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Mrs. Graning

English 11

27 January 2025

Macbeth

Macbeth is a famous Shakespeare play set in eleventh century Scotland and England. Shakespeare introduces supernatural elements very early in the story. The play tells the story of Macbeth, a Scottish lord. He is visited by the Three Witches, and they share with him their predictions that he will become king. After Macbeth hears of these prophecies, he writes a letter to his wife Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth has an ambition to kill the current king, Duncan, in order for Macbeth to become king. Macbeth does not see a reason to kill Duncan, and thinks he is a good king. But Lady Macbeth insists that they kill Duncan. This plot line raises the questions of the ambitions growing and the choices that determine fate. Supernatural elements such as the witches, the apparition, and Banquo's ghost influence the events of the story, by contributing to the themes of fate and free will, and predict Macbeth's downfall.

Shakespeare uses the Witches to bring in the power of fate, but Macbeth still makes his own decision about what to do with their prophecy. The Witches have a major role all throughout the play. They make their first appearance in the beginning scene. They visit Banquo and Macbeth, and tell Macbeth that he will be king and that Banquo's descendants will become king as well. Sergeant proves this when he says:

“The multiplying villainies of nature Do swarm upon him
— from the Western Isles,
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied.

And Fortune , on his damnèd quarry smiling,
 Showed like a rebel's whore. But all's
 too weak, For brave Macbeth” (1:2:11-17).

Macbeth never intended to kill Duncan; that was Lady Macbeth's idea. This was not an example of supernatural, but instead free will, the choice of one of the characters.

Before Macbeth kills Duncan with an actual, physical dagger, he has a hallucination of a bloody dagger. When Macbeth is on his way to kill Duncan, he sees an imaginary dagger with blood on it. Macbeth could have taken this as a warning to not go through with the murder, but ignores the warning and continues to go through with it. That proves that he made the decision himself, so that is free will. But, it could also be understood the other way. He could just have been dreading to go through with it, and the dagger could be foreshadowing his fate. In the lines of Macbeth, Macbeth proves this when he says:

“Is this a dagger which I see before me,
 The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
 I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
 Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible To feeling as to sight,
 or art thou but A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? I see thee yet,
 in form as palpable As this which now I draw”. (Shakespeare 2:1:34-32).

When Macbeth goes through with the murder, he seems to be shocked and does not know what to do. He forgets what to do with the dagger and brings it back to Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth shames him for forgetting what to do, and goes to finish their plan herself. In the lines of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth says,

“Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,
And 'tis not done. The attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark. I laid their daggers ready;
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't.” (Shakespeare 2:2:10-14).

Lady Macbeth does not understand how he could forget this, and shames him like he is a disappointment to her and a failure.

The last super natural element is Banquo's ghost appearing at the banquet Macbeth hosts.

At the banquet, Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost sitting at the table covered in blood staring at him. Even though he is imagining this and it is not real, Macbeth starts to panic, and causes a scene. He is the only one who can see the ghost. Shakespeare shows this when he writes

“Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.” (3:4:61:62)

All the guests start to become worried and curious because Macbeth is about to give himself away for the crime he has committed. However, Lady Macbeth saves him and tells the guest he has episodes like this and not to worry. Shakespeare proves this when Lady Macbeth says,

“I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse.
Question enrages him. At once, good night. Stand
not upon the order of your going, But go at once.” (3:4:120:123).

She also says,

“You lack the season of all natures, sleep”. (3:4:144)

By saying this, she is helping cover up for the murder he has committed. Macbeth can not seem to escape what he has done and he feels extremely guilty. This is an example of free will, because he decided to kill Banquo and it was his decision.

The witches, apparitions, and Banquo's ghost have a substantial influence on *Macbeth* and contribute in a major way in predicting Macbeth's downfall. Macbeth was hungry for power and as he became more paranoid, he rationalized his immoral actions by trying to secure his control. Macbeth's tragic flaw was prioritizing his ambitions over his moral compass. He was overly confident and this led to his ending.

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