

Macbeth's crimes

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Macbeth's crimes are blood, appalling and pitiless. Does Shakespeare present this "butcher", "hell-kite" and "fiend" as a monster or as someone with whom it is possible to feel sympathy?

The play Macbeth was written by William Shakespeare. It was written for the successor of Elizabeth I, James I of England. James I of England, who was James VI of Scotland, was a descendent of Banquo, and for this reason Shakespeare changed his play from the way this event actually took place in history.

In history Banquo actually aided Macbeth in the killing of Duncan, this would have upset the king and may have got Shakespeare in a lot of trouble.

Therefore Shakespeare changed it so that Banquo was not part of the plan to murder the king and was against the idea totally. Shakespeare added the witches into the play, as James was deeply interested in witchcraft.

This would make the play more appealing to the king. James was a firm believe of "The Divine Right Of Kings", this was a way of thinking that kings were hand picked by God and that they were, second in the hierarchy of the whole universe underneath God.

As James believed in this way of thinking it made the murder of Duncan a lot more dramatic.

When Duncan was murdered there was dramatic affects on Scotland. Shakespeare showed this unnatural affect over Scotland by things happening that would not happen normally. Such as horses eating each other and earthquakes happening. In the play Macbeth is shown as a tradgic hero. A tradgic hero is when a great heroic man has a weakness in his character, for

Macbeth the flaw in his character is his great ambition. His flaw has come from the witches telling him the 3 prophecies. This turned his whole perspective around and that was when his ambition took over.

As the play starts we see do not see Macbeth but we hear of how great a man he is and how much of a great brave warrior he is highly respected by all of his fellow Thanes and he also commands high respect from the king as well. There seems to be a connection with him and the witches in the first scene as the witches say

“ Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (act 1, scene I)

This quotation show that things are not exactly what they seem. Macbeth repeats these words later on in that act.

“ So foul and fair a day I have no seen” (Act 1, scene III)

When Macbeth says this there is a sense that the witch has already got some power over him, even though they have not met each other yet.

At the battle the sergeant seems very happy that they had Macbeth on his side. The sergeant shows that he has great respect for Macbeth by complimenting him.

“ Except they mount to the battle in reeking wounds; or memorize another Golgotha” (Act 1, scene II)

This phrase means that the sergeant was not sure if Macbeth and Banquo wanted to swim in blood or make another Golgotha, which was when Jesus was sacrificed. King Duncan also shows his respect for Macbeth when he says:

“ O valiant cousin! Worthy gentlemen!” (Act 1, scene II)

Duncan is showing that he has great amounts of respect for Macbeth.

After the battle has taken place Macbeth and Banquo are on their way home when they come across the 3 witches. The witches greet Macbeth with 3 prophecies:

1. All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
2. All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
3. All hail Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter.

As Macbeth is told he will be king hereafter there is a thought in the back of his mind to kill the king. These prophecies have shocked Macbeth and when the witches start to leave he tries to make them stay. He tries to make them tell him more about the prophecies. When Ross tells Macbeth that he has become Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth has the thought of killing the king again. Banquo says to himself in a soliloquy

“ What can the devil speak true?” (Act1, scene III)

Banquo is stunned at the news, as is Macbeth. Macbeth asks them where they got this information as the Thane of Cawdor lives. Ross says that the Thane of Cawdor has been a traitor and that he is to be hanged. In Macbeth's first soliloquy he says

“ Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor: The greatest is behind.” (Act 1, scene III)

This shows that Macbeth has great trust in the prophecies and is contemplating whether or not to kill the king. Macbeth also shows that he doesn't really want to kill the king when he says

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" If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, with out my stir."
(Act 1, scene III)

Macbeth is showing resistance to killing the king as he thinks that if he doesn't do anything then maybe he will have a change of being king. This shows that Macbeth does have a conscience and that he knows the difference between right and wrong. There is a great contrast between Banquo and Macbeth when they are told about each of their prophecies. Macbeth looks a lot in to them where as Banquo doesn't really look into them much. Banquo also warns Macbeth that the witches prophecies may not be the whole truth and may cause a lot of damage to him, despite this Macbeth still wants to be king. This shows Macbeth has ambition and this is the flaw of his character.

Macbeth is not at all happy with Duncan's decision to make Malcolm, The Prince of Cumberland his heir to the throne. Macbeth is so angry with the decision in his soliloquy he says

" Stars hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires" (Act 1 scene III)

Macbeth has reached a turning point he wants to kill Duncan because now there is now way the he can become king unless he kills Duncan. The quotation shows that he knows what he is going to do is wrong so he wants to make no one can see what he is doing.

