

## **Macbeth as a Tragedy According to Aristotle's Definition**

While the genre of some works of literature can be debated, *Macbeth* written by William Shakespeare seems to fit into a perfect mold. Aristotle's definition of a tragedy, combining seven elements that he believes make the genre of a work a tragedy, is that mold. Displaying all seven aspects, *Macbeth* fits the definition precisely.

Key elements in the play substantiate the fact that *Macbeth* is a serious story, the first elements of Aristotle's definition. From the first lines of the play, the mood is set featuring witches whom speak of witchcraft, potions and apparitions. Not only do the three witches aid in making this a serious story but also, they appealed to Elizabethans whom at the time believed in such supernatural phenomena. War for centuries has represented killing and feuding, thus, the war taking place between Scotland and Norway provided a dark component. The Thane of Cawdor's rapidly approaching execution due to his deceiving the king also plays a role in this grim work. Murder throughout all of *Macbeth* is an essential aspect when dealing with the seriousness of the play. From the beginning, Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to do anything to overthrow King Duncan, whom is the king of Scotland, the role Macbeth desperately yearns for. During the excursion to become king, Macbeth successfully murders King Duncan, Macduff's wife and children, and with the help of a group of murderers Banquo; a brave general who will inherit the Scottish throne. Through the whole play, while such dark occurrences are used to create deep mood, Shakespeare also uses strong language and words. Such as when Lady Macbeth calls upon the gods to make her man-like so she will have the fortitude to kill King Duncan herself in this quote, "Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here... Make my blood thick... Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunest smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark." This...

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### **Macbeth: a Tragic Hero**

**Summary:** Macbeth can be truly classified as a tragic hero after interpreting Aristotle's definition and applying it to Macbeth's character. Throughout the play, Macbeth is seen as an out of control ranging mad man that is out to achieve his grievous self-indulging ambitions. In the long run he struggles, but cannot fight the inevitability of his demise.

### **Macbeth: A Tragic Hero**

Tragedy occurs to some more often to others, but most define it differently. Webster's Dictionary defines it as "a kind of drama in which some fatal or mournful event occurs" (764). To philosophers and traditional writers philosophy takes on another meaning. For example, to famous philosophical figure Aristotle, "tragedy occurs when noble or great persons are led, through pride or a secret flaw in their personalities, to suffering that changes their fortune. The tragic hero must begin in a high position and end in death or some sort of degraded role" (Definitions of Tragedy). Based on human nature, Aristotle's philosophy of tragedy, and current literary criticism of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the main character, Macbeth, is classified as a tragic hero.

Born in 384 B.C. at Stagirus, well known philosopher Aristotle was a student to Plato for over twenty years. Growing up on this Greek Colony and attending lectures, he acquired and retained new information. His father was a well-known physician and scientist therefore Aristotle's knowledge was broadened by his father. Unlike Plato, Aristotle studied the natural and sensory world; "while Plato used his reason, Aristotle used his senses" (Gaarder 107) He said that "things that are in the human soul were purely reflections of natural objects" (Gaarder 107). Aristotle believed that reason is man's most distinguishing characteristic; Macbeth had great lack of reason. When the first murder occurred, Macbeth did not anticipate the outcomes of the events, thus his soul was infected with selfish thought, and to him, nothing else mattered.

A human soul in Aristotle's words is "the perfect expression or realization of a natural body," which Macbeth follows (Aristotle). His internal instinct led his actions and soon to his main goal. Fellow philosopher Democritus, (460-370

B.C.), believed that all men are just mechanical and made up of different substances (Gaarder 44). If, his belief that there is no spiritual force in nature, and everything happens mechanically is true, then Macbeth could not control his actions thus is innocent of his crimes. To Macbeth, it meant that he was destined to become king, and mechanically could not manage his own actions. This is because Macbeth's imagination is "plunging deeper and deeper into unreality," and turns into uncontrollable desires and wants (Knight 42). These two elements of soul and imagination are able to cause a dreadful combination of tragedy and misfortune. A Shakespearian critic implies that, "once caught by the devil's bait, only at the end he is able to express his inward state openly" (Davidson 92). Wayne Booth, another critic, reasons that only, "a highly individualized noble man is sent to complete moral, intellectual and physical destruction" (85). Although Macbeth only recognized his sin towards the end and caused major destruction without much moral, he fought like a noble man and faced his flaws, which is important to Aristotle's definition of tragedy.

