

Fate vs free will in macbeth

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The tragedy of Macbeth, written by William Shakespeare in the 1600s, continues to be one of Shakespeare's darkest, most powerful tragedies. The play, set in Scotland, depicts the rise and fall of King Macbeth. It explores whether Macbeth was in charge of his own destiny in his quest for power, or under the control of others surrounding him. The play examines many themes, especially those concerning evil. A prominent theme in Macbeth is fate vs freewill. Is it fate, or free will which determines the rise and fall of Macbeth? The rise of Macbeth begins with him running into three witches on his way home from a battle.

The witches prophesised that he would become King. This is one of the factors that contributed to Macbeth's belief that he should become King. Another factor was his wife, Lady Macbeth, encouraging him to fulfil the prophecy right away by killing the current king, King Duncan. Although these factors may have contributed to Macbeth's actions, he remained capable of making his own choices.

The witches, or the weird sisters, in Macbeth represent fate.

There are several variations on how weird is spelt throughout the play's stage directions, such as weyard, and wayward. In Shakespeare's time, this meant fate, or fateful. In the visual representation, Macbeth is depicted in the centre with a witch whispering into his left ear, and Lady Macbeth whispering into his right ear. This symbolises how Macbeth was being treated like a puppet by both the witches, and by Lady Macbeth. It shows how Macbeth was influenced by their words, although he could have chosen to ignore them and make his own decisions. The witches represent fate, and

Lady Macbeth a controlling influence in his life. These 2 people are included in the visual representation because they are the main influences in the tragedy of Macbeth. Macbeth, in the middle, represents the way in which Lady Macbeth and the witches are influencing him. Macbeth's serious expression is representative of how he feels in Act 1, Scene 3, where he is torn between fate, and his own free will. Dark colours are used to provide an image of the play – it is not bright and happy. It is a dark tragedy.

Macbeth states in Act 1, Scene 3, “ present fears are less than horrible imaginings, my thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, shakes so my single state of man that function, is smothered in surmise, and nothing is, but what is not.” In this scene, he is trying to make sense of his thoughts – Shakespeare represents this through soliloquy. He is talking about how Duncan's murder is just a fantasy right now. This is before Lady Macbeth can even bring up the murder. This quote is shown in the visual representation, as it shows Macbeth is thinking about murder based on what the witches said, even before the influence of Lady Macbeth. Neither the witches, nor Lady Macbeth, could force Macbeth to kill Duncan. Macbeth had thoughts of murder before talking to Lady Macbeth, showing that the witches awakened his ambition to become king. They could only use their words to manipulate him, this is indicated in the visual, through the quotes which relate to their manipulation of Macbeth.

“ All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!” – This quote, from one of the witches represents the start of Macbeth's rise to power – this triggers Macbeth to think about killing King Duncan. This is represented in the visual representation as it is a key quote from the witches. In Act 1, the witches

appear in front of Macbeth and Banquo, the best friend of Macbeth. They represent fate, although it is unclear if they really can control Macbeth's fate, or have any powers at all. They make three predictions for Macbeth, one that that he will be Thane of Cawdor, secondly that he will be King, and thirdly that Banquo's sons will become King. When Macbeth reflects on the predictions, he starts to feel that he may need to kill King Duncan to become King, but hopes it will come about by fate or chance instead. The predictions shown in the visual representation are an example of Macbeth reflecting upon them. " Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair, and make my seated heart knock at my ribs" This was said before he murdered King Duncan, and shows the guilt he was feeling for even thinking about murder. If it was his fate to kill, he would not have felt so uncomfortable about it.

