

Lady macbeth's breakdown in a particular scene



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This essay will consider this scenes repetition from earlier in the play. It will also consider some of the themes and images in this scene and throughout the rest of the play.

One of the themes running throughout the play is control. Early in the play she says:

“ Think of this, good peers,

But as a thing of custom”

This is from the dinner party scene, and is talking about the ghost of Banquo. She has complete control over the situation and is even able to lie, and pretend that everything is in order. This shows that she must have control over herself, and the situation to be able to do this. Lady Macbeth's loss of control is shown in the sleepwalking scene. In this scene, she says:

“ No more o' that, my lord. No more o' that; you mar all with starting.”

This is in a completely different tone; she now sounds desperate, and no longer has control. This loss of control is clear in her tone, but also in the fact that at the beginning she addresses the people at the party, which shows she has more control and confidence. In the sleepwalking scene she is addressing Macbeth, this shows a lack of confidence and control, because she does not talk to the people around her.

Another example of Lady Macbeth's loss of control is when, earlier in the play when she is talking to Macbeth. He is in doubt of her scheme to kill Duncan:

Macbeth: " If we should fail?"

Lady Macbeth: " We fail"

This is said scornfully. She believes that there is no way they can fail. This shows her control. She has no fear of failing, and because they won't fail, they won't be caught. In the sleepwalking scene however, her tone is quite different:

" a soldier and afeared?"

She is saying, " you are a soldier yet you are afraid?", but it is said in a completely different tone from before, she is more questioning herself and her fear. Before, however, she showed no hint of being afraid. This shows her loss of control of her emotions.

From the beginning she is very certain of herself, and the only thing she doubts is Macbeth. She has complete control and is also able to use reverse psychology on him and says:

" From this time

Such I account thy love"

She is saying that unless he does help her with her scheme to kill Duncan, he doesn't love her. Later on she has completely changed and now only doubts herself.

" The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?"

This is showing that she is conscious of not being there for Macbeth, and also of her thoughts becoming disjointed. She has lost faith in herself, and the ability to persuade others. This shows a loss of control over others and ability to blackmail them.

Another theme that runs throughout the play is guilt. Guilt is one reason for her breakdown. It is represented in several ways; one of them is blood. She is obsessed by blood.

“ My hand are of your colour; but I shame to wear a heart so white”

This is from earlier in the play, she is saying to Macbeth that her hands are also covered in blood, but she would be ashamed if she was as much of a coward as he is. This shows no sign of fear or guilt. She has no fear of being caught and believes that there is no reason to be guilty. Later, in the sleepwalking scene, however, she has much more guilt. This is shown in the fact that she is so obsessed with the blood on her hand:

“ Out, damned spot! Out I say!”

There is actually no blood on her hand, but she still sees it. This may be a metaphorical representation of her guilt. She can't seem to get rid of the blood, like she can't get rid of the guilt. It is a direct comparison.

Cleanliness is also another image of guilt. Early in the play she says:

“ A little water clears us of this deed”

She says that it only takes a little water and we have escaped detection. This is showing that she has no guilt or she wouldn't have been so sure. She is

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saying that the little water will not only clear them of the crime, but of the guilt that they would have had to face. However, later in the play, in the sleepwalking scene, the cleanliness of her hands is important:

“ What, will these hand ne'er be clean?”

Lady Macbeth keeps rubbing her hands but cannot get them clean. This is contradicting when she said a little water would rid her of the guilt. It is obvious that a little water won't clear someone of a crime, if they committed it. This, therefore, shows the significance of cleanliness when guilt is being considered. Earlier in the play a little water cleared her of her guilt, and she was completely clean. However in the sleep walking scene she couldn't become clean, therefore couldn't get rid of the guilt.

Another instance where cleanliness is considered is when earlier in the play Lady Macbeth says to Macbeth:

“ Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures;”

She has to take the daggers back so they won't be suspected of the murder. She then says that sleeping people and dead people are basically the same and Macbeth really has nothing to be afraid of. She shows no signs of guilt, and is even willing to go back and replace the daggers. She wouldn't be able to do this if she had had any guilt. Yet later, in the sleepwalking scene, she can even bear to think about what has happened:

“ Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”

Here her tone is much different, she is realising what she has done and is starting to regret it. There cannot be regret without guilt, therefore this is showing Lady Macbeth's guilt. She is beginning to wish she had had nothing to do with the murder, as the guilt is affecting her so badly.

Another theme running throughout the play, is that of power, the power she has over Macbeth, and the power she has over his actions. One example of power over Macbeth is:

" Get on your nightgown"

This is from earlier in the play. It is an order to Macbeth. She has the power to order him about, and he listens to her and does as she says, but later in the play, she says:

" Put on your nightgown"

This is in a completely different tone. She is no longer giving orders. The remark is empty, she has no one to give orders to anymore, she just has herself. She has lost her power over Macbeth, he is now his own man.

She has also lost her power to conceal the truth. At the beginning of the play, she is careful not to be caught:

" lest occasion calls us and shows us to be watchers."

She is careful that they leave before that they are caught. She has the power not only to tell Macbeth what to do here, but also has the power of deceit. In contrast, later in the play, she has no power over what she is saying, and the gentlewoman is aware of this, this is shown when she says:

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“ She has spoke what she should not”

Lady Macbeth doesn't even know what she is saying, she doesn't have the power over herself to stop her saying what she is.

From this essay it is clear that the sleepwalking scene is important in lots of different ways. It shows Lady Macbeth's breakdown not only mentally, but also as a main character. It also makes you think more highly of Macbeth, as he has got through the situation without revealing anything. It also makes you realise that Lady Macbeth isn't the strong person she was first perceived to be. The repetitions from earlier scenes also make you look at the play as a whole more.