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Macbeth

In the streets of Scotland is where Macbeth, the protagonist of this Shakespearean play, lives. In the beginning, he was viewed as a brave soldier who was loyal to his kingdom, but in the end he was the villain. Throughout this tragedy written by Shakespeare, Macbeth is faced with temptation which ultimately leads him to make decisions that give him short-term glory but hurt those around him.

Macbeth's personality and character vary throughout the play. Out of all his many characteristics, his ambition remained the same until the end. When Macbeth was first approached by the witches, and they told him his prophecies, he was full of ambition. He said to them,

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

Against the use of nature? (Shakespeare 1:3: 136-139)

In these lines Macbeth shows that his ambition had already caused him to be tempted and interested in these prophecies. In addition to ambition, Macbeth also displayed pride when he became king after murdering Duncan. Although Macbeth was very scared and paranoid, he took pride in his reputation and the status he had earned from becoming king (Shakespeare 1:3:

46-49). As a result of Macbeth's pride and ambition, he was motivated to commit more murders and cause more violence to protect his crown.

Macbeth and Duncan's friendship was once one of loyalty and respect, until a series of events led to Macbeth murdering him. At the start of the play, after Macbeth leads the Scottish army to victory, Duncan displays his respect and affection for Macbeth by saying "O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman" (Shakespeare 1:2: 24). Duncan shows his affection and respect towards Macbeth by referring to him as a "cousin" and a "worthy gentleman". Although Duncan felt this way towards him, in the end Macbeth was still tempted to kill Duncan so he could become king, and ultimately did. When the witches told Macbeth their prophecy, he felt as if it was meant for him to become king it would happen without him intervening. This shows that although Macbeth did not want to kill Duncan, the witches had put the temptation of becoming king into his mind (Shakespeare 1:3: 146-147). In the end, the vision of becoming king got the best of Macbeth, and he got what he wanted.

Just as Duncan and Macbeth had a friendship, Macbeth and Banquo also had one, but it did not stop Macbeth from murdering him also. At the beginning of the play, Banquo shows concern for Macbeth (Shakespeare 1:3: 51-57). In these lines, Banquo is trying to warn Macbeth about the witches, which shows that he cares for him and his future. Although Banquo showed concern for his future Macbeth was willing to do whatever it took to become king and protect his throne. This eventually led to him being suspicious of Banquo and hiring two murderers to kill him (Shakespeare 3:1: 140-141). As a result of Macbeth killing Duncan and Banquo, he suffers from paranoia and many other things because of the innocent lives that he took.

The three witches in this play affected the story as well as Macbeth as an individual character. The three witches were described as chaotic and very strange by Banquo. He expressed these feelings towards the witches by saying

So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? (Shakespeare 1:3: 40-42).

In these lines, Banquo describes them as having a strange and unnatural appearance. Although Macbeth felt this way about the witches at first also, his perception of them shifted towards believing in them when their first prophecy about him became true. Macbeth's thought of them just being strange women as he did before changed to him now thinking they were his key to power and his friends (Shakespeare 1:3: 129-131). As a result of Macbeth believing in the witches and allowing them to become close to him, he loses many relationships and friends. The rise of Macbeth occurred when he became king and the witches his prophecies became true. Macbeth's path to becoming king was a very violent and unusual one. In the end, although Macbeth was king, he regretted that he had to kill Duncan to become king (Shakespeare 2:2: 50-51). In these lines Macbeth expresses his sadness and regret for killing Duncan. Although Macbeth had gotten what he wanted, which was to become king, the witches' prophecies were far from over. The prophecy that arguably killed Macbeth was the prophecy that no man born of a woman could kill him (Shakespeare 4:1: 88-89). In these two lines, the witches told him that no man born of a woman could kill him but Macduff was not born of a woman because he was cut out of his mother's womb. In summary, the witches affect Macbeth as a character in a positive and negative way, but more negatively than positively.

Once Macbeth's first set of prophecies became true, the witches came back to manipulate him and Malcolm and Macduff came back to fight him and his downfall had begun. When Macbeth's first set of prophecies became true, he reached out to the witches to get answers about his future. The witches manipulate Macbeth by saying,

Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him. (Shakespeare 4:1: 101-103)

This led Macbeth to think that he was invincible because he believed that the forest could not move, but was not thinking that people could carry the branches onto Dunsinane Hill. In addition to the witches manipulating Macbeth, he also had enemies like Macduff and Malcolm wanting to come back to take the throne. Macduff hints at his hatred for Macbeth while conversing with Malcolm (Shakespeare 4:3: 216-217). As a result of the witches' manipulation, and Malcolm and Macduff's hatred for Macbeth, Macbeth's downfall was slowly beginning.

In the end, although Macbeth got what he wanted, which was to become king, it came with many consequences. Although, in the beginning, Macbeth's pride and ambition was a good trait, it slowly began to ruin him as the witches gave him prophecies and boosted his ego. This tragedy can be a lesson to all that you have to be careful what you wish for.

Act 1, scene 1. myShakespeare. (2023, November 21)

<https://myshakespeare.com/macbeth/act-1-scene-1> 3 February 2025

Macbeth. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. (n.d.).

[https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/macbeth/#:](https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/macbeth/#:~:text=Macbeth%20Summary,Macbeth%2C%20resulting%20in%20more%20death)

[~:text=Macbeth%20Summary,Macbeth%2C%20resulting%20in%20more%20death](https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/macbeth/#:~:text=Macbeth%20Summary,Macbeth%2C%20resulting%20in%20more%20death). 3 February

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