This is a direct example of Macbeth's free will, and is represented in the visual representation with the out of order quotes, and Macbeth's unfixd hair. The quotes placed around the visual representation show all the words that may have been echoing around his head, influencing him and pressuring him. The words from others helped contribute to Macbeth's madness. " If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me, without my stir." – Macbeth is unsure about killing King Duncan, for good reason – the witches never fated him to kill Duncan. This is an example of his free will. It is hard for Macbeth to decide what he wants to do with all of the pressure, although he does not have to succumb to it. The witches never stated that Macbeth would need to kill King Duncan to become king, that idea was completely his own. Macbeth states in the above quote from the play that if it really is fate, it will come about by chance. From the beginning, Macbeth

kept his own free will, even though he was influenced by others. After learning of the witches' prophecies, Macbeth makes the mistake of writing a letter to Lady Macbeth, telling her about the encounter with the witches, in detail.

Lady Macbeth becomes excited, about being Queen, about having power. She wants Duncan dead, so she can be queen. In many ways Lady Macbeth is more power hungry than Macbeth. In Act 1, scene 7, she murmurs to herself that she knows Macbeth is ambitious, and wants power, but fears that he is too full of 'the milk of human kindness' to kill Duncan and become King. She begs to be 'unsexed' so she can do it herself, but knows that it will not happen. "...Unsex me here! And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty!" She wishes to lose her feminine characteristics, so that she can kill King Duncan. It seems that Lady Macbeth is more influenced by the witches' prophecies than Macbeth is. She decides to convince Macbeth to seize the crown. She cannot fate Macbeth to kill the king, but she can encourage his free will, and pressure him into it. She bullies him into it, calling him a coward, and telling him that he is less of a man.

In many ways, Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth, she influences his decision in a dramatic way, and contributes to Macbeth's rise, and ultimate fall, as King. The dark colours used in the visual representation show that Macbeth's morals, and values disappeared, thus making his mind a dark place. "And to be more than what you were, you would be so much more the man" "What beast was't then? That made you break this enterprise to me?" These quotes are represented in the visual representation as they represent the pressure Lady Macbeth is putting onto Macbeth. She appeals

to his conscience by telling him that he promised her that he would be King, and now he's broken that promise. Although the witches never told Macbeth that he had to kill Duncan to become King, Lady Macbeth encourages this idea, and pressures Macbeth into it. Macbeth becomes convinced that he should kill King Duncan, after Lady Macbeth assures him that he cannot fail, because Duncan is asleep. Lady Macbeth may have bullied Macbeth into killing King Duncan, but she cannot be blamed for the rise and fall of Macbeth.

He knows what the consequences of his actions will be, but does it anyway, out of his own free will. Macbeth succumbs to the pressure, and influence from Lady Macbeth and the witches. He loses himself momentarily. Macbeth murders King Duncan with a dagger in Act 1, Scene 8. After the murder, we see that Macbeth has a conscience. He expresses guilt and stress about his actions. If he was under the control of fate, he would not feel such guilt as he would know his actions were not of his own making. It is clear that Macbeth realises his actions were made from his own free will. Macbeth allows influences of evil into his life. The witches, and Lady Macbeth push Macbeth towards murder.. The witches tell Macbeth 3 things, he will be thane of Glamis, and Cawdor, and he will be King. The prediction that Macbeth would be thane of Cawdor is true, leading Macbeth to believe he will become King. The witches do suggest that he will become king, but it is Macbeth who produces the idea of murder. The witches never told him that he must kill to become King, or have power.

This is shown in the visual representation through the presence of a witch – and Lady Macbeth. Quotes are included to provide an example of their

pressure/influence on Macbeth. The thought of murder cannot be blamed on the witches, or Lady Macbeth, even though she encouraged it. It was Macbeth who first thought of murdering King Duncan, thus proving that the murder was as a result of his own free will. Although Macbeth is stricken with guilt after murdering Duncan, he does not learn from his mistake. He continues, hiring two murderers to kill Fleance and Banquo, proving that Macbeth is led by his own free will. Was Macbeth a victim of fate? Or did he fall under the pressure of his wife, Lady Macbeth? It is possible that Macbeth already had murderous ambitions, but the witches awakened it. The witches did not instruct Macbeth to murder king Duncan, but motivated him by letting him believe his fate was sealed. Macbeth succumbs to pressure from Lady Macbeth, but his actions were all of his own free will.