

Macbeth: the mind of a murderer

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The Mind of a murderer is one of the most intriguing, malicious, and frightening ideas that can be portrayed by a writer. Authors across the globe have tried to grasp their hands on the line that a murderer crosses when making his first kill. One of the most complex murderers in literatures history is Macbeth of Shakespeare's Macbeth. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is introduced as an ambitious, valiant warrior who cares for both his country and his people. Soon after the beginning of the play, Macbeth is corrupted by the prediction of the 3 witches that he will soon be king. As the play progresses, Macbeth is driven to kill Duncan, and from there he hires 3 murderers to kill Banquo and Macduffs wife, along with everyone in his house. It is a common theory that from the beginning, Macbeth was corrupted and insane, wanting nothing but power. However, Macbeth was never insane- only paranoid after his first kill. Through the course of the play, Macbeth goes from a noble warrior to a paranoid murderer- and this paranoia is what drives him to kill. Macbeth's first step in committing murder is when the witches predict his rule over Cawdor and the thought of killing King Duncan initially crosses his mind. " All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter," (Act 1. sc. 3 line 53), with this prophecy begins Macbeths thoughts of murder. Bewildered yet captivated by these words, Macbeth begs to hear more just before the witches vanish. As soon as Ross informs Macbeth that he is Thane of Cawdor (as the witches predicted), Macbeth begins to think of what he can to help the witches next foretelling come true. Soon after this, Macbeth wonders whether he will have to perform a murder in order to gain the position as king. At this point, Macbeth is captivated by the power offered to him by this new position, and is overcome with the

thirst for power. However, dissimilar to what most would do, Macbeth fixates on this prophecy and it begins to take over his life. This obsession drives him to think murderous thoughts, although he is not determined to go through with them. Once he tells his wife about the witches prophecy, her reaction is much different to his. Lady Macbeth fears that her husband is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (Act 1. sc. 5 line 17) to kill Duncan (a thought that immediately comes to her mind). She even wishes that she were a man so that she could perform the task. Sure enough, Lady Macbeth drives tentative Macbeth to go in for the kill. At this point, Macbeth is eager to test out the waters, and see how far he can go before he falls in. He is curious to see how serious his wife is, but realizes only too late. Macbeth's being forced to commit his first murder begins his murderous rampage and downfall into paranoia. Once Macbeth kills Duncan he begins to take the downhill drop into a state of paranoia. Immediately after the excitement of his first kill wears off, you can see Macbeth's paranoid mind beginning to form. Before killing Duncan, Macbeth realizes that the bad actions that he takes "return to plague the inventor" (Act 1. Sc. 7 Ln 9-10), however he still goes through with the kill, after hearing Lady Macbeth encouraging him. Because Macbeth gives into his wife's wishes to kill Duncan immediately, it shows how close they are and how good their relationship is—but it turns out not to be strong enough to make it through the play. When walking into the king's chamber, to kill Duncan, Macbeth sees the image of a bloody dagger pointed at Duncan and this is the point at which he begins to get paranoid. Here, he questions whether or not the dagger is real, but before he can think about it, he hears the bell toll and goes to kill Duncan. After Macbeth commits the

murder, he sees the chamberlains awake and say a prayer, he tries to pray with them, but finds that the word "amen" is unable to come out of his mouth. At this initial stage, it is possible that this paranoia is just nervousness immediately following the kill that will wear off, but it stays with Macbeth and gets worse through the rest of the play. Macbeth knows what he has done is wrong and as if his conscious is talking to him, as he leaves the scene of the murder, "sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep," echos in his ears as he cringes with fright. When Macbeth hires 3 murderers to make his second kill, he goes into a second state of paranoia in which he will stop at nothing to be safe. As soon as Duncan is found to be dead, Macbeth's mind makes a full turn around and he is full of the paranoia that someone will figure out what he has done. Showing his fear to his wife, he tells her that his mind is "full of scorpions," and that he is afraid that the battle has not been won yet; that they need to continue killing. His wife is taken aback by this, but agrees to be nice to Banquo so that he does not expect the murder to come. So that he does not have to kill again, Macbeth hires three murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance, but Fleance escapes- showing that the witches second prophecy cannot be avoided. At this point, Macbeth is getting used to the fact that in order for him to remain king, the body count will rise. However, Macbeth is okay with this and will kill as much as he needs to, just as long as he can keep the throne to be "safely thus". When Macbeth and Lady Macbeth switch personalities, the third phase of paranoia sets in. In this third stage, Macbeth is driven by power and getting more nervous by the second, and vows to kill as much as necessary to keep the throne safely. After Banquo's kill, Lady Macbeth starts having second

