

Who do you think is responsible for Macbeth's downfall? Philosophy essay



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This essay will explain the factors contributing to Macbeth's downfall and who was responsible for his tragic and fatal downfall. Due to the essence of Macbeth's downfall it would be formidable to blame a specific person for his downfall. The main characters that were at blunder in Macbeth's downfall are The Witches', Lady Macbeth and of course Macbeth himself, on the other hand, who is to blame the most out of the three?

In this literary tragedy, Macbeth who is the prevailing protagonist ends up in a very tragic situation through a series of unfortunate events. In the play Macbeth, by William Shakespeare, the central character, Macbeth, is a good archetype of greed and ambition, however, he has many forces which are supernatural influences, Lady Macbeth, the witches and Macbeth himself.

William Shakespeare's original audiences could respond at different levels in the early 17th century when witchcraft was controversial. Some believe that Shakespeare wrote Macbeth partly as a tribute to King James, already king of Scotland, who became King of England in 1603 after Queen Elizabeth's death. Several aspects of the play have been taken to support mainly these two views; King James made a special study of witchcraft. His book, 'Demonologie' contained beliefs and detailed practices which also appear in 'Macbeth' and in 1605 King James and parliament escaped destruction when the gunpowder plot was discovered; it showed a snake concealed by flowers. In their first scene Lady Macbeth urges her husband into deceitful concealment: 'look like th'innocent flower/but be the serpent under't'. This shows how Macbeth can conceal his evilness and appear to resemble like an innocent flower. This also reflects on how Lady Macbeth strongly influences and overtakes her husband by ordering him and telling him what to do.

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Audiences may have seen the play as a moral exploration, and have identified Macbeth's downfall as a significant theme in the play. Like all play writers, Shakespeare reflected in his plays to the world he knew. Audiences watching Macbeth would recognise aspects of their own time and country in the 1600s. 'Macbeth' draws images from everyday experiences, from customs and preoccupations of Jacobean England. William Shakespeare's Macbeth is not necessarily a play of fate, but rather a tragedy that occurred as a result of uncontrollable greed and malevolence by Macbeth and his wife.

The witches' prophecies; Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's ambition, and his fate, all play a major role in the tragic downfall of Macbeth, which eventually leads to his death. The witches greet Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 3 with three formal 'All hail's, then address Banquo more simply with three 'Hail's, followed by the three paradoxes that compare him with Macbeth; First Witch - "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater". Second Witch - "Not so happy, yet much happier". Third Witch "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none: So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo. When the witches are privately conducting their ceremonies, they chorus the lines, in which, as with most ritual language, whether for good or evil, repetition works strongly in assonance, alliteration and rhyme: "Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble"- This rhyme is used for incantatory effects in the witches' scenes and helps to convey for example the weird ambivalence of horror and absurdity in their language.

The Witches also played an enormous part in Macbeth's downfall, as they were the first characters who dominated Macbeth as they met him, this shows the Witches were determined from the start to influence Macbeth's way in life; they intended to meet with him from the beginning to start the <https://assignbuster.com/who-do-you-thinks-responsible-for-macbeths-downfall-philosophy-essay/>

destruction of Macbeth, "When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won. /There to meet with Macbeth". However, Macbeth has a mind of his own, and he knew what was right for him and what was wrong. Before they approached sticking ideas into his head they had to make sure that he was willing to listen to them so they waited until he was sure of his abilities, therefore they only started manipulating him after the battle against Norway where he had shown his bravery and strength, "As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion. If I say sooth, I must report they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks, so they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe". Macbeth is thought as brave, for bracing himself in battle and finishing with victory. Macbeth had to double his accomplishment whilst in battle. As Macbeth would not normally listen what the Witches have to say, they had to cleverly mix the truth and things that had not happened yet to gain his confidence. They influenced Macbeth's first thoughts of killing Duncan as they first told him that he would be Thane of Cawdor, and he already was but he did not know yet. They then said that he will be King, which would have triggered his thoughts later on when he found out he was Thane of Cawdor. "All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis, / hail to the Thane of Cawdor/, all hail Macbeth that shalt be King hereafter". These prophecies lead Macbeth to think of the possibility of becoming a king. Although in Act 1 when Macbeth first hears the witches' prediction, he flinches and looks anxious; readers know this because Banquo mentions, "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear things that do sound so fair". Macbeth may have flinched because he was already considering murdering Duncan and he feels as though the witches' have read his mind and know what he is thinking, this is because, the first witch mentions, "lesser than Macbeth, and greater", this also shows <https://assignbuster.com/who-do-you-thinks-responsible-for-macbeths-downfall-philosophy-essay/>

that Macbeth seems to be mocked and manipulated, by their uncertainty of their futures.

