
Factors that Cause Macbeth's Downfall

The play "Macbeth" by William Shakespeare depicts the beginning and end of a tyrant who loses his strength of will. It can be said however that the fault is not Macbeth's alone as the witches and Lady Macbeth were partly responsible for Macbeth's downfall. This can be shown through a variety of techniques such as symbolism, metaphors and the use of dialogue. The moment Lady Macbeth receives the letter from her husband, she begins plotting the death of the current king, Duncan. This then leads to Lady Macbeth provoking Macbeth to gain the power, influence and status of king and queen. Lady Macbeth believes that Macbeth is too soft, which can be seen by the use of the metaphor, "too full of the milk of human kindness" (Act I, scene VII).

This metaphor refers to the milk a baby drinks when it is young and innocent; thus Lady Macbeth compares Macbeth's innocence to that of a baby. Because of his softness, she finds that she has to provoke him into agreeing on the murder of Duncan through manipulation. She does this by cajoling, by scorning him and by looking down upon his manhood. However, in a way, this is not that difficult a task since Macbeth himself wants the position of king deep down inside. His ambition can be seen in the use of the aside when Duncan names Malcolm Prince of Cumberland. This shows his determination and the audience can see that Lady Macbeth has somewhat underestimated her husband.

Despite the fact that Lady Macbeth plays a part in Macbeth's downfall, the witches are also an important factor. It can be said that without the witches the play may not continue or even be created. The witches are seen at the very beginning of the play and it is them who begin the play's momentum. Without them putting the idea across to Macbeth it is most possible that Macbeth may have remained loyal to Duncan. Before the witches approached Macbeth, he had always been Duncan's trusty subject and Macbeth had admired him. "his great office..." showed that he may have continued being the brave soldier in battle that he was first depicted to be. At the same time, the witches had probably caused the havoc; which started when Macbeth murdered Duncan up until Macbeth's downfall. The witches probably wanted to see whether Macbeth would heed their prophecy of him being Thane of Cawdor and then king or see whether he would just let it come. From here, the contrast between Macbeth's nature and Banquo's is astounding, the audience can see that Banquo would rather let it come as opposed to murdering anyone to get the prophecy to come true. Macbeth, on the other hand is different. At the very beginning when the witches first mention the prophecy the audience can see that he wants to know more as he goes after them but doesn't entirely believe it to be true. He doubts the witches but when Ross arrives and tells him that he is now the Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth begins to gradually believe the witches more and more.

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This is when Macbeth falls as he puts in too much thought of what the witches are telling him. The witches themselves seem to symbolize evil, yet they are not portrayed as the villains. This is because in the play, they, along with Macbeth's ambition and at the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth's ambition and determination, drive the play. When the witches were first seen by Macbeth he claims "what foul creatures...such that rags look like hair..." (Act I, Scene III) the audience is immediately given an image of unkempt, old hags who have nothing better to do. They symbolize fate and prophecies but are not shown in a good light. When Macbeth visits them in their cave, the audience is shown their full extent of 'witchcraft' as the image of cauldrons, burnings and hallucinations are portrayed. In a sense, the cave itself seems to show the loneliness and emptiness of the witches. Once he visits the cave, he is shown many things, namely that Macduff is a threat and that once Birnam Wood moves, Macbeth is doomed. From here, it can be seen that he is falling, falling and will not stop as everything has been set in motion.

Thus we can see that the witches and Lady Macbeth were important factors and responsible for the downfall of Macbeth. However, it cannot be said that they alone were responsible for his downfall as Macbeth's own ambition and actions led to his tragic fall. The use of imagery, symbolism and dialogue (asides) helped the audience to realize that nothing can be pinpointed to one person. That, when someone is at fault, there may be a lot of other forces behind it. Such was like that in Macbeth, where various people influenced him; the witches, his own wife, that the audience can see why he did what he did.

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