Human nature plays a great role in everyday life and actions of people. Human nature is made up of many elements; greed, guilt, and morality to name a few. People like to bathe themselves in self-indulgence; which Macbeth demonstrates throughout the play. He first followed his desires to kill Duncan and become king, in order to gain nobility and stature. "Macbeth, like the whole universe of this play, is paralyzed, mesmerized, as though in a dream," adds Booth. Macbeth is tempted to do evil in order to indulge himself, but after the crime is completed, he begins to realize that yes - his crown is indeed "fruitless." Shakespeare did a great job underlining Macbeth to be a somewhat a moral person. He made his character become "isolated from humanity lonely, endures to the uttermost torture of isolation," explains Knight. He only kills to indulge his wants and he does not think of the consequences to follow. At the end, he "repents and avoids his proper punishment" (Booth 85). In Act 1, Scene 5, Macbeth says, "Yet do I fear thy nature; it is too full o' milk of human kindness:" he is a moral human being because he fears kindness and does not trust others. He also makes several sacrifices in the duration of the play; "he must sell his eternal jewel to gain an earthly crown" and give up his inner pride (Davidson 92). The reader finds out that Macbeth has a very strong inner desire to be king when he listens closely to the witch's prophecy, and then follows it. This subconscious desire was filling him with guilt and causing several hallucinations to occur. In Act 2, Scene 1 Macbeth recites, "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand"" referring to nothing but his mind playing jokes on him. And after the first murder, Macbeth while losing sleep cried out, "Macbeth does murder sleep!" (Act 2, Scene 2). This character's guilty mind does not permit him to cope with his sin and move on, he even cannot "wash the blood off" his hands. Once he begins the sin, he must continue it to prolong his throne by killing everyone in his way, one thing this hard headed character did not take into account, for example Duncan's two sons. Next, when Banquo is killed out of Macbeth's fear and rage, one Shakespearian critic believes it "symbolizes his guilty soul" (Knight 41). If Macbeth killed his friend out of his own guilt, then Aristotle was right when he said "Misfortune shows those who are not really friends" (Aristotle Quotes).

Finally, modern day criticisms of Shakespeare's work outline many aspects on making Macbeth a tragic hero. First, Wilson Knight's essay, "Fear, Evil, and Nightmare in Macbeth", explains that Macbeth is helpless as a man in a nightmare: and this helplessness is integral to the conception. He cannot get out of the chain that he has started and fears that the sin will never leave. Furthermore a tragic hero like Macbeth does indeed have "secret flaws in their personalities" as Aristotle believed. From these events Macbeth turns into a raging machine, although to Duncan he appeared to be "as an angel of light; inwardly, he ravening wolf in the service of darkness" (Davidson 51).

Royalty in Macbeth's eyes is like authority in today's society. Macbeth sees the king as the highest power, thus idolizes him. Like Aristotle once said, "the only stable state is the one in which all men are equal before the law" (Aristotle Quotes). Macbeth tries to accomplish this stable state by becoming it, by taking Duncan's place as leader. Also, Shakespeare's works lead critics to believe that Macbeth was guided by the witch's apparitions. Because they "promise him success in terms of natural law...he thinks to build his future on the laws of reality," Macbeth forgets the reality and enters a world of fantasy that is false (Booth 52). In addition, he contends for his own individual soul against the universal reality, but still stays determined to keep his position. "Man can only achieve happiness by using all his abilities and capabilities" as Aristotle would add. (Gaarder 111).