However, the witches cannot be entirely blamed for Macbeth's downfall, because Macbeth listens, follows and believes in their prediction. Even though Banquo, his loyal friend tries to convince him that the witches are evil and never good. Just after Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth is wondering if he can believe the rest of the witches' prophecies, and Banquo remarks, " oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / the instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray / in deepest consequence". Banquo is warning Macbeth that the witches' could lure him to great evil by telling small truths. Nevertheless, Macbeth has in heart that his friend Banquo is avoiding him from achieving his dreams.

When people have a dilemma they naturally turn to towards people they love and are close to. In Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is greatly responsible for the killing of King Duncan and misleading her husband towards catastrophe. Lady Macbeth comes across as a determined woman who can manipulate Macbeth easily, for example Lady Macbeth says '...like the poor cat i'th'adage'? By saying this she is referring to Macbeth as the cat that would eat fish but is not prepared to get its feet wet. She also says implicitly that Macbeth is not hard enough to kill King Duncan and is not manly enough to play his part in the killing: " It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness to catch the nearest was. Thou wouldst be great; Art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it". In this quotation Lady Macbeth is saying that Macbeth has the ambition as he wants to kill King Duncan and become king but he does not have the wickedness or cruelty to go ahead with it. She

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manipulates his self-esteem by playing with his manliness and his bravery. Lady Macbeth has an influence on Macbeth that lets out his evil side. I do not think that Macbeth is a cold-blooded killer with no feelings; I think that Lady Macbeth brought out that side of him.

Macbeth wants to be manly and Lady Macbeth persuades him to kill Duncan by telling Macbeth he is a coward, "Wouldst thou have that which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, and live a coward in thine own esteem, Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' Like the poor cat I' the adage". If Macbeth was truly brave he would have stood up for what he knew was the right thing to do. Although he does agree to go along with the killing of Duncan, the first steps of the killing were hesitant; Macbeth began to see images before him, "Is this a dagger I see before me"?

Lady Macbeth requests, "Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood"..... The supernatural world will aid her in the hardening of her heart and make it possible for her to carry out her malicious plan. Lady Macbeth wishes to throw out her morality for the sake of gaining a title. With the help of invisible spirits, she wants to make herself able to commit a heinous act of murder to make her dreams of the royal life come true, without having reservations or remorse. She approaches Macbeth with her intent to kill King Duncan. Macbeth, although wanting the prophecy to come true, and become king, lacks the enthusiasm as his wife does, to commit the murder. Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to act on his desires or he will think of himself as a coward.

An example of his new character occurred when he killed King Duncan. After the first murder, killing seemed to be the only solution to keep his reign over the people of Scotland. It was because of these killings and his overbearing ambition that caused him to be overthrown and kill himself. Another force was the prophecies which were told by the witches. If it had not been for the witches telling Macbeth that he was going to be, " hail to thee, Thane of Glamis, / hail to the Thane of Cawdor/, all hail Macbeth that shalt be King hereafter". This quote shows one of the supernatural influences that Macbeth experiences. The first supernatural factors are the witches and their prophecies

Macbeth is a brave hero and a brutal murderer. The first time the audience are introduced to Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 2 he is known as a brave warrior and appears to be a loyal and honourable person. When the sergeant who reports the battle news says, " For brave Macbeth well he deserves that name Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel, Which smoked with bloody execution, Like valour's minion carved out his passage till he faced the slave"; Macbeth is highly praised because of the risk he has taken during the battle, however, his character changes enormously throughout the play by the influences of several other characters. He dies bravely too - he fights to the end even though he knows he will not win, in Act 5 Scene 8. He brutally kills King Duncan in Act 2 Scene 2, but they are signs to show that Macbeth does not want to. He knows that killing Duncan is wrong because he decides not to do it in Act 1 Scene 7, but Lady Macbeth talks him into it. Before Duncan is killed Macbeth feels bad, and after he has done it he feels extremely guilty. In Act 3, when he has Banquo killed, he is a guilty wreck

when Banquo's ghost appears. Macbeth knows that everything he has done is wrong, his feelings and emotions show this.

