

# Lady macbeth character analysis essay

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The major theme of ambition continues to be explored by Shakespeare through the presentation of Lady Macbeth's perspective upon the dangerous quality, in regards to what she believes Macbeth must require to make effective ambitious decisions. My evidence from Act 1 Scene 5 of the play 'Macbeth' which strongly suggests this point is: 'thou wouldst be great; art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it.' Lady Macbeth has just read the letter she has received from her husband, Macbeth, regarding his meeting with the weird sisters and their prophecies that are beginning to come into action- Macbeth tells her about the 'greatness promised thee'. In her soliloquy Lady Macbeth reacts ambitiously to this great news and begins to think of how she can make her husband king and therefore starts to reflect on her husband's character in terms of his ambitious abilities and ruthless capacity.

Additionally, she fears that he hasn't the killer instinct that will allow him to achieve greatness, as this is a precursor to her telling him to be the serpent under the flower. The terms 'wouldst' translates to 'would like to', which means that Lady Macbeth is saying that Macbeth wants to become king; however Lady Macbeth might be actually hinting at her own desires, since she desperately wants him to become king- and since she wants him to become king, so would Macbeth.

Moreover, this presents how Lady Macbeth's ambition is making her the dominant and controlling one of the relationship where she decides what Macbeth wants based on her own yearnings, regardless of gender stereotypes. Furthermore, Lady Macbeth described the third prediction as 'great'- exactly how Macbeth has described it in the letter as well as previous

scenes such as in Act 1 Scene 3: ‘greatest is behind’. This to further highlights their strong relationship at the beginning of the play, as they are presented to have the same ambitious approach towards the third prophecy.

Due to the fact that they have a good relationship, where they both plan to achieve royalty, this foreshadows the possibility of the plan succeeding as they have they can work well as a team. To elaborate, the fact that the audience are already expecting for Macbeth’s ambition to lead to his downfall (due to the way in which his immoral intentions are presented in previous scenes), this illustrates the idea that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s relationship is bound to fall apart, dragging Macbeth as well as Lady Macbeth to their complete destruction. The presentation of Lady Macbeth’s perspective upon ambition is further presented through the noun ‘illness’ which acts as a metaphor for the ‘ruthless streak’ that she believes is necessary for ambition to be successful in their pursuit to the crown.

Due to the fact that Lady Macbeth has only just started plotting for the crown, the use of the noun ‘illness’ implies that even at this stage she knows what she is doing is wrong. Alternatively, Lady Macbeth could use the noun ‘illness’ as a metaphor for ‘evil’, which foreshadows how Macbeth will indeed ‘catch’ evil, as one may catch a disease. As the play progresses, the audience will see Macbeth’s ‘symptoms’ develop and worsen, to the point where there is no hope for any cure- causing Macbeth to tragically die. Further into this, Lady Macbeth’s use of the imperative ‘should’ suggests that she sees this ‘illness’ as an essential requirement for effective ambition, where ambition will not work without it.

In simple terms, Shakespeare successfully presents Lady Macbeth as an ambitious character as she is seen as more motivated and determined than Macbeth, which would appear as ironic to the audience as not only is Lady Macbeth a female- but the prophecies are not even directly related to her, as they were mainly intended for Macbeth than her, yet she still is more ambitious than him. This could be due to the fact that she can only be Queen if Macbeth becomes king, so when he hesitates and is reluctant, she displays enough ambition for the both of them. As well as her determination, Lady Macbeth's serious and firm tone when plotting illustrates that once she has worked out a plan, nothing will turn her from that course until her ambition is fulfilled.

The audience will without a doubt find it interesting how Lady Macbeth, thinks a virtue and a strong sense of morality is Macbeth's greatest weakness in his quest for greatness. Of course Lady Macbeth is aware of the good compassion within her husband as described in the previous line of the same soliloquy: ' it is too full o' th' milk of human kindness', however she sees him as being ' full' of this form of good nature in which she believes isn't pathways to social/ political ascendancy.

Lady Macbeth believes in Macbeth's capacity to be a great and ambitious leader, but she knows that with every promotion Macbeth receives, he would want to rightfully earn as he is honest and honorable. In regards to the theme of kingship, Lady Macbeth's ambitious mindset causes her to believe that kingship is only acquired when it is seized and doesn't just fall upon you because you deserve it. The Jacobean audience, especially King James I,

would've obviously disagreed with this ideology and therefore would've guaranteed that Lady Macbeth would be punished by god, most likely through the means of death. Through this quote, the audience is able to see how she wants Macbeth to quickly return from the battlefield (now that the war is over) to talk to Macbeth about the prophecy and influence his perspective and desires by giving him the 'illness' which he is missing.

Also, she plans to encourage him to seize and take advantage of the moment to snatch the crown as he has the support of the other Thaners, since he is looked up to by many for his courageous performance on the battlefield against Norway. Relating back to historical and social context, during the Jacobean era as well as the 11th century that Macbeth was set, women were the inferior and vulnerable ones in a relationship. Married women of these eras only held value as their husband's property and were expected to have children and carry out general household activities as well as obeying and supporting their husbands, with no legal rights as an independent individual. Contrasting this, Lady Macbeth is presented to be the complete opposite as she acts an ambitious, spirited and determined woman with her own desires. A typical Jacobean audience, would have seen all these features as ones of masculinity that show a lack in femininity; which would have been further emphasized as she would've been played by a male actor. Generally, this how the major theme of ambition continues to be explored by Shakespeare through the presentation of Lady Macbeth's perspective upon the dangerous quality, in regards to what she believes Macbeth must require to make effective ambitious decisions.