

# Macbeth's misunderstanding of evil

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's most well-known plays, captivates the audience and readers with a unique plot and note worthy characters. Of these characters, Macbeth, not unaffected by evil, an internal or external force that compels an individual to do harm to others, ultimately reaches self-devastation by his own hand. His choices lead him to do so. Macbeth, the tragic hero of the play, allows his flaw of misunderstanding of evil guide him to destruction. As the tragic hero of Shakespeare's Macbeth, Macbeth is perceived a character with values. Shakespeare portrays him as a tragic hero, having one flaw, but primarily an honorable character.

In act 1 a servant tells about Macbeth's experiences on the battle field. The servant relaying the events of the battle to the king refers to Macbeth as "For brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name (2)." This shows that others view Macbeth as being brave. Macbeth, also said to be "Like valour's minion (2)," clearly can be seen as courageous because he models himself based on heroism and bravery. Macbeth "unseam'd [the enemy] from the nave to the chaps,/ And fix'd his head upon our battlements (2)." This shows Macbeth's strength and power in battle. It also displays his loyalty to the king because he kills the enemy.

Macbeth, being brave, strong, and loyal, is a decent and wholesome character. Although Macbeth exists as a note worth character, he misunderstands evil and this flaw leads to his demise. In act one Shakespeare shows Macbeth's curiosity in the witches who are the epitome of evil. When the three witches tell Macbeth that he can potentially be the Thane of Cawdor and the King of Scotland, he wonders how and requests

more information from the witches. Macbeth's speech reveals that he has much interest in what the supernatural powers of the witches can tell him.

When he says, " Stay you imperfect speakers, tell me more (6)" he asks them to give him more information about how he can become thane and king. He believes that the witches are giving him useful information and he has faith that he will prosper if he listens. Macbeth also displays his curiosity when he says, " and to be king/ Stands not within the prospect of belief,/ No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence/ You owe this strange intelligence? (6)" He wonders how he can become king and inquires about the witches' source of information.

This shows that he believes that good can come from evil. Macbeth does have ambition, but he has ambition only because he misreads the witches' intentions. His ambition causes him to want to be thane of Cawdor and king of Scotland, but the misunderstanding of evil causes him to believe that his dreams of being more powerful can come true. After continuing to misunderstand evil Macbeth finally fully commits to evil in act three.

Shakespeare shows his audience that Macbeth has made a choice to stay with evil because he has faith that evil is getting him where he wants to be.

In act 3 Macbeth admits that he is looking forward to hearing the rest of the witches' prophecies. In scene three he has made a commitment to evil. He acknowledges the fact that righting his wrongs can be possible, but because he believes being evil will gain him power, he chooses to continue on the path of the murderous actions he has already taken. When Macbeth says, " More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know, By the worst means, the

worst (46). " he is revealing that he would like to hear the witches' predictions and find out what he has to do in order to move himself further up the social ladder.

When he says, " I am in blood Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er (46)" he is committing to evil. He believes that turning back to good could be possible, but he chooses to follow the witches' prophecy because he believes that good will come out of his evil actions. His ambition and excessive pride do play a role in causing him to commit to evil, but he only takes on those other characteristics because he misunderstands the wicked forces working against him.

After committing to evil, Macbeth realizes that his life no longer has value and therefore does not have a life worth living. Shakespeare breaks the mold of tragic heroes' demises being their downfall with Macbeth. Macbeth's demise is that he now has an empty life. It finally occurs to Macbeth that he lives a life that does not possess any qualities that give meaning to life, when he says, " I have lived long enough: my way of life/ Is fall'n into the sear (73)" he comes to the conclusion that he now lives a wicked life that will propel him towards being condemned to Hell.

He also says, " the which should accompany old age,/ As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,/ I must not look to have (73)," at which point he realizes that his life no longer has any meaning because he has no honor, emotion, self control, or loyal friends. These are the things that make life worth living, and because none of these qualities are preserved within him he approaches his downfall rapidly. Macbeth's downfall, being that he lives a

meaningless life, is proof that an individual's fate is the direct result of the choices he makes.

Shakespeare's theme in Macbeth, an individual can control his own fate by the choices he makes despite the temptations of supernatural forces, can be demonstrated by Macbeth choosing to commit to evil and as a result eventually having a fate worse than death. In the final act of the play Macbeth speaks of how he no longer has emotional reactions to events that would have previously aroused him. When he says, " my senses would have cool'd/ To hear a night-shriek (76)" he confesses that once before he would be nervous after hearing noises at night. Now that he has made many bad decisions he will never again react to a " night-shriek".

Macbeth also says, " Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,/ Cannot once start me (76). " Again he is saying that happenings that would have fazed him before he committed to evil will not faze him now. He has fated himself to become cold and callous. Throughout Macbeth, Macbeth is seen as a noble worthy and honorable character. He has only shown one flaw, his misunderstanding of evil. His misunderstanding of evil ultimately leads to his own death. He acknowledges his flaw at the end of the play which proves that he is a tragic hero. Unfortunately, Macbeth caused his own death, due to his misunderstanding of evil.