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# Macbeth By William Shakespeare: Responsibility For Own Actions

“Macbeth” is a tragic play about Macbeth’s downfall. There are several key moments that lead to the tragic hero’s downfall: firstly when Macbeth meets the three witches in Act 1 Scene 1, secondly when he decides to kill King Duncan in Act 1, and finally the order of the killing of Macduff’s wife and children just before Lady Macbeth kills herself. These three moments are crucial in moving the play and Macbeth’s demise forward, and Shakespeare uses these very intelligently.

At the very start, the witches play a massive part in the play. They predict Macbeth’s future aka becoming King and Elizabethan (audience) would have believed that they cast a spell on the play which changed everything. The lines ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair in Act 1 Scene 1, mean two related things in general. First, it means that things that are good will become bad and things that are bad will become good. The witches are referring first to themselves. They look ugly, they are the type of women who has ‘beards’, but the predictions they offer are beautiful to Macbeth. Secondly, it introduces the theme idea of fate and whether the witch’s influence in the play caused the main characters to change their minds throughout the play. Finally, suggestions of morality play a crucial significance in Macbeth’s decision about his future and his hesitance of whether to kill King Duncan. “What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won”. King Duncan here is talking about whether to give the title Thane of Cawdor to Macbeth.

Another reason why Shakespeare decides to add the witches in the play is that this play was seen by King James (Mary I son). Shakespeare knew that King James was fascinated with witchcraft (magic), so this may have been why he begins the play introducing the witches. Having the witches in the playback then was the main topic because of all the superstitions in the past. The witches were portrayed as women who could predict the future, cursed the climate (bad weathers) now and again, and would have the conscience to spoil crops. For these reasons in Shakespeare’s time, hundreds of thousands of women were tortured and convicted for witchcraft (source ‘Superstition’).

Shakespeare follows the supernatural topic throughout the play as it was a fundamental concern to the people of his time. In the supernatural lay ‘horror’ and brought ‘fear’. During the soliloquy ‘Is this a dagger I see before me’ Act 2 Scene 1 (imaging a dagger which is not real), Macbeth changes his mind by going from one extreme to another. This impacts Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare illustrates whether Macbeth is going to use the dagger or not. Shakespeare uses this with great effect to express the thoughts of individual characters, particularly in the case of the protagonist. It was said that protagonists or the tragic anti-hero were ‘goodies’ and antagonists were defined as the ‘baddies’ in this case it is Lady Macbeth.

The next key moment in the downfall of Macbeth is when he decides to kill King Duncan. The moment he has killed the King. Macbeth feels destroyed and distraught; he says, ‘Great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand’. At this moment he feels guilt and thinks that the act he has committed cannot be washed away, even with all the water in the ocean. Macbeth is so shaken by the murder that he brings back the daggers which he used to kill the guards and the King.

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By this point, Shakespeare has made Macbeth a weak and vulnerable person. This is because he has committed a murder which he now regrets. Shakespeare slowly takes Macbeth's character from 'I see thee yet, in form as palpable' to a man who is so easily persuaded to change his mind.

In Act 4 Scene 1. The witches say 'double, double, toil and trouble'. This line means that they are trying to toil and trouble with their own spell, and this presumably is aimed more towards Macbeth and increasing his misery. This is on the return of the second time, then Macbeth meets the three witches, they have another prediction for him 'Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth: beware Macduff'. They are saying be careful of Macduff. Soon after that, they say, 'none of woman born shall harm Macbeth', in Act 4 Scene 1 and the witches disappear.

Macbeth is totally confused because he knows that everyone is born from a woman. The audience may interpret that Macbeth becomes excited because he does not know Macduff was not born naturally. 'But yet I'll make assurance double sure. He is saying that he wants to achieve further security by killing Macduff, he just wants to make sure that all the danger is over. As the audience are happy and satisfied to see that Shakespeare is preparing us for the end of the play.

When Macbeth orders the killing of Macduff's wife and children, the audience loses sympathy for him. The murderers come charging in and are soon at Macduff's home. The child says, 'He has killed me, mother'. The son has just been stabbed and before he dies, he tells his mother to 'Run away. From this moment on Macbeth's downfall is imminent. The grief and pain that the family is going through must have been really shattering at the time, however, as we know these are minor characters who do not play a major role. They are being cleverly used by Shakespeare to make it seem as if they are important characters.

The whole idea of fate and morality is brought to life by Shakespeare in Act 1 Scene 3. The line 'Without my stir' means that Macbeth will be crowned as King soon when King Duncan dies without any effort from him. It is said that fortune or being King will take him by chance. In the Elizabethan times, the whole witching conjuring up a devil in the spirits was thought to be the idea of fate. But as for now the modern audience, no one believes in witches and if they exist or not is another matter. On the other hand, in the modern-day, if people still believe in witchcraft it could be about their family backgrounds and upbringing. The witches in the Shakespeare plays were introduced simply because they would suit the audience and it was the main thing to talk about back then. The modern audience would not be frightened or scared by the idea of witches and of their presence around us nowadays is very rare.

Lady Macbeth's act in the play is very significant, she is the one demanding many difficult deeds from her husband "Macbeth", she is the one who puts him at risk, and she is the more clever one. Throughout the play, there is an ongoing relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. This relationship is one of the functions of the play that creates most of the actions, reactions, moods, feelings, and attitudes. In the early stages of the play, the Macbeths seem to be a devoted couple. Their love and concern for each other remain strong and constant throughout the play, but their relationship changes dramatically following the murder of King Duncan in Act 2.

Lady Macbeth does, however, see Macbeth's emotional anguish when they are having a party to celebrate Macbeth becoming king. Macbeth sees a ghost of Banquo, his trusty and loyal

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friend, who he ordered to be killed because he saw him as a threat to his throne. Nonetheless, their relationship has deteriorated so much that Macbeth shows no emotion when his wife dies.

Lady Macbeth may have been of lower political status than Macbeth, but she is a major influence on Macbeth's life and is also the initiator of his downfall. She has a very calm and premeditated approach and systematically brainwashes Macbeth into killing the King. The timings were decisive, this is because 'brave Macbeth' has just come back from war and therefore he is very drained, and Lady Macbeth knows this, so she takes the right opportunity to roughly control his intellect and manipulate his mind. She also uses cunning deception and asks, 'Are you a man?', this way she knows that she is bound to get a sticking reply from him, and this causes him to follow on his actions.

'Come, you spirit, unsex me here. However, interestingly she wants the strength to commit the murder. She also wants to be turned into a man so that she has the power to do dreadful things. When she asks to be "unsexed" she is asking to gain the typical male characteristics of violence and detestation and hardheartedness. This is her flamboyant way of asking to be stripped of feminine weakness and invested with masculine tenacity. As a result, she wants to disconnect herself from being a mother. She does not have the right female qualities.

Macbeth struggles internally between ambition and guilt. Part of him really doesn't want to kill Duncan, his conscience knows that he will be anguished with guilt if he commits the murder.

In the Elizabethan times, the audience would have thought that the witches had excessive powers of control in the play, so the main characters were controlled by those powers they had embarked on. However, Macbeth was responsible for his own actions in the murder of King Duncan. Ultimately his inability to control his own thoughts were his major downfalls. Macbeth's dark intentions seem to overwhelm him, and he fear being caught in the process of destroying his honor.