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AP Literature

03 December 2014

*The Tragedy of Macbeth:*

Human Weakness at its Worst

It is a necessity for any logical plot to have a catalyst which aids to move it forward into more exciting. More often than not, it is an antagonist, protagonist, minor characters, or a combination of any of the previously mentioned that stirs the plot. In William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1606), an argument has erupted over the primary source of power that drives the plot. All of the characters --such as Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the witches-- take blame in starting some incredibly important events that change the landscape in the play dramatically. Shakespeare in his unique way, however, does not develop a single character to progress the plot, rather a single trait: Human weakness. Human weakness is at the core of the major events throughout Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

 Lady Macbeth has an insatiable thirst of her own that plays into King Duncan’s demise. Lady Macbeth feels unjust to be a woman and instead wants to be a man. She holds on to nothing but doubt. Lady Macbeth cries out to the spirits, “unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty” (1.5.42-44). Without having the same morals and respect that she feels a man receives, her mission is impossible and is doomed to fail. Thus, due to her physical female status, it is not she who is able to kill King Duncan to ascend to the throne. It must be someone else. And it is at that moment, Lady Macbeth narrows in on Macbeth to be used as her pawn to orchestrate the regicide. Lady Macbeth sways him by attacking his own manhood and manipulating him to kill King Duncan. Thus, the kingdom is without a king, and there is but a short list of candidates. It was her malevolent nature that motivated her to strikeout at and cause King Duncan’s murder.

Not to be left unaccredited, Macbeth plays in his own part in the murder of King Duncan. When introduced, Macbeth is a valiant hero. He is seemingly content. He has fought for his land, Scotland, with the utmost bravery and success. Macbeth was summoned by three witches and was told his future included him becoming king. "Why, if fate will have me king, why, / Chance may crown me, / without my stir" (1.3.157-158). Immediately, Macbeth is sparked with impatience and intolerance towards the reception of his due title. Although made to appear as a large part of Macbeth’s motives, he needed little persuasion from Lady Macbeth. He needed a more outward motive to brutally kill the holder of the throne without showing his true self and found one in her speech. Thanks to Lady Macbeth’s and Macbeth’s equally self-motivated reasonings, the plot is gaining speed. In addition to the initial unraveling of the kingdom’s hierarchy, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth quickly fall under a vale of guilt that starts the deterioration of their own persons, which is visible subsequently throughout the play. It was Macbeth’s impatience in being unwilling to wait for his due time to come that made his thoughts of killing King Duncan into actions.

 Coupled with the foretelling of his reception of the crown, Macbeth learned that only he was to be crowned king in his family lineage. Not a single one of his offspring would hold the position. Instead, it was Banquo’s family line that would be king and queen in the coming times. The paranoia of Macbeth began to grow. He started asking himself questions like “How am I to secure the crown for my future generations? How am I to leave a successful legacy?” Only by erasing Banquo and his son (Fleance) from the face of the earth would he be able to have a bloodline of royalty. Sending out three assassins, he had Banquo killed. The death of Banquo spurred a large amount of attention to the Macbeth household now having had two power-related killings. No longer was it the guards that could have killed King Duncan, as the Macbeth’s had previously tried to portray. It was someone with something to gain out for the killing. The second murder is serves as only further confirmation for Macduff that Macbeth is the person behind the killings, leaving opportunity for a climactic fight scene between the two. Macbeth’s faults in his insecurity and his large anxieties over what would be left after he diminshes is what drove him to yet another murder in attempt to secure the crown for his family’s future generations.

 Although only regarded as side-characters, the witches are not to be pushed away and ignored. The three witches all hold a prominent part in the play. They service to forecast prophecies to Macbeth. The three witches share in this excitement and joy gathered from their manipulation of Macbeth. They are comfortably watching their prognostications come true. Witch 1, Witch 2, and Witch 3 (as they are referred to without names in the play) have a void of happiness. Hara Estroff Marano, a psychologist/journalist for *Psychology Today*, shares that **"**studies reliably show that [Bullies] have a distinctive [cognitive](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/cognition) make-up—a hostile attributional bias**”** (Marano). Marano is saying that bullies have a keen trait that they, uniquely, act on.It is in my experience that bullies often continue rather bad actions because of the satisfaction. Witch 1, 2, and 3 entice the downfall of Macbeth purely for their own enjoyment. Which, interestingly enough, upsets their head witch, Hecate. The actions carried out and traits displayed by the three witches are parallel to those displayed by the classical bully. The witches, by attempting to spur action’s by Macbeth, prey on his own inner weakness to benefit their own. Thus causing events to unfold, murders to occur, vengeances to want to be made.

