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AP Literature

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*The Tragedy of Macbeth:*

Macbeth the Money Maker

It is fairly well known that William Shakespeare based a lot of his plays on real events documented in the historical accounts of other authors. This pattern is exemplified by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which is based on Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus’ accounts of a real Danish King, King Amleth, and again with many of Shakespeare's plays based on Greek figures, such as *Julius Caesar* and *Timon of Athens,* thought to be from Greek historian Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*,which contains over forty biographies of Greek and Roman leaders(Jaimeson)*. The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1606) is assumed to have been adapted from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, written by Hector Boece and also by George Buchanan’s *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (Mabillard)*.* By the time he wrote *Macbeth*, Shakespeare had already composed twenty-eight plays—including *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Hamlet,* and *Othello—*and been successful so he already had a lot of experience with his techniques. It is known that Shakespeare had an affinity for history, and he used this enthusiasm along with his insight of the time period to his advantage. Shakespeare used his knowledge of these sources to create the successful play *Macbeth* and generate more wealth.

One of the most important and overlooked aspects of *Macbeth* is the setting. The fact that this play takes place in Scotland affects this play significantly. It is widely known that Shakespeare is from England, Stratford-upon-Avon, to be precise. But what makes this fact so important is that during the time period that he lived in, the people in England were wary about their neighbors to the North. They viewed the Scottish people as “bloody and mysterious” (Maslen). They also thought of northern lands as a place where the supernatural had a strong influence. This view is evident throughout the play. The whole conflict of this play starts out with the witches, who we first see searching for gruesome ingredients to use for their wicked potions and spells, telling Macbeth alluring prophecies that eventually end up driving him to kill many people. The characters in the play are leery of the witches and their conspicuous use of double-speak, as demonstrated by Macbeth when he greets them saying “How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags? / What is ’t you do?” (4.1.48-49). The way Shakespeare makes Macbeth say this in such a fearful and distrustful way exhibits how Shakespeare had in mind the notion that the people in England who were going to watch this play would strongly associate Scotland with the supernatural and would find the witches very enticing and intriguing. Shakespeare’s intent while writing *Macbeth* was to entertain the audience, which would make the play successful and therefore profitable. So the direction of the play is influenced by Shakespeare’s business savvy in wanting to show the audience a vision they could relate to. Not only is the supernatural view a factor, but the view that Scotland was associated with a lot of bloodshed affected it in the same way. Quite a bit of the play is centered around the killing and assassination of several people. The play opens up with the characters on a battlefield after Macbeth has just killed the traitor Macdonwald by “Unseaming him from the nave to th’ chops, / And fixing his heads upon our battlements”(1.2.24-25) and then subsequently ends with Macduff holding up Macbeth’s severed head in triumph. To accompany the bloodiness there is also a lot of treachery that goes on throughout the play, with *Macbeth* and his lady doing some shady things like playing off King Duncan’s murder so that they will be the new king and queen. All these factors, the supernatural happenings, the gore, and the corruption, are influenced by the British view of Scotland being in upheaval, and Shakespeare used this view to better entertain his audience so his play would be successful.

Another aspect that affected Shakespeare’s writing in Macbeth was the fact that Shakespeare was King James I’s chief playwright. Because the king was his benefactor Shakespeare would of course want to make sure the king liked the play. King James I became the king of Scotland at the ripe age of one in 1566 and was later crowned the first Stuart king of England in 1603 after Queen Elizabeth died without an heir (Mathew). This play being set in Scotland would immediately pique the King’s interest because that is where he is from. Even today when the news or a television show is talking about something happening in the place where you are from, it is difficult to not become at least a little interested because you identify with that place so well.

But the setting is not the only element that would appeal to the king. He was particularly accustomed to a lot violence and assassinations. “The Stuarts,” as senior lecturer of English literature at the University of Glasgow, Rob Maslen, puts it “had been subjected to a seemingly endless series of assassinations and massacres, more often at the hands of their own subjects than those of their English neighbours.” All of the violence would really hit home for James and further draw him in. The assassinations being carried out by Macbeth would also be very intriguing to the king. King James I was no stranger to assassinations and bloody deaths. Not only had many of his family members been killed by being beheaded but there was also an instance in which disaffected Catholics were found attempting to blow up James and the entire English parliament (Maslen). Naturally, King James would be affected and intrigued by assassinations. Shakespeare implements many assassinations throughout the play, such as King Duncan’s, to appeal to the king’s terror.

