

# I have no sympathy for macbeth

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Shakespeare's tragedy of Macbeth is written about a story of a Scottish thane (Macbeth), whom, fuelled by burning desire and ambition, urged on by his wife and also triggered by the three witches' equivocation, murders his king, Duncan. Despite Macbeth's negative attributes such as his greed, corruption, paranoia, the audience still retains and pities Macbeth due to the fact that Shakespeare employs soliloquies, humanity and tragic flaw.

Judging Macbeth superficially by his actions alone leaves the reader no choice but to consider him as evil and immoral; yet when one examines the full presentation of his character and understands his mental struggles (through his soliloquies), a feeling of sympathy is evoked.

Throughout the whole play, Macbeth is shown as having a conscience. Prior to his murdering of Duncan, Macbeth has serious reservations about following through with the assassination, with Shakespeare portraying Macbeth as a reluctant murderer.

After all, his ambitions for the throne were only made public after hearing a prophecy, which the audience later realises as an equivocation, made by witches.

Even then, he weighs up his reasons for and against murdering Duncan and concludes, " If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me, without my stir". This shows the audience that Macbeth has a clear conscience and realises that there is no way back once he has done the deed.

Shakespeare juxtaposes Macbeth's conscience to Lady Macbeth's, whose conscience does not kick in until the very end of her life, when the enormity

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of the deed suddenly dawns upon her whereas Macbeth's conscience was there from the start. This makes the audience realise that Macbeth is not all evil, and that he has only human, which more or less makes the audience understand his actions and sympathize with him. Upon thorough examination of his conscience, he realises that as Duncan's kinsman, subject and host, his duty is to protect Duncan and "not bear the knife myself".

When he remembers the virtues of Duncan's kingship, he concludes that his only reason for murdering him is his own "vaulting ambition". At this point he firmly tells Lady Macbeth that, "We will proceed no further in this business", expressing his desires to put an end to all talks about murder. This gains further sympathy from the audience, as they understand the emotional turmoil of Macbeth's mind and further proves the point that Macbeth is only human. Shakespeare also uses other characters to further build on the audience's sympathy for Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is one of the many characters that Shakespeare employs.

When Macbeth refuses to go ahead with the mission to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth, however, persists. She plays a critical role in the build-up to the murder where she uses her powers of persuasion to make Macbeth change his mind by taunting him with questions about his courage and masculinity: "Art thou afeard?", and also equating murder to manliness and courage. This makes the audience see that Macbeth is a reluctant murderer and that his wife was the driving force behind the murder, which makes the audience wonder if Macbeth would have gone ahead with the murder if Lady Macbeth was not there, thus garnering unexpected sympathy in this area.

In the end, however, Macbeth caves in at the urging of Lady Macbeth, killing Duncan and framing the guards to tricks the rest of the high-ranking Scots to think that the murder was some sort of plot formulated by the king's sons Malcolm and Donaldbain. The three witches are also used as means of obtaining sympathy for his main character. Throughout parts of the play, the witches appear, only to toy with Macbeth's conscience by prophesising, through the use of equivocation, about his future.

The audience is first introduced to the witches in the very beginning, which is a way of Shakespeare communicating to the audience about the major parts the witches play throughout the whole production. After all, it is the three witches that toy with Macbeth again and again, making him in their words by equivocating only parts of the truth, thus portraying Macbeth as vulnerable and still human: " All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter". This equivocation fuels on Macbeth's long burning desire and all consuming ambition to be King of Scotland.

This leads on to Macbeth murdering Duncan for his title and ultimately, his tragic fall at the hands of Macduff. The audience sees that the three witches made equivocations and can relate to Macbeth as a human being as he wrongly believes the lies of others, which eventually led to his untimely death. Thus, because the audience can relate Macbeth to a real life character, he is pitied on and sympathised with. Soliloquy in Shakespeare's work allows the audience to dive in a character's mind. It is that extra view that makes the audience see what the characters in Shakespeare's work can't see.

Shakespeare cleverly writes the murder scene, where he does not write the particular actions Macbeth murdering Duncan, but rather focusing on the inner torment or the soliloquies of the villain rather than the suffering of the victim to gather more sympathy for Macbeth. The audience witness Macbeth's doubts through his soliloquies beforehand through the clever use of imagery: " He's here in double trust..." and his feelings of guilt: " Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand...", regret: " wake Duncan with thy knocking!

I would thou couldst! " and horror: " I am afraid to think what I have done. Look on it again I dare not" after the murder of his king. This portrayal of Macbeth's troubled conscience suggests that, despite his evil deeds, he never entirely loses his humanity. Also, the air-drawn dagger that leads him to Duncan's chamber, the voices he hears and the ghost of Banquo are all products of Macbeth's guilty conscience and vivid imagination, adds to his image as only human. This point is even further explored in the killing of Macduff's family (ordered by himself).

While he appears to be unaffected by the dreadful slaughter, Macbeth is initially reluctant and unwilling to fight Macduff in Act V because he has too much of his family's blood on his conscience. This is witnessed again through his many soliloquies throughout the play: " My soul is too much charged with blood of thine already". This quote also shows continued evidence of Macbeth's troubled conscience and his humanity, which evokes a certain degree of sympathy from the audience. Shakespeare also portrays Macbeth as a tragic hero who possesses a certain degree of humanity.

The readers also feel some sympathy for Macbeth in his painful awareness of the high price to be paid for achieving his ambition by evil means. No sooner has he killed Duncan that he begins to realise that he will never sleep peacefully again, having murdered “the innocent sleep” of a good king. This act of realisation evokes further sympathy from the readers, as they begin to understand a character that is very much flawed in his hungry desire for ambition. While Macbeth’s morality declines dramatically and his actions become more evil and appalling, the reader still retains a degree of sympathy and understanding for him.

They realise that while Macbeth does evil, he is not evil. While he is a ferocious warrior who carves a bloody path through the ranks of his enemies on the battlefield, he is too sensitive to play the roles of a murderer and butcher unaffected. Macbeth is essentially a noble individual whose finer qualities are corrupted by ambition. This prevents Macbeth from being portrayed as the complete monster he had become. Therefore, Shakespeare masterfully makes Macbeth a tragic hero, saving him from being a full-fledged villain.

This tragic hero theme is also shown after the murder of Banquo and his subsequent haunting by Banquo’s ghost as Macbeth mourns that he has passed the point of no return and has no choice but to continue with murder. Shakespeare writes these scenes with the intentions of having the audience know Macbeth’s guilty conscience, which is done with the intention of generating some degree of compassion for him. This morality in Macbeth is further explored at the end of the play when the combined forces of Macduff,

Malcolm, and Siward are ready to attack Dunsinane castle to depose and dispose of Macbeth where Macbeth is holding fort.

He has the choice of waiting out the siege in his castle that is stocked with enough supplies to last a long time but instead, Macbeth elects to take on the challengers in battle, declaring, “ I’ll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked”. His court officer Seyton tries to convince him otherwise, but Macbeth will hear nothing of it. It is this display of bravery against his foes that finally secures sympathy for Macbeth as he goes down valiantly in battle rather than cowardly in the depths of his castle.

In the end, because Macbeth is a flawed hero and not a super hero, because he is capable of doing great right and great wrong, the audience can empathise with him. They can understand his motivations and actions, even though the audience may not like them, because they are the same motivations that drive all human beings. It is because of his humanity and morality, portrayed through his soliloquies and his fatal flaw, does the audience understand Macbeth’s actions so that they retain a degree of sympathy for him through to the very end of the play.