

Exploring the theme of guilt in the fifth business and macbeth

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



This paper will explore the theme of guilt in the stories of “ Macbeth” by William Shakespeare and the “ Fifth Business” by Robertson Davies. More specifically, this paper claims the guilt is a powerful emotion that can destroy a person. Basically, guilt in the context of the two stories led to devastations and up to some extent the ultimate downfall of a person. Moreover, guilt is confronted by people in different ways. Some would have a difficult time getting over it while others would easily get rid of it. And finally, it is the guilt of a person that serves as a catalyst to his suffering which is most of the time, on the emotional aspect

On the story of Macbeth, guilt is found on the act of killing. The protagonist of the story, Macbeth, was persuaded to kill King Duncan of Scotland as well as his guard due to the persuasion of the three witches and his wife. But after the deed was done, Macbeth was guilt stricken. This is evident on the absent-mindedness nature of Macbeth after committing murder. In fact, after immediately killing the King, Macbeth is still carrying the bloodied daggers which are supposed to be planted on the guards of the King.

Because of this, Lady Macbeth has to return into the King’s chamber to plant the daggers and even smear blood on the guards. It was noted that Macbeth has told her wife that he could not bring himself to return at the room anymore. In addition, even before the act of killing the King, Macbeth already feels guilty to what he will do. This is depicted on Act II, Scene II, Line 42 and 43 of the novel. It was declared in these lines that he heard of a voice saying that he has “ murdered sleep” and that he “ shall sleep no more”.

Even after Macbeth became a King, the guilt feeling still lingered. It has even aggravated by his hallucinations with his order of killing Banquo.

Furthermore, even Lady Macbeth has suddenly felt remorse with their deed. As a matter of fact, Lady Macbeth's conscience has been irrelevant on their earlier part of the story. Eventually, she was also guilt-stricken thus having hallucinations and other vivid forms of imagination. At the end of the story, both of the Macbeths suffered a painful death which is a result of their deed in killing King Duncan.

Meanwhile, the story of the Fifth Business tells about the guilt felt by Dunstable Ramsay towards a woman named Mary Dempster. Basically, when Ramsay and his friend, Percy Boyd Staunton, are snowfighting, they accidentally hit Mrs. Dempster who is pregnant at this time. Because of this, the act resulted to the very problematic as well as premature labor of Mrs. Dempster to his child, Paul Dempster. Unlike his friend Staunton,

Ramsay was very guilty to what happened because he was the one who is supposedly hit by the snowball. This is evident in his lines, " I was contrite and guilty, for I knew the snowball had been meant for me..." (Davies, p. 3).

From then on, everything had changed especially on the family of Mrs. Dempster. These changes had greatly affected Ramsay which caused him great emotional suffering. Although Ramsay was not directly affected by the changes in the family of Mrs. Dempster, he was nonetheless indirectly hit hard by these changes. More specifically, after the premature labor of Paul Dempster, Mrs. Dempster has become what they call a ' simple-minded fool' or a plagued with ' madness'.

This condition was perceived by Ramsay to be a lifelong responsibility to take care for Mrs. Dempster, thus offering some help in the chores of the Dempster household. Furthermore, Paul Dempster ran away from home even before he reached the age of ten (10). This is because of the Mr. Dempster blames him for the things that happened to his wife after giving birth to him. Specifically, he blames him for his mother's madness.

In fact, this blaming is complicated by the cruel jokes of people to Mrs. Dempster who thinks there is something funny about her. All throughout his life, Ramsay felt guilty to the many things that happened after the untimely labor of Mrs. Dempster. This is proclaimed in his lines delivered to Staunton that, "[This] is the stone you put in the snowball you threw at Mrs. Dempster... I've kept it because I couldn't part with it." (Davies, p. 270) In other words, up to the end of the story, Ramsay was not able to get rid of the guilt he felt toward the incident that happened during his snow fighting.

Indeed, the theme of guilt is relevant on the two stories. On Macbeth, the protagonist of the story, Macbeth, was guilt stricken for killing the King in order to get his throne. In the long run, he was not able to get rid of this guilt thus contributing to his downfall. The same is true with the fate of her wife, Lady Macbeth, who committed suicide because of her guilt, which she was not able to contain. On the story of the Fifth Business, the protagonist, Ramsay, was also unsuccessful in getting rid of his guilt despite the efforts he had done in order to reconcile with it.

In a nutshell, guilt can be concluded as a strong emotional force which can significantly shape the lives of every man. This is especially true in the case of people who are guilt-stricken. All their lives, they will be haunted by their conscience because of what they have done. And most of the time, it is their guilt that dictates the tempo of their life. As such, they become forever bound with the power of guilt.

REFERENCES

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