

Macbeth – tragic hero  
or bloody tyrant?  
essay sample



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In this essay I am going to examine Macbeth's character and decide whether Macbeth was a hero or a Tyrant. Macbeth was both described by people as a hero which is someone in which is admired for nobility, courage, outstanding achievements. He was also described as a tyrant which means a king with too much power who rules in a selfish way and doesn't look after the people who live in his country; tyrants also try to gain power through violence just like Macbeth did.

In this essay I am also going to discuss character and action, dramatic devices and structures, the language ideas and themes also the social and historical settings of the text. This will be by analyzing 4 of the key chapters that show Macbeth's characters change the most. These four scenes will be:

Act 1 Scene 2 -Macbeth's heroic battle.

Act 1 Scene 7- Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan.

Act 3 Scene 1- Macbeth decided to have Banquo murdered.

Act 5 Scene 8 -The showdown with Macduff

During the time in which Shakespeare was writing Macbeth Scotland was an independent country and totally separate to England. Also during this time a king didn't have to be the old king's son because Macbeth was not King Duncan's son, But King Duncan did want to give his eldest son the heir to the throne but Macbeth frames him and his younger son Malcolm and Donalbain. This makes Macbeth the next heir to the throne because he was Duncan's cousin.

The story of Macbeth wasn't written from scratch by Shakespeare it was based on a true story with a few minor changes. Duncan, Macbeth and Edward were all real kings. Duncan I was king of Scotland from 1001 to 1041. One of the generals in his army was a noble called Macbeth. In 1040 Macbeth killed Duncan and became king. In real life Duncan was not a good king and popular like Shakespeare's story.

Macbeth ruled from 1040-1057. Most of his reign was peaceful and successful until eventually one of Duncan's sons Malcolm killed him in a battle who took over to be king next. The king of England at the time was Edward the confessor. When Malcolm invaded Scotland to kill Macbeth, Edward helped him with cash and soldiers.

Shakespeare got most of the facts of Macbeth from one book " chronicle of England Scotland and Ireland." He used both this book and other stories involving plots and violence in Scotland to write his story of Macbeth.

Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in the early 1600s when the king on England was James I. James was also king of Scotland too he ruled there before he came to England in 1603. He was also a descendent of the real Banquo and Shakespeare made his character to be as little like Macbeth as possible, event though the real Banquo helped Macbeth to kill all the people he did.

In the 17th century in the time it was wrote people believed a lot in the super natural they believed in witches and everything they said. This was why Macbeth listened to them, it was only when he spoke to the witches that Macbeth was tempted into actually doing something evil. They say he will become king and immediately he starts to think about killing Duncan, The

witches predictions all came true but they never told Macbeth of the consequences as he would have to pay.

Initial opinion Hero or Tyrant?

My initial opinion on the essay question whether he was a hero or a tyrant is that I think he was a tyrant because he was only a king for being selfish and wanting the throne so he killed Duncan and framed his two sons for it which made Macbeth the next heir to the throne. Throughout the play after he killed Duncan he ruled in a selfish way killing people that had any suspicions that he was the one that killed Duncan including his best friend Banquo and heroes wouldn't be seen to do anything like this.

Act one scene 2

Act 1 Scene 2 is all about when Macbeth was seen to everyone around him as a hero.

The battle was between the king's Scottish army which was led by Duncan and Macbeth, Banquo and the other Scottish lords were on his side. They were in the battle against the rebel army who were led by Macdonwald. The Norwegian army was on his side and so was the Thane of Cawdor. When the battle was close Macdonwald got more reinforcements and Macbeth bravely fought his way to Macdonwald and killed him.

The Norwegian lord then started a new attack and Macbeth and Banquo got reinforcements and fought harder. After the battle that Duncan's army won

Rosse realized that the Thane of Cawdor had been a traitor as he was

supposed to be on Duncan's side but he fought on the side of Macdonwald.  
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Duncan says the Thane of Cawdor must die so sent for him to be killed and he then promoted Macbeth to take his place as a reward for winning the battle. This scene has introduced Macbeth's character as a hero and audiences will think this too. The scene fits into the story because this is what the witches predicted that he would become the Thane of Cawdor and then become king but as one of the witches prophecies came true it could for Macbeth mean the rest of them do to which was why it led Macbeth in the later scenes to kill Duncan. The audience of this play at this point about Macbeth would think that he was loyal to Duncan and that he would fight for him and his country and be a true hero.