Hypocrisy is one of the main themes critics believe is present in this tragic hero. Davidson explains, " derives of sensitivity and makes him a tyrant guilty of wrongs." Macbeth never feels pity at the end of the play and does not agree with his wrong doings, he is his own fool who is "lightened by his death, which is symbolized by the extinguishing of the 'Brief Candle' " (99). Davidson also argues that the "Tomorrow" speech destroyed all moral distinctions and values (93).

In conclusion it is evident that Macbeth can be truly classified as a tragic hero after interpreting Aristotle's definition and applying it to Macbeth's character. Throughout the play, Macbeth is seen as an out of control ranging mad man that is out to achieve his grievous self-indulging ambitions. In the long run he struggles, but cannot fight the inevitability of his demise. As Davidson concludes, Macbeth's path leads to, "despair and death" (94). Seeing that, Shakespeare's way to express himself was through his characters, in Act 2, Scene 3, his character states, "There's daggers in men's smiles." This implies that not every man is perfect and that everyone has some imperfections that somebody somewhere will not be satisfied with. To Macbeth he was his own self, and he was aiming for what he truly desired. His actions were purely from his heart, this is why in Act 4, Scene 2, he implies, "When our actions do not, our fears do make us traitors."

### **Macbeth: Aristotelian Tragedy**

The definition of tragedy in an excerpt from Aristotle's "Poetics" is the re-creation, complete within itself, of an important moral action. The relevance of Aristotle's Poetics to Shakespeare's play Macbeth defines the making of a dramatic tragedy and presents the general principles of the construction of this genre.

Aristotle's attention throughout most of his Poetics is directed towards the requirements and expectations of the plot. Plot, 'the soul of tragedy', Aristotle says, must, be an imitation of a noble and complete action. In Macbeth, Shakespeare provides a complete action, that is it has what Aristotle identifies as a beginning, a middle, and an end. These divisible sections must, and do in the case of Macbeth, meet the criterion of their respective placement. In an excerpt from Aristotle's "Poetics" it states:

"The separate parts into which tragedy is divided are: Prologue, Episode, Exodus, Choric songs, this last being divided into Parodos and Stasimon. The prologos is that entire part of a tragedy which precedes the Parodos of the Chorus. The Episode is that entire part of a tragedy which is between complete choric songs. The Exodus is that entire part of a tragedy which has no choric song after it. Of the Choric part the Parodos is the first undivided utterance of the Chorus." Shakespeare follows this precise arrangement of parts to tell his story of Macbeth. Macbeth is divided into five acts. It contains a Prologue, Episode, Exodus, Parodos and Stasimon, but is the only one of Shakespeares plays that does not include Choric songs. This does not dismiss Macbeth as a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense, because it still follows Aristotle's fundamental component of a plot. That the arrangement of actions and episodes arrange themselves into a 'causally connected', seamless whole. The ideal arrangement of action into a plot is: Exposition, Inciting Action, Rising Action, Turning Point(Climax), Falling Action, and Denouement. Macbeth follows each of these steps while introducing a new question every moment that keeps our interest. That is called dramatic tension, a very important part of a tragedy: to keep the audiences attention at all times.

To make Macbeth's plot a complete action, according to Aristotle, the

story must contain an activating circumstance, a disclosure, and a reversal of action. The activating circumstance in Macbeth is the three witches. Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches that possess supernatural powers and predict the two men's futures. It is part of the wicked sisters' role in the play to act as the forces of fate. These hags lead Macbeth on to destroy himself. Their predictions are temptations of Macbeth's. They never tell Macbeth he has to do anything, and nothing the witches did forced him to commit the murderous acts he did. But their prophecies stimulated his desire for kingship and intensified his ambition which is the characteristic that led to his downfall. The disclosure is the point in the play in which the audience finds out something they did not know before, that enables them to put the pieces of the tragedy together. It's the point of realization. In Act V scene 1, Lady Macbeth is found sleep walking muttering the lines of reassurance she gave her husband after they murdered Duncan and Banquo, "What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?" (lines 40-42) and "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried" (lines 66-67). The plot of the tragedy unfolded for the audience in that scene and it becomes apparent that it was Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's own evil actions that destroyed themselves. The last guideline of an Aristotelian complete action is the reversal of action. This occurs when Macduff kills Macbeth. Throughout the play Macbeth, driven by his corrupt ambition, went after what he desired most. Even subjecting himself to evil sins, but it is at the very end where his...

