

Macbeth- equivocation essay sample

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The Tragedy of Macbeth is a story set in Scotland, and England in the Renaissance (1605-1606). Macbeth is about a man whose overriding ambition leads him onto a path of evil. Sadly, it is a relentless path that admits no deviation or departure. To develop the progression of evil in the play, Shakespeare employs the idea of equivocation, beginning with Macbeth's temptation, then his commitment, and finally the resultant confusion and disorder that permeate his life. The play opens with the three witches discussing their upcoming meeting with Macbeth.

Before they depart, they intone together the equivocal words: " Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1. 1. 10). This phrase sets the stage for the evil that takes place in the play. Evil is never attractive if it looks like evil; it tempts only if it looks like good. Thus, we know that the witches will approach Macbeth with something that looks " fair," but is actually " foul. " Indeed, when we first meet Macbeth, he remarks to Banquo, " So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1. 3. 38), accentuating the feeling that Macbeth will soon become the victim of the witches' equivocal tricks.

The witches meet the two men on the heath, and hail Macbeth as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King hereafter. Macbeth is already Glamis, and he learns soon after that Duncan has named him the new Thane of Cawdor (1. 3. 105). Although Banquo warns him that " instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray's/ In deepest consequence" (1. 3. 124-126), Macbeth takes the witches' bait, and immediately begins entertaining murderous thoughts as he imagines himself to be the next King of Scotland. Underneath the apparent " fairness" of the prophecy lies the " foul" temptation to commit evil.

When Lady Macbeth reads of the prophecy in her husband's letter, she also immediately thinks of murdering Duncan, but fears that her husband has too kind a nature to go through with it (1. 4. 1-16). She reveals her affinity to evil when she entreats him to “ look like th' innocent flower,/ But be the serpent under't” (1. 5. 63-64). At this point, Macbeth is still able to think clearly and comes up with good, logical reasons why he should not murder his king. He tells her that he has changed his mind and they will not proceed with their plan. Furious, Lady Macbeth retaliates by attacking his manhood and persuades him that they will not fail (1. 7. 1-60).

At last, Macbeth is convinced, and echoes his wife as he commits his life to the course of evil: “ Away, and mock the time with fairest show:/ False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (1. 7. 82). He realizes that in order to succeed in evil, his actions must be equivocal. What he does not realize is that equivocal actions result from an equivocal mind, which on one hand claims that fate via the witches will make him king, but on the other still feels the need to take matters into his own hands (Johnson 305).

In due time, we see that ambiguous thoughts and behavior end in full-scale confusion. The Macbeths murder Duncan and attain the throne, but their lives are far from happy. They are beset by nightmares and insecurity. Macbeth fears Banquo, whom the witches prophesied would be a father to kings (3. 1. 49-66). What had seemed a fair prospect of peace has turned into foul mental chaos. Ultimately, the Macbeths' equivocal stance in “ helping” destiny along takes its dire toll (Johnson 306).

Better be with the dead,” Macbeth says, “ Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,/Than on the torture of the mind to lie/ in restless ecstasy” (3. 2. 19-22). The fear and disorder in Macbeth’s mind is also reflected in the state of the country. Increasingly his thanes turn against him, so that Macbeth must keep a spy in each of their houses (3. 4. 131-132). Like Macbeth, Scotland is beset by fears, sleeplessness, and bloodshed (3. 6. 33-35). Clearly, the result of equivocation is not order but disorder, not clarity but confusion.

After Banquo’s murder and Fleance’s escape, Macbeth turns to the witches for help, desiring to know his future. They show him three apparitions, and like the first encounter with the witches when he is hailed as Thane of Glamis, the first communication is a known truth: beware of Macduff (4. 1. 71). These truths he already knows, and this puts him at ease. But the second and third apparitions tell him things equivocal: Macbeth would not be harmed by any one born of a woman, and Macbeth would not be vanquished until great Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill (4. . 79-94).

They give him false hope, for in one sense they are true, but in another sense false. Ironically, although Macbeth should know through his own actions that equivocation is the face of evil, he takes these prophecies at face value. His mind by this time is so disordered and confused by evil that he cannot think clearly at all. As he faces Macduff in the final battle, he realizes too late that he should not have listened to those “ juggling fiends” who “ palter with us in a double sense” (5. 8. 19-20).

Truly, the life of evil and equivocation is a journey towards death, a downward spiral of disintegration and disillusionment. The absolutes of truth and falsehood, of good and evil, blur and become indistinguishable. The result is a life devoid of meaning. Macbeth is a tragic tale of a great man full of promise, who succumbing to temptation, ends broken and defeated, who sees in a moment of understanding that his life has become merely " a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing. "

Macbeth is a multifaceted tragedy, you can analyze in different sides. We can help you with it - read our Crime in " Macbeth" essay right now!