# AQA English Literature GCSE

## Macbeth: Character Profile

### Macduff

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# Macduff

***SYMBOLISES ULTIMATE LOYALTY***

## INTRODUCTION



MAC DUFF

Macduff is, essentially, a minor character. However, he is, arguably, the **most prominent minor character** in the play. Macduff is a **static character**, in that his **loyalty** to King Duncan, and righteous heirs to the throne, is **unwavering**. He immediately distrusts Macbeth and refuses to attend his coronation. Ultimately, Macduff becomes a **focal point** for Macbeth's **rage and desire** to protect his throne. Macduff's family is murdered by Macbeth's assassins, after Macduff flees to England to seek help from the king. **Revenge** drives Macduff to eventually kill Macbeth and instill Malcolm, the **rightful heir** to the throne.

## SYMBOLISM

Macduff is, in every way, the **opposite to the character of Macbeth** and therefore they are the **foil** of each other. It is important to consider why Shakespeare portrays Macduff as in stark contrast to that of the character of Macbeth. These two characters extend to the **symbols** of the fight between good and evil. Arguably, these characters may also have a Biblical **symbolism** – a representation of **sin being defeated and order restored**.

- ➔ Defeating Macbeth is Macbeth's destiny, as Macduff suspected him from the start and the Witches **prophesied** that "***for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth***".
- ➔ He has the **opposite definition** of manhood to Macbeth, as Macduff doesn't resist emotion but embraces it.
- ➔ His bravery is selfless and out of a love for his country; violence is for a justified cause (not murder) and it is only proportional to what is needed. He is confident in facing Macbeth, as he calls to him "***turn hell hound, turn***", demonstrating that he is not afraid to fight Macbeth, as Macduff has **righteousness** on his side. His true bravery exposes **Macbeth's cowardice.**
- ➔ Macbeth's confidence and bravery comes from **hubris** (excessive pride), due to the witches' prophecies that state "***none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth***". Thus, it is clear that Macbeth has been a **coward** since Act 1: he killed Duncan in his sleep, he killed Banquo with murderers. Macduff's bravery is pure and honourable and therefore succeeds in killing Macbeth in battle.

**EXAM TIP!**

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first but once you get the hang of it, this can greatly benefit AO2 for subject terminology.

## CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

### Religious Context

Macduff's reaction to Duncan's death is a **long hyperbolic speech**, where he uses **religious language** to show his belief in the '**Divine Right of Kings**'. This shows Macduff to be adhering to the religious, moralistic thoughts of the historical period.




Macduff uses **metaphorical language** to describe Duncan's death: "***most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope the lord's anointed temple***". His body is referred to as a "***temple***" in order to reinforce the holiness of Duncan's reign. He recognises Duncan as the true, **divinely ordained**, king; the "***Lord's temple***" and thus God's earthly deputy. Kings are anointed with **holy oil** at their coronation to signify this.

- ➔ Hence the murder is not just a crime (murder), it is an unforgivable sin against God, which is "***sacrilegious***" and **unholy - tantamount** (equivalent) to the murder of God himself.

In the Jacobean era it was believed that God picked who was to be king, therefore to try and change who was king was a sin as you were going directly against God's will. This is similar to the **Biblical fall** of man in the **Garden of Eden**, as Adam disobeyed God's orders. Macduff emphasises this belief that the king is **divinely ordained** and is therefore loyal to him. He associated Duncan with **piety and virtue** as he is aligned with God.

- ➔ He also recognises that the murder will have greater consequences for Scotland as he states "***see the great doom's image***", which is a reference to judgment day. This suggests that he sees the **death of the king** as comparable to the end of the world – complete loyalty and devotion, or that perhaps, ending a **divine bloodline's** right to the throne would enrage God. The **natural order** has been disturbed and thus **chaos will ensue**, like at the end of the world.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Sensitive:** Macduff differs from the other male characters in the play; he publicly exhibits **emotional behaviour**, something which was considered a **feminine trait** at the time.

Macduff's violence is not dangerous like Macbeth's as it comes from love for his country and family; it is "***grief convert to anger***". This is demonstrated through the **very emotional reaction** to the death of his family.

