and yet still decides to kill them. Macbeth is also very suspicious of all people. Macduff going to England is automatically seen as a sign to Macbeth that Macduff is a traitor and needs to be destroyed. He even says that from now on he will act of first impulse when he suspicious, " The very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The firstlings of my hand." (4. 1. 146-147). This shows further that he is becoming increasingly corrupt. Towards the end, Macbeth's kingdom has fallen into total disrepair. People think of him as a bad leader and think he is causing problems for Scotland. After seeing what Macbeth is like, the doctor decides to leave Macbeth's castle and says he will never return, " Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,/ Profit again should hardly draw me here." (5. 3. 61-62). Caithness reports that many people do not like Macbeth and think he is a bad leader, " Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,/ Do call it valiant fury; but, for

certain,/ He cannot buckle his distempered cause/
Within the belt of rule" (5. 2. 14-17). At this point, we see Macbeth teasing a servant who is telling him that an army is coming towards his castle, " Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,/ Thou lily-livered boy. What soldiers, patch?/ Death of thy soul! those linen cheeks of thine/ Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?" (5. 3. 13-16). By the end, Macbeth is losing his mind and all rationality. He cannot think logically and begins to make bad decisions. An example of this is that he does not care about the death of his wife. He even says " She should have died hereafter" (5. 5. 17); this shows that he does not even give her death a second thought. He is now so used to his state of madness, that he talks of forgetting what it feels like to be afraid, his mind is full of all kinds of horrible thoughts, " I have almost forgot the taste of fears. /The time has been, my senses would have cooled/
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair/
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir, /As life were in't. I have supped full with horrors: /Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, /Cannot once start me." (5. 5. 9-15). As we can see, Macbeth is now a very mentally troubled man. Macbeth is a character who falls a long way from his state of mind in the beginning. He is tempted by the witches, and from here he begins his evil reign of terror by murdering Duncan, after this he becomes more and more willing to murder. From this, we can see that Macbeth is no longer able to function as king by the end of the play. He has given up his noble state to become king, and by doing so loses his ability to do good.