Ambition In Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

Ambition in Macbeth

In Macbeth, a play set in Scotland, William Shakespeare wrote a tragedy of a man s ambition. In the play, Macbeth is described as a man who has ambitions of becoming king. After the first part of the prophecy by the witches whom he has met returning from battle comes true, he begins to think the second part may also come true, supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good. The witches have predicted that Macbeth would first become Thane of Cawdor and then king of Scotland. Encouraged by his wife, Lady Macbeth, he murders King Duncan who stays as a guest in his castle. Macbeth then becomes king of Scotland.

According to his critical essay on Macbeth, Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition, Robert N. Watson comments that ambition becomes the enemy of all life, especially that of the ambitious man himself, in this play. In Macbeth, Shakespeare interprets a man s lifelong ambition that seems to be fulfilled, but causes consequences that his mind cannot handle. Macbeth s desire to gain wealth and status completely overpowers him. Macbeth becomes more ambitious as his wife and the witches make him question himself and his desires. Lady Macbeth is the biggest encouragement to his ambition, since she uses her husband s trust to change her own future.

In Act I, Scene iii, the witches and their prophecies influence Macbeth s ambition as he begins to consider murdering Duncan, 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? Macbeth strongly believes witches words. Also, the apparitions who are called by the witches influence Macbeth by making him believe that he is invincible in Act IV, Scene I, rebellion s head, rise never, till the wood/ of Birnam rise, and our high- placed Macbeth/ shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath/ to time, and mortal custom.

In Act I, Scene v, Lady Macbeth also influences Macbeth s ambition, Hie thee hither,/ that I may pour my spirits in thine ear,/ and chastise with the valour of my tongue/ all that impedes thee from the golden round,/ which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem/ to have thee crown d withal. She tries to influence him to kill Duncan. She says, Art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it, meaning that Macbeth is not without ambition, but lack of ruthlessness that is needed.

When Macbeth decides not to continue with their plan to murder Duncan, his wife urges him to act on his desires or he will think of himself as a coward. She says, Art thou afeard/ To be the same in thine own act and valour/ As thou art in desire? (Act I, Scene iv) She then makes sure he will perform the deed by taking an active role in preparing for the murder: his two chamberlains/ Will I with wine and wassel so convince, ( Act I, Scene vii) and cleaning up afterwards give me the daggers: the sleeping, and the dead/ Are but as pictures; tis the eye of childhood/ That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,/ I ll gild the faces of the grooms withal, / For it must seem their guilt. (Act II, Scene ii) As Macbeth worries about failing to carry out the plan, Lady Macbeth tells him to screw up his courage and they wouldn t fail.

Although Macbeth becomes king of Scotland after killing King Duncan, he cannot have peace. Duncan s sons escape to England and try to avenge their father. Also, the witches predict that his friend Banquo s descendants will be kings of Scotland. Macbeth orders his men to kill Banquo and his son.

During the course of the play, Macbeth changes from a person with some moral sense to a man who will stop at nothing to get and keep what he wants. By the play s end, he has lost all emotion. He cannot even react to his wife s death saying that life is only a tale/ told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ signifying nothing.

In Macbeth, ambition is the fatal flaw that causes his downfall. The play shows that one may get easily influenced by other people when he/ she is over- ambitions. After becoming king, his endless ambitions lead him into misery and tragic ending. Being obsessed by the witches prophecy, he even tries to control his future, He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour/ to act in safety. There is none but he/ Whose being I do fear; and under him/ My genius is rebuked, as it is said/ Mark Antony s was by Caesar. Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,/ And put a barren scepter in my gripe,/ Thence to be wrench d with an unlineal hand,/ No son of mine succeeding (Act III, Scene I). Macbeth considers Banquo and his son Fleance as threats to his security as King. Although outwardly friendly to Banquo, Macbeth is jealous and fearful of him.

Throughout the play, it is Macbeth s ambition that destroys his good nature and forces him to break all moral boundaries. Until he meets the three witches, he is loyal to his king, to his wife, and to his friends. If he had not desired to become king, the three withes prophecy would not have changed his life. All of the problems start to develop when he decides to murder Duncan. He commits the murder because he is too ambitious. If he weren t so ambitious and determined to become king, he would not have to kill Duncan.

After all, the witches prophecy influences his fate by turning his ambition into a tragic reality. Although he is initially led to evil by the witches prophecy, he does not hesitate to commit crime. After killing Duncan, he kills Banquo and Macduff s family. Macduff flees to England and then gathers an army to overthrow Macbeth. Lady Macbeth becomes a sleepwalker and finally dies in pain.

At the end of the play, Macduff kills Macbeth in battle. Duncan s son, Malcom then becomes the king of Scotland. If Macbeth patiently waited for his time, he would have become king peacefully and have had a chance to enjoy it.

The play, Macbeth, shares themes with other stories, with historic and current events, and with individual, personal experiences with which one can identify. Ambition which is one of Macbeths themes can be traced to the issue of corruption in national politics, in sports, and in a terrorist government. The Watergate scandal, the 1988 and 1994 Olympic Games, and Haiti s historic civil unrest are examples of abused power, scandal, and violence in which the players are motivated by ambition.