

# Animal imagery of moral reversal

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



In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the theme of moral corruption is portrayed through the moral reversal of animals throughout the play. Shakespeare utilizes this strategy to help establish the theme to his audience. This type of reversal is usually connected with Macbeth himself and the more he grows self corrupt, the more abundant the animal imagery.

Toward the beginning of the play, Macbeth is portrayed off as a lion in comparison to a rabbit, an eagle in comparison into a sparrow, showing Macbeth's courageousness and bravery; "...Yes' as sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.

If I say sooth, they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks..." (Act I: Scene II: Line 35). This image only helps establish further the moral reversal and corruption throughout the play because, as a reader, Macbeth is here seen as a brave courageous man, a hero if you must. But as the play goes on, we drastically see a change in Macbeth as he grows more corrupt and following along with it, we see the change in animal imagery associated with Macbeth.

Not only does Shakespeare use animal imagery to portray Macbeth and his own corruption, but he also uses it to evoke it by depicting moral disorder amongst the animals themselves, showing how Macbeth's actions not only affect him, but the balance of nature as well. " On Tuesday last A falcon tow'ring in her pride of place, Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed. And Duncan's horses - a thing most strange and certain - ...Turned wild in nature... 'Tis said they ate each other." This scene was depicted after Duncan's death by the murderous hand of Macbeth. This not only shows how

Macbeth's negative actions upset the balance of nature, but it shows the destroying of balance within Macbeth himself. This comparison to Macbeth earlier being portrayed as a lion, an eagle, as this courageous man, shows his shift in character. It's a great depiction of his corruption progressing within contrast to earlier depictions.

" We have scorched the snake, not killed it. She'll be close and be herself, whilst our poor malice remains in danger of her former tooth." In Act III Scene II, Macbeth thinks of Banquo in this way because of the witches' saying he will make kings, but not be one himself. Macbeth refers to Banquo like this because he has identified Banquo as a threat that could, as a snake can, lurk in the underbrush and strike him when he least expects it. It is an ironic use of the image, since it is Macbeth who really is the " snake."

Macbeth falls deeper in his corruption, only causing him to seek out to " get rid of" others who he sees as a " threat". The animal imagery here helps portray this image and this detail. Macbeth says " o, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" Meaning his mind is full of evils and dark thoughts. This shows his realization of his corruption, and here we can see more that Macbeth has fallen deeper into his own corruption in contrast to early portrayals of his corruption.

Throughout Macbeth, Shakespeare uses animal imagery not only as metaphorical imagery, but to portray the fall of Macbeth and his inner corruption.