

The epidemic of a tragic hero

Literature, William Shakespeare



The Epidemy of a Tragic Hero In order to be respected by people, one must do the “right thing” regardless the amount of mistakes that have been made. In the play Macbeth, by William Shakespeare, protagonist Macbeth faces decisions that change the course of his life. If no one can be all good or all bad, the question may be raised: why or why not is Macbeth a true tragic hero? Although Macbeth fails to meet some characteristics of a tragic hero, his most important realization of his own tragic flaw is what makes him a hero even though it led to his downfall. Despite the fact that Macbeth did not come from royal decent, he is still a character of noble stature. At first, Macbeth is a great Scottish general and thane of Glamis. After he wins an important battle three witches tell him that he will become thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland. When Macbeth is given Cawdor by King Duncan, he takes the witches words for truth and conspires against Duncan with his wife. The thought of more power, caused a spark in Macbeth which leads to his tragic flaws. The prophecies which were told by the witches were one of the factors which contributed to the degeneration of his character. When Macbeth first gains knowledge of his prophecies, his arrogance begins to show. He demands the “imperfect speakers, [to] tell [him] more” (I, iii, 75). It is unwise for Macbeth to disrespect the witches because they control his fate. In addition, Macbeth is very gullible. He puts his full trust in the words of the witches and his wife. Whenever the witches talk with Macbeth, they give him a false sense of security. The witches grant Macbeth three visions of his future. The first apparition warned Macbeth to “beware Macduff”; the second stated that “none of woman born” could kill Macbeth; and the third said that Macbeth cannot be killed “until Great Birnam wood [can reach]

Dunsinane hill" (IV, i, 90-112). All these things gave Macbeth self confidence because the apparitions made him believe that he was invincible. When Macbeth talks to Lady Macbeth, she convinces him to pursue the deed of killing Duncan for the throne because she believes that Macbeth " shalt be what [he was] promised" (I, v, 14-17). She does so by being the emasculator and taking action for herself. These influences were direct results to Macbeth's greatest flaw: disordered ambition. One crime leads to another crime to cover it up. This is exactly the situation Macbeth finds himself in. His first murder was Duncan and as a result Macbeth kills the two guards to avoid any suspicion. When Macbeth gained rule over Scotland he obtained the taste for power. This is his transformation into a ruthless leader who ruled by instilling fear in others. Macbeth becomes obsessed with his power and is willing to do anything to keep it. Macbeth is now greedy, violent, and power hungry. He continues to kill anyone he suspects is a threat to him and his throne. He kills his friend Banquo and even Macduff's family. Macbeth justifies his actions by saying that he is " in blood, stepped in so far that [he should] wade no more [because] returning [would be] as tedious as go'oe" (III, iv, 135-137). He is at a point of no return. The most important aspect of a tragic hero is the recognition of one's own flaws. When Lady Macbeth commits suicide, Macbeth finally comes to this realization. He begins to understand that " life's but a walking shadow.. " and that his life " signif[ies] nothing" (V, v, 9-14). Macbeth becomes aware that his life was meaningless and that he betrayed himself as well as the trust of many others and expresses a sense of desolation. He now knows what he should do, yet at the same time cannot do them. Since it is too late, Macbeth's disordered

ambition comes back around in his reversal of fate. All of the apparitions are undone in reversed order, leaving his inevitable death for last. Macbeth is definitely not all good; at the same time he is not all bad. Aside from his imperfect characteristics that he obtained from influences from witches, his wife, and his transformation into a brutal leader, Macbeth carries strong morals. He knows that what he has done is wrong and feels guilty.

Unfortunately, due to Macbeth's desire to hold onto his power at any cost, result in his death. Macbeth's noble stature, tragic flaws, transformation, and recognition of his own flaws all allow to perfectly fitting the description of a tragic hero.