

Analysis of how shakespeare presents guilt in the play 'macbeth'

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Shakespeare's Macbeth is a play about the devastating effects of guilt. It is arguably the most prominent theme in the play of 'Macbeth', due to the way it seizes hold of the protagonists, and leeches from their innocence. It is presented through symbols and figures of imagination. Guilt galvanizes the protagonist's actions, and drives them to their fatal fall.

Shakespeare presents guilt through Macbeth's mental suffering, 'a dagger of the mind', 'O full of scorpions is my mind'. The words 'dagger' and 'scorpions' have connotations of danger and fatality. Macbeth is warning himself subconsciously through hallucinations, demonstrating how guilt will bind him to sorrow. The use of repetition of the word "mind" suggests that guilt has taken root in him and is poisoning him from the inside out.

In addition, Shakespeare presents guilt through Macbeth's relationship with sleep. He is no longer permitted to sleep, instead he has to bear weight of the sin through day and night. Shakespeare writes, 'Still it cried, "sleep no more", Macbeth shall sleep no more'. Sleep has been perceived as heaven, as a land far from danger or sin. He is no longer authorized over the threshold of consciousness, not permitted through the vast gates to heaven. He has subverted nature, gone against God's word; therefore, now, he cannot rest. Through Macbeth's deprivation of such a necessity, we see how guilt has seized him, and racked his body through and through.

Guilt is presented through reoccurring symbols and themes of the play. Guilt manifests objects and imagery associated with light, personifying the emotion. Shakespeare continuously mentions hands; moulding them into emblems of intent. Macbeth is burdened with 'hangman's hands'. This has

connotations of intent, murder and guilt. Hangman's hands are not noble, nor are they respectable. Macbeth has de-evolved from a valiant, brave man to one that kills to gain undeserved power. Another symbol is light and dark. Lady Macbeth cowers from dark, yet Macbeth summons it. Shakespeare writes, ' Stars, hide your fires, Let not light see my black and deep desires'. Here, Macbeth demands that his sins be hidden from the heavens, or from any superior beings. The alliteration of ' deep desires' signifies the sincerity of his evil and, supposedly, uncharacteristically immoral thoughts. Later, however, Lady Macbeth cannot rest and walks in her sleep through a guilt-ridden conscience. She clasps onto a candle, holding the dark at bay. The contrast between Lady Macbeth shows the development of guilt, and how the roles almost swapped in Lady Macbeth becoming taken over by guilt.

In addition, Shakespeare presents guilt, and development of it, through the character of Lady Macbeth. Initially, she feels no remorse or guilt. In Act 2, scene 2 of Macbeth, Shakespeare writes, ' My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white'. Lady Macbeth is unapologetically impenitent, advising Macbeth to be the same. She ensures Macbeth that only a little water will cleanse him of his sins, implying that what they have done is nothing to feel guilt or remorse over. However, in Act 5, Scene 1, of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth asks through her sleep, ' Out damned spot, this shows that her sins have taken a toll on her and the guilt of her actions has struck. The use of plosives accentuates her desire to rid herself of sins.

In conclusion, guilt drives Macbeth and Lady Macbeth towards their descent to insanity. In Act 1, they are presented as unphased; however in Act 5 they

have been leeched of their innocence. Shakespeare presents guilt to be the most powerful theme throughout Macbeth and much of their downfall is due to guilt.