

SOME THEMES AND CHARACTERS PORTRAYED IN THE PLAY, “MACBETH”

MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK MACBETH

(A) Appearances versus Deceptive / Appearance versus Reality.

The witches echo fair is foul and foul is fair meaning that what seems to be is not what actually is. This theme is portrayed through

- a. Duncan who initially considers Macdonald the former Thane of Cawdor and Macbeth the present Thane of Cawdor as being faithful yet they both later rise against him.
- b. Duncan and Banquo praise the appearance of Inverness Macbeth's castle to have pleasant vicinity yet Macbeth is inside it with his wife planning for his murder.
- c. Lady Macbeth tells her husband to look like an innocent flower but be a serpent under it when Duncan goes there for the feast.
- d. Malcolm, too, tells the English soldiers to hide themselves with Birnam Wood so that Macbeth should not be aware of how many soldiers are there.
- e. Malcolm also tells Macduff that angels are righteous (bright) though the brightest (Satan) fell.

(XII) Gender and aggression / cruelty and gender

- a. The source of the whole chaos in the play is the witches who are also called the weird sisters. This implies that the feminine gender is more aggressive than the masculine.
- b. Lady Macbeth as a woman also influences her husband a lot to kill Duncan. This also portrays the same implication about the feminine gender either to be crueler or aggressive.
- c. On the other hand, though, men are also deemed to be crueler and aggressive than women because Lady Macbeth prays to the spirits to unsex her by the time she wants to kill Duncan, to remove from her the feminine traits possibly to be replaced by masculine ones. This gives us an implication that men are more aggressive than women.

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d. Macbeth also asks the murderers if they are really men who can carry out a killing action. This shows that men are above women in terms of cruelty.

e. Malcolm also tells Macduff to dispute the case about his family's death like a man and tells him to prepare a medicine that can cure their grief which is the revenge. This means that men are more aggressive than women.

f. More importantly, though, the witches seem to be transgender because they also look like men since they have beards meaning that it is difficult to tell if they are women or men. This finally, shows that aggressiveness and cruelty falls on both genders. sound so fair?|| It is due to his ambition to become a king that forces him to kill King Duncan.

(D) Betrayal

There are several incidents where the characters betray one another, such as;

a. The first Thane of Cawdor betrays Duncan by plotting an inversion against his king.

b. Macbeth betrays Duncan by rising against him and up to the extent of killing him.

c. Macbeth also betrays Banquo his friend his close friend. Macbeth kills Banquo by using the murderers to prevent him from being the root of kings. However, he is not successful because Fleance, his son flees.

d. The witches also betray Macbeth by the use of equivocation (half-truth) promises.

e. He is told that he is going to be a Thane of Cawdor and king hereafter which are fulfilled and later he is

f. told that no man born of a woman shall defeat him until Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane, yet he is later defeated by Macduff.

g. Macbeth betrays his family by leaving them in Scotland where they are not safe and indeed the wife and children are killed by the cruel Macbeth.

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(IX) Fate versus free will

Fate refers to such events that occur over which people do not have control. Free will, on the other hand, refers to such ability people have over certain things thus, they can cause things to happen the way they want.

People use their own effort to achieve what they want, for instance:

- a. Macbeth becomes a Thane of Cawdor by fate since he just fights for his country not to achieve something at the end. However, we see that at the end he is given the position of a Thane of Cawdor. The position in other words, comes automatically.
- b. Contrary to this, he becomes a King of Scotland by free will. He puts his effort in killing King Duncan for him to become a king because that is what he wants.
- c. His death is due to free will because he chooses to commit a crime of killing a king and Macduff's family which angers Macduff a lot. consequently, Macduff kills him. Besides, he is given a chance by Macduff that he should surrender so that he should be used for shows. People would come and pay to see him as tyrant.

(B) Good versus evil / good over evil / order versus disorder / light versus darkness.

Duncan and Malcolm represent a harmonious, ordered or God fearing society, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the witches on the other hand, represent evil or darkness. The play initially presents Macbeth as a dutiful servant and later a rebellious character (usurper) who gets the kingship by crooks but later he is defeated. This shows that man is good but is prone to temptations of evil.

(C) Uncontrolled ambition

Macbeth murders King Duncan because both he and Lady Macbeth have uncontrolled ambition for leadership. We know that he wants to be a king because once the witches tell him that he is going to be a king, he becomes silent until

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Banquo asks him why he seem to fear things that sound so good. This shows that he is surprised as how the witches come to know his ambitions.

