

Macbeth: Responding to Critics

1. “The tragedy of Macbeth is not to be found in his death; rather it is evident in his mental suffering, moral weakening, and defeated purpose.” —Samuel Thurber, “Notes on *Macbeth*.”
Cite evidence from the play to support this statement.
2. “It is a question whether Shakespeare knew the lore of the Scottish Weird Sisters (as the Three Fates), but a more important question is whether he gives them the power not merely to prophesy but to determine the future.” —Willard Farnham, “The Witches in *Macbeth*.”
How would you answer this question? Is Macbeth a victim of the witches and so of Fate? Or is he alone responsible for his downfall?
3. “The word ‘bloody’ appears on almost every page, and runs like a red thread through the whole play...” —Bodenstedt, editor’s comments.
Choose this or any other motif and discuss how it underscores a particular theme, referring to examples found in the play.
4. “The Weird Sisters present nouns rather than verbs. They put titles on Macbeth without telling him what actions he must carry out to attain those titles. It is Lady Macbeth who supplies the verbs.” —Susan Snyder, “*Macbeth: A Modern Perspective*.”
In what respects is Lady Macbeth a fourth witch? What aspects of her character tie her firmly to a more moral human, rather than a witch?
5. “The natural universe revealed in the play is essentially attuned to the good, so that it reacts to the unambiguously evil act of killing Duncan...” —Susan Snyder, “*Macbeth: A Modern Perspective*.”
How does nature inform against and even turn against Macbeth? Consider not only the elements, but also psychic aspects of what is natural for human beings.
6. “It is a troubling thought that *Macbeth*, of all Shakespeare’s characters, should seem the most ‘modern,’ the only one you could transpose into contemporary battle dress or a sport shirt and slacks.” —Mary McCarthy, *Signet Classic Macbeth*.
Compare Macbeth with a modern equivalent, perhaps a political, a sports or entertainment figure who has let ambition control his/her life.

* Essay questions compiled by Eileen Bach