

How does
shakespeare use
theme of appearance
and reality in
'macbeth'



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Appearance is a noticeable aspect of something or somebody, appearance can create different impressions depending on who is observing. Almost the opposite is reality, actual being or existence, as opposed to an imaginary, idealized, or false nature (taken from dictionary). We should not judge, take opinions of people or anything only on their appearances.

For example there are people who appear to be extremely trustworthy and reliable but in reality, are not. This does not only occur with people as there is an English saying “ don’t judge a book by its cover”. Appearance versus reality is an important theme in William Shakespeare’s Macbeth. There are many actions from the characters where they portray this theme of appearance versus reality; this theme is applied in almost each act of the play. There are loads of moments where the theme of appearance and reality is portrayed however I would like to start with the first one in Act one Scene one, where the three witches chant, “ Fair is foul, and foul is fair” This introduces to the reader that throughout the play you will find confusion between what is right and what is wrong, this quote shows the chaos that is occurring already.

It also portrays that if one’s actions are grateful it will appear to be wicked, however, if ones actions are sinful it will appear to be good. This clashes in with the theme of appearance and reality, where if one’s motives are grateful it will appear to be unappreciative and vice versa. Shakespeare was creating this to attract the audience’s attention, this is an interesting quote as it is a paradox where the quote contradicts itself, and also the quote makes the audience interpret it in different ways. Macbeth cannot believe the reality that the witches are women as they appear like men, “ you

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appear to have beards, but you also look like women” Macbeth cannot trust his eyes as his eyes and his mind are interpreting these women in different ways which is confusing him. Also in the era of the play they believed in witches, so the audience would have an idea of what a witch would look like, whereas today when we read the play Shakespeare uses descriptive language to demonstrate to us how they used to understand the appearance of the witches. Again Shakespeare is using appearance versus reality to attract the reader’s attention; it also relates to the idea of chaos and that everything is not what it appears to be.

Even nowadays people change their appearance mainly to fit in example change your clothes and hairstyle to fit in, however in the end the reality will show. Once again Shakespeare is using this theme, this time it to cover up the guilt with innocence, “ look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under it” Lady Macbeth says this; she is referring to Macbeth and telling him to appear innocent but act brutally. This is in Act 1 scene 5 when King Duncan is visiting Macbeth’s castle and they are planning to murder him, Lady Macbeth’s intention is to make their house appear welcoming, warm and inviting, but they intend to kill him. An innocent flower is harmless and is attractive aspect as its features are colorful and delicate. On the other hand a serpent is a evil reptile, to add on to the iniquity “ serpent” is mentioned in the bible the as the reptile said to have tempted Eve.

Also Shakespeare is warning people that in real life it is dangerous to trust what you see as people try to cover up the reality. During Macbeth’s dagger monologue, he is overcome with a false vision, “ Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. I have <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-use-theme-of-appearance-and-reality-in-macbeth/>

thee or, and yet I see thee still. Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight? Or art though but A dagger of the mind, a false creation, Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? ” The dagger is just a hallucination, which Macbeth can only see. There is no confusion or bewilderment, it is clear that Shakespeare demonstrates the difference in appearance to reality in this scene. Macbeth is seeing only a figment of his imagination; this quote defines the theme of appearance versus reality.

Even though in Macbeth’s mind there is a dagger in front of him, in actuality there is nothing. This quote is interesting as we do not know whether he is hallucinating because the witches are controlling his mind or whether he is obsessed with murdering King Duncan. The mind controls what you see and what you don’t besides the physical tangible real world, Shakespeare is telling the reader that when you are obsessed you start seeing things that the brain wants to see. Yet again, Shakespeare is using the theme of appearance versus reality to portray to the reader that people are not as they appear as Donalbain says, “ There’s daggers in men’s smiles” What Donalbain is trying to explain is that they see smiles on the outside but they know that danger is beneath the friendly appearance. The men all appear to be friendly but reality they are dangerous, this makes it difficult to choose who to trust and who to not. It also shows the disorder that is occurring which reminds the reader of the first act where the three witches chant “ Fair is foul, and foul is fair”, the reader might think that the witches are responsible for all this chaos and madness.

This is a metaphor as there cannot possibly be daggers in a smile suggest that the people will smile to their face but those very smiles could kill them.
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In Act 4 Scene 3 Malcolm is testing Macduff through a conversation to see which side he is taking, “ Be not offended I speak not as in absolute fear of you...

... Be like our warranted quarrel.

Why are you silent? Macduff is tricked as Malcolm creates a false reality instead of his own character, Malcolm paints himself as the most evil and worst ruler there can possibly be. Then he uses a simile to compare himself to Macbeth, he says he will appear “ as pure as snow”, all what he is saying is a fake appearance used to test Macduff. Malcolm is then certain that Macduff is on his side when he says after Malcolm’s speech “ Thy hope ends here” He utters this because he finds that Malcolm has become evil and that there is no hope in anyone, then Malcolm interrupts him to reveal the truthful reality as Macduff had passed the test. Although I did not include every example related to the theme of appearance and reality in the play of Macbeth. The reader or the audience can understand what Shakespeare was trying to do, whether he described an appearance that was false in reality or whether used to test another’s innocence.

In the end appearance does not always agree with the reality and that Shakespeare was demonstrating that the way people act on the outside and who they actually are on the inside may be two totally different things.