When Duncan is asleep

(Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey

Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains

Will I with wine and wassail so convince

That memory, the warder of the brain,

Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason

A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep

Their drenched natures lies as in death,

what cannot you and I perform upon

Th’ unguarded Duncan? (1.7.71-80)

By having assassinations such as this in the play, Shakespeare is again appealing to the interest of James. This kind of clever assassination plot is the type thing that a thrill-seeking king would like. King James seeing this could be compared to modern day people going to see a scary movie. People like to be scared simply for the rush it gives, and a king would be no exception. Along with being killed, which is a very rational fear for a king, King James was also terrified of witches. Many people of that time thought witches existed, and he believed himself to have narrowly avoided murder by witchcraft in 1587, when he nearly shipwrecked on his way to collect his wife from Denmark (Maslen). He even published a book about witches and how to kill them called *Daemonologie*.In *Macbeth* the supernatural witches are the driving force of the story line.

FIRST WITCH

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter! (1.3.51-53)

By having the witches taunt Macbeth with these words Shakespeare is engaging the kings interest as well as the rest of the audience. All of these factors reinforce the idea that Shakespeare wrote this play the way he did so the king would like it and keep him employed.

The specific situation Shakespeare was in at the time was not the only thing that has a heavy significance in *Macbeth*. The events of many years before also changed the writing of Macbeth. As was mentioned earlier, Shakespeare took a lot of his material for his plays from real historical events. Macbeth is no exception. After killing King Duncan and becoming king himself he starts to think about the witches’ prophecy to his friend Banquo saying that his kin will eventually be kings so he contemplates killing Banquo and his son. “Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown / And put a barren sceptor in my grip, / Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand. / No son of mine succeeding. For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind” (3.1.66-70). Macbeth wants his bloodline to flourish and to hold the throne. Historically there have been instances of people killing heirs to the throne in order to have their own kin take the crown. Between the years of 971 and 997 the king of Scotland, Kenneth III made his son joint king to ensure that he would succeed him, but this failed when Malcolm, a nobleman with relations to him, killed Kenneth. Malcolm then arranged the murder of Kenneth III’s grandson to ensure his own grandson’s succession to the throne (“Kenneth III”). Similarly, throughout Scottish history there has been an ample amount of combat over the position of monarch. There are also occurrences of this in the play. When Lady Macbeth hears of what the witches informed Macbeth she immediately starts planning to take the throne. “He that’s coming / Must be provided for; and you shall put / This night’s great business into my dispatch, / Which shall to all our nights and days to come / Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom” (1.6.78-82). Shakespeare is allowing the historical accuracies to further stimulate his audience. To accompany all this, there was also a King Macbeth who ruled medieval Scotland from 1040 to 1057. Just like Shakespeare’s Macbeth, the real Macbeth also killed a King Duncan to become king and was later defeated at the hand of the Earl of Northumberland, Siward (Taylor). While some people find written history to be quite dull, bringing events to life on the stage can engage them in an exciting way. Shakespeare is using the actual historical events to appeal to the interest of the people in the audience who are fascinated by history.

The notable influence that the king and audience held on the play shows the importance Shakespeare placed on pleasing his audience. By 1607 Shakespeare had been writing for a long time and this experience shows. He knew what he needed to do in order to draw in his audience and he also knew who his audience was. If he had not been writing simply for the enjoyment of the people he could have traveled many different paths with this play. He could have chosen to make it less brutal and gory and taken a more philosophical road and made it more complex but that would have deterred a great portion of the population who were not highly educated. He also could have crafted it in a political manner to prove a point about an issue that he felt strongly about but personal opinions don't generate revenue. There is an endless amount of possibilities that could have affected *Macbeth* but in the end money talks, and money spoke the loudest to Shakespeare.

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Outline

I Introduction (talk about topic, name of book somewhere(1607))

* Macbeth has a strong correlation with Holinshed’s chronicles, a historic account of the non fictional king Macbeth by Hector Boece, and also George Buchanan’s *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (Mabillard)
* Shakespeare has been known to base his plays off of real historical events such as *Hamlet* being based of Saxo Grammaticus’ story of the Danish King Amleth and Many of his Roman plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *Timon of Athens* are thought to be from greek historian Plutarch’s *Parallel lives* (Jaimeson)
* Many aspects of Macbeth are influenced by the place and time period it was written in
* mention at least one keyword
* don't surprise with thesis, use sentence before to lead into
* they say, i say, extend, with quotes, say author and what the article says

