

Minor characters, plot, and imagery in macbeth essay sample

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



In today's society, people commonly judge one another based on their own standards. How you dress, speak and act are values and measurements on which people can judge you with. Some people tend to emphasize one of the above values over the other, creating differences in opinions frequently. However, those values that people have used to judge others can be faulty with consequences very dire. This is tragically illustrated in Caesar's death, in another Shakespearean classic, Julius Caesar.

The great Emperor's death is planned and carried out by the person he loved like a son for all his loyalty and courage, Brutus. The analogous tragedy is also shown in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth. Macbeth is trusted as one of the King's most loyal and faithful servants. However, it is none other than Macbeth himself who murders the King, persuaded by his desire of possessing more power. In Macbeth, the central theme is that one should not base their judgement completely on appearances since they can be deceiving. This can be seen through the minor characters, plot and imagery throughout the play.

The minor characters in Macbeth are part of the constant drive of action that ultimately leads to Macbeth's demise. Each provides a different perspective on the theme, and yet in that way, a connection can be made so that the theme emerges more clearly than ever before. King Duncan, his son Donalbain, and Macduff are each distinguished by their specific functions in the play and through their speech, reveal the theme from different perspectives. Near the very beginning of the play, the theme was established as an important force by King Duncan, who is a major part of the

plot as the innocent obstacle in Macbeth's path to the crown. When the King comments on the former Thane of Cawdor, who has just been executed for treason, he reflects: "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face: / He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust." (1. 4, 9-12) Certainly, the Thane had appeared to be a perfect gentleman under what one would expect to be the watchful eye of the King.

Hidden beneath the exterior, however, that was not the case, as the Thane was found guilty of treason. The King's reaction was not without reason, for who would not be shocked, angered, and grieved to discover that a trusted person was not whom you perceived them to be? Indeed, he was deceived by appearances, and the theme warns us to be wary of just that. Similarly, Donalbain, the son of the murdered King, holds an important place in the play as a character who attempts to hinder the progress of Macbeth's deceptive rule. When Macduff discovers the dead King, Donalbain and his brother quickly realize that they could become the next victims of a deceitful crime. It was not unlikely, after all, that a threat to the crown had been made and the living heirs would be the next targets. Thus, Donalbain and his brother decide to flee Scotland for their personal safety, and he comments: "Where we are / There's daggers in men's smiles, the near in blood, / The nearer bloody."

Donalbain makes a striking reference to the theme: that fair appearances may have foul intentions. Naturally, the smile is meant to show and bring happiness; however, here it is used to disguise the true intent of deception. Donalbain realizes this and they wisely hide themselves from the precarious

situation. In this way, the theme is acknowledged, and is in fact, used advantageously. Donalbain recognizes that trusting anyone at the moment based on a smile or simple gesture could prove deadly and so decides to leave the bloody scene with his brother to seek safety elsewhere. Finally, Macduff, a foil of Macbeth, through his speech, once more uncovers the theme. Soon after the discovery of the dead King, Malcolm and Donalbain have already fled, and Macbeth has been installed as King. In a discussion with Ross, Macduff explains: " They were suborn'd / Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's two sons, / Are stol'n away and fled, which puts upon them / Suspicion of the deed." (3. 4, lines 9-12) Certainly, the quick exit of the two sons of the King looked suspicious in the eyes of many, allowing the true murderer, Macbeth, an advantage for the time being. Rather than mourning the loss and taking up their duty, they quickly fled the country without an explanation of any kind.

However, though Malcolm and Donalbain appeared guilty, they were completely innocent, and fled the country in order to avoid immediate danger and remain safe. It was their true wishes to return once the real murderers (Macbeth and his wife) were discovered, and ultimately to return as the rightful rulers of their country. Unfortunately, Macduff and many others were initially deceived by what appeared to be the case, though the theme tells us repeatedly to be cautious of this. Thus, upon examining the speech of important minor characters, such as the King, Donalbain, and Malcolm, we can see that each further emphasizes the theme. Indeed, the theme serves as a vital role in directing the fate of various characters

throughout the play: one must never be too quick in judging by appearances alone, for many consequences may arise. Yet even in today's world, we continue to "judge a book by its cover". The theme of Macbeth may cause us to think twice in the future.

The central theme of Macbeth is also apparent during the trigger, climax, and tag of the plot. At the trigger, Banquo presents the theme and its significance. Banquo is suspicious of the encounter with the witches, unlike Macbeth who tries to find legitimacy and is curious to find out more about the witches' prophecy. " Oftentimes, to win us to our harm, The instruments of darkness tells us truths, Win us with honest trifles, to betray's, In deepest consequence." (I. iii, 123-126) Although Banquo believes that there is some truth to the witches' claims, he warns that such "small" truths will lure him toward evil and deception. What may appear to be true and fair may be a disguise for foul intent, thus the theme emerges once more. The theme presents itself again shortly after the climax of the play by Lady Macbeth. After Duncan is killed, Lady Macbeth and her husband soon realize that more deaths must follow - including that of Banquo's. Her desire and strong will pushes her to motivate Macbeth, despite his paranoia and lapses of guilt.

