

Macbeth

What defines Macbeth's story are the concessions he makes, little by little, until he loses everything. Macbeth, despite his reservations, makes choices that go against his better judgment. Macbeth loses everyone he cares about and his moral compass. While not gradual, Macbeth's descent unravels throughout the play as the horrors become more intense and the world he inhabits becomes bloodier and more tragic. Macbeth consistently expresses reservations to Lady Macbeth about their plans but moves forward with them anyway. He makes erratic decisions to hold onto his power as his mental health declines, and his world falls apart.

In Act 1, Macbeth quickly expresses his reservations about Lady Macbeth's plan to put him in power. "Present fears Are less than horrible imaginings./My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,/Shakes so my single state of man/That function is smothered in surmise,/And nothing is but what is not./ (Mac. 1.3.150-55) Macbeth is expressing that he does not have to go through with anything yet, he has not yet taken action and can choose to turn back. In this statement, he is also stating his own fear of moving forward with the plan; it just doesn't sit well with him; he states that it shakes him to the core. Despite articulating these reservations, Macbeth moves forward with murder. After a lengthy conversation with Lady Macbeth, who belittles him and tells him to be a man, he resigns himself to doing what she wants. "I am settled and bend up/Each corporal agent to this terrible feat./Away, and mock the time with fairest

show./False face must hide what the false heart doth know.” (Mac. 1.7.91-97). Macbeth acts like he is a man without a decision like he is fated to do something he has not done yet. In articulating these words, Macbeth also admits that he is deciding to do something he does not fully want to do. Whether he wants to or not, Macbeth does move forward with Lady Macbeth’s plan showing both weak character and a faltering mind.

Macbeth’s guilt plagues him before he murders and immediately after the murders. Macbeth admits to Lady Macbeth that he is in his head about what just occurred. “One cried “God bless us” and “Amen” the other,/As they had seen me with these hangman’s hands,/Listening to their fear. I could not say “Amen”/When they did say “God bless us.” (Mac. 2.2.36-40). Macbeth feels guilt for what he has done, which he immediately expresses in telling this to Lady Macbeth; like before, Lady Macbeth dismisses his feelings putting Macbeth at odds with his internal narrative. Macbeth chooses to continue to listen to Lady Macbeth despite his initial reservations and his immediate guilt; he is worried that he can no longer say Amen and realizes he will never be the same after this. “Renown and grace is dead./The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees/Is left this vault to brag of.” (Mac.2.3.110-12). Macbeth is saying that he no longer has the beliefs he once had and that while he continues to live, his life no longer has any deep meaning. Once Macbeth compromises his understanding of morality, life ceases to have any real meaning for him. Macbeth’s faith continues to falter as his mental health declines.

Macbeth makes erratic decisions as his mental health declines, continuing to harm other people and putting himself at risk. While Macbeth sometimes believes that he is invincible, he also admits that he is not of sound mind. He is aware of making the wrong decisions but makes them regardless. "My dull brain was wrought/ With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your

pains/ Are registered where every day I turn/the leaf to read them." (Mac. 1.3.166-69). Instead, Macbeth continues because when he is not feeling extreme guilt and doubt, he has extreme hubris and acts with a larger-than-life ego. "Thou sure and firm-set earth,/Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear/thy very stones prate of my whereabouts." (Mac. 2.1.70-71).

Macbeth believes that he is untouchable at times and that no one can topple the bloody throne he has obtained for himself. This extreme emotionally charged monologuing back and forth is apparent from the very beginning of the play; Macbeth goes back and forth from extreme indecision and insecurity to extreme ego and entitlement.

Macbeth's initial failing mirrors all his other failings. Despite his internal wrestling with what is right and wrong and despite his feelings of guilt, he makes the decision that goes against his moral compass not once but repeatedly. Although Lady Macbeth sways Macbeth, Macbeth is the one responsible for the choices he makes. Macbeth suffers the consequences until he has nothing left. Macbeth's feelings of guilt do not save him or any of his other victims; they only serve to show that he has all the evidence to make a right and moral decision and instead fails to do this again and again and again.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. Edited by Mowatt, Werstine. *Macbeth*. Folger Edition.

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