

Light and dark imagery in macbeth

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Light and Dark imagery in Macbeth A tragedy play, written by William Shakespeare, is Macbeth. This play is filled with imageries of light and darkness. In the play Macbeth, Macbeth himself goes through a transformation in character. At the beginning of the play, he is noble and loyal, but in an effort to be crowned king, he is drowned by greed and darkness. His reign of terror, driven by insanity and ambition affects the natural order of the world and results in his death and the restoration of the natural order. The change in Macbeth's character from a noble man to a dark figure is mirrored by the imagery of light and dark.

During the first three scenes of the first act, Macbeth is absent and is only described by other characters. As a soldier informs Duncan of Macbeth and Banquo's performance on the battlefield, he says, " If I say sooth, I must report they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks" (I. ii, 40-41). This quote highlights Macbeth's actions as a light character. Macbeth is portrayed to be a great man and soldier in fighting for his king. After being told of Macbeth's role in the fighting near Forres, Duncan utters these praises, " O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman! " (I. ii, 26).

This is said in recognition of the outstanding fighting that Macbeth is doing for his king and country. Good is synonymous with images of light, therefore the good deeds of Macbeth are associated with light imagery. When Macbeth finally has a chance to respond to Duncan's praises, he says, " The service and loyalty I owe, in doing it, pays itself. " (I. iv, 25-26). Macbeth explains to the king that he does not require anymore payment than he already receives, as even just the satisfaction of fighting for Duncan and his state is enough. Macbeth believes himself to be a truly loyal and noble man.

At this point, Macbeth's character is tied only to images of triumph, but this begins to change when Macbeth realizes great opportunity. Realizing ambition and opportunity as well as outside influence from Lady Macbeth causes the light inside Macbeth to fade, thus beginning his transition into darkness. When Macbeth says this: " This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill; cannot be good..." (I. iii, 140-141), he begins to give the witches prophecies more thought. The witches are described as the instruments of darkness, and by contemplating their prophecies, he dims the light that he was surrounded by, and becomes a slightly darker character. During an aside, Macbeth says, " Stars hide your fires; let not light see my black and deep desires..." (I. iv, 57-58). The quote represents Macbeth's acknowledgement of his own dark thoughts and desires. This is his first thought of acting on ambition through dishonest means, and marks an evident change in Macbeth as a light character. This only furthers his transformation into a dark figure. Finally, Macbeth is portrayed as dark and evil when he says this, " Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?

Come, let me clutch thee. " (II. I, 40-41). Macbeth says this during the night in which he would commit his first murder and cross the point of no return. Accepting the dagger symbolizes Macbeth finalizing his decision to murder the man that had shown him nothing but kindness. Perhaps Macbeth was never as genuine as he had seemed to be and was always a dark figure. What is known for sure though is that once Macbeth starts his reign as a tyrant, he is unable to stop. After committing a series of killings, Macbeth has unarguably become a dark figure.

Although it is in Macbeth's own speech that he affirms himself as an evil man. When Macbeth speaks to Lady Macbeth, he states, " I am in blood stepped so far, that I should wade no more. " (III. iv, 167-168). He reflects upon his wrong doings by creating a dark image. The image pictures Macbeth wading in a river of blood, having proceeded so far that it is easier to continue than to try to return back to where he started. When Macbeth is informed of his wife's death by suicide, his only response is, " And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.

Out, out, brief candle! " (V. v, 24-25). The light and dark imagery is quite significant here, as this particular phrase is his way of saying her life was short, like that of a burning candle. Though, he exhibits a great lack of remorse for his wife, and goes on to explain that all the past has done is lead foolish people to their graves. During Macbeth and Macduff's final exchange of words before their battle, Macduff tells Macbeth, " I have no words: My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain than terms can give thee out! (V. viii, 8-10). This quote is an example of how Macbeth is viewed by his enemies. He is viewed as a bloody villain. This view of him contrasts to previous views of him in that he is no longer a light character and he will die a true figure of darkness. Macbeth is now seen by others as, and admits his self to be, an evil man. The play Macbeth is a story of the rise and fall of a tragic hero. It is clear that the character Macbeth goes through an evident change in character.

Whether it due to the outside influence of the three witches, his wife or his own ambitions, he is the one who makes his decisions. After capitalising on

opportunity by murdering Duncan, he ends up having to kill several people in order to eliminate suspicions. He is unable to halt his reign of terror, which would later result in his own death. The imageries of light and dark play a significant role in representing Macbeth's transformation from a strong and respected military leader to a murderous tyrant. Works Cited: Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. Roy, Ken. Toronto: