

Macbeth

Character

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Aoife O'Driscoll

First Impression

Violent
Terrifying
Brave
Noble
Physically strong
Morally Weak



Dual Image

- ✦ '...memorise another Golgotha...'
- ✦ 'he unseam'd him from the nave to the chops'
- ✦ 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen'
- ✦ Do we empathise with him or are we simply awed by his strength and valour?

Weakness

- ✦ Hones in on the fact that Banquo's children shall be kings
- ✦ Less perceptive than Banquo who is wary of 'the instruments of darkness'
- ✦ Recognises his own capacity for evil: the horror of it makes his heart race and his hair stand on end

Not without good points

- ✦ 'If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me...'
- ✦ 'Too full of the milk of human kindness'
- ✦ Has ambition but without 'The illness should attend it'
- ✦ Does admire Duncan, ironically

Drawn into the Witches' Equivocal World

- ✦ Appearance versus reality
- ✦ Hides his true feelings from those around him
- ✦ Claims he never thinks of the witches yet asks Banquo to discuss them with him at a later date
- ✦ Hints that Banquo would do well to show him loyalty

“Had I but died an hour before this chance
I had lived a blessed time; for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys: renown and grace is dead
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.”

Macbeth: Act 2 Scene 3

Desensitised to murder

- ✦ Calls on forces of evil to help him suppress his finer feelings
- ✦ 'Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day'

Morally Weak

- Balks at killing his king, an unarmed guest in his house
- Subjugates morality, pity, doubt and fear when pushed to do so by his wife
- Tries to become the man she wants him to be

Tormented by Guilt

- ✦ Dagger is a symbol of his guilt
- ✦ Banquo's ghost is a further manifestation of guilt
- ✦ Imagination is a mirror of his finer self
- ✦ He works hard to suppress this, but is self-aware enough to know that he has saddled himself with the burden of mental anguish

Tyrant

- Submits to darkness with astonishing rapidity after the banquet scene
- Believes he is 'in blood / Stepped so far that should I wade no more,
/ Returning were as tedious as to go o'er'
- Tells his wife that he is 'but young in deed'
- Banquo's ghost only serves to show him that he needs more practice at murder
- Killing of Macduff's family pure tyranny
- Interesting that we see this murder on stage

Tormented

- ✦ Kingship brings no joy
- ✦ Paranoid
- ✦ Sees no point to life: 'supped' too many horrors
- ✦ 'I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, / And wish th' estate of the world were now undone'

Final Impression

- ✦ Is he redeemed?
- ✦ Depends on what you thought of him at the start
- ✦ Is being a brave fighter enough?
- ✦ 'Why should I play the Roman fool...?'
- ✦ Feared and despised tyrant whose passing is not mourned by anyone
- ✦ 'Dead butcher'