



## Stature Of Shakespeare's Tragic Hero: Macbeth

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**Abstract:** *Shakespearean tragic heroes are all great and eminent persons, Kings, Monarchs, Princes or great Generals. For this, Shakespeare was indebted to the Greeks who said that tragic hero should be someone of high fame and flourishing prosperity.*

*Shakespeare's tragic heroes are, therefore, all eminent persons-Lear is a mighty King, Macbeth a renowned General, Othello an unchallenged Warrior and Hamlet the Prince of Denmark. Macbeth was a noble and highly respected figure in King Duncan's reign. He lived a brave and honest life, serving the king and his country against all evils and dangers. The seeds of tragedy of Macbeth were sown with his first encounter with the three weird sisters in the wilderness. Evil began to overpower Macbeth, and he was doomed to the witches' prophecies until his death.*

**Key words-**eminent persons, Monarchs,Princes,Generals, doomed.

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There is no doubt that, at the beginning of Act one, Macbeth was a great, noble man at the pinnacle of his career. This is clearly shown in the battle in Act I, Scene II, further described by the wounded captain before the king:

"For brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name- Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, Which smoked with bloody execution, Like valour's minion carved out his passage Till he faced the slave. Which nev'r shook hands, nor bade farewell to him."

The captain describes, 'Brave Macbeth' as 'disdaining fortune.' He was invaluable to the king. Macbeth, like 'valour's minion' was the very personification of bravery. The fact that he 'carved out his passage' with 'brandished steel which smoked with bloody execution' indicates that he was an extremely blood thirsty, ruthless warrior. The use of the verb 'carve' indicates that he is extremely skillful at fighting-not unlike a butcher, carefully and efficiently slings up his meat. The whole of the captain's speech is particularly lively and energetic, reflecting Macbeth's behaviour on the battlefield. The strong use of plosives further emphasizes his aggression: "Mark, King of Scotland, mark: No sooner justice had, with valour armed, Compelled these skipping kerns to

trust their heels But the Norwegian lord, surveying vantage, With furbished arms and new supplies of men, Began a fresh assault."

The captain then goes on to describe Banquo and Macbeth "As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lions." Eagles and lions are kings of land and sky. They are the ultimate predators, top of the food chain in their respective habitats. However, this also shows us an interesting view of Macbeth and Banquo that they are equal yet opposite. They are both powerful, noble men, but one is the foil of the other.

The captain then further highlights both, their vigorous performances, by describing them "doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe." His repeated use of the word 'double' reflects the sheer magnitude of their attack on the opposing army. They were both two times more effective as anyone else on the battlefield. This is backed up by the use of onomatopoeic plosives. Indeed Ross goes far enough to compare Macbeth to Mars, the war God by calling him 'Bellona's bridegroom' giving this substantial evidence:

"Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof, Confronted him with self-comparisons, Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm, Curbing his lavish spirit: and to conclude,

The victory fell on us." As the play advances and king Duncan meets Macbeth after the battle, he also does not fail to signify the grandeur and the skilled performance that Macbeth has shown in crushing the rebellions and also that he greatly



owes to such a brave warrior: "Thou art so far before, That swiftest wing of recompense is slow To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved, That the proportion both of thanks and payments Might have been mine! Only I have left to say, More is thy due than more than all can pay."

Macbeth's reply to the appreciation of King Duncan shows that power and authority has not made him regardless because he is very well conscious about what he is supposed to do, in serving the state as well as in serving the king with all humility and dutifulness: "The service and the loyalty I owe, In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part is to receive our duties: and our duties are to your throne and state children and servant; which do but what they should by doing everything safe toward your love and honor." It is clear that Shakespeare wanted to convey to the audience that Macbeth possessed ruthlessness, blood-thirst and nobility—all the important qualities in a true leader at that time. Shakespeare wanted the audience to feel that Macbeth was doing God's work. He also wanted them to feel that Macbeth had great potential. The reason for Shakespeare wanting all this is quite simple. Macbeth is a tragedy. It is the calamitous tale of the gradual deterioration of an inherently good man into a heinous murderer. So, for the audience to feel the tragedy of Macbeth's demise, he must be presented as a man of great potential at the beginning.

