

Critical lens



As Herodotus once said, "...men are the mercy of events and cannot control them. " In other words, men cannot control fate, and they are forced to endure the situations that come their way. In both the plays Macbeth and Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare, the characters, however, the characters determine their outcome by the actions they take, and it is by their own decision that they lead themselves to demise. In both plays the quote is established through conflict with ones self, others and foreshadowing.

In Macbeth, Macbeth morphs from an iconic and respected war hero, but by his own doing, becomes a tragic character. His narcissistic and cruel actions turned him into a hated man. Most importantly, Macbeth faced a conflict within himself. As Thane of Glamis, and crowned Thane of Cowdar by King Duncan, he's loved and honored. However, that power and position he sustained, soon became too meager for Macbeth. Once the Witches prophesized his kingship, he was hungry for more. However, Macbeth wasn't sure that title was worth him taking the life of King Duncan, a man who loved him and cherished him like family.

Macbeth could have changed the outcome, and sacrificed being number one by being content with the titles he already had, but greed overcame him. By killing Duncan for the crown, he by his own doing set himself for his demise. Macbeth also faces conflict with others in the play. His vicious wife, Lady Macbeth, wants nothing more than to become queen. She will do anything to have her husband kill the King, whether it be demeaning his manhood, questioning her love for him, or even a begging a higher power to give her

the ruthless qualities of a man to empower her to be able to go through with her plan.

Macbeth constantly questioned the morality of what he was planning, and the external force of his wife pressuring him and beguiling him into doing so made almost drove him to a point of insanity. Lady Macbeth played with his mind, and essentially tried to manipulate his actions for her desires. Macbeth could have held his own and did what he knew was right. But by his own desires and those of his wife, he succumbed and killed Duncan. Again, he willingly decided what he was going to do, and by that he made his bed. The last and final element is foreshadowing.

The driving force of the Witches, depict and hint at what is to come throughout the play. In the beginning, they foreshadow his kingship. Macbeth knows, however, that to become king Duncan must be dead. This leads Macbeth to decide if he's willing to take that measure for what he wants, even if it means taking an innocent man's life. By these three elements, Macbeth shows that men are not in fact at the mercy of events, but they control their outcomes through the decisions they make. In Macbeth's case, his greed and murderous actions lead to his own killing.

In Julius Caesar, the actions of the characters also lead to their downfall. In the play, both Caesar and Brutus make choices that may have made the difference between life and death. One of the biggest ways the play exhibits that is through foreshadowing. Before Caesar takes the crown of Rome, he receives a warning from the Soothsayer saying, "beware the ides of March." However, Caesar was too indulged in his glory to acknowledge the

Soothsayer's warning. By ignoring his prophecy, Caesar walked into his own murder when it could have been prevented.

Another form of foreshadowing in the book is his wife Calphurnia's dream. The night before his crowning, his wife dreamt of Caesar like a statue with blood spouting from it, and "lusty" Romans bathing and smiling in it. This was a warning of Caesar's death, but once again he refuted the idea and ignored what his wife was trying to tell him. Another element is the conflict Brutus faces with himself. He knows Caesar is a loved and cherished friend, and friends don't kill one another. However, he also knows he wants to do what he can to benefit the good of Rome.

Unfortunately, Brutus contemplates that a King would not be good for Rome. He fears that Caesar will lead Rome like a dictator, and he will be in total control and no one else will have a say. Brutus could have let Caesar take the crown, or he could have let the other Conspirators do the deed without him, but he chose to betray his good friends, and kill Caesar. The last element in the play is the conflict Brutus faces with others. Many times Cassius persuades Brutus to believe that Caesar is no better fit to serve Rome as their leader than anyone else.

He pushes Brutus to feel that he could serve just as well, if not better, than Caesar. He also presses Brutus to remain faithful to his loyalty to Rome, even if Caesar is a good friend. Cassius tells Brutus of how he saved Caesar from drowning, and also saw him fall into an epileptic fit. These things show how he is unworthy of his status as King, and tries to influence Brutus into believing that Caesar couldn't and shouldn't be the leader of Rome. He tries

to make Brutus believe that it is his duty to Rome to stop Caesar from taking over.

Brutus could have been strong, and let what was meant to be happen. However, Brutus took it upon himself to act on Cassius' words, and take down Caesar. This, eventually, led to destruction and even Brutus' own death. Men can, in fact, control their fate by the course of action they take. In Macbeth, Macbeth was willing to do whatever it took to be king, even if it meant becoming a ruthless killer. In Julius Caesar, Caesar ignored multiple warnings that could have saved his life due to his pride, and therefore lost it all.

Brutus ignores the fact that Caesar is a good friend, and intervenes where he shouldn't and murders Caesar to prevent him from taking the crown. He lets jealousy and the persuasion of Cassius to overtake his logical thinking. This too leads to his death. The quote is disproved in both plays by showing that fate is determined by the choices and course of action one takes, and in these two plays these actions of greed and jealousy in the end came back to haunt them and lead to their demise.