

Macbeth college essay



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Macbeth There are many forms of imagery in the world today. They usually take on two main forms, those being visual and mental. Word means different thing to different people. The Webster's Dictionary defines it as, in rhetoric, representations in writing or speaking; lively descriptions which impress the images of things on the mind; figures in discourse. This once again goes back to the idea of mental imagery and the different ways people interpret things. In William Shakespeare's Macbeth. Imagery is connected to both character development as well as theme and are patterned throughout the play.

From the beginning of the play we are introduced to image of darkness. It was called upon by Banquo, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. In his aside to Macbeth "Buttis strange: And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, The instruments of darkness tell us truths, Win us with honest trifles, to betray us In deepest consequence" (I, II, 131-135) Banquo shows that he is immediately aware that the witches are associated with darkness. He chooses not to act on the witches prophecies, but rather to be wary and reluctant. He is not ready to involve himself with the witches, as he sees them as a dark force. However Macbeth is an opportunist and the image of darkness reveals his deepest, darkest desires. This is shown in Macbeth's aside.

"The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step On which I must fall down or else o' ver-leap, For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires" (I, IV, 55-58) It becomes apparent that, it bothered Macbeth a great deal to hear that Malcolm was named successor to King Duncan, he then calls on darkness to hide his evil thoughts. Lady Macbeth

does the same, she conjures up the forces of darkness, to make sure the heavens don't see her having these thoughts.

"Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, To cry, "Hold, hold!" (I, V, 53-57) By the end of Act I, we can see that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have sided with "Darkness". By listening to the prompting of the witches they have given in to them and sided with the forces of evil. But, Banquo, is still cautious about the idea of even and darkness. He shows us that the witches only tell partial truths that look pretty at first, but, will hurt you in the end. This also brings to us to the theme of evil and how it does the same thing. It comes across as being very tempting but, will definitely bring you down in the end.

Another strong image in the play is "blood". It is perhaps the most powerful image of Macbeth's character change. One such image is portrayed just before Macbeth visits the witches for the second time. He says to his wife, Lady Macbeth that "For mine own good All causes shall give away; I am in blood Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er:" (III, IV, 166-169) This says that he is no longer concerned with who is in his way as long as he gets to the top. He is being driven by evil once again..... The blood image shows that once Macbeth sided with the forces of darkness, killing Duncan, he was overwhelmed and would never escape evil's ugly grasp. Thus changing his character forever. It also effects the theme of the play. In Elizabethan times, to be named King you were appointed by God. So, to kill a King you are going against God, thus once again siding with evil. So when Macbeth murdered King Duncan it was almost

like a "cardinal sin". So bad in fact that he would never be able to clean his hands of the blood. If he were to try to clean his hands there would be so much of it that it would turn the oceans red with the blood of the King (God). This point is made clear by Macbeth when he says.

"Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red." (II, II, 77-80) Thus this shows us just how much of an impact the image of blood has over the characters and plot.

Finally, through the use of clothes, Shakespeare reinforces the theme that Macbeth is never comfortable with his newly appointed roles in the kingdom, and that his character was never meant to be more than a brave loyal subject. When Macbeth is named Thane of Cawdour he asks the question "The Thane of Cawdour lives: why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" (I, IV, 115) Even when he is given a new title the clothing image shows he is never comfortable. This idea is shown again with Banquo says "New honours come upon him, Like strange garments, cleave not to their mould, But with the aid of use," (I, III, 157-159) Banquo is comparing this idea to ill-fitting clothes. He is stating that at first all clothes are binding and uncomfortable, but with time and use they work themselves in and become snug. This clearly helps develop the idea that Macbeth will never be satisfied with his changing roles. He will always be wearing tight fitting clothes in his mind. The imagery of clothing helped to develop a picture of a character (Macbeth) who never fit in and was never comfortable with a role he obtained by evil means.

When we look back at the play so far we can clearly see that his images are not only connected to his characters and theme he also give a moral message. He is telling us don't get caught up in the pool of blood and darkness and do not wear borrowed robes. You will never be satisfied with where you end up because you got there by unholy means. Also, this process might keep repeating itself and you never know how much you will change or how many people will get hurt on your climb to the top. Which makes the success you were striving for worthless. The only real way to achieve self gratification for your successes is to go about them honestly, because honesty is the best policy. These were just a few of the hundreds of images in Shakespeare's Macbeth, those of which make his play structurally sound as well as didactic.

Works Cited

- 1 Shakespeare, William, Macbeth, Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, Inc, 1988.

- 2 Webster, Noah, New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, New York: Rockville House Publishers, Inc, 1965.