

## Write about Macbeth and the way he is presented in the play [25]

Macbeth acts as the play's protagonist, and like other Shakespearean plays, the narrative centres around his character and his fatal flaw: ambition. Shakespeare first introduces Macbeth through other character's perceptions, *'Brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name'* *'Worthy gentleman!'* We are made aware of his title and reputation, clearly one of high regard and esteem shown through the use of such complimentary language and positive adjectives including 'brave' and 'worthy'. Shakespeare informs our own opinions of Macbeth as the archetypal 'hero', and yet he also foreshadows the violence within him, *'bathe in reeking wounds'*. Given that such violence occurs as an act of loyalty, the audience is unaware of its ominous connotations at the beginning of the play.

Once Macbeth is made aware of the witches' prophecies, their tempting of his ambition begins to raise doubts in a once clear and noble mind, *'Cannot be good, cannot be ill'*. And yet, unlike the sceptical Banquo, Macbeth is receptive to their message of success and personal gain, *'chance may crown me without my stir'*. The witches appeal to his fatal flaw of ambition, as well as conjure up his deepest and darkest desires. Macbeth allows himself to be manipulated *'without my stir'*, immediately drifting away from the once assertive and much-celebrated soldier in Duncan's army.

Upon realising that *'fate'* will not merely hand him the crown, Macbeth's mind begins to fill with *'imperfect'* thoughts like that of the *'imperfect speakers'*, *'Let not light see my black and deep desires'*. All notions of Macbeth's immovable loyalty appear to be shattered, as Shakespeare alludes to Lady Macbeth's later persuasion of *'look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it'*. Macbeth now conceals *'black and deep desires'* and clearly possesses deceitful and treacherous ideas, much like that of the biblical *'serpent'*.

Prior to Duncan's murder however, Shakespeare offers a slight sense of Macbeth's earlier rational mind. His inner turmoil is once again demonstrated through the use of a soliloquy, an internal monologue, in which he speaks of the fact that there *'is still judgement here'* and that murder *'returns to plague the inventor'*. The irony of these insights is that Duncan's murder does indeed *'plague'* him, as well as his wife, and his most significant cause for concern and fatal flaw, his *'vaulting ambition'*, leads to his eventual *'fall'* at the end of the play. Macbeth is simply unable to heed his own warning as a result of his true desires.

Although Macbeth is inspired through external forces: the witches, Lady Macbeth, the image of the floating dagger, it is through his own volition that the prophecies come to fruition. He becomes his own *'spur'* and catalyst, diminishing the role of his wife as a result. And yet, his ambition poisons, as well as unsettles his mind, persuading him to order the murder of his once good friend, Banquo. It is telling that Shakespeare introduces the ghost of Banquo, not Duncan, to the coronation banquet to spark Macbeth's rage, anger and public descent into madness. *'Let the earth hide thee!'* conveying his sheer desperation to *'hide'* the dire consequences of his actions. Even the once commanding and manipulative Lady Macbeth is merely left with dismayed questions about the state of her once rational and loyal husband, *'why do you make such faces?'*

The fact that Macbeth then seeks solace and guidance from the witches *'one word more'* further underlines the puppet he has now become. His decision to order the merciless slaughter of Macduff's family appals the audience *'his wife, his babes'*, turning Macbeth from the play's hero into its maddening antagonist.

Shakespeare sets up an impossible situation for Macbeth with the impending invasion of Macduff and Malcolm's army, something he appears to acknowledge, *'I begin to be weary of the sun'*. The

audience would be forgiven for perceiving this as regret in a loose guise, and yet his indifference to his wife's suicide, as well as his stubbornness when faced with certain defeat, '*I will not kiss the ground.*' confirms the '*fiend*' and '*hell hound*' he now embodies.

Malcolm and Macduff depict Macbeth's tyrannous reign as a disease, and yet it is a '*black and deep*' disease which Macbeth allows himself to be consumed by. He truly 'falls' from the noble, valiant and archetypal hero, to the villain of the piece, and instead we see the likes of Banquo, Malcolm and predominantly Macduff, take on the mantle of a true 'hero' – Shakespeare proving that even in times of civil war and deceit, good will prevail.

The great irony of Macbeth is that he was seemingly aware of the dire consequences, '*plague*' '*judgement*', even discussing Duncan in religious terms '*angels*' '*heaven*', showing his appreciation of the 'ungodly' nature of murder. And yet, his ambition truly was his fatal flaw, resulting in his eventual demise. Macbeth therefore embodies the darkest traits of the human condition, and acts as a stark warning of the dangers of uncontrolled and unbridled '*vaulting ambition*'.