Supernatural And Ambition In Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

Is it the influence of the Supernatural

Or Macbeth s overriding ambition that

Ultimately causes his downfall?

Macbeth was originally written for and performed in front of King James I in 1606 The King had an interest in witchcraft and believed that witches and magicians were agents of the devil, and that the devil was permitted by god to work upon men as a punishment to the wicked and a temptation to test the faith of the virtuous. Thus, a man faced with Satan s temptation would be faced with a choice and on that choice, he would be judged. Both Macbeth and Banquo are so tested in this play.

In this essay, I am going to give my opinion as to what caused Macbeth s downfall and how both ambition and the supernatural played their parts in doing this. My belief is that Macbeth s ambition was led by the supernatural and in the way that Macbeth interpreted the prophecies of the witches. Macbeth is initially presented as a mature man of established character, as a bold, brave valiant man.

For brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name also

O valiant cousin! O worthy gentleman!

These two quotations give very strong first impressions to what the audience initially believes Macbeth to be like. However, this picture soon changes!

On meeting the witches, Macbeth aligns himself with them linguistically by retelling their words.

So foul and fair a day I have not seen

As the witches begin to speak with Macbeth, it is very dramatic because again they have entered with a thunderstorm. This represents disturbances in nature and therefore does not paint a picture of happiness and joy. The witches prophecy told Macbeth of his fate, (That he would become Thane of Cawdor and then King) and this brought his ambition to the forefront. However, Banquo was very disinterested in the witches and did not believe that they were completely human.

That look not like th inhabitants o the earth, and yet are on t? also

And oftentimes to win us to our harm,

the instruments of darkness tell us truths

Banquo was in the above line, trying to warn Macbeth that these women are evil but Macbeth is now too wrapped up in his own ambition to listen to what Banquo had to say. By this point, it is apparent that Macbeth is prepared to take ambition to the limit. As the witches had prophesied that Macbeth would become king, he was not going to let anything get in his way of fulfilling the task. However, the king had already named his son Malcolm king so how could this be? This is a shock to him and Macbeth begins to think that he must overcome this.

At the beginning of scene five we are introduced to Lady Macbeth. As she reads the letter from Macbeth she realises that if he is King, she will be queen. She also thinks that Macbeth is too nice natured to have the good qualities of a king.

What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature; it is too full O the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way

This thought becomes of interest to her. Lady Macbeth was also ambitious, possibly more so than her husband. She however lacks the morals of her husband. This immorality causes her to appeal to the supernatural to give her cruel and horrid thoughts.

Unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty; make thick my blood stop up the access and passage to remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature shake fell my purpose, nor keep peace between the effect and it! Come to my woman s breasts, and take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers

Lady Macbeth has already established how close she is to becoming royalty; therefore, as she is more ambitious than Macbeth she begins to push him to the killing of the king. Macbeth seems a little apprehensive but she has no time for apprehension and will doubt his manhood if the killing fails to be carried out.

When you durst do it, then you were a man .

Lady Macbeth has more planning skills ( It is her idea to intoxicate the guards) than Macbeth and so it is Lady Macbeth that drives him to the murder. Not his own ambition. I believe that if Macbeth had been left to decide for himself whether to kill Duncan, he would have chosen the option not to carry the task out.

He s here in double trust: First as I am his Kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed

The vision of the dagger (a supernatural doing) that Macbeth sees could have one of two meanings. One is it could be telling him to kill Duncan, however it could be telling him not to. It is Macbeth s own interpretation of the vision that leads him to his downfall. After the killing, Macbeth feels very guilty, and cannot cope with the fact that he has just killed his king. This shows that Macbeth still has a good side and has not turned completely immoral. Now that the King is dead, Macbeth has achieved his ambition and so one would assume that he would now be content. However, Banquo seems to be suspicious of Macbeth and Macbeth decides that the only way to end the suspicion is to kill Banquo too. I think that Macbeth suspected that Banquo had believed the witches and therefore Macbeth is afraid of Banquo s children

They hail d him father to a line of kings —- Rather than so, come fate into the list.

Macbeth now at this point is obviously feeling paranoid. We can now see that Macbeth, as the strong bold valiant warrior as he used to be, has now become paranoid, and weak. (Why else would he call upon murderers to kill Banquo?) Up until this point, Lady Macbeth has been the strongest of the couple but we can now see the change in character. Macbeth now seems to have become stronger and more towards evil (Supernatural link). They have changed roles.

Macbeth after Banquo s death, whilst sitting at the table with his guests is the only one to see Banquo s ghost. This unsettles him and it drives him back to the witches of his own free will. Before Macbeth s arrival at the witches, the second witch says

By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes

Ironically, Macbeth then enters. This quotation proves that Macbeth has now become completely evil and has changed roles with Lady Macbeth. As I previously said, I believe that it is Macbeth s interpretations of the witches prophecies which lead him to his downfalls,

Macbeth was told to beware of Macduff, was also told that no man of woman born can harm him.( He must think well what other kind of man is there? so I am safe.) Also they say that he is secure until Birnan Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth also takes this as good news because he thinks that trees cannot grow legs and walk to meet each other. The third vision is of eight kings.( all descended from Banquo) This mortifies him. Macbeth at this point thinks he has no worries about Macduff but decides to kill the family anyway. This underlines his complete evilness and malicious ways. Macbeth has now shown that he has no King like qualities and that he has grown into wickedness.

Lady Macbeth (under the care of a doctor) begins sleepwalking as a result of psychological stress and begins to wash her hands because she feels she can t wash herself clean. Macbeth also feels the same.

For mine own good, all causes shall give way. I am in blood Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more returning were as tedious as go o er

Also

Here s the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand oh oh oh

Macbeth s reaction to Lady Macbeth s death is not as strong now as it would have been if she had died earlier in the play. He was previously very tied up in the relationship before, however it now seems to have no meaning. Macbeth now feels that any ambition futile because the outcome always leads to death.

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death

Although Macbeth didn t ignore the prophecies by the witches, he interpreted them in his own way, according to his driving ambition. By the intervention of his wife to drive his ambition, and the supernatural, this ignited him to push himself to the limit and led him to his downfall. Macbeth during the play began as a loyal valiant warrior and ended as a useless King. He rejected his wife, betrayed his best friend, and killed his king. In my opinion Macbeth is to blame for his own tragedy because in the end he had a choice and he chose his fate by committing murder.

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