There comes a point when Lady Macbeth expresses her true feelings of her new position as Queen: " Nought's had, all's spent, 'Tis safer to be what which we destroy Than be destruction dwell in doubtful joy." (III. ii, 4-7) All their deeds, steeped in risk, danger and deception, were to gain the coveted titles of King and Queen. The power to rule over Scotland was seemingly good in the eyes of Lady Macbeth and her husband. It was an ultimate

desire, and yet, as Lady Macbeth stated, it provided no contentment once the deed was done. She further describes the dead as being happier, since everything they had done to gain power had only brought more discomfort to them. The theme strongly presents itself in Lady Macbeth's confession: possession of the crown appeared to be good, but once they had gotten it, it only brought them trouble. Finally, Macbeth unmask the theme in the tag, where he is soon killed by Macduff. The tag plays an important role in any story as it is the final result of the decision made by the major character during the climax. In this case, Macbeth is killed by Macduff as a result of his choice to deceitfully murder the King at the climax.

Upon being confronted by Macduff, who firmly intends to kill Macbeth, Macbeth proclaims: "Thou lovest labor. As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air, With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed. Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests; I bear a charmed life, which must not yield, to one of woman born." (5. 8 11-16) Macbeth has fallen into the trap that the theme warns us of: do not judge by appearances because they can be deceiving. He quickly assumes that all human are woman-born. On that basis, he believes that neither will be able to kill him and he has nothing to fear. Yet, he is cruelly surprised when Macduff reveals that he was torn from his mother's womb. Macbeth's quick judgement based on appearance alone was to cost him his life, by the sword of one who was not of woman-born, Macduff. By looking at the trigger, climax and tag of Macbeth it can be seen that deceitful appearances are present throughout the plot. Even today, people are frequently deceived by those who present themselves as being trustworthy.

It is only after being deceived when they realize the errors in their judgement. Thus, once more, the theme of Macbeth emerges to warn us of such folly.

Lastly, imagery is no doubt a significant part of the play Macbeth.

Subsequently, for a theme to be considered a central theme, it would have to be constantly present in imagery. The theme, that one should not base their judgement completely on appearance since it can be deceiving, is present in several types of imagery in the play. Examples of such can be seen through: a metaphor, a simile, and personification. A metaphor that relates to the theme can be seen in the beginning of the play, when the three witches are chanting together. "Fair is foul and foul is fair." (I. i. line) This metaphor means what seems to be good can be bad, whereas what seems to be bad can be good. The relevance to the theme can be seen clearly since this metaphor is another way of saying that appearances can be deceiving. The theme can also be seen through a simile. At Macbeth's castle, shortly before King Duncan's arrival, Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth that they should murder Duncan. "Be like th'innocent flower but be the serpent under it." (I. v. line)

She is saying that Macbeth should act loyal and innocent on the outside but be deadly and murderous as a serpent in his mind. It relates to the theme in the way that from the point of view of others, Macbeth would seem like a heroic and loyal person, but in reality, he's actually treacherous and deceitful. Finally, personification is used later in the same act. After Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are plotting to

murder Duncan. Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know." (I. vii. line) A face is given the action "hide" thus this line employs personification. Shakespeare reinforces the theme here by having Macbeth say that what Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are thinking must not be revealed by their appearances or actions. Through a metaphor, a simile and personification, it may be seen that appearances can be deceiving. Thus, through imagery, Shakespeare emphasizes the theme once more: that making hasty judgements based on appearances can make us forget the significance of considering all the options.

As seen through the minor characters, plot, and imagery in Macbeth it is evident that one should not base their judgment completely on appearances since they can be deceiving. Macbeth is led on by what seemed to be blessing premonition, becoming a king, the most powerful position attainable. However, in order to realize that prophecy, his heart and conscience becomes that of a deceitful villain, hidden behind the face of his loyal and honourable former self. Truly, "foul is fair and fair is foul", since it was that very source of prophecy, which prophesied Macbeth's downfall. People today are led on in the same way, tempted to think that things they see in their daily lives as everything they need to know, wilfully ignoring other possibilities. Though it is improbable to suspect everyone of lies and treachery, the consequences of being unaware can be severe. Thus, rather than making hasty judgements based on what is seen on the outside, one should carefully consider all possibilities.