In act 1 scene VII Macbeth has another soliloquy in which he faces a real dilemma. He is stuck with the decision weather or not to kill the king. His say

" He is here in double trust: First as I am his kinsman and his subject, Strong both against deed; then, as his host, Who should against his murderer shut the door" (Act 1, scene VII)

Macbeth is really confused at this point he is not sure if he wants to kill Duncan or not. The quote above shows if he does then he is going against his morals and conscience. I think Macbeth knows the full consequences of what he is about to do, this is why he has some doubt in his mind, as the consequences are terrible. Macbeth then talks to his wife about his plan to kill Duncan, and how he is having second thoughts about killing Duncan. Lady Macbeth teases him, so out of pride Macbeth is forced into killing Duncan.

In Act 2 Scene I Macbeth is all alone when he sees a dagger in front off him.

" Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee: I have thee not" (Act 2, scene I)

I think that there is a large significance of this dagger being there. The dagger is blood soaked and is pointing towards the chambers of the king. I think that the dagger is a way of his mind showing us that he has a guilty conscience and that he has become possessed by evil. All of the forcing from his wife has passed him over to the evil side and now he is dead set on killing Duncan. There is also an element of ambition, as he wants to kill Duncan to show he is capable and also for himself to show that he is a real man to his wife.

Once Macbeth has murdered Duncan he acts very strange almost like he is in a daze. He looks very disturbed, he says

" This is a sorry sight" (Act2, scene II)

He says this as he is looking at his hands as if he was disgusted with himself and that he couldn't believe he had done such a terrible thing. While Macbeth was killing Duncan he heard voices saying

" Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep" (Act 2, scene II)

This really got to Macbeth, he didn't know where the voice came from and it really startled him. Lady Macbeth just told him to take no notice of what the voices had said.

" But wherefore could not I pronounce ' Amen'? I had most need of blessing, and ' Amen' stuck in my throat." (Act 2, scene II)

This also scared Macbeth has when he was about to kill Duncan he wanted to say a prayer but the word ' Amen' was stuck in his throat. These two affects were the first few consequences of killing Duncan.

" Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous sea incarnadine, Make the green one red" (Act 2, scene II)

This quote shows Macbeth is starting to feel guilty about his actions. When Macbeth says will great Neptune's oceans wash this blood clean from my hands he is conveying that it is such a bad thing that he has done nothing in the universe can clear him of his sins. Macbeth shows regret for him killing Duncan when he says

" Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!" (Act 2, scene II)

Macbeth is becoming unstable mentally and is regretting killing Duncan.

In act 3 Scene 4 Macbeth is having a banquet. At the start Macbeth is called away to see one of the murderers who gave him a report. Macbeth wanted Banquo and his son Fleance to be killed, the murderers only killed Banquo but Fleance got away.

“ Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect; Whole as the marble, founded as the rock, As broad and general as the casing air: But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in To saucy doubts and fears.” (Act 3, scene IV)

Macbeth is very frustrated that the killers did not kill Fleance as it has ruined his plan but he believes he can get around this hiccup. Once Macbeth has returned to the banquet he is asked to join the Lords. Lenox says to Macbeth here is a place reserv'd, sir. Macbeth asks him where? Lenox says here my good lord. What is't that moves your highness? Macbeth goes into a rage and starts to scream

“ Which of you have done this?” (Act 3, scene IV)

Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost in his chair, now Macbeth is going insane. All of the guests start to worry about the king but lady Macbeth tells them

“ Sit worthy friends: my lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth: pray you keep seat; the fit is momentary; upon a thought He will again be well.” (Act 3, scene IV)

Lady Macbeth is trying to cover for Macbeth by saying that he is disturbed because of a childhood drama. Lady Macbeth does this out of panic so that none of the lords are worried about the king. This could also affect his respect and reputation with the lords as they may think he is delusional.

Lady Macbeth covers for Macbeth very well. Lady Macbeth then asks the lords to leave, as Macbeth is very sick. Once the lords had left Macbeth tells lady Macbeth that he has a spy in every house. Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to get some sleep as he is become mentally unstable. Macbeth is suffering from all of the killing that he has done and it is not only affecting him it is also affecting his marriage to which seems to be deteriorating as the play goes on.

