

# Macbeth's state of mind essay sample



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Macbeth's state of mind changes drastically throughout the play, this is shown most evidently through the soliloquys. There are references to world order in each of the soliloquys I will be exploring, which reinforces the character of Macbeth and the way in which an audience sees him.

In Act I scene VII, Macbeth seems quite stable in his mind, this could be because he is able to find reasons for his thinking, one of them being his vaulting ambition. It states, " I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself and falls on th'other." This suggests that if it wasn't for his ambition motivating him, Macbeth would not go through with what he is intending to do. He also criticizes ambition, saying that it forces people to rush into things, causing unwanted circumstances. This shows that he doesn't agree with the idea of killing Duncan, that he thinks its wrong, and that his only reason for even thinking about it, is his ambition.

In this particular soliloquy, he appears to be reasoning with himself, weighing up both outcomes, whether he is to kill Duncan, or if he should not. It says, " This even-handed justice commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice to our own lips." By using the word ' justice', it suggests that whatever Macbeth does to Duncan, will eventually come to fall on himself, because justice is unbiased, equal to everyone. This is one of the main reasons why Macbeth is pondering whether to kill Duncan, because if justice catches up with Macbeth in the end, then what will be the point of killing him?

In Act II scene I, the structure of the soliloquy emphasizes the ascent from uncertainty to complete confidence in his decision to kill Duncan. The use of

unstressed syllables at the end of the lines in the first half of the soliloquy, gives feminine endings, which shows that Macbeth is uncertain, because of him being male. However in the bottom half of the soliloquy, he starts to use masculine endings, with each line ending in a stressed syllable, putting emphasis on the last word, which shows he has confidence in what he is saying.

Although Macbeth seems more confident in this soliloquy, his mind doesn't appear to be as sane as it was before he made the decision to kill Duncan. The hallucination of the dagger demonstrates this. For example, "A dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?" Macbeth calls his brain 'heat oppressed', this shows that even he thinks his brain is fevered, not right. He feels his mind is playing tricks on him, perhaps because of the guilt he is experiencing from what he is about to do. Also Macbeth could be thinking that the dagger is a sign, something which is telling him to go on and do the deed, encouraging him, making his decision for him; "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going". This suggests he is blaming the dagger, but not entirely, because he was going that way anyway.

The soliloquy in Act III scene I, is the final turning point for Macbeth. He started off by using his ambition as an excuse for his actions, but by this time he is ready to kill anyone and anything in his way, in order to stay on the throne. In this soliloquy, he talks of how him killing Duncan will ultimately be wasted, if he has no one to hand down the throne to. He therefore sees Banquo and his sons as a threat. For instance, "For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind; for them the gracious Duncan have I murdered." This shows

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that he feels he has not only disturbed the order of the world and interfered with fate (he did not agree with fate's choice of king), but he has disturbed his inner peace, his sanity, only for Banquo and his sons. Everything he has done, everything he has risked was for another's gain, and Macbeth in the meantime has destroyed himself. He also refers to Duncan as 'gracious', which suggests that Macbeth still respects him and is now possibly regretting killing him, but not because he feels guilty, but for fear that he will not benefit from it.

Macbeth sees Banquo as a threat to him, not only because "He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor to act in safety", but because of the witches prophecy. The witchcraft is a very important aspect in this soliloquy, because Macbeth is unnerved by them and of what they predict. If it weren't for their prophecy, Macbeth would have not have known to fear Banquo. He says, "Then, prophetlike, they hailed him father to a line of kings, upon my head they placed a fruitless crown." Perhaps Macbeth thinks the witches are hypocritical, for they told Banquo he was next in line for the throne, but then gave the crown to Macbeth. He sees this as 'fruitless', because he feels there is no point in giving him the throne, when he has no heir to pass it on to.

In the soliloquy of Act V scene V, we see Macbeth lose control completely as he discovers his wife's suicide, born from her guilty conscience. He comes to a conclusion that life is pointless, for everyone dies in the end, most of us, like him, leaving no mark on the world. There is a semantic field throughout, of life representing life, and the darkness representing death; "All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to a dusky death. Out, out, brief

candle, life's but a walking shadow." By referring to a 'brief candle' Macbeth shows how delicate life is, how it can be extinguished so carelessly. Also the light of a candle flickers, which could refer to life, sometimes being good, sometimes bad. This implication suggests that Macbeth feels that life is monotonous, repetitive, yet insignificant, perhaps he believes humans only exist to carry on the evolution, and this metaphor reiterates that.

Overall Macbeth is very selfish throughout the play, and only cares what is to become of him, even when his wife dies, he thinks only of how he must thwart his enemies. The last soliloquy I have looked at, represents what the meaning of life is to Macbeth and shows most effectively what kind He is fully disturbed in his mind by that point, yet what he speaks of has never seemed more relevant. At the start it was his ambition that drove him, where as towards the end it was more of his desire to survive.