II Body (The British view of a scotland at the time was that it was a mess)

* Scottish setting
* Scotland was viewed as bloody, mysterious, associated with witchcraft
* lots of killing in play
* “Where we are,/ There’s daggers in men’s smiles. The near in blood,/ The nearer bloody”
* Lots of treachery involved throughout play
* Very big Supernatural influence with witches using equivocation to affect Macbeth’s actions and cause conflicts
* “How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags?/ What is ‘t you do?” (4.1.48-49).
* Shakespeare had an interest in scottish history
* Overall Macbeth shows the incredible difficulty of holding power and controlling the kingdom which parallels the real life struggles of non-unity in scotland

III Body (Shakespeare wanted to appeal to the liking of king James I)

* King James I was the king of Scotland before he became the King of England in 1603
* Shakespeare was his chief playwright
* King James had a history of assassinations with his mother being so and he also felt like he had been almost been killed
* lots of assassination in the play
* “When Duncan is asleep/ (Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey/ Soundly invite him),his two chamberlains/ Will I with wine and wassail so convince/ That memory, the warder of the brain,/ Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason/ A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep/ Their drenched natures lies as in death,/ what cannot you and I perform upon/ Th’ unguarded Duncan?”(1.7.71-80). tab twice, take out quotes, move period
* explain quote
* King James was also believer of the supernatural like many of the time, even wrote Daemonologie, a book about witches and hunting them.
* Heavy supernatural influences affect plot of the play
* “**First Witch** All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!/ **Second Witch** All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!/ **Third Witch** All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!”(1.3.51-53)
* Shakespeare wanted to entertain the king so he added in the things he think would be interesting

IV Body (Conflicts over Crown Reflect real life events)

* Right away Macbeth kills Duncan
* Lots of regicide in Scotland and with stuarts
* Macbeth starts killing for his bloodline
* “Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown/ And put a barren sceptor in my grip,/ Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand./ No son of mine succeeding. For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind”(3.1.66-70).
* Real life incident of Kenneth II killing the heir prince malcolm so his own son could be king
* Macbeth and his wife become very ambitious toward getting the crown
* “He that’s coming/ Must be provided for; and you shall put/ This night’s great business into my dispatch,/ Which shall to all our nights and days to come/ Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom”(1.6.78-82).
* Scotland has a rich history of people bloodily lusting for kingship
* There was an actual Macbeth in 11th century scotland who killed a king duncan to become king of scotland and was later defeated by an earl from Northumberland, Siward.

V Conclusion

* Macbeth shows heavy instances of historical influence throughout every aspect of the play
* all of these factors come together to form not only an entertaining play but also an accurate depiction of how shakespeare and the people of england felt at the time
* Shakespeare's plays are all widely affected by his own personal feelings

Prospectus

Thesis:

* Many aspects of Macbeth are influenced by real events and feelings from the time period it was written.

Ideas From Text:

* The conflicts over the crown reflect conflicts in real life
  + Regicide of Duncan
  + Macbeth Killing for his bloodline
  + Macbeth becoming ambitious and fighting for the crown
* The british think of Scotland as a mess
  + Scottish setting
  + Heir trouble
  + Supernatural Witches/ Equivocation
* Shakespeare wanted to appeal to the liking of King James
  + King James I was Scottish
  + Assassination plots
  + Supernatural Influences

Possible Quotes :

* “When Duncan is asleep/ (Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey/ Soundly invite him),his two chamberlains/ Will I with wine and wassail so convince/ That memory, the warder of the brain,/ Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason/ A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep/ Their drenched natures lies as in death,/ what cannot you and I perform upon/ Th’ unguarded Duncan?”(1.7.71-80).
* “Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown/ And put a barren sceptor in my grip,/ Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand./ No son of mine succeeding. For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind”(3.1.66-70).
* “Where we are,/ There’s daggers in men’s smiles. The near in blood,/ The nearer bloody”  
  (2.4.164-166).
* “How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags?/ What is ‘t you do?” (4.1.48-49).

Research Ideas:

* A Scottish Play?
* Shakespeare Online
* KingMacbeth.com
* The Real Macbeth
* Witches and Witchcraft in Macbeth

(Weller).

(Weller 6).

(“Blindness”).  
(“Blindness” 6).

Shakespeare quotes are just place

For Italicized words in quote:

(my emphasis, Weller 6)

(author emphasis, Weller 6)

(Qtd. in Weller 6)

(Smith Qtd. in Weller 6)