#### Act one scene 7

In Act 1 Scene 7 Macbeth talks himself out of the idea of Duncan he thought to himself in his soliloquy that killing Duncan wouldn't be the end of it there was bound to be circumstances he says that on line 5 and goes on to say how it would "jump the life to come" line 7 which means he would forget about going to heaven and that his path to come was going to change. Macbeth was also a true believe in what goes around comes around and he believes that if he kills Duncan someone may also kill him. Another thing that helped Macbeth change his mind of killing him was the fact that Duncan totally trusts Macbeth and is related to him and is a follower. He is also Duncan's host which means that he should be doing everything for his safety and looking after him not murdering him. It says on line 12 "He's here in double trust. First as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed; then as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door not bear the knife myself."

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Macbeth also knows that Duncan was good kind king that was popular to all in his country and that people would be very upset if he died and they would seek for revenge and that whoever was to kill him would be in huge danger.

He had nothing to drive him to murder Duncan other than his ambition and he was aiming to high.

Macbeth thought all of this until Lady Macbeth arrived he tried to explain to her how he didn't think it was right of him to kill Duncan as he was so loyal to him and he was looked upon as a great warrior by the country as well. But Lady Macbeth soon changed Macbeths mind about that though. She wouldn't allow him to back out calling him a coward and how could he possibly be a real man backing out of what he had said he would do and he was obviously to afraid to do it. Macbeth didn't like this at all especially coming from his own wife as he liked to be seen as a brave warrior not just a coward. Under persuasion by his wife he changed his mind and said that he was going to kill King Duncan.

This scene fits in with the rest of the play in the way that it was a start to the tyrant Macbeth agreeing to kill a loyal friend who thinks so highly of him just because his ambitions are set to high in wanting to be a king and soon.

What you can learn about Macbeth's character in this scene is that he is easily persuaded and intimidated by especially his wife lady Macbeth. It also shows that if it wasn't for his wife with even higher ambitions than Macbeth then chances are he would not have killed king Duncan, without her persuasion and her driving him to do it calling him a coward etc. he would still want to be king but would in no way wanted to kill king Duncan.

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I think an audience would respond to Macbeth's character as very vulnerable as he was so easily led but also that he should stick up for himself against his wife and not let her persuade him into doing something that was so wrong.

### Act 3 scene 1

In act 3 scene 1 Macbeth decided that he is going to get his most loyal and best friend Banquo killed. Macbeth didn't need his wife to drive him to do this he never even told her. He felt that he had to do it because he was suffering from paranoia because he was sure that Banquo knew that he had killed King Duncan. This is a huge betrayal to Banquo because he was always there for Macbeth they had one battles together and was seen as loyal friends for him to hire murderers to kill him he couldn't even have the courage to do it himself he hired others to do his dirty work.

At the beginning of the scene it starts off as just Banquo he starts to talk to himself about how the witches prophecies all came true about being the Thane of Cawdor and then now him being a King and he has suspicions that this didn't all happen by chance and that Macbeth had played dirty into how he has got where he is now. Macbeth then enters inviting him to the feast tonight and asking him if he will be out riding tonight.

Banquo tells him that he will but that he will be back Macbeth then checks how far he shall be going and whether he will be taking his son Fleance. This is because he is planning to have them both killed so there is no way that his son could ever be king like the witches prophecies had said that would

happen. Macbeth also shows signs of being paranoid because of the English  
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army “ We hear our blood cousins are bestow’d in England and in Ireland, not confessing their cruel parricide, filling their hearers with strange invention” (Act 3, Scene 1, line 31-34). Macbeth is also hypocritical in this scene because he is planning to have Banquo killed when riding and as he leaves he says to Banquo: “ I wish your horses swift and sure of foot, and so I do commend you to their backs.”

