

Macbeth by shakespeare and oedipus by sophocles comparison essay

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In both plays Macbeth by William Shakespeare and Oedipus by Sophocles we have forces of fate stepping in and intervening upon the characters of the play. We must question whether or not the characters would have acted in the way that they did had they not been given their respective prophecies.

Oedipus is driven to act by hearing that he will murder his mother and kill his father. Because he hears this, he takes actions that inadvertently fulfill this awful prophecy. Similarly, Macbeth fulfills the prophecy and alters his actions because he had been told of the prophecy in the first place, but what we must ask and consider is whether he would have ended up doing the same thing anyway, though we can never really know the answer to this.

In Act 1 Scene 3 of Macbeth, we have the three witches who greet him and inform him that he is to become the "Thane of Cawdor," the title that he will receive that evening, and "king hereafter" (46-48). In this we can think about how Macbeth acts throughout the rest of the play. Would Macbeth have decided to murder the king if he had not been given that prophecy? In Act 1 Scene 5, we have Lady Macbeth goading her husband into action because she feels as though greater power is within her reach, though she's afraid that her husband is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness"(15).

If Macbeth had not been given the prophecy, he would have accepted the title of Thane of Cawdor graciously, but there is nothing inherent in this that would have pushed him into taking the actions that he did. It's hard to see Macbeth deciding upon murdering the king without having being given this prophecy and the additional influence of his wife, who from the second she

heard that Macbeth was prophesied to become king couldn't wait to become queen and take the full power of the kingdom.

It is only because the witches told him that he would become the Thane of Cawdor before he officially received the title that he believed the other half of the prophesy about him becoming the king. Because he had been told that he would become king, he chooses to take action to expedite the process. This, of course, brings up questions of free will versus fate. Is Macbeth fated to murder the king? Are the witches merely serving to help bring about fate's grand plan? Or are we to take this to mean that we are responsible for our own actions? There are many important questions that we can consider if we think about how the play would be different without the witches. Macbeth could have possibly been given the Thane of Cawdor title, and realizes how close that made him to being king, he could have decided to murder the king regardless of whether or not he had been told that he would eventually become king.

If anything, the witches prophesy would seem to suggest the exact opposite of the actions that Macbeth took. He did not have to do anything else and he was awarded the Thane of Cawdor title. He should have simply sat back and said " Well, I was told that I would become king at some point, so i'll just let it happen the same way this first part of the prophesy happened." This, of course, seems to have been what he had in mind, though we of course know that Lady Macbeth was not about to sit by and wait around to become queen when such an obvious shortcut had presented itself to them.

In Act 2 Scene 2, we see the results upon Macbeth's conscious from his actions: " will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / clean from my hand?" (58-59). He had such terrible misgivings about murdering the king before he did so, and afterward he seems to realize that he was right for feeling so in the first place. But of course it's too late and such actions must be followed through. We can see how the actions of the play escalate from simply killing one person, and how complicated everything quickly becomes for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth by the end of the third act.

Shakespeare, William, Folger Shakespeare Library: Macbeth, New York, 2003.