

# Who is more to blame for the murder of king duncan?

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In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the tragic hero or the great and virtuous character, Macbeth is destined for downfall as he brings suffering and defeat upon himself. However, this statement can be widely debatable, as many would assume that Lady Macbeth also plays an immense role in the murder of Duncan, the beginning of the tragedy. Early in the play, Macbeth encounters three witches or supernatural beings that foretell his future as the new King of Scotland. Intrigued by their prophecies, Macbeth places faith in their words.

Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth, is instrumental in his ambition, manipulating him, as they both scheme for greatness. Driven by the will to become King, Macbeth commits the murder of the current King Duncan and continuously murders those that suspect him.

He is led to his own destruction as Macduff, a Scottish noble, later kills him. Moreover, although both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth can be considered guilty for the downfall of Macbeth or the tragedy of the play, Macbeth is more to blame as a result of his ruthlessness, his ambitious desires, and his naïve character, which allow him to betray his own conscience.

Macbeth's ambitious character and his insatiable lust for power drives him to change his nature towards evil commencing his tragic downfall. Upon hearing the prophecies of the witches, Macbeth immediately ponders about the predictions and creates an idea to murder the King. Macbeth states that the image of Duncan, the current King's death "doth unfix my hair" (I. ii. 148) meaning that this image was too horrid to even imagine. Early in the play, the witches only predicted that he would become King but it was

Macbeth's ambitious character that takes it to the next step as he now thrives on the will to become King.

Although the King's death was never mentioned in the prophecies, Macbeth plants the idea in his head that the only way for him to become King, as the predictions stated was to kill Duncan, which creates and displays his lust for power. Macbeth also mentions, "let not light see my black and deep desires" (I. iv. 58). This is another example in which he now admits this dark character inside him, demonstrating that his valiant, brave character displayed in the beginning of the play is slowly fading away or deteriorating as his ambitious character takes over.

Furthermore, by virtue of his honest character, Macbeth admits to himself of his "vaulting ambition" as he states, "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'er leaps itself." (I. vii. 25-27) These lines portray that Macbeth has no other reason to kill Duncan except for his strong desires of wanting to become King. Macbeth's character as ambitious appears again as even to the eyes of his wife, is seen clearly as lustful for power. Lady Macbeth states "art not without ambition" proclaiming of his ambitious character.

Macbeth's ambitions is the root cause of his tragic downfall as his lust for power drives him to murder which is the misdeed that places his life at risk and begins his fall from glory. Macbeth as a man with solid morals and a well-established conscience allows himself to be manipulated by other significant characters of the play such as the witches and Lady Macbeth. The witches make two significant appearances in the play, each in which they

use equivocation to confuse and manipulate or spark the characters in the play to lead a life of evil.

Their first appearance was in front of Banquo and Macbeth in which they praise him as they predict his future as the next King. They know that by calling him “ King hereafter” (i. iii. 53) that it will create desires in his heart and they use these quick phrases or these words placed in paradox to manipulate Macbeth to do something that would earn him that title. Macbeth who has a conscience of his own, allows himself to create unwanted desires in his heart knowing well that patience is an attribute that only the noble obtain.

Macbeth, by the end of his first soliloquy, makes the final decision to not murder the King because in his point of view, “ Duncan both born his faculties so meek” (i. vii. 16-17) and it would be injustice to kill a righteous person but later on changes his mind as he allows his conscience to be moved again by his wife, Lady Macbeth who questions his manhood to achieve the power that they would get if they kill Duncan. She states “ If you durst do it, then you were a man” (i. vii. 56-57) as she tries to convince her husband to go along with Duncan’s murder.

Foolishly, Macbeth allows her to change his mind when he could have easily refused proving that he had a mind of his own. The witches near the end of the play manipulate Macbeth once more, but this time it was Macbeth who sought their help therefore getting himself into more trouble. A wise person would make the right decision not to ask the troublesome witches for help, but in Macbeth’s case, he deals with this situation differently as he is again

easily manipulated into developing hubris, which leads to his downfall and his tragic ending.

Therefore, although Macbeth had a conscience of his own and had the right to make his own decisions, he allowed himself to be manipulated by others, which eventually leads to his own death. Macbeth makes further errors in judgment following his misdeed of killing Duncan as he commits other major crimes, which all precipitate his downfall. For example, the murder of his friend, Banquo. Acting completely on his fear that Banquo's sons will become King and himself remaining unrecognized, Macbeth decides to kill both Banquo and his son, Fleance.

Macbeth knew that he was under suspicion for Duncan's murder therefore concludes with these two reasons to kill an innocent man and his son. This is proven through Macbeth's statement made in Act 3. Scene 2. Lines 41-42. Macbeth establishes his fear as he says that he is "full of scorpions in his mind". Therefore, this murder was another factor or crime that leads him directly to his downfall. Another crime that Macbeth commits that is unforgivable was when he murdered a mother and a child.

To take advantage of the situation, Macbeth kills Macduff's family, which was a tragic scene as Macduff's son dies creating pathos in the audience's heart and depicts Macbeth's character as mad or insane. These murders portray his downfall as extreme for all the serious sins Macbeth has committed. Macbeth's desire for power, his ignorance towards his own conscience, and the further crimes he commits portray him as more to blame over Lady Macbeth for his own downfall and death.

Throughout the whole play, although Lady Macbeth may seem as the masculine character and the brain behind the murder of Duncan, she plays a minor part in Macbeth's own desires and the further crimes he independently commits that end in his downfall. Lady Macbeth is a significant character but is not more to blame for every tragic hero brings his fate upon himself. Therefore to conclude, Macbeth is more to blame for his own defeat and suffering.