 Surging from deep within himself, Macbeth demonstrates *with great ease* his incompetence and lack of anger control. Throughout the first half of the play, Macbeth is constantly held to be indecisive relying only on his heart and emotions to contribute the right solution to the problems that lay before him. The decision to murder King Duncan proves to be one that is filled with nothing but regret. His incompetence and lack of control arose again in a second murder scheme involving Banquo and his son Fleance. Macbeth, having murdered King Duncan, only needed to kill Banquo and Fleance to ensure his a long reign of dominance. Bypassing or erasing some of the witches prophecies. The three murderers sent by Macbeth were only able to kill Banquo and allowing for Fleance to escape. Macbeth became furious. As long as Fleance is alive, his power as current king remains insecure. Macbeth’s mind raced at the horrible outcomes that his failed plot could result in. Macbeth passed under a veil of insanity.According to Alianess Benny Njuguna, “Anger, not managed, has led to adverse consequences. [Anger] is an emotion that can lead to insanity”. Allowing anger to grow without reigning it in --similar to Macbeth’s own (or lack there of) therapy-- can lead to a type of anger known as “Anger Explosion” (Njuguna). Shakespeare orchestrated Macbeth to erupt in insanity at a key point in the story. While at the banquet, Macbeth witnesses the ghost of Banquo and becomes frivolous, startling his guests. With the random, seemingly irrational acts, the scale of justice is leaning more and more towards Macbeth in seeing that other’s recognize his unscrupulous actions. Macbeth’s insanity is causing him much more strife his in plot for king than he could’ve ever prophesized.

Macbeth’s blood is filled with cockiness. On another one of his prophetic conferences with the three witches, he is told two things: he will never be vanquished until “Great Birnam Wood [moves] to high Dunsinane Hill” (4.1.104) and “The pow’r of man, for none woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.90-91). Macbeth scoffs at both believing that there is no creature on this earth that is able to move such a vast forest and assumes that all men *must* be born of a woman. The wealth of information he just belittled from the witches remains largely ignored by Macbeth until his final moments. With his defenses unfitted for a battle, he ignores all possibilities of an attack leaving him extremely vulnerable for the blood-thirsty Macduff. Macduff reaches the castle and confronts Macbeth in an epic swordfight. Where he goes on to vanquish the murderous, tyrannical King Macbeth. Macbeth is under the false sense that he could remain as king until he dies a ripe, old age. The same narcissism and ignorance that he held onto so tightly are apart of his many malevolent traits that cause his death in the subsequent resolution to the play.

 It was the fragile personality traits of the characters that created the connected events of the plot. It was in each one’s jealousy, desire, or ambition left uncontrolled that they choose to deceive and deteriorate their own situation. William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is unique in the sense that there is a deeper underlying within in the plot line. Without careful considerations, any emotion is able to become one’s own downfall.

Works Cited

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prospective

Thesis

* Human weakness, rather than the Witches, is the driving force of the events that unfold

Ideas from text

* Macbeth’s
	+ Greed
	+ Anxiety
	+ Narcissism
* Lady Macbeth
	+ jealousy
	+ Fear

Possible Quotes

* “words go here[Space][Slash (end of line)][Space]” (Act.Scene.Line-Line)
* “ And, which is worse, all you have done / Hath been but for a wayward son” (3.5.11)
* "Why, if fate will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir." (1, 3, 157-158)
* “The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.96-97)

Research Ideas

* <http://quinnae.com/2012/12/28/shaking-her-fell-purpose-lady-macbeth-as-tragic-heroine/>

Structure

* Emotion/Trait
* inciting action
* What is done
* What changes in the plot