
How the Character of Macbeth Developed Throughout Shakespeare's Macbeth

Discuss how Shakespeare develops his title character in Macbeth. Consider language, form, structure and the plays context in your response.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Macbeth is presented to us at the start of the play as the epitome of a brave and courageous man, this however changes as we progress through the play, towards the end, Macbeth's tragic demise leaves him a broken man full of desire and nihilism.

In the early scenes of the play, Macbeth is depicted as a noble, bold, daring and loyal character. Shakespeare achieves making the audience experience this admiration by using a well-respected character, the captain, to report of Macbeth's victory against the Norwegians. This adds a more heroic aura to it, as if it is a myth or a legend, but also lets the audience's imagination run wild. It leaves them to imagine every minute detail of what occurred. In act 1.2, Shakespeare refers to Macbeth as 'valour's minion,' by personifying the noun 'valour,' he is effectively saying that Macbeth is 'bravery's' favourite. The euphemism of 'minion' suggests to the audience that it is obligatory for Macbeth to carry out these actions. Macbeth's heroic characteristics are most apparent in the simile of 'As sparrows eagles or hare the lion,' this has significance because Shakespeare is comparing an inferior animal to a beast, the lion. It has a deeper symbolic meaning, suggesting to the audience that Macbeth is the lion and the Norwegians are the eagle and how much stronger and overpowering Macbeth is, this fuels the audience's minds with what they already know about Macbeth. The use of the comma (pause) in this quotation is used to let the audience appreciate the title of which Macbeth has at this stage in the play, and how he is the most important and superior character at this moment in time. By the end of act 1.2 and soon into 1.3 Macbeth's ambition starts to become clear. Macbeth's decline starts to commence in act 1.3, he becomes anxious and subservient as devious, conniving attempt to taunt him into committing a terrible deed, as well as this, and Macbeth's ambition starts to consume him. As we progress through this act, Macbeth starts to challenge the witches and their doings. He says 'why... dress me in borrow'd robes,' visually, the past tense verb suggests to the audience that the clothes in which he is wearing do not belong to him, whereas symbolically the title which he possesses is borrowed. This quotation further suggests that 'borrow'd robes' also may mean that he is mocking the monarchy which he is trying to possess as the reign he may acquire will not be appointed by god and be very temporary. He's disrupting the Great Chain of Being and going against his nature, this causes him to become conflicted between right and wrong.

By act 1.7, the spell like formation of the witches' passage at the start of 1.3 has hypnotic and poetic connotations, this leads to Macbeth's hematoma as his overwhelming ambition devours him. Shakespeare writes of this ambition throughout the play, the most apparent aspect which Macbeth says is 'If it were done... it were done quickly.' Shakespeare's use of anaphora here interestingly emphasises Macbeth's sheer crave for power. The adverb 'quickly' also credits the hematoma idea, and the fact that Macbeth has fallen from his grace. What once was a well-respected and noble character has stooped to such a low level, not even himself feels comfortable. Macbeth performs a cautious train of thought when he says 'trammel up the consequence.' This metaphor and vivid use of imagery suggests Macbeth has considered the

outcomes and repercussions of killing Duncan – he's trying to find the deciding factor. The verb 'trammel' also has connotations of gathering everything in its path, meaning Macbeth is prepared to absolve himself of the consequences and get rid of anyone who stands in his way. This causes the audience to disapprove of Macbeth's strategy to become king as he is dismantling the Great Chain of Being. During Macbeth's decline, the audience's tolerance starts to decrease, less and less. Macbeth uses a 1st person plural to say 'we teach... bloody instructions.' The word 'instructions' tells the audience that it is obligatory for Macbeth to carry out this deed, against his better knowledge and of what may be an outcome of following these so called instructions – foreshadowing what may happen to Macbeth in the future. 'Bloody' gruesome imagery describes the outcome of these dreadful actions. Even though he sees and knows all of these factors his ambition is so awesome that he can't or won't stop. Towards the middle of act 1.7 Lady Macbeth (Macbeth's wife) starts to poison his ear. The most apparent line which Lady Macbeth says to taunt him is 'and dash'd the brains out,' the is large significance to this quotation as Shakespeare uses violent and gruesome imagery to portray the extent that lady Macbeth would go to in order to influence Macbeth into killing their king. It also shows how power-hungry, ruthless and a sense of masculinity due to her resilience through this situation. This makes the audience pity her and Macbeth as she has turned a fool for power, as well as being rather astonished as it would be a young baby which Lady Macbeth would be killing.

By act 4.1 Shakespeare portrays Macbeth's character as one of an arrogant, hubristic and dismissive one, His desire and ambition fulfils to a level, so much that irrationality starts to creep into his train of thought. This ambition corrupts and destroys him. To get to where Macbeth wants to be (the throne) he has to kill Duncan, which is breaking the Great Chain of Being. Since in Jacobean times, they thought this chain was created by God, this disruption would cause natural disasters. 'Sear mine eye-balls,' this quotation has very vivid imagery. The word 'sear' has connotations of immense pain and suffering, its almost as if the light is so painful that Macbeth can't bear to look at it. This light Shakespeare speaks of is Macbeth's hallucination of Banquo induced by the witches. This has occurred in order to remind Macbeth of what he has done and fill him with guilt but also to reiterate to him that he nor his bloodline will become king but Banquo's will. After seeing this vision Macbeth starts to harangue the witches – 'filthy hags,' as he doesn't like what he sees. This portrays an important aspect. Macbeth was imprudent enough to put his trust in creatures with the ugly faces of supernatural powers, which tells the reader that he doesn't have much self confidence due to other characters cursing him throughout the play or he is simply moronic that he'll confide in anything that promises to get him what he wants.

Once the play progresses to act 5.5, the audience see Macbeth's nihilistic characteristics come through more discernible. Due to Lady Macbeth's death, he becomes shell shocked and emotionless. Macbeth starts to muse on life and questions his and everyone else's purpose in it. On line 15 – 'wherefore was that cry,' suggests apathy, Macbeth is unresponsive to the cries of help, distress or danger. This is the cry of Lady Macbeth as she dies. What Macbeth doesn't seem to see is that Lady Macbeth had died too soon, this is a consequence of a combination of his and her actions due to their greed for power and disruption of the Great Chain of Being. Macbeth starts to speak wearily when saying 'tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,' the use of polysyndeton slows down the pace of the play, as the does the repetition of 'tomorrow', this is a reflection of what Macbeth thinks of life. Shakespeare also uses this repetition to draw the reader to focus on a minor detail; 'tomorrow,' perhaps foreshadowing what may happen in the near future to those who have challenged God and his Great Chain Of Being.

To conclude, the recurring factor throughout the play is that Macbeth is contemplating whether or not to kill Duncan and is at conflict with himself whilst the audience are deciding whether or not to side with him. There are also deceitful individuals working with and against him simultaneously. Also, the Elizabethan idea of the Great Chain of Being has no place for the supernatural, therefore suggesting that they have a great effect on the Godly order of things as both Macbeth and the witches carry destruction and chaos. Macbeth's conflict finally comes to a halt when Lady Macbeth dies as he has lost his 'fuel for becoming king and starts to question the soul reason of what he was doing.

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