

Analysis of macbeth's soliloquy essay



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Exuding the underlying reflections of Macbeth's psyche, the soliloquy represents the outpouring of confusion and conscience, adding to our insight into Macbeth's obscure persona.

At the opening of the play, we have a strong impression of Macbeth as a 'worthy gentleman', with Duncan referring to him as 'noble Macbeth'. Though, this becomes untenable with ironic juxtaposition when we witness Macbeth's intent to murder Duncan for the 'golden round'. Macbeth's soliloquy better elucidates this complex character, providing a more comprehensive basis for our judgement. Incongruous to the courage and physical strength Macbeth displayed on the battlefield 'unseam[ing Macduff] from the nave to th'chaps', he is weak and vacillating in his soliloquy. Macbeth emanates an atmosphere of confusion and anxiety suggested by the rapid overlapping movement of imagery that reflects the swift intuitive movement in his mind. The concept of spurring a horse is overtaken by that of vaulting, and 'heaven's cherubin' riding the winds, 'the sightless couriers of the air' merges into the winds themselves and 'blow[s] the horrid deed in every eye'.

It follows that Macbeth is irresolute about whether he should 'commit the deed'. The structure of Macbeth's arguments is based on assumptions - 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/It were done quickly'. This shows us that Macbeth is struggling to reason with himself accentuating his doubts of his moral capability to 'bear the knife'. The uncertain tone that is immediately introduced into the first few lines of the soliloquy also establishes dramatic tension creating an ambience of suspense again alluding to Macbeth's bitter mental conflict.

Macbeth's emotionally labile attitude towards killing Duncan, presenting himself a two-sided argument for carrying out the 'horrid deed', demonstrates there still exists a shred of conscience within him. From the order of Macbeth's stream of consciousness, contemplating the thought of murdering Duncan, before considering the moral arguments, we witness the large extent to which ambition controls his reasoning. Macbeth's exceeding aspiration is evident from his concern only lying in the repercussions on himself in this life, disregarding the possibility of divine retribution after death in the 'life to come'. The inadequacy of this tough-minded attitude, however, is expressed in the imagery - 'bank and shoal of time', which emphasises his description of the world as temporal and impermanent, easily washed away by the 'sea of eternity'. This imagery implies what Macbeth really knows to be true, that it is the eternal spiritual values that matters not the earthly successes and riches. Again, we note Macbeth's morals, unable to escape the thought of Heaven and God, continuing to use religious references and childlike imagery, metaphors and personification - 'angels, trumpet-tongued against the deepest damnation.

.. ' and '...

like a new born babe/Striding the blast'. Also, Macbeth continually uses euphemisms, never referring directly to Duncan's murder - 'my intent', 'his taking off', 'this blow', 'these cases', 'his surcease' and 'it'. Macbeth is evading the true meaning of his actions, his moral concepts unable to grasp the depth of murdering Duncan. Furthermore, if Macbeth were capable of cold-blooded murder, he would be at the banquet table, calmly exchanging pleasantries with the victim, instead of being isolated in guilty reflections.

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Overall, Macbeth's soliloquy penetrates into the deeper recesses of the human mind, allowing us to create a better judgement and understanding of Macbeth.