## Poetics

### Summary

Aristotle proposes to study poetry by analyzing its constitutive parts and then drawing general conclusions. The portion of the *Poetics* that survives discusses mainly tragedy and epic poetry. We know that Aristotle also wrote a treatise on comedy that has been lost. He defines poetry as the mimetic, or imitative, use of language, rhythm, and harmony, separately or in combination. Poetry is mimetic in that it creates a representation of objects and events in the world, unlike philosophy, for example, which presents ideas. Humans are naturally drawn to imitation, and so poetry has a strong pull on us. It can also be an excellent learning device, since we can coolly observe imitations of things like dead bodies and disgusting animals when the real thing would disturb us.

Aristotle identifies tragedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with lofty matters and comedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with base matters. He traces a brief and speculative history of tragedy as it evolved from dithyrambic hymns in praise of the god Dionysus. Dithyrambs were sung by a large choir, sometimes featuring a narrator. Aeschylus invented tragedy by bringing a second actor into dialogue with the narrator. Sophocles innovated further by introducing a third actor, and gradually tragedy shifted to its contemporary dramatic form.

Aristotle defines tragedy according to seven characteristics: (1) it is mimetic, (2) it is serious, (3) it tells a full story of an appropriate length, (4) it contains rhythm and harmony, (5) rhythm and harmony occur in different combinations in different parts of the tragedy, (6) it is performed rather than narrated, and (7) it arouses feelings of pity and fear and then purges these feelings through catharsis. A tragedy consists of six component parts, which are listed here in order from most important to least important: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle.

A well-formed plot must have a beginning, which is not a necessary consequence of any previous action; a middle, which follows logically from the beginning; and an end, which follows logically from the middle and from which no further action necessarily follows. The plot should be unified, meaning that every element of the plot should tie in to the rest of the plot, leaving no loose ends. This kind of unity allows tragedy to express universal themes powerfully, which makes it superior to history, which can only talk about particular events. Episodic plots are bad because there

is no necessity to the sequence of events. The best kind of plot contains surprises, but surprises that, in retrospect, fit logically into the sequence of events. The best kinds of surprises are brought about by *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, and *anagnorisis*, or discovery. A good plot progresses like a knot that is tied up with increasingly greater complexity until the moment of *peripeteia*, at which point the knot is gradually untied until it reaches a completely unknotted conclusion.

For a tragedy to arouse pity and fear, we must observe a hero who is relatively noble going from happiness to misery as a result of error on the part of the hero. Our pity and fear is aroused most when it is family members who harm one another rather than enemies or strangers. In the best kind of plot, one character narrowly avoids killing a family member unwittingly thanks to *anagnorisis* that reveals the family connection. The hero must have good qualities appropriate to his or her station and should be portrayed realistically and consistently. Since both the character of the hero and the plot must have logical consistency, Aristotle concludes that the untying of the plot must follow as a necessary consequence of the plot and not from stage artifice, like *adeus ex machina* (a machine used in some plays, in which an actor playing one of the gods was lowered onto the stage at the end).

Aristotle discusses thought and diction and then moves on to address epic poetry. Whereas tragedy consists of actions presented in a dramatic form, epic poetry consists of verse presented in a narrative form. Tragedy and epic poetry have many common qualities, most notably the unity of plot and similar subject matter. However, epic poetry can be longer than tragedy, and because it is not performed, it can deal with more fantastic action with a much wider scope. By contrast, tragedy can be more focused and takes advantage of the devices of music and spectacle. Epic poetry and tragedy are also written in different meters. After defending poetry against charges that it deals with improbable or impossible events, Aristotle concludes by weighing tragedy against epic poetry and determining that tragedy is on the whole superior.

