

How does  
shakespeare present  
human weaknesses  
and flaws through  
macbeth



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Throughout Scene 1-4 Macbeth is portrayed as a heroic and valiant man, however with sly and manipulative characteristics brought out by the Witches. The use of structure and language allows Shakespeare to present both Macbeth's flaws and weaknesses to the audience. Structurally scene 1 opens with the witches gathered together reciting plans about meeting Macbeth, establishing an occult malevolence which permeates the play.

The choice of starting with the witches instantly creates a mood of terror and unearthly evil, setting an unnatural and deceptive atmosphere. The third witch says, ' There to meet Macbeth', this intertwining of Macbeth reflects the relationship which will be made between him and the witches, and the evil which is going to be involved in Macbeth's life. The arrangement of meeting place shows their target for the forces of evil, and their thorough planning of making an appointment to lure Macbeth to destruction.

This scene symbolises the witches as a representation for temptation, therefore foreshadowing Macbeth's potential human weakness to be susceptible to temptation, before we are even introduced to Macbeth himself. Shakespeare presents Macbeth's character as brave and fearless in Scene 2; without Macbeth being present. " Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps and fixed his head upon our battlements", this quotation is said by the captain, who is commending Macbeth for defeating the leader of the rebel army.

The use of vivid imagery depicts Macbeth's bravery in slaughtering the enemy, despite the brutality of the death. The gratitude proclaimed by the Captain highlights Macbeth's loyalty and devotion to the King, placing

Macbeth on a pedestal to highlight Macbeth's vast downfall later on in the play. In addition to this the Captain uses a simile, " Like Valour's minion carved out his passage till he faced the slave". Again, this depicts Macbeth as a courageous hero who used his ruthless bravery to make a pathway for himself in battle, highlighting his determination.

Despite this, the word " minion" has connotations of servitude and subjection, suggesting that perhaps Macbeth is only a follower and is incapable of working independently, as though he is a brave slave of the King. These connotations highlight a flaw of Macbeth, as he is an assistant of the King and in some ways only as powerful as a servant. Structurally it is important for Macbeth to be set up as a pinnacle of loyalty for his ' tragic hero' status to ensure, and to highlight the witches' power over humans and their ability to bring forward human weaknesses.

Scene 3 is the first time Shakespeare has Macbeth appear, a time in which both the world of the witches and the world of man collide, making their threat a reality. Additionally, this scene shows the beginning of Macbeth's downfall and temptation, the start of the witches plans to destruct Macbeth. The language of Macbeth has an uncanny ring reminiscent of the witches, " So foul and fair a day I have not seen," this phrase suggests that because his syntax is so close to the witches, he is somehow already intertwined with them, and evil will shortly prevail.

This connection with the witches highlights Macbeth's weakness to temptation, and his malevolence hidden behind his character. The line, " Stay, you imperfect speakers. Tell me more," not only accentuates the

supernatural being of the witches through the word “ imperfect”, but from the word choice of the imperative verbs it indicates Macbeth’s urgency to find out more about the prophecy’s he seeks out, and the involvement with the occult; this emphasises the trap and temptation he has fallen into.

The beginning of Scene 4 shows Macbeth being loyal and noble towards the King, as he explains how Malcolm will be the heir of the throne. “ The service and the loyalty I owe, in owing it, pays itself. ” Here Macbeth demonstrates reverence and devotion to the King, showing his faithfulness and commitment to all of the Kings actions. However, at the end of Scene 4 Macbeth contradicts himself through a small speech he makes aside from the main drama, “ Stars, hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires, the eye wink at the hand.”

The use of light imagery represents Macbeth’s fear of exposing his internal wicked desires, and through the word “ stars” we can depict that this is his true character, a fire he is trying to conceal and hide from others. Macbeth’s hypocrisy is a flaw accentuated by Shakespeare, and shows Macbeths changing from good to evil, due to the actions of the witches and their supernatural capabilities. Additionally, the rhyming couplets present in this short phrase create an inclination reminiscent of the witches, emphasising Macbeth’s connection with them, proving how the witches have lured Macbeth into their trap.

In conclusion, through Scenes 1-4 in Act 1 Shakespeare presents Macbeth’s flaws and weaknesses through structure, language and other characters.

Macbeth is set-up to be a tragic-hero by the heightening of his character in

Scene 2, and the sudden change in his personality in Scene 4 due to the witches' manipulation. The weaknesses explored by Shakespeare intensify the use of supernatural activity, and the downfall of a character that the audience were supportive of, showing how not all people are whom they seem to be.