After Banquo leaves Macbeth brings in the murderers. You can tell that from what Macbeth says you no he has spoken to the murderers before, and he’s already convinced them they should hate Banquo. And therefore managed to be persuaded that it was the right thing to do and so agreed to kill Banquo.

This scene fits into the story because it was the one murder in which Macbeth did not have to get edged on by his wife lady Macbeth to do and it was also his loyal friend that people would never have thought he would kill ever at the beginning but because of his paranoia and his turning into a tyrant because of the first murder of Duncan he’s found it easier to be able to decide for someone to be murdered. I think you can learn a lot about Macbeth’s character in this scene because it shows he can betray even more of his friends so they obviously weren’t important to him, he can also murder without being persuaded by Lady Macbeth as well in the scene. Macbeth also didn’t kill Banquo himself he hired murderers to do it for him this shows that he can do more of what he wants now he is a king and can get away with it easier as he can just hire others to do it. It also shows he doesn’t have the courage still to do it himself.



Macbeth's characters changed a lot in the sense that he is more confident in wanting to get people murdered, he does now not need his wife's persuasion instead he now persuades murderers to kill people and do his dirty work for him. He is also much more of a paranoid person he suspects people of knowing he killed Duncan which is making him suffer of paranoia.

I think an audience's response to this would be that he has changed now quite dramatically from the beginning being a well liked brave warrior into a paranoid tyrant that doesn't care at all for friendship and who gets murdered.

#### Act 5 scene 8

Act 5 scene 8 is the scene in which Macbeth gets killed by Macduff.

When Macduff finds Macbeth ready to kill him, Macbeth says that he doesn't want to fight him because he has already killed the rest of his family so he doesn't need to kill him. Macduff didn't give him that option he wants his blood he hates Macbeth so much and just wants to kill him. Macbeth tried to tell him he would be wasting his time because he should kill someone who is vulnerable and women born as he believes he can't be killed because he wasn't. Macduff then tells him he wasn't born naturally and through caesarian so he wasn't born through the womb. Macbeth then says again he doesn't want to fight him; maybe another reason in which Macbeth doesn't want to fight Macduff is because of what the witches said that for him to beware of Macduff.

Macduff then went on to call Macbeth a coward just like his wife called him for not wanting to kill King Duncan near the beginning of the play which we know Macbeth did not like being called at all, Macduff also called him a tyrant which Macbeth wasn't happy about as he likes to be known as a brave warrior. After this Macduff said that if he doesn't fight then he'll be locked up and kept a prisoner. They then fight and Macbeth ends up being killed.

This Scene fits in with the rest of the play because it's the end of Macbeth, after getting many people murdered including his loyal friends and Macduff's family. It was when the army came from England and Macduff wanted to be the one to kill him.

Macbeth's character in this scene came across as very arrogant man that thought he couldn't be killed he thought very highly of himself as well.

I think the audience would respond to his character as he does deserve to get killed for all the things he's done he's been a tyrant and now he is being arrogant about it.

## Conclusion

Macbeth's character changed a lot during the different point of the play; he started as a loyal friend of King Duncan and known to everyone as a brave warrior. This was until he heard the witch's prophecies which said that he would become Thane of Cawdor and then even on to being king, so when Macbeth did get Thane of Cawdor he told Lady Macbeth about what the witches had said and she persuaded Macbeth in to killing Duncan. This shows Macbeth to be easily forced into things and certainly didn't like to be known

as a coward and not a man. In the beginning of act 3 Macbeth decided to kill his best friend Banquo which means he's turning even more into a tyrant because he was meant to be his most loyal friend. By the end of the play Macbeth had got Murderers to kill Macduff's family and he was also very arrogant thinking that Macduff could never kill him which was found out to be wrong.

I still think that Macbeth is a tyrant because he had a lot of power and he used it to his advantage by killing people in order for him to have what he wanted. He killed Duncan so he could make himself king. He killed his most loyal friend Banquo because he was paranoid that he had suspicions that he killed Duncan and he also wanted to kill his son because then the witch's prophecies couldn't come true that his son would become king.

He also had Macduff's family killed because he knew Macduff was in England getting an army together to fight Macbeth so that was his way of getting him back by hiring murderers to do so.