## Analysis

Aristotle takes a scientific approach to poetry, which bears as many disadvantages as advantages. He studies poetry as he would a natural phenomenon, observing and analyzing first, and only afterward making tentative hypotheses and recommendations. The scientific approach works best at identifying the objective, lawlike behavior that underlies the phenomena being observed. To this end, Aristotle draws some important general conclusions about the nature of poetry and how it achieves its effects. However, in assuming that there are objective laws underlying poetry, Aristotle fails to appreciate the ways in which art often progresses precisely by overturning the assumed laws of a previous generation. If every play were written in strict accordance with a given set of laws for a long enough time, a revolutionary playwright would be able to achieve powerful effects by consciously violating these laws. In point of fact, Euripides, the last of the three great tragic poets of Ancient Greece, wrote many plays that violated the logical and structured principles of Aristotle's *Poetics* in a conscious effort to depict a world that he saw as neither logical nor structured. Aristotle himself gives mixed reviews to Euripides' troubling plays, but they are still performed two and a half millennia after they were written.

Aristotle's concept of mimesis helps him to explain what is distinctive about our experience of art. Poetry is mimetic, meaning that it invites us to imagine its subject matter as real while acknowledging that it is in fact fictional. When Aristotle contrasts poetry with philosophy, his point is not so much that poetry is mimetic because it portrays what is real while philosophy is nonmimetic because it portrays only ideas. Rather, the point is that the ideas discussed in philosophical texts are as real as any ideas ever are. When we see an actor playing Oedipus, this actor is clearly a substitute through which we can imagine what a real Oedipus might be like. When we read Aristotle's ideas on art, we are in direct contact with the ideas, and there is nothing more real to imagine. Art presents reality at one level of remove, allowing us a certain detachment. We do not call the police when we see Hamlet kill Polonius because we know that we are not seeing a real event but only two actors imitating real-world possibilities. Because we are conscious of the mimesis involved in art, we are detached enough that we can reflect on what we are experiencing and so learn from it. Witnessing a murder in real life is emotionally scarring. Witnessing a murder on stage gives us a chance to reflect on the nature and causes of human violence so that we can lead a more reflective and sensitive life.

Aristotle identifies catharsis as the distinctive experience of art, though it is not clear whether he means that catharsis is the purpose of art or simply an effect. The Greek word *katharsis* originally means purging or purification and refers also to the induction of vomiting by a doctor to rid the body of impurities. Aristotle uses the term metaphorically to refer to the release of the emotions of pity and fear built up in a dramatic performance. Because dramatic performances end, whereas life goes on, we can let go of the tension that builds during a dramatic performance in a way that we often cannot let go of the tension that builds up over the course of our lives. Because we can let go of it, the emotional intensity of art deepens us, whereas emotional intensity in life often just hardens us. However, if this process of catharsis that allows us to experience powerful emotions and then let them go is the ultimate purpose of art, then art becomes the equivalent of therapy. If we define catharsis as the purpose of art, we have failed to define art in a way that explains why it is still necessary in an era of psychiatry. A more generous reading of Aristotle might interpret catharsis as a means to a less easily defined end, which involves a deeper capacity for feeling and compassion, a deeper awareness of what our humanity consists in.

Aristotle insists on the primacy of plot because the plot is ultimately what we can learn from in a piece of art. The word we translate as "plot" is the Greek word *muthos*, which is the root for *myth*. *Muthos* is a more general term than *plot*, as it can apply to any art form, including music or sculpture. The *muthos* of a piece of art is its general structure and organization, the form according to which the themes and ideas in the piece of art make themselves apparent. The plot of a story, as the term is used in the *Poetics*, is not the sequence of events so much as the logical relationships that exist between events. For Aristotle, the tighter the logical relationships between events, the better the plot. *Oedipus Rex* is a powerful tragedy precisely because we can see the logical inevitability with which the events in the story fall together. The logical relationships between events in a story help us to perceive logical relationships between the events in our own lives. In essence, tragedy shows us patterns in human experience that we can then use to make sense of our own experience.