thoughts and begins to RECEDE from center stage and Macbeth takes her place as the most COMPELLING character in the play. Macbeth's newly confident ambition and lack of sympathy is shown in his conversation with Lennox about the troublesome night of Banquo's murder. In this conversation, Lennox is upset and talks about Banquo's death and the BAD weather of the previous night, to which Macbeth can say nothing but, yes, " 'Twas a rough night" (act 2. Sc. 3. Ln. 57) . Because of Macbeth's newfound confidence, he fails to notice right away that MacDuff is casting suspicion on him. Then later, at the banquet, which ends up being the beginning of his DOWNFALL- Macbeth finds that Banquo has been killed, he sees his ghost sitting at the table, showing that his paranoia has been taken to a new level; hallucinations. At this point, he starts to backtrack and get nervous, admitting that he may have to kill more to keep the throne. Macbeth realizes that he can no longer go back, knowing that he is " in blood, stepped in so far that, (he) should wade no more" (Act 3. Sc. 4 Ln 135-136). Macbeth's confidence is boosted once again when the witches tell him that no man born of a woman can harm him. Following this are the three apparitions, the bloody child (symbolizing the way that MacDuff was born), the head in armor (possibly showing the war to come), and the child with the crown (showing that Malcolm will rule Scotland). At this point, Macbeth has no reason to continue his killing massacre, but is possibly just getting more nervous about MacDuff minding him out; hence he sends men to kill everyone in the Macduff house. This is the point where Macbeth is utterly paranoid, with no reason, sending men to kill everyone in sight. Overall, this decision is the one that leads to Macbeth's downfall. When Lady Macbeth kills herself, Macbeth is

knocked back into the reality of what he is doing only to realize that it is too late to go back. Lady Macbeth's eventual suicide is CAUSED when she begins sleepwalking. She sleepwalks with a candle in her hand, talking to herself about the murders and then VIGEROUSLY washes her hands, as if trying to cleanse herself of the deed. We do not hear of Lady Macbeth after this until she kills herself. When Macbeth finds that his wife is dead, he tries to let it go but it upsets him and he realizes that he has nothing left. He insists that life is "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." Now, Macbeth realizes that his future is doomed, for he knows that Birnam Wood is moving and that his death is inevitable. However, Macbeth stands up for himself and although contemplating suicide, he decides it best to die with honor in war. As a whole, Macbeth realizes everything that he has done wrong only to laste to go back, but still fights to the end. Macbeth's killing rampage is brought on by his paranoia of being discovered as a killer. In the beginning, Macbeth is almost forced to commit murder after the witches predict his rule over Scotland, and his wife convinces him that killing Duncan is a good idea. After his first kill, however, Macbeth realizes that he is not cut out for doing such things, and begins the downhill drop to paranoia. Next, he hires murderers to perform his next kill which show that he is getting used to the idea of killing; at this point he is willing to do anything as long as he is safe. Macbeth's 4th stage in paranoia is when he and his wife switch personalities and he is so ambitious that he does not even realize the simple things going on around him that give him hints as to Macduff's suspecting him. Because he is feeling

so ambitious, he sends killers to do in the entire Macduff household and this decision is what ultimately leads to his downfall. Then, when Lady Macbeth kills herself, Macbeth is knocked back into the reality of what he is doing only to realize that it is too late to go back. At this point, he knows that he is going to die but wants to do so putting up a fight; bravely and courageously. Macbeth's strength RETURNS in the end, but Shakespeare's MORAL ending leaves him in a situation in which it is impossible to survive.