Even Bradley has accepted that Macbeth is a sublime character.

He is a warrior and fighter like Othello. He has been commanded to overcome the rebellion of Macdonald. On the battlefield all are too weak before 'brave Macbeth'. His 'As cannons overcharged with double cracks' shows him as one of the most heroic characters in the realm of Shakespearean tragedy.

Duncan calls Macbeth his 'valiant' and 'worthy gentleman' and presents, therewith, a glowing picture of a man possessing a truly heroic character wedded to endurance and sublimity. The way Macbeth fights and endures the suffering engendered by external and internal conflicts is evocative of his real greatness and loftiness. The way he retains his innate character, his individuality amidst the crosscurrents of adverse forces—natural or supernatural—is a remarkable point that focuses our attention on his qualities of endurance and sublimity. An ordinary man would breakdown at the fearful and ghostly appearance of the weird sisters who seemed 'corporal' to both Macbeth and Banquo but who 'melted as breath in to the mind'. Banquo feels aghast at their withered and wild appearance; his reason is 'taken prisoner' at their sight, but Macbeth does not wilt at their forecast. He does not mistrust the witches; nor does he run away from their presence. His brave nature prompts him to reason out the prediction of the superhuman forces. His heroic heart swells after hearing of the 'imperial theme'. He takes the prophecy as true since it commences with the truth of his being made the

thane of Cowdor. He, however, understands that it cannot result in good, for a murderous deed is not to his liking. He is essentially good and fears to indulge in blood shed. It is difficult for him to kill his conscience; the idea of the murder of his 'good being' is fantastical to him. To this extent those who find no goodness in Macbeth are wrong. However, Macbeth cannot reject the witches' prediction that he takes to be true. He is fearless in trusting and consulting the witches that are his direct adversaries.

Macbeth does not lose his endurance and sublimity, the characteristics of a real heroic character in dealing with Lady Macbeth. He does not show himself a coward before a woman of equal boldness. If she can decide to get herself unsexed; he can also tell her "I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none."

He really defies the undaunted metal of his lady when he tells her that he is settled to the task and bends up "each corporal agent to this terrible feat." He would have lost all his heroic grandeur and failed in the tragic role if he had entrusted Lady Macbeth with the deed feeling himself nervous and shaken. In that case he would have been found, to use the phrase, "paralyzed, and helpless as man in nightmare." To rise to the occasion and perform once own task in valour, be it the valour in valour in the field of crime.

Macbeth is an exceptional hero who wins our sympathy in spite of being a criminal. Claudius is also a murderer like Macbeth. Hamlet calls



him 'bloody, bawdy, remorseless, treacherous, lecherous kindless villain.' We do not use any of these epithets to Macbeth for two reasons: at first, he is not a pure criminal like Richard III; he is not devoid of 'good' altogether. He is in deep love with his wife. To this extent Macbeth is not an ordinary criminal; perhaps no man of ordinary rank would bother so much about the blood stance on his hands as Macbeth does. Truly speaking, to wash the blood is not a problem for him; he trembles because he thinks of the consequences. Claudius, too, has a bit of conscience but he does not repent the manner of Macbeth. He also possesses no love for his wife unlike Macbeth.

Secondly, Macbeth has a kind of grandeur in his crime. He possesses no meanness of an ordinary criminal. To all intent and purposes, he adores sublimity in his deed and to attain this objective he can afford to make or to mar himself; he may lie in restless ecstasy on the torture of the mind and may be set on the wreck. But he does not think of abandoning the path of crime. In this way, he presents the picture of a man in love with the immensity of crime. This means that even crime has grandeur of its own. In this act of cruelty, supernatural forces like the witches as well as by the natural agency of Lady Macbeth mostly influence him. Since Claudius has no such grandeur we have no sympathy for him while we are in love with a tragic character like Macbeth. Thus the concept of the tragic hero helps us to do justice to the grandeur of Macbeth's character.