### **The Tragedy of Macbeth Term paper**

The Tragedy of Macbeth is plagued with the images that coincide with its many themes. Although there is really no central theme and all seem to intermingle, it would be extremely difficult to research the play in its entirety. Therefore, I've chosen to focus my study towards the recurring image of blood and how it's presence affected both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and the eventual outcome of the play. The blood images in the play had different

effects on the two. But perhaps the most noticeably affected person would be Lady Macbeth. It was after the death of Duncan that most of the repercussions took place, however, she began making references to blood even before the murder. In her pleading to the spirits, she prayed, "Make thick my blood (Act I.Scene v.line 43)" in order that she may not feel any "remorse" by her future action. She sees her thin blood as a

weakness in her character and wishes it to be richer (thicker) with the qualities of courage, bravery and even emotional strength which that of a man might have. For a time these demands seemed as if they had actually been answered. Not even after the murder of Duncan or Banquo did she lose her composure, in fact, she actually kept her husband from losing his mind. Eventually, though, her granted desire appeared to wear off and her

naturally thin blood began to flow through her veins again. The pressure of her guilty conscious had driven her to insanity. As she expresses in her sleepwalking state, this guilt is felt due to the presence of Duncan's blood. Out, damned spot! Out I say! One: Two: why, then 'tis 2. time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and

afear'd? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt? Yet who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him (V.i.34-39)? It is easily seen how she has lost total control of her mind. For she jumps from topic to topic and in her jumbled thoughts has incriminated herself without even knowing it. She even experiences a hallucination as to

the blood of Duncan which had once been on her hand. "Here's the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh (V.i.49-51)!" It is actually a sort of irony that her weakness in character

(thinness of her blood) could not bear the strength of guilt brought upon her by the presence of Duncan's blood. This fact proves to be her downfall for it ultimately

drives her to take her own life. Macbeth is the next character upon which the image of blood took its toll. However, its effect was the exact opposite on Macbeth than on his wife, for he immediately felt a guilty conscience and was often being emotionally pulled together by his wife. As time went on though it became easier for him to kill and he grew emotionally stronger while his wife got progressively weaker. Once

Macbeth had committed his first crime against Scotland, he instantly felt the effects of his deed. The overwhelming state of fear, anxiety and skittishness that set in can easily be seen in 3. these lines. Whence is that knocking? How is't with me, when every noise appalls me? What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes! Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? No ;this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red (II.iii.56-62). Lady Macbeth, maintaining her calmness, guides her husband through his infirmness, as they prepare to explain their deed. For the time they had appeared successful and Duncan's murder had been pushed to the back of Macbeth's

### **Tragedy In Macbeth Essay**

Many people believe that Shakespeare's plays all have a tragedy to them. There are very good arguments that support this theory. Macbeth is one of the many tragic plays that Shakespeare has written. There are many incidents that take place in the play of Macbeth, which prove that this is a tragic play. There are the murders of many innocent people. There is the murder of King Duncan, who is killed by Macbeth. There is the murder of Banquo, which

is set up by Macbeth. There is the murder of Macduff's wife and son, which is also set up by Macbeth. These meaningless killings are what make Macbeth a tragic story. The first tragic murder in the play was that of King Duncan. Duncan was a respected man by all in Scotland. Duncan had no enemies within his kingdom. He was a good leader and good father to his sons and to Macbeth as well. People were shocked to

discover the murder of Duncan had taken place. Duncan was liked by everyone in Scotland, which made it hard for the people of Scotland to come up with a conclusion as to why Duncan was murdered. This is best summarized by Banquo's reaction towards Duncan's death," Fears and scruples shake us. In the great hand of God I stand, and thence against the undivulged pretense I fight " here Banquo is saying that no one person can be suspected

