



CHARACTERISATION

Ambitious

Macbeth is a brave warrior who is rewarded by becoming the Thane of Cawdor for his bravery in battle. However, this doesn't satisfy his ambition as he desires greater power. Upon hearing the Witches' prophecy, Macbeth becomes obsessed with power which causes him to murder Duncan to claim the throne of Scotland. Macbeth is so driven by his own personal ambition that he acknowledges the flaws of his plan to kill Duncan and that it will result in his own demise, yet he lets his ambition cloud his thoughts and carries out the murder of Duncan. However as the play concludes, Macbeth loses his ambition as he rejects life having any significance, illustrating that personal ambition was his downfall.

Brave

Macbeth is most comfortable on the battlefield. When Macbeth is fighting he doesn't have to think about his moral conscience and his personal ambition. Macbeth clearly exhibits bravery when he fights for his country, this is acknowledged by King Duncan who rewards Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is characterised as a "valiant" warrior at the start of the play and furthermore, Rosse calls Macbeth "Bellona's bridegroom". This is a metaphor that compares Macbeth to Mars, the Roman God of War, showing that Macbeth is a skilled warrior who's ability can only be likened to the God of war. Macbeth dies in battle against Macduff's army in the final battle and Macbeth fights "bear-like" to

the end despite knowing he has no chance of victory, Macbeth is steadfast in not yielding to his opponent.

Brutal

Macbeth's dark desires and violent ambition overshadows all of his noble characteristics, his dark desires drove him to become a ruthless and calculating killer. Once Macbeth has the taste of murder, after being influenced by Lady Macbeth, the murders that follow come more easily to Macbeth as he secures his position as King. Macbeth has Banquo and Macduff's family killed because he thought they would threaten his position as king. These brutal murders illustrate that Macbeth's ambition is much greater than his sense of morality, indicating that his nobility as a soldier has been surpassed by his dark desires.

Easily led

Macbeth is influenced by Lady Macbeth, she insults him saying he will be "more the man" if he kills Duncan. As a brave soldier these insults will anger Macbeth, since Lady Macbeth is questioning his masculinity. Consequently, Lady Macbeth's cunning behaviour persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan. Macbeth is very easily led by the supernatural, especially the prophecy of the Witches. As the Witches' prophecies start to unfold, Macbeth's faith in them grows stronger and he becomes convinced that what they say will come to fruition. Consequently, Macbeth refuses to go back to his original ways since it challenges the prophecy of the Witches.

Moral

Towards the start of the play, Macbeth has a strong sense of right and wrong. Macbeth focuses a great deal on the consequences of his actions because of earth's "judgement" and the "deep damnation" following death. Macbeth is initially reluctant to kill Duncan because he knows that murder is wrong and that he is a good King. However, Lady Macbeth's ambition influences Macbeth and results in him murdering Duncan. But after Duncan's death, Macbeth struggles as he experiences waves of terrible guilt and remorse for his actions. This illustrates that despite his violent actions Macbeth can still comprehend that what he did was wrong.

MACBETH'S KEY THEMES

Manhood

As a warrior, Macbeth exhibits very traditional masculine traits including bravery and strength. When Macbeth fights he is seen to be a courageous warrior who is willing to lay his life down on the battlefield. Thus, Macbeth is awarded with the title of Thane of Cawdor by Duncan for his bravery in battle. However, all too often Macbeth's manhood is called into question by his own wife as she manipulates him to achieve her own ambition. As Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to kill Duncan, she insults his manhood by calling him a "coward" and says that he will be "more the man" if he murders Duncan. Lady Macbeth's emotional blackmail of Macbeth results in him murdering Duncan in an attempt to uphold his masculinity.

Good and Evil

Macbeth is a noble character with a strong moral conscious who carries out evil deeds. Macbeth's nobility is recognised at the start of the play where Duncan makes him the Thane of Cawdor after seeing Macbeth's potential for glory and greatness. However, Macbeth's ambition is so strong that it exceeds his virtue and allows his wicked desires to flourish. After this Macbeth becomes even more evil as he becomes accustomed to his dark desires and he isn't fazed when orders the murder of Banquo and Macduff's family. Good and evil also encompasses the fight for the crown of Scotland. Macduff raises an army to topple the evil King Macbeth to allow the throne of Scotland to be pure and good once more.

Kingship

Macbeth gained the throne of Scotland unlawfully by murdering Duncan and framing Duncan's son's Malcom and Donalbain. There is little that Macbeth is unwilling to do in his desire to become king. However, upon being king Macbeth cannot be described as a good ruler but rather as a tyrant. To consolidate his position as King, Macbeth orders Banquo to be killed and Macduff's family too. Macbeth is undeserving of the title of King due to the way he gained the throne and also because of the way he acts as king. Macbeth's reign as king causes disruption in the land of Scotland as the days turned to night and the horses began eating each other, indicating a imbalanced natural order. Consequently, this is why the



throne of Scotland is eventually prised away from Macbeth in the final battle against Macduff's army.