(V) Hypocrisy

Macbeth and his wife are supposed to protect and take care of Duncan their visitor but instead Macbeth bears the knife himself raising it against his own visitor instead of shutting the door against the enemy of him. This is total hypocrisy because they do contrary to what is expected of them.

(VI) Futility of crime / retribution / consequences of what we do / guilty conscious.

a. Macbeth kills Duncan, Banquo, Macduff's wife and children thinking that he will triumph over this. Contrary to his expectation, he is also killed by Macduff in revenge of his family's death. He does not progress well after killing Duncan no wonder he is troubled by Banquo's ghost at the banquet.

b. Lady Macbeth is also not spared as she also faces the consequences of her part in the crimes. Firstly, she suffers the sleep walking disease and later commits suicide.

(VII) Greed

a. Macbeth commits the crimes because of greed for leadership. He kills Duncan for him to be a king.

b. Later he also kills Banquo to prevent him from being the father of kings. He does all this out of greed; he just wants him and him alone to be the leader not anyone else.

(VIII) Incalculability of evil

Macbeth commits one crime, that of killing King Duncan thinking that this will be the only crime. Contrary to this, he feels not to be safe as such he kills Banquo. Macbeth says that to be thus is nothing but to be safely thus'. Here he means that to be just a king is useless but to be a king who is safe. He thinks that

Banquo is a threat to him because he can suspect him to have murdered King Duncan to have the kingship.

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This is so because they were together by the time the witches prophesied to Macbeth that he will be a king.

Consequently, he commits one crime after the other. One crime leads to the other.

(X) Superstitions and omens

a. The play includes witches which represent the darkness. Macbeth believes in them and he even consults them to foretell his destiny.

b. People also believe that the day Duncan is murdered strange events occur such as his own horses eating one another, darkness during the day and that an owl which is a weak bird kills a falcon which is a strong bird.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN MACBETH

(A) MACBETH

(i) Ambitious

Macbeth has an ambition to become a king. This is seen soon after the witches tell him that he is going to be a Thane of Cawdor and later a king of Scotland. He is amazed as to how the witches know his ambitious thoughts. This is why Banquo asks him, —Why do you start (seem amazed) and seem to fear things that do sound so fair? It is due to his ambition to become a king that forces him to kill King Duncan.

(ii) Brave and courageous

His brevity and courage are portrayed through the way he fights in the battle against Macdonald the former Thane of Cawdor. The bloody captain reports to Duncan that Macbeth deserves his name because he fought with valour up to the extent that his sword smoked with blood of those people he killed in the battle. No wonder, therefore that he unseamed (cut open) Macdonald from the navel to the chaps (jaw).

(iii) Noble

Macbeth is admired by fellow actors because of his qualities of being brave especially in the first scene where he fights against Macdonald. Even Duncan calls

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him ‘valiant cousin’. Meaning he remained brave and courageous even when the battle became tough. He is initially an honest man. This is why Duncan entrusts him with the two positions, first as the Thane of Glamis and next as Thane of Cawdor. No wonder therefore that Duncan says that ‘What he Macdonald hath lost noble Macbeth hath won’.

(iv) Selfish

He does not want anyone to be a king but him alone. This is portrayed through the murder of Duncan. Banquo is also killed on the same grounds to prevent his son Fleance to be a king with reference to the prophecies made by the witches as they said that Banquo will be the root of kings.

(v) Cruel and violent

He violently kills innocent Macduff’s wife and children out of cruelty. Employing murderers to kill Banquo is also a sign of being cruel. Worse still he kills his king in his own house despite being a relative. All these incidents reveal nothing but cruelty and violence in him.

(vi) Disloyal

He is supposed to be loyal to king Duncan as a leader, let alone his cousin. On the contrary, he chooses to rise against him by killing him. He does this although he recognizes how virtuous Duncan is. Macbeth tells us that he firstly fails to kill him because he has discharged his duties as a king so well and we all know that he has just being given another post as a Thane of Cawdor.

(vii) Superstitious

He greatly believes in what the witches say that he will be a Thane of Cawdor and a king hereafter. This is also portrayed through his behaviour of consulting the weird sisters to enquire about his destiny after being troubled by Banquo’s ghost at the banquet.

(viii) Loving

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He sends a letter to his wife informing her about the promotion to the position of a Thane of Cawdor and that Duncan shall feast at their house. In this letter, he calls his wife his dearest partner of greatness.

