

There tragic hero
comes from a noble



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There is a difference between a tragic hero and an epic hero. A tragic hero comes from a noble birth, but is not necessarily held to a higher standard by society. Since there is no structure on how this hero should be viewed by commoners, this “hero” unfortunately has a flaw which ultimately brings them to their tragic downfall, forcing them to accept the consequences that follow.

An epic hero, on the otherhand, is known to be charismatic, noble, brave, and admired for great achievement from their grand events. Both an epic hero and a tragic hero are similar despite their major differences about morality and overall goals. Macbeth, the main character in William Shakespeare’s Macbeth, is a tragic hero. Whereas, Beowulf, the main character in Seamus Heaney’s Beowulf, is an epic hero. The tragic play of Macbeth and the epic poem of Beowulf share the literary concept of having the hero as the protagonist. Although the two stories were written in different time periods, the context shares many similarities as well as differences. Macbeth and Beowulf both hold traits of being overly confident, which is seen through their actions.

Although the two share this similarity, they approach gaining higher power and personal challenges in a manner of impulsivity that is unique to their respective character. Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor, and Beowulf, Thane of Geats, both can thank their overconfidence for the titles they obtain. Beowulf, from the beginning, was able to hold his title as king because he is considered to be proud, fearless and overall a good warrior. Macbeth uses outside help, the witches, and his cunningness to trick everyone and this makes him overconfident and boastful.

Beowulf has always been the stronger of the two given the fact he developed his confidence as a young boy, whereas Macbeth only gained his confidence after he assassinated King Malcolm and was able to get away with it.

Needless to say, both believed their life was untouchable and could never be taken away, but eventually this overconfidence was the ultimate reason for their demise. Macbeth has many character traits that amplify his flaws – he has a large sense of ambition, pride, imagination and insecurity as a man that contributes to his end. His unnaturally large amount of ambition is even acknowledged by himself in Act 1 Scene 7: “ I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition which o’erleaps itself and falls on th’other..”. This scene refers to Macbeth’s motivation to kill Duncan, who is the King . Macbeth’s ambition is the central force for almost all of his actions in the play, and the witches play on this ambition.

Macbeth’s insecurity is another one of his character flaws. Macbeth can “ prove” his manliness on the battlefield easily; however, Lady Macbeth’s knowledge of Macbeth’s lack of manliness in other areas allows her to easily manipulate Macbeth to kill the king. In Act 1 Scene 7, after Macbeth makes the tentative decision not to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth starts to question Macbeth’s manhood by stating, “ When you durst do it, they you were a man.” Lady Macbeth then continues to taunt Macbeth leading Macbeth to question what would happen if they fail and Lady Macbeth continues to bring him down by stating that she will make the plan and take care of the murder. From the moment that Macbeth decides to live a lie in Act 1 Scene 7 “ False face must hide what false heart doth know,” the audience knows he has condemned himself. They know his thoughts in the soliloquy earlier in the

same scene (Act 1 Scene 7, Lines 1-28) will come true – the killer is damned for eternity and the killer will be killed. The audience immediately feels a pang of pity for the once valiant man, now so obviously on a trail of self-destruction.

Beowulf on the other hand, thrives from his characteristics of bravery, loyalty, honor, and strength. He is a man who is willing to risk his life for his people as well as the greater good, which is a trait that Macbeth is not able to relate to. The characteristics that Beowulf shows are exemplified further in Beowulf's great deeds. When Beowulf agrees to fight Grendel, a monster who has already been beaten up by countless numbers of men, Beowulf's success in killing Grendel displays how his strength and bravery make him a hero and how he puts the safety of his people before his own. Beowulf also showed heroism and courage when he decided to go to Hrothgar's kingdom despite hearing horrific stories about the damage that Grendel was causing. He not only puts himself in danger but he also chose to put himself in an unfamiliar environment to bravely face a horrendous monster. His epic heroism does not end there though, he ultimately sacrifices his entire life as he fights a dragon with the final intention of protecting his own kingdom.

Something that Macbeth would not be able to handle due to his selfishness. Therefore, Macbeth and Beowulf both have a striking amount of overconfidence that both leads them to put themselves in difficult situations that lead them to make impulsive decisions. Although it can be interpreted that Beowulf is more of a conqueror than Macbeth, both characters live up to their literary definition of hero. It is clear to understand that the mistakes that

these two characters have made ledthem to their successes as well as their major flaws.

Without these personalityflaws, both Beowulf and Macbeth would not have been able to die surrounded inwhat makes them unique to their books.