- Macduff believes that Macbeth must have "***no children***" to explain how he can live with a **guilty conscience of killing Macduff's children**. This also means that there is no way for Macbeth to receive retribution, as Macduff has no way to deliver a pain equal to having his own children killed. Nothing Macduff can do will **truly pay for this pain** – not even killing Macbeth; losing family is a greater pain than death.
- Macduff's disbelief is evidenced through Shakespeare's use of many **rhetorical questions** and the **repetition** of questions he has already asked: "***all my pretty ones?***" "***my children too?***" "***my wife kill'd too?".*** These reveal his **flabbergasted** state as he cannot imagine that someone could even do that. This contrasts to Macbeth, as his **selfish ambition** is put before all else, including emotional sensitivity and morals.

- **Patriotic:** Shakespeare portrays Macbeth as a man who adores Scotland and feels as though he must save it from the tyranny of Macbeth's rule. He is the one to recognise that Macbeth's reign brings chaos to Scotland and sets about creating an opposition to Macbeth.
  - Macduff uses the **motif of personifying Scotland**, as Macbeth is causing Scotland to "***bleed bleed poor country***". Shakespeare uses this technique in order to **symbolise** how Scotland is dying because the 'Great Chain of Being' has been subverted.
    - The 'Great Chain of Being' is a **hierarchical social structure**, which dictated who had authority over who (the King was at the top of the hierarchy, just under God).
  - Shakespeare evidences Macduff's care for all of Scotland through the use of **parallelism** as "***new widows howl, new orphans cry***" demonstrates that Macduff is considering the detrimental effects of Macbeth's reign, **holistically** (as a whole). Hence he left his own wife and children to try and save the women and children of the whole country. This contrasts Macbeth, as Macduff acts for the good of others, not the good of himself. While Macbeth's allegiance is to himself and his wife, Macduff's is to Scotland.



## KEY MOMENTS

| SC | OCCURRENCE | SIGNIFICANCE |
|---|---|---|
| 1.6 | Macduff is introduced to the audience. | Macduff is introduced to the audience amongst a series of other characters, and doesn't speak in this scene. By introducing him in a scene where he has no lines, the audience do not suspect that by the end of the play, he will be a character which enacts revenge on Macbeth and a character which will hold a great deal of power. |
| 2.3 | Macduff discovers Duncan's death. | Macduff's complete **loyalty** to Duncan and adherence to the **'Divine Right of Kings'** is demonstrated through a **very emotional reaction to the death** and Shakespeare's use of the group of three "***O horror, horror, horror***" revealing Macduff's distress and also his honour. Shakespeare employs **repetition** to emphasise the strength of this emotion. Macduff adopts the **role of the judge** in this play – he knows Macbeth is in the wrong. He will act on God's behalf (in the absence of Duncan) to bring justice upon Macbeth. **Judgment day for Macbeth** – his actions will result in eternal damnation. |
| 4.1 | Macbeth receives warning from an apparition (conjured by the Witches) that he should be wary of Macduff. | Though Macduff doesn't appear in this scene, the Witches conjure an apparition which warns Macbeth that he should "beware Macduff, beware the Thane of Fife". This works to set Macduff up as Macbeth's foil, as he becomes suspicious of what Macduff could do to him. |
| 4.2 | Macduff's family is killed by Macbeth | This is the ultimate 'trigger' for Macduff: he has left his family in the country he loves in order to help rid his country of Macbeth - this shows the choice he has made between his family and his country, which causes the death of his loved ones. This provides Macduff with even more rationale to enact his revenge on Macbeth. |
| 4.3 | Malcom suspects that Macduff may be working for Macbeth so tests him to see if he is trustworthy. He also finds out that his family has been killed in this scene, and promises | Malcom's test involves talking to Macduff about why he wouldn't be fit to be the King of Scotland, and though Macduff initially disagrees politely, he eventually agrees, proving his allegiance to Scotland and as an ally to Malcolm. This shows him as both a truthful and loyal character. |