(ix) Patriotic

He initially seems to be patriotic to his country Scotland. This is seen when he fights Macdonald the former Thane of Cawdor who rises against Scotland. He does not join in the troops of Macdonald.

(B) LADY MACBETH

(i) Ambitious

She has an ambition of becoming a queen. We see this when she tells her husband how she feels after reading the letter. She says ‘Thy letter has transported me beyond this ignorant present and I feel now the future in the instant.’ This means that she is not thinking about the current position of a Thane of Cawdor but of that which is coming of being a queen once Macbeth becomes a king.

(ii) Influential / persuasive/ manipulative

She is the one who influences Macbeth to kill King Duncan although Macbeth says that they will proceed no further in this business. Macbeth thinks that it is not right to kill King Duncan because of four reasons: he is a kinsman, he is a subject under Duncan’s rule, a host of Duncan and that Duncan has ruled very well seen in his recent promotion to the position of a Thane of Cawdor. Despite all these reasons Macbeth kills Duncan due to his wife’s persuasion.

(iii) Superstitious

She prays to the spirits to come and unsex (remove from her feminine feelings), to come to her breasts to take her milk for gall and for thick night to come so that she should not see and feel sorry for Duncan’s murder.

(iv) Loving

She always comes in to defend Macbeth. This is seen when she fakes fainting by the time Macduff is asking him why he has killed the guards. At the banquet too, she tells the lords and other thanes not to speak to Macbeth to avoid worsening his

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fits and she even tells them that her husband has suffering such a disease from young age yet she does this to prevent Macbeth from revealing that he and his wife are the ones who killed Duncan. She even commands them to take leave after the reappearance of Banquo's ghost which she cannot see.

(v) Heartless / cruel

She goes on with the murder despite Duncan having brought her a gift of diamond. She tells Macbeth that he should leave that night's business into her dispatch (hands).

(vi) Cunning / clever

She tells her husband that they should look like an innocent flower but be the serpent under it and that Duncan should be provided for (fed) so that he should not realize that they have planned something bad for him. She is also the one who brings back the daggers to the crime scene and gild (smear) the faces of the guards with Duncan's blood so that people should suspect them to have murdered the king.

(vii) Courageous

Despite being a woman, Lady Macbeth is the one who plans everything about Duncan's murder. She is also courageous because she takes the daggers back to the crime scene, a thing which her husband fails to undertake.

(viii) Coward

She fails to kill King Duncan which is contrary to what she told her husband to live everything in her hands. She gives a lame excuse that she fails to carry out the deed because Duncan resembles her father in sleep.

(C) DUNCAN

(i) Noble

This is portrayed through Macbeth who says that he does not want to kill him because ‘_he hath borne his faculties so meek and hath been so clear in his great office’. This means that Duncan was an admirable leader because he discharged his duties so well.

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(ii) Trust worthy

Many of his subjects trust him. This is because of the way he performs his duties.

(ii) Naive

He lacks insight into human character. He trusted in the first and second Thane of Cawdor very much yet they both later rise against him. When talking of Macdonald, the former thane of Cawdor he admits by saying that ‘There is no art to find the minds construction in the face’ meaning that it is difficult to know someone’s mind just by looking at the face.

(iii) Considerate

Duncan gives positions to deserving people. This is clearly portrayed through the way Macbeth is awarded another title of Thane of Cawdor because he fights so bravely that he defeats Macdonald.

(iv) Just

Duncan rules out that the former Thane of Cawdor be executed because he rises against the country. Duncan also chooses Malcolm as the heir to the throne which shows that he is not selfish.

(D) MACDUFF

(i) Just / patriotic

His justice and patriotism are seen when he aligned himself to Malcolm the rightful heir to the throne not Macbeth the tyrant. He fights to the side of Malcolm.

(ii) Loyal / dutiful

He comes to wake King Duncan up at Macbeth’s castle, although he is late by an hour

(iii) Courageous

He fights with Macbeth yet he is quite aware of Macbeth’s fighting ability in the battle. He fights up to the extent that Macbeth is killed.

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(iv) Irresponsible

He runs away to England while leaving the wife and children in Scotland where they are not safe. He is quite aware that Macbeth can disturb his family's peace. This is seen in act 4 scene 3 where he asks Ross that _ ‘the tyrant has not battered at their peace?’

(v) Noble

He is also admired by other characters due to his qualities that he fights for Malcolm. Menteith in act 5, scene 2 line 1 calls him as the _good Macduff. ‘This is why Caithness, Lennox, and Angus join Malcolm's army following what Macduff has done.

