

Macbeth symbolism



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Macbeth Symbolism In our society, darkness tends to be the primary characteristic of evil. A black cat, a dark and stormy night, and a dark alley, for instance, are all modern day symbols of wickedness and evil. Authors many times will use these and other symbols to describe an evil character or setting. William Shakespeare employs the imagery of darkness throughout his play of Macbeth. He uses dark images often to describe instruments of disorder and the evils which characters act upon.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare's use of the night's dark hour's give a sense of evil to the play. The words, actions, and descriptions of people such as the witches, Macbeth shows this, and even of other characters who are thought to be against all evil. Evil is present throughout the play, at a time when there is no light, and Scotland is covered by a shadow of darkness. In Macbeth, the witches are a prime source of darkness. First of all, the place and time of the witch's meetings all take on the feeling of darkness.

The only times of their meetings are in the middle of the night, and often in terrible conditions of thunder and lightning. The witches meet in a dark cave. The cave is an appropriate setting for the witches because caves are murky and gloomy, and tend to represent the ideas of the underworld and hell. From the conditions and the location that the witches meet, a feeling of evil is already created. The appearance of the witches also adds to the feeling of darkness and evil.

The witches are described as being, secret, black, and midnight hags! by Macbeth himself (Act IV, i, 47). The image today of a witch is an old, ugly woman who dresses all in black, and has a wart on her nose, and rides

around on a broomstick. The picture hasn't changed much, except for the fact she now rides around on a broom. Witches still practice their magic, casting spells and hexes, looking into the future, and creating mystical potions, all things that manifest wickedness. Banquo even refers to the witches as instruments of darkness (Act I, iii, 125) after their first prophecy comes true. The witch's dark meeting place and dark appearance all emphasize their evil nature and the feeling of evil in the play. Nighttime is obviously a key setting for darkness and evil. Besides the witches meeting only at night, the dark hours also host other major events which take place in the play.

The murdering of King Duncan takes place at night. Once again, nighttime is a host for the most evil of deeds. Death is by far one of the most villainous acts, and the fact that it takes place at night ties it in with darkness representing evil in the play. Macbeth chooses to murder the king at night because it is the most concealing time to do it. Everyone has retired to their chambers and is sleeping when Macbeth goes to do his evil act. He is able to sneak into the king's room and kill him without waking anyone, and quickly washes his hands and returns to his own room. When Macduff and Malcolm wake the castle, Macbeth has already unclothed himself to look as if he were just waking up from the commotion. When the King is discovered dead, all meets in their pajamas and no one is suspected of being awake and killing the King.

Let's briefly put on manly readiness, and meet i' th' hall together, says Macbeth to put distance between him and the murder. Darkness and the nighttime, in this case, help Macbeth to hide his evil actions. Nighttime is

also the time in which Banquo is murdered. Banquo and his son must leave one day from Scone, but will make it back in time for Macbeth's banquet. As far, my lord, as I will fill up the time I must become a borrower of the night.

For a dark hour of twain, Banquo says to Macbeth, stating his intentions.

When Macbeth hears that Banquo and Fleance will be returning home at night, he commissions two murderers and says to them The moment on't; for't must be done tonight Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart.

Macbeth tells the murderers that Banquo must be killed that night in the dark, when no one else will see. This is a specific reference to dark connected to the evil act of murder.

Banquo and his son come riding that night, and the assassins kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes. In Macbeth, other characters use references to darkness to get across their point that something evil is at work. At the time of the eclipse the day after King Duncan's murder, Ross says, Threaten his bloody stage. By the clock, 'tis the day, And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp. Is't night's predominance, or the days shame, that darkness does the face of earth entomb, when living light should kiss it? By this, Ross is tying the eclipse to the murder, saying that night mortifies the day from the actions that took place in Macbeth's castle.

Scotland is also described as being a dark place when under the control of Macbeth. Malcom describes it as shrouded in darkness in Act IV, after he flees to England to escape Macbeth's tyranny. Under Macbeth's leadership, Scotland is filled with sighs, and groans, and shrieks, that rent the air, all signs that something horrible has enveloped the country and its leader (Act

IV, iii, 168). Macduff describes Scotland as O nation miserable! (Act IV, iii, 103). All of these descriptions of Scotland portray it as a place where the agents of darkness have shrouded the land. The dark images in Macbeth portray a sense of evil throughout the entire play.

The witches are the epitome of evil, and their appearance and their gatherings show their darkness. Being secret and black hags, their evil nature is also indicated. The time in which the witches meet also shows how darkness represents evil. This is where night comes into play. The witches always and only meet at night, and night is also the time when two murders take place, Duncan's and Banquo's.

Because of the darkness of night, it is the perfect time for somebody to hide his works of evil. And because of the evil acts against the king, according to Ross, there was an eclipse. It happened because the night shamed the day from the murder of Duncan. Later on, after Macbeth takes the throne, Scotland is once again in darkness. Not from the eclipse or the usual nightfall, but because of Macbeth's tyrannical and evil ways. This is made clear by Malcom and Macduff, but later ended by the pair. Shakespeare's imagery of darkness throughout Macbeth adds greatly to the element of evil in the play.

In the words, actions, and descriptions of the characters in the play, Scotland becomes a very dark place, controlled by evils all around. The dark images in the play complete the sense of evil and create an eerie feeling throughout the play.