for committing this crime and that this murder has a hidden purpose (II, iii, l. 131-133). Duncan was killed for a very terrible reason. Macbeth killed Duncan because Macbeth was greedy and was desperate to become king. Macbeth wanted to be in control and knew that if he killed Duncan he would be able to receive it. An innocent man is killed because of the greed of another man. Such a tragedy is inhuman. Others have also been killed

because of Macbeth. The second tragic murder in the play was the brutal killing of Banquo. Banquo was an innocent man that had no flaws whatsoever. Banquo was always kind to everyone and respectful to Macbeth, even though he knew Macbeth killed Duncan. Banquo was also a loving father. Banquo had a son named Fleance whom he loved very much. When Macbeth sent the murderers out to kill Banquo and Fleance, Banquo sacrificed his own life so that Fleance

could get away. Banquo never suspected that Macbeth would do such a cruel thing, to try to kill him and his son. Macbeth tried to kill them because the witches had told him that Banquo's sons would become kings. Macbeth was scared of losing the kingdom and the power. Therefore, he had sent murderers to kill both of them, but Fleance escaped. We know Fleance escapes when the third murder recites, "There's but one down ;the son is fled."

### **What Makes Macbeth a Tragic Hero?**

What makes a hero tragic? Why should an audience feel sorry for a murderer like Macbeth?

The play is named after him and he dies at the end. These two facts are indicative of Macbeth being a tragic hero, but they don't make him one. So what does?

What is a Tragic Hero?

Shakespeare's perception, and our modern view, of tragedy are founded in Aristotle's theories on the subject. Aristotelian tragedy, as described in [Poetics](#), has shaped every form of dramatic art, from Ancient Greek theatre to big-budget, Hollywood blockbusters.

According to Aristotle, tragic heroes must conform to a few rules, most notably:

- They should not be too good. Otherwise, an audience will feel that their downfalls are unjust.
- They should not be too bad. Otherwise, an audience will feel no sympathy for them.
- They must have an intrinsic character flaw 'hamartia', which causes them to do something horrific and instigates their fall from grace.

Macbeth's Bad Side

It's not difficult to explain how Macbeth conforms to the first of the rules above. As soon as the witches tell him that he'll be king, he begins to have rather dark thoughts about how he can make it happen. "...why do I yield to that suggestion/Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair/And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,/Against the use of nature?...My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,/Shakes so my single state of man..."(I.iii)

Of course, he doesn't stop at the assassination of Duncan, either. In order to retain the throne, he is driven to even more heinous acts, such as ordering the murders of Banquo, Fleance and Macduff's household.

Macbeth's Good Side

However, in concordance with Aristotle's opinion, Macbeth isn't all bad. At first glance, it may seem difficult to find redeeming features in a mass-murdering tyrant. But it's important to remember that, at the beginning of the play, he is lauded as a great and loyal soldier. "For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel..."(I.ii)

His hesitancy over committing regicide, "We will proceed no further in this business..."(I.vii) is also evidence of the fact that he is not an innately 'evil' person.

Macbeth's Tragic Flaw

Often, Aristotle's use of the word 'hamartia' is translated as a fault that causes a horrific act to occur as an unforeseen consequence or accident. Alternatively, the terrible act can be as a result of ignorance or negligence. For example, Hamlet's murder of Polonius is an accidental act, which is caused by his reluctance to exact revenge in the previous scene.

However, Macbeth's flaw, which is initially that of ambition, does not cause an accidental or unforeseen event. The murder of Duncan is a very purposeful act, although it could be argued that, as he was focused solely on the witches prophecy, it was an act of ignorance rather than malice.

Later, after he has met with the witches for a second time, he begins to develop another flaw; [hubris](#), which mistakenly convinces him that he is immortal. "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn/The power of man, for none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth."(IV.i)

The tragic flaws of ambition and hubris cause Macbeth, the loyal and honourable soldier, to become a mass-murdering despot. Despite the many horrific, bloody acts he has committed, an audience feels empathy for him,



because he isn't a bad guy. And there is a sense that, if he had never met the witches, he would not have met his downfall, either.