Supernatural

The supernatural visions that Macbeth has are used to remind Macbeth of the guilt of his actions. Macbeth's visions are seen as ambiguous because they don't provide a clear message. Consider Macbeth's vision of the dagger, it isn't clear as to whether it is encouraging him to kill Duncan or warning him against killing Duncan. Supernatural themes are highlighted when Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at a banquet. Nobody else can see Banquo's ghost so it indicates that Banquo's ghost is merely the guilty conscience of Macbeth. Macbeth's vision of Banquo is frightening for Macbeth, his fear results in him babbling away as he loses control of his speech. Macbeth's continuous encounters with the supernatural suggest signs of madness as he is disturbed by the visions.

Loyalty and Betrayal

Macbeth's loyalty is shown through his actions. At the start of the play, Macbeth is loyal to his King and country as he fights for Duncan and gives him his "service and loyalty". However, this loyalty soon wanes as Macbeth lets his dark desires get in the way of his loyalty as he betrays Duncan by murdering him. Macbeth's initial devotion and loyalty to Duncan makes the betrayal all the more shocking. As well as betraying Duncan, Macbeth also betrays his own moral conscience. Macbeth had a strong sense of right and wrong, but Macbeth's ambition seems to have taken priority ahead of this eventually resulting in his own demise where he rejects the notion of life having any significance at all.

MACBETH'S KEY QUOTES

"Stars, hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires." Act 1, Scene 4

Explanation

Macbeth has his own aspirations of taking power from Duncan, through murderous impulses after hearing the Witches' prophecy, when he learns that Duncan is visiting the castle. When Macbeth says, "Stars, hide your fires!" he wishes to remain in darkness so that his "black and deep desires" can be hidden. Metaphors of light and dark are used here, the darkness is used to illustrate Macbeth's immoral desires and the light is used as a divine force that critiques Macbeth's actions and desires.

"I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself and falls on the other." Act 1, Scene 7

Explanation

Macbeth questions whether he should carry out his plan to murder Duncan, he notes that he is being driven by his personal ambition rather than prioritising the good of his country. But Macbeth isn't convinced by his own personal ambition and he begins to assess what is causing him to act in this way and the consequences of this action. But ultimately, Macbeth recognises that he will ignore this sense of reluctance and he "o'erleaps" himself, thus falling to the flaws of his own ambition.

"Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee; I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight? Or art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? I see thee yet, in form as palpable as this which now I draw." Act 2, Scene 1

Explanation

As Macbeth thinks upon his plan to murder Duncan, he sees a dagger floating in front of him and he ponders whether the dagger is real or if it is a figment of his imagination. As Macbeth goes to clutch the dagger he finds that he cannot grasp it,

this confuses him greatly since he notes that it is impossible to have such a vision yet he can see it so clearly in front of him, this is shown when Macbeth talks of the dagger's "palpable" quality and how much it resembles his own sword. The vision of the dagger leads Macbeth to question what is fictitious and what is reality, the vision of the dagger is merely a vision but it results in a truth of Macbeth's coming murder of Duncan.

"I am in blood stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er." Act 3, Scene 4

Explanation

When Macbeth says "I am in blood" he means that he is deeply involved in murder after killing Duncan and Banquo, Macbeth feels that the blood he has spilled is flowing around him and that he is beginning to drown in it, this is illustrated where Macbeth says, "should I wade no more". The imagery of a pool of blood is used to show Macbeth's shame and guilt, Macbeth feels that his fate is sealed as a result of his actions and that nothing he can do will change this. Macbeth states that reverting to his original ways would be "tedious", thus illustrating that he could turn away from his murderous ways if he were more tenacious.

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Act 5, Scene 5

Explanation

As Macduff's army approaches for the final battle, Macbeth claims that life has no meaning and is just a monotonous series of events ending in eventual death. Eventually, Macbeth's ruthless nature has caught up with him and he rejects the notion of his life having any significance whatsoever, this is shown when Macbeth commands, "Out, out, brief candle!".



EXAM QUESTION PRACTICE

1. How does the character Macbeth exhibit the theme of betrayal?
2. How does the supernatural affect the character Macbeth?
3. Explore the ambition expressed by the character Macbeth.
4. Show how Shakespeare develops the character Macbeth.
5. How does Shakespeare present the character Macbeth?
6. Does Shakespeare present the character Macbeth as evil?