The main force that was predominately responsible for the downfall of Macbeth was his single flaw. This was his own ambition. Even though his ambition brought him to his height of power, it was also what led him to his downfall. During the play Macbeth's ambition brought him to achieve his goals but as the play evolves, it forced him to face his fate. Macbeth had become so obsessed with becoming King, and remaining powerful, that he became a completely different man. His ambition led him to become greedy, violent, power hungry, and a murderer.

By this time Macbeth senses that the witches' predictions are legitimate, however he feels a disastrous downfall. He perceives this way because he assumed to become king promptly. His high expectations were destroyed. The King's son, Malcolm was appointed heir to the throne. Malcolm had got into the way of Macbeth's ambition to be king. Which shows in act 1 scene 7 when Macbeth is thinking about killing King Duncan he talks about his 'vaulting ambition' in lines 27 - 28: "Vaulting ambition which o'er leaps itself and falls on th'other..." / "The Prince of Cumberland, that is a step On which I must fall or else o'er leap". What Macbeth means in this quotation is that his excessive ambition is like a horse that tries to jump too high and falls on the other side of the fence. Macbeth may realise that killing Duncan may be a bit far-fetched and his plan will not work - the audience will find out what he has done if he is to go through with the murder. The second quote shows that, Macbeth already sees Duncan's son as an obstacle to his destiny. Ominously, Macbeth adds "Stars, hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep

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desires;" Moreover, this shows how eager Macbeth is to hide his dark and bloody desires and give a face of pleasantries.

Macbeth can be ruthless and cold-blooded. He orders Banquo and Macduff to be killed because he does not want anyone to be more powerful than him. This shows that Macbeth is greedy too and is obsessed with power, and reigning as king, but he does not realize that what he is doing to make himself more powerful is actually leading him to a tragic and a fatal downfall, therefore, Macbeth could be blamed for his own disastrous downfall.

Nevertheless, another factor that contributes to Macbeth's downfall is fate. Fate is the power that is believed to control events. Macbeth makes a soliloquy in act 5 scene 5 and says: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing." Macbeth feels humans are nothing more than actors playing a part on a stage, and that they are not really in control of their lives. Macbeth's fortune in the play is a tragic one. Many people believe that fate is what you make out of it. Macbeth started out as a hero and became more popular as he was made Thane of Cawdor. Everything looked positive for his future until he became too greedy and his desire for power overwhelmed him. In act 1 scene 2 Macbeth is given the title 'Thane of Cawdor' but the title first belonged to one who was 'a most disloyal traitor' / '...The merciless Macdonald- Worthy to be a rebel...' (Lines 9 -10) This is one of the significant ironies in the play of "Macbeth". Therefore Macbeth has "disloyal" nature; for this reason Macdonald is crowned with the title.

This may symbolize the future that was to be for Macbeth. Killing Duncan made Macbeth hungrier for power and the more he killed the more power he desired. By doing this Macbeth's fate changed and he no longer had a happy and successful life and future ahead of him; he knew this because, after the first brutal and horrible murder he worryingly says, "Still it cried, 'sleep no more!' to all the house, Glamis hath murdered sleep and therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more." The image of sleep is symbolized by Shakespeare to highlight one of the play's themes, conscience. In reality sleep rests the mind, refreshes the mind and eases a person allowing them to function normally. It is a fact that a person cannot survive without sleep. Therefore, Macbeth as well as Lady Macbeth's characters demonstrate this. They both will never be at peace again and forget what they have done. The conscience permanently keeps them alert and observant. Hence they will ultimately perish.

People and decisions can greatly affect the outcome of a person's life determining whether the outcome will be triumphant or catastrophic. One of them being more to blame: The influential character of Lady Macbeth displaying manipulation towards Macbeth, or Macbeth's own ambitious and insecure nature. There are doubts whether Macbeth's downfall might have displayed more for his own blame. In closer examination, it will become perceptible that Macbeth is more to blame for his downfall.

In conclusion, I believe that Macbeth