In Act 4 scene I Macbeth goes to visit the witches, which shows he firmly trusts the witches as he has gone to them which gives a sense that they have power over him where as if he waited and let them come to him he would not have given the impression that he was desperate. Macbeth is told 3 prophecies the first is:

“ Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff; Beware the Thanes of Fife. Dismiss me. Enough”

(Act 4, scene I)

The first apparition says this; it is a warning to Macbeth simply telling him to beware of Macduff, as he is dangerous. Macduff was never happy about Macbeth becoming king as Macduff never attended Macbeths crowning and he also suspected Macbeth of killing Duncan.

The second prophecies is:

“ Be bloody, bold and resolute; laugh to scorn the power of man, for none of women born shall harm Macbeth” (Act 4, scene I)

This prophecy made Macbeth relax a little, as he didn't think that there was any one in the world that could not be of women born. Which made him feel much more safer and almost invincible.

The third prophecies is:

“ Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill; shall come against him” (Act 4, scene I)

Macbeth was very happy with this prophecy as for him this meant he was invincible, as he believed that Burnam wood would never come to Dunsinane. He shows that he is very happy about his prophecies when he says:

“ That will never be: Who can impress the forest, bid the tree Unfix his earth bound root? Sweet bodements! Good!” (Act 4, scene I)

Macbeth has decided to kill the Macduffs as Macduff has fled to England and Macbeth sees this as the perfect time and way to kill them. If they are killed Macduff will be distorted and will want to kill Macbeth but Macbeth thinks he is invincible. This is the perfect time as there is no one to protect his family.

In Act 5 scene I Macbeth is getting ready for battle when he hears a woman screaming he sends his servant to investigate. He returns and tells Macbeth that his wife is dead. Macbeth responds to this by saying:

“ She would have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this pretty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a

walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, gull of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (Act 5, scene V)

This speech is said by Macbeth as he thinks life is not worth living for any more. He tries hard to make his life better but in the end he is going to die so what is the point. That is the kind of attitude he is taking. Macbeth is then told that Burnam Wood is moving towards Dunsinane. Macbeth reacts very badly to this he calls the messenger a

"Liar and slave" (Act 5, scene V)

Macbeth cannot believe it, the wood is moving, he is in such anger as the prophecies are not holding up to their word. Macbeth has his armour put on so he is ready for battle.

In the final scene Macbeth and Macduff have a battle, Macbeth is very full of himself until Macduff says

"Despair thy charm: and let the angel whom thou still hast serv'd tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd." (Act 5, scene VII)

Macbeth is in shock he cannot believe it, all the prophecies have been untrue. Then Macbeth is killed by Macduff and Macbeth's head is stuck on a pole and paraded around. This was a way of showing the people that if they betray the king this is what will happen to them.

The witches have influenced Macbeth, if they had not shown him the 3 prophecies then he would never have killed the king and he would still be a noble man. The witches were agents of evil so they were bound to tempt

Macbeth. The witches simply showed Macbeth what he could be if he listened to them they did not force him they gave him the option and Macbeth choose their way. The witches have no power so they simply tempt and try to push Macbeth in the direction they want him to go. Their influence is fair great on Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth is a very possessive woman and has a great amount of ambition about her. When she read the letter from her husband in Act 1 scene V she was determined on making Macbeth the king. She wanted him so badly to become the king. She showed her determination in Act 1 scene VII when she said she would:

“ I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me: I would, while it was smiling up in my face, Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, and dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you have to this.” (Act 1, scene VII)

She is so determined she would kill her own baby while she was feeding it, this shows that she is a very strong woman. Lady Macbeth wants to become purely evil she shows this when she says

“ Come spirits that tend on mortal thoughts! Unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty; make thick my blood.” (Act 1, scene V)

Lady Macbeth also says

“ TH' effect and it! Come to my women's breasts, and take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, wherever in your sightless substances”

Lady Macbeth wants very thing that is feminine about her taken away from her so she can be purely evil.

Lady Macbeth shows she isn't purely evil in Act 2 scene II when Macbeth asks her why she didn't kill Duncan she says

" Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't." (Act 2, scene II)

As the play goes on lady Macbeth and Macbeths relationship starts to fall apart. At the beginning of the play Macbeth tells his wife every thing as the play digresses they lose faith and trust in each other. They do not tell each other anything. Lady Macbeth was not told by Macbeth that he was planning to kill Banquo or the Macduff's he simply just didn't communicate with her anymore.

I believe that Shakespeare has presented Macbeth as some one who you can feel sympathy for, as he seems to be pushed in to killing Duncan by Lady Macbeth. I think that he never had any intentions of killing Duncan it was because his wife drove him so that he could gain power. He was not as strong as he seems, his wife bullies him into killing Duncan but he is a hero on the battlefield. Also if he had not seen the witches then I do not think that he would have any thoughts of killing the king.