

Example by StudyDriver

Source: <https://studydriver.com/macbeth-fate-vs-free-will/>

Macbeth Fate Vs Free Will Example

In William Shakespeare's 17th century play, Macbeth, the dichotomy between fate and free will play a central role as a theme throughout the story. On one hand, denoting one's destiny set forth at birth, fate may appear impossible to be controlled by mere mortals. On the other hand, free will refer to the idea that every event is a reaction to some other action carried out of one's own accord. Contrary to an explanation based solely in fate as a driver, Shakespeare instead puts free will at the core of Macbeth's decisions, demonstrating that fate is under the control of the actor.

To begin with the Witches' prophetic incantations, we see that although fate is a common motif in the story, the results are usually caused by a string of personal decisions that coincide with the prophecies. For example, when Shakespeare writes that "The Witches are an enactment of the irrational" (2.3.17), he then demonstrates how even their fate-bound personas fall subject to the logical decision-making of Macbeth. This is evident in Macbeth's attitude, as he rationalizes everything he is told, basing his actions off of an action-reaction analysis, rather than off of blind belief in his fated outcome. Shakespeare then has the witches say "Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn, The power of man, for none of woman born, Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.90-92). Every one of these

actions is a choice the witches encourage Macbeth to make, evident in the commanding tone pushed across by the action verbs. If fate truly were the driver, the witches would not have needed to emphasize such a path of action. Rather, the importance placed upon a “to be” verb shows that one’s free will is still the deciding factor in their future. Next, Macbeth’s fall at the hands of Macduff provides a similar point of contention between fate and free will. Foreshadowing the event, the witches say to Macbeth in the second apparition, “The power of man, for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.91.). This was a key turning-point in the story demonstrating the importance of free will is in Macbeth’s murder of Duncan to become king. Although it had been predicted in prophecy, the action itself came as a result of Macbeth following through his own plan. He may have eventually become King if he never did anything, but Shakespeare’s storyline instead shows a logical pathway connecting the original prophecy to its fulfillment. The idea of fate, he thus suggests, might simply be a matter of coincidences. “All hail, Macbeth Hail to thee, thane of Glamis! All hail, Macbeth Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor! All hail, Macbeth Hail to thee, thou shall be King hereafter!” (1.3.49). Duncan’s two sons flee so that they will not be suspected of committing a crime that they did not, the murder of their own father.

Finally, a look into Macbeth’s communications with Lady Macbeth reveals the intentions that guide Macbeth’s every action. “I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none.” (1.7.50-52). Rather than fate, Macbeth demonstrates in these interactions that he knows exactly what he is trying to do. During the Ted Talk: “Are we in Control?”, it was really interesting to see the way we view things or make decisions is influenced by our fears, the environment we live and the expectations from our family, we all have an inner moral, a selfless code to which we all abide, in that way we might see things differently and make the right decisions, just like Macbeth who desired for the crown and made the decision of killing so many innocent lives.

Macbeth’s choices to fulfill the prophecies that the three evil witches gave him depict that, although, characters are influenced by others, ultimately their decision is what they follow through with and what impacts their life the most. For instance, at the core of Shakespeare’s story, Macbeth’s murder of Duncan is what ultimately causes his own death at the hands of a vengeful Macduff. This is not fate, but rather a logical consequence caused by Macbeth’s own choices. Fate, as Shakespeare thus demonstrates, exists only in coincidence, guided along by the

much more influential decisions that an individual is free to make.