(vi) He is not superstitious

Macduff continues fighting with Macbeth despite being told that Macbeth was told by the witches that he cannot be defeated by a man born of a woman.

(E) LADY MACDUFF

(i) Insensitive

She keeps on questioning the messenger on what wrong she has done to be killed by Macbeth. This delay I what results into her death and the children. She was supposed to be calculative enough as she is aware that her husband has runaway because of the same person Macbeth. She just needed to take hid of the advice and flee with the children.

(ii) Hopeless

She tells the murderers that her husband is hiding in a place which is not holy (unsanctified) meaning not protected by God. She also tells her son that his father is dead.

(ii) Emotional

She tells Ross that her husband has fled leaving them behind because of fear and that he does not love them. She also tells him that her son has a father yet he is

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fatherless. This she does out of emotions. She is so emotional because she feels not to be safe without her husband.

(F) MACDUFF’S SON

(i) Wise

He tells his mother that his father is not dead because had it been so then his mother would weep (morn). He also answers his mother that without a father he can live just the same way birds do with what he gets.

(ii) Inquisitive

He wants to know more from his mother if his father is really a traitor.

(iii) Courageous

He courageously tells the murderers that they are liars in their speech that his father is treacherous. He even scorns one of the murderers as shag-haired villain.

iv. Vengeful

He does not want anyone to kill except him. Macbeth kills Macduff’s wife and Macbeth wants to revenge.

(G) MALCOLM

(i) Sensitive

Soon after his father’s murder, he and his brother Donalbain flee to Scotland and Ireland respectively in fear of being killed by Macbeth. This means that he is quite aware that Macbeth can also kill him and his younger brother. This is portrayed through his speech that “this murderous shaft that’s shot hath not yet lighted.... Let us not be dainty of leave-taking”.

(ii) Courageous

He fights with Macbeth yet he is aware that he is good in battle. This he does only out of courage. Had it been that he is not courageous he would not fight against Macbeth the great warrior.

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(ii) Inquisitive

He tried to enquire from Lennox and Macduff who murders his father. This he does with an aim to know more information about the murderer.

(iv) Wise

He requests King Edward the Confessor to offer him 10000 soldiers to help him fight against Macbeth back in Scotland. His wisdom is also seen when he tests Macduff's loyalty by telling him that he cannot be a better leader than Macbeth. This he does on the grounds that Macduff is unharmed by the time he goes to England and that Macduff loved Macbeth so much.

(v) Just

Soon after being a king he promises that some lords will be promoted to the position of earls. He also promises to do the right thing at the right time as he says ‘we will perform in measure time and place’.

(H) BANQUO

(i) Superstitious

He asks the witches also to prophesize about himself. This means that he believes in the witches. Besides, he also tells his son Fleance that he had a bad dream on the day he is guarding King Duncan at Macbeth's castle.

(ii) Inquisitive

He pleads with the witches to tell him about his future with reference to what the witches tell Macbeth. Thus, he wants to know more about his destiny.

(iii) Brave / courageous

The report by the bloody captain to Duncan reveals that Banquo alongside Macbeth fights so bravely and courageously. This is why they manage to defeat Macdonald the traitor because as the bloody captain reports ‘they doubly (as a pair) redoubled strokes upon the foe’.

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(iv) He lacks insight into human character/ insensitive

He was together with Macbeth when the witches made their prophecies to Macbeth but he does not run away to safeguard his life. As a result, he is killed, yet he is the first one to suspect Macbeth to have murdered Duncan because as in act 3, scene 2 line 1 he says “Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all as the wretched women promised, and I fear thou played'st most foully for't”.

(v) Loyal / patriotic

He is loyal to both Duncan and Macbeth. He is patriotic to the country in the sense that he fights together with Macbeth against Macdonald the former Thane of Cawdor. He is also loyal to Macbeth. This is portrayed through his acceptance to attend the banquet at Macbeth's castle.

(vi) Wise

He does not fully believe in the witches' prophecies. This is seen when he does not take any action to make sure that the prophecies are fulfilled as Macbeth does. He is wise because he knows that if it is really true that he is going to be root of kings then there is no need to do something for it to be fulfilled but to let it happen by chance.

vii) Opportunist

He finds an opportunity to ask the witches about his own destiny after they prophesied about Macbeth.

(viii) Caring

He gives his son a dagger and a torch for his protection the day they guard Duncan at Macbeth's castle. He also tells his son Fleance to flee by the time he is being killed by the murderers.