

Macbeth's influences

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The play 'Macbeth' is written by William Shakespeare. In the play the three witches, Lady Macbeth and his own thoughts and feelings, influence Macbeth. The major themes are ambition and guilt. The other themes are the supernatural, the evil thoughts some characters think, bravery and symbols of good. It is set in the 12th century in Scotland and England. The dialogue is old but it sometimes rhymes and is eventually easy to understand. When I started to read Macbeth I found it hard to follow but after the first couple of scenes I found it easier.

The witches plan to meet Macbeth. The king finds out the Thane of Cawdor has betrayed him. The title is given to Macbeth. Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches. The key prophecy given by the witches to Macbeth is he will be king. The witches are proved right when Macbeth finds out he is Thane of Cawdor. The king announces his son; Malcolm will be the next king. The king spends the night in Macbeth's castle. Lady Macbeth is furious. Macbeth kills the king. Macduff finds the king dead. Macbeth kills the two key witnesses.

The king's sons flee to England. Suspicion falls on the king's sons. Macbeth is the king. Macbeth arranges for Banquo and his son to be killed. Macbeth finds it hard to sleep. Banquo is killed but his son escapes. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost. Macduff has gone to England to join the king's sons. Macbeth prepares for war. The witches give Macbeth more prophecies. War breaks out. Macduff kills Macbeth. Malcolm is the new king. When the witches are introduced in Act one the theme of supernatural is also introduced because there is thunder and lightning.

The quote 'fair is foul and foul is fair' alludes to the perverse way in which they find good things bad, and bad things good but it is the initial link with Macbeth, since one of the first things he says is 'so foul and fair a day I have not seen'. The question of femininity is introduced when Banquo comments 'you should be woman, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret, that you are so'. It is not their looks with which they beguile the men, but their words and prophecies and because Macbeth takes their prophecies more seriously, and it leads to his downfall.

He eventually relies on them, just as he would prefer to rely on fate and superstition rather than reality. Their prophecies become deliberately ambiguous, but Macbeth does not search for hidden meanings because he does not believe they will deceive him. They are a huge influence on him because they work on his weakness and appeal to his ambition. The witches are integral to the plot. Lady Macbeth is a powerful character, as a result of her great desire for success and the lengths to which she is prepared to go, all her ambitions appear to be for her husband.

As soon as she receives the letter from Macbeth, including the prophecies, she begins to plot. However she does not appear to trust her husband fully: 'yet I do fear thy nature'. She is initially devoted, she cannot foresee what they will have to go through in order to make Macbeth king. As soon as we are introduced to her, Shakespeare reveals how passionate she is and how merciless. The speech beginning 'come you spirits' gives an important insight into her character. She even wants to be stripped of her femininity, in order to be ruthless, for her husband's sake: 'unsex me here'.

Her words are ugly, as she calls on the supernatural to prevent her heart from ruling her body. When Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are together, it is evident that she is dominant, since she is the one urging action in the plot. Her imagery is violent and her method is manipulative and she rarely allows him to express uncertainty. However, she herself begins to express weakness about the murder of Duncan, when she says: 'had he not resembled my father as he slept I had done it'. Nonetheless she is still coldly efficient when completing this part of the plot, and in deceiving everyone else, by the horror she expresses at the murder.

She retains this control when Macbeth starts to hallucinate and is quick witted in accusing him. However, in so doing, she accuses Macbeth of being weak: 'less than a man'. The last scene where Lady Macbeth appears shows her engulfed in guilt, which manifests itself when she sleeps, and her anxiety and paranoia reveal everything. She warns herself and Macbeth: 'what's done cannot be undone', showing that deep down, she feels remorse. She becomes obsessive with cleaning her hands, and the blood on her skin is a sign of her guilt. She cannot wash it off and knows it will never go away.

After this scene, she does not appear again, she is driven to suicide. Macbeth dismisses it as a nuisance. Macbeth shows ambition early on in the play and the first signs are in response to the witch's prophecy, when he asks: 'why do I yield to that suggestion whose horrid image doth unfix my hair'. His ambition is straight away linked with violence. By the end of act one Macbeth's attitude appears to have changed: 'if by chance will have me king,

why, chance me crown me'. Macbeth sounds resolved at some points but deeper thoughts are troubling him.

Thoughts of ambition and the violence that will result, if he acts on them. Macbeth realises this as soon as he hears the news that Malcolm is in succession to the throne by divine right, when he states: 'stars, hide your fires; let not light see my black and deep desires'. The act Macbeth commits is pure evil. Macbeth's prior goodness is established early in the play. He is 'brave Macbeth', 'full of honour', 'noble Macbeth' and 'bellona's bridegroom'. When the plot to kill Duncan is underway, Macbeth tries to resist, stating: 'we will proceed no further in this business'.

Despite attempting to resist Lady Macbeth's influence, he murders Duncan. He knows the murder of a king is evil, and once he is resolved to murder, he knows it is a 'terrible deed'. He does not understand the nature of the forces influencing him, nor the witches or Lady Macbeth, never once does he recognise the motive of these characters. I found the play interesting and as the play progressed I found it easier to understand the use of language. The use of language is effective because it would be boring if Shakespeare used normal words. I thought Macbeth would be boring but I found it quite interesting.