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|---|---|---|
| | revenge on Macbeth for this. | |
| 5.8 | Macduff kills Macbeth | In this scene, Shakespeare utilises the character of Macduff to restore order to the play, by ensuring that it is Macduff who brings an end to the **tyrannous reign** of Macbeth, rather than Malcolm. Arguably, Shakespeare does this so that Malcolm's reign isn't **tainted by violence** and he is able to **maintain his own purity**. Macduff has the strongest reason to kill Macbeth: **revenge**. Therefore, this killing from emotion is perceived as more acceptable by the audience. This reveals the ambivalence and **double sense of the witches'** prophecies and forces Macbeth to realise his mistake in trusting them. He was warned of Macduff all along but chose to **interpret the prophecies to suit his own ambitions.** It is only then that Macbeth realises the witches were "***juggling fiends***" and recognise the truth in a classical moment of **anagnorisis** (the point in a play, where a principal character recognises or discovers another character's true identity). Macduff, therefore, is **symbolic** of a bringer of truth and he calls Macbeth what he is – "***tyrant***" "***hellhound***" "***bloodier villain***". He brings truth to the **deception** that has been Macbeth's reign, exposing him for what he is and purges Scotland of its illness: "***bleed bleed poor country***"; the **blood that must be bled** is Macbeth's. |

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Malcolm** | Both Malcom and Macduff hold an immense amount of **loyalty** and **patriotism** towards their country, and this is crucial as it leads to Macbeth's removal from the throne. Malcom tests Macduff's loyalty in the play, which Macduff succeeds in and hence proves to the audience that Macduff is a character to be trusted.

**Macbeth** | Macduff is eventually the character who kills Macbeth in the play.

### EXAM TIP!

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Macbeth and Macduff.

**Ross** | Ross is part of the army which eventually overthrows Macbeth, and is a Thane. He is the one who tells Macduff that Macbeth has murdered his family. He serves as a character who


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delivers news both to the characters and audience in the play, and Macduff is part of this deliverance.

**King Duncan** | Macduff shows great loyalty to King Duncan, and is the character who finds him dead after Macbeth murders him.

## KEY QUOTES

"***lest our old robes sit easier than our new***"

- Here, Shakespeare reveals Macduff's **bleak perception of a future Scotland** under Macbeth as he uses the **extended metaphor** of predicting Scotland will change for the worse.
    - He suggests there will be **chaos and a divergence** from the peace of the past

Macduff opposes Macbeth's rule: "***fit to govern? No not to live!***"

- Through Shakespeare's use of **rhetorical question** and **hypophora** (a question is raised and immediately answered) emphasise Macduff's strong hatred of **tyranny** and complete loyalty to Scotland.
    - He resents **tyranny** and this is clear through his immediate attempts to oppose Macbeth with an army from England. In the scene 4.3, **Malcolm tests Macduff** to see if he is **in fact a man of principal**. It is when Malcolm changes from **character flaws** (like greed and lust) to the disruption of Scotland's order that Macduff rejects him. This is evident as Malcolm suggests that ***"I should pour the sweet milk of concord into hell***".

***"thy hope ends here"***

- This demonstrates Macduff's pessimistic outlook – he would not be able to live in happiness if Scotland was ruled by a **tyrant**.
- Malcolm also tests Macduff and proves him not to be **naïve**; he will not accept something that wouldn't be good for the country as he shows great emotion towards the **well-being of the country.**


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"***he is noble, wise, judicious***".

- Here, Ross is defending Macduff, and the audience are provided with an initial view of Macduff as a trustworthy and calculating leader.

"***Cruel are the times when we are traitor and do not know ourselves***"

- Macduff is only doing what he thinks is best for Scotland in not being a traitor to Scotland, but he is a traitor to his family as he could only save one.
    - In doing this, Macduff becomes the **complete foil** to Macbeth, who conversely obeys his wife and is a traitor to his country.

"***Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope the lord's anointed temple***"

- Shakespeare uses this **metaphorical language**, in stating that Duncan's body was a "***temple***", in order to reinforce the holiness of Duncan's reign.
    - He recognises Duncan as the true, **divinely ordained**, king.
    - This demonstrates Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, in addition to his intensely patriotic nature.

"***new widows howl new orphans cry***".

- Macduff kills Macbeth after the murder of his wife and children, as he is fighting for his family, but also for all the women and children in Scotland, which is evidenced through Shakespeare's use of **zoomorphism**.
    - The **verb** "***howl***" cultivates a greater sense of **sympathy** for these orphans - like abandoned puppies.

## EXAM TIP!

When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Shakespeare" explicitly. This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.