Goodness, as an essential quality of a tragic hero, constitutes a vital part of Macbeth's character. He is undoubtedly a man of good nature. The other characters of the play call him 'noble' and 'honourable'. His own wife, Lady Macbeth, speaks of him as "too full of the milk of human kindness." Her opinion about Macbeth is of greater importance because she is the lady that contributes greatly to the advancement of evil inside Macbeth. But the opinions held by other characters make it very clear that he is the man of extreme valour, that dangers leave him fearless and undaunted and that he has a number of good qualities of head and heart for which he is honoured and loved by one and all.

In the analysis of goodness of his character, imagination is something, as we see, is the voice of his conscience; it is his moral sense, sense of right and wrong, expressing itself through vivid pictures. Macbeth's imagination is the finest part of him. So long it is active we watch him fascinated; we feel suspense, horror, awe; in which are latent, also, admiration and sympathy. The possession of a rich and sensitive imagination means that Macbeth is a good man who is not dead to the moral sense. It is only the unimaginative people who are unaffected by those, compunctious visitings with which Macbeth is so deeply troubled. And it is the presence of his imagination which makes him a victim of indescribable mental and moral suffering. How deep that suffering is be now from

his 'asides' and 'soliloquies' which are of imagination compact. In all the stages of Duncan's murder, before, during and after Macbeth's imagination is fired at the thought of murder. It makes him horribly aware of the gruesomeness, the dishonour and ungratefulness of the crime. It makes him aware of all the consequence of the crime. His soliloquies before the murder are important in this connection. It is crowded with images with which rush on rapidly from white heat of his imagination.

Several times in the play Macbeth reviews his act of sin and in these situations, he is hearing to his inner sense. He is firm, self-controlled and practical. This kind of inclination, though not very often but not at the same time unavoidable, establish the goodness of his character.

Macbeth's personality can be examined as good on the bases of his sense of realization also. "As it is", says Bradley, "the deed done in horror and without the faintest desire or sense of glory done, one may almost say, as if it were appalling duty; and, the instant it is finished, its futility is revealed to Macbeth, as clearly as its vileness had been revealed him before hand." His repenting at the deed, his sense of futility clearly brought out by the following lines: "Had I but died an hour before this chance I had lived a blessed time; for from this instance There is nothing serious in morality." Macbeth may proceed from crime to crime but this remorse, this sense of futility is always there. We here it in the following lines "Duncan is in his





grave After life's fitful fever, he sleeps wiliness And again in the following lines: "Better be with the dead I have lived long enough." And further, in his final words: "Out, out brief candle! Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon stage And then heard no more."

This activity of repentance fairly proves that though he is obviously involved in the deeds of sin, he realizes also every time after it that his action is somehow objectionable. This is something we can say forms goodness in him.

Macbeth's ruin seems complete but in fact it is not at all complete, for to the end of the play he does not lose our sympathy. He is never entirely criticized. Moreover, we may add here that there is something sublime in the defiance with which he faces earth, heaven and hell, up to the very last. As Bradley points out, evil is never congenial to him. He does evil but evil never becomes his good, for even in the end he thinks off the "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," which he must no longer, "look to have", and he is overwhelmed with remorse and heart sickness, when he thinks of: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace

from day to day." In the very depths of crime, gleam of his native love of goodness, and with it a touch of tragic grandeur, rests upon him. He has embraced evil but he does never see glory in it, or make his peace with it. He is not a child of darkness; the forces of evil that assail him fail to make him their own. He retains till the end his humanity that makes him a good and refined person. To quote Thomas Whatley: "Macbeth wants no disguise of his natural disposition, for it is not bad, he does not affect more piety than he has: on the contrary, a part of his distress arises from a real sense of religion: which makes him regret that he could not join the chamberlains in prayer for God's blessing' and bewail that he has given his eternal jewel to the common enemy of man. He continually reproaches himself for his deeds; no use can harden him: confidence cannot silence, and even despair cannot stifle, the cries of his conscience. By the first murder he put rancours in the vessel of his peace, and of the last he owns to Macduff, 'My soul is too much charg'd with blood of thine already'

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