

# H1 Sample Essay | Macbeth

**‘Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’ invites us to look into the world of a man driven on by ruthless ambition and tortured by regret’  
(2004 LC HL)**

I wholeheartedly agree that Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’ invites us to look into the world of a man driven by ruthless ambition yet tortured by regret. As members of the audience, we witness the perpetual decline of Macbeth’s mental capacity for the atrocities he commits. This can only be seen as the manifestation of our titular character’s fundamental flaw: ruthless ambition.

The tragedy commences with the immediate introduction of the witches. ‘The weird sisters’ paradoxically chant that ‘fair is foul and foul is fair’. This perverse sense of reality underscores the theme of the play.

Macbeth’s name is introduced in Act 1 Scene 2 at the scene of a battle. His fellow countrymen revere him as ‘brave Macbeth’ and ‘Bellona’s bridegroom’. Our initial impression of our protagonist is incontrovertibly positive as he can be considered none other than the epitome of nobility and honour.

We finally meet our titular character in Act 1 Scene 3, and we are immediately drawn back by his opening statement ‘so foul and fair a day I have not seen’. As Macbeth echoes the witches, an inextricable link between darkness and light is established. Macbeth then, alongside Banquo, encounters the witches. They profess that ‘Thane of Cawdor, [...] thane of Glamis, [...] shalt be King hereafter’. Macbeth is visually affected and ‘rapt withal’. In soliloquy, he impulsively states that ‘if chance will have me King why chance may’. As Macbeth’s demise is fundamentally highlighted, his ruthless ambitious nature is underscored.

Act 1 Scene 3 can be seen as the fork in the road for Macbeth. Although he has not made any significant faults, we see the witches act like catalysts as Macbeth’s

mindset is seemingly irreparably altered with ‘my thought whose murder yet is but fantastical’.

In the following act, Macbeth recounts what he witnessed to Lady Macbeth in a letter. His ‘dearest partner in greatness’ immediately acknowledges the potential in this opportunity. However, she notes that her husband is ‘too full o’ the milk of human kindness’ and summons the insidious spirits ‘that prey on mortal thoughts to unsex [her] here’. Whereas the witches can be seen as an influencing factor in Macbeth’s ambitious conquest, Lady Macbeth is unequivocally an accelerant; ‘thou [...] shalt be what thou art promised’.

As the plot thickens, it becomes apparent the dynamic duo is conspiring to commit regicide against Duncan. Macbeth reveals a level of hesitance but his ambitions, alongside his wife, coerce him into the heinous act. As Macbeth prepares to kill Duncan he begins to hallucinate ‘is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand. Come let me clutch thee’. This scene, colloquially known as the dagger scene, accentuates Macbeth’s incompatibility with treachery.

Between Act 2 Scene 1 and Scene 2 Duncan is mercilessly murdered in his sleep by Macbeth. Our titular character displays immediate grief as he begins to understand the ramifications of his ambition-fueled ruthlessness. He spirals into a thoughtless ramble uttering how he may never sleep again, ‘Macbeth does murder sleep’.

Our tragic hero now begins his descent into the moral abyss and the theme of light is shadowed by the sacrilegious murder of Duncan. Macbeth’s hamartia, unbridled ambition, is now established and as the play unravels, we stand witness to the consequences, namely the inner turmoil he experiences - onset by grief.

As Macbeth now claims the throne, he acknowledges the futility of his position. This is underscored by one of his soliloquys ‘upon my head they placed a fruitless crown and put a barren scepter in my gripe’. Macbeth views Banquo as a threat to his position. He without hesitation this time, ruthlessly orders the murder of Banquo and his son Fleance. ‘Banquo thy soul’s flight if it find heaven must find it out tonight’.

Banquo is consequently murdered for Macbeth’s peace of mind however this has an inverted effect on Macbeth as is physically revealed at the opulent banquet. Macbeth

envisions the ghost of Banquo and declares 'thou canst not say I did it, never shake thy gory locks at me'. This is the first palpable evidence that Macbeth is tortured by regret and as the play continues this regret increases exponentially.

After the opulent banquet, Macbeth informs Lady Macbeth that he is 'in blood stepped in so far that if [he] should wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er'.

Macbeth has now reached his moral nadir and accepts the inevitable outcome.

However, Macbeth's escapades are not unrivalled. Macduff has begun gathering troops to overthrow the 'tyrant'. When our titular character hears this, he orders the murder of Macduff's family. 'The castle of Macduff I will surprise [...] his wife, his babes and all unfortunate souls that trace his in his line'.

At this stage in the tragedy, the darkness has now eclipsed the light and Macbeth is no longer viewed as the quintessential hero but as a guilt ridden opportunist who is only prolonging his death.

In Act 5 Scene 8, the penultimate scene of the play, Macduff and Macbeth face off for the last time. Macbeth confesses that 'my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already'. This statement reveals the regret experienced by Macbeth although it bears no significance as he launches into battle and is consequently killed.

William Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' affords us an unparalleled insight into the world of a man who is driven on by ruthless ambition whilst tortured by regret. Shakespeare ultimately reveals to us the capacity for evil in even the greatest of men as our once revered protagonist meets a loveless fate.

In summation, all of us, just like Macbeth are the masters of our own fate. Though there are incontrovertible powers permeated throughout the play, Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' essentially shows us that 'it is not in the stars to hold our destiny, but ourselves' – Julius Caesar.