The Darkness Of Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

The Darkness of Macbeth

William Shakespeare’s Macbeth is a play of darkness. Throughout the play, three things in particular play a part in setting this stage, so to speak, of darkness. These three things are characters, theme and mood. Each has its own part in setting up the darkness. The characters (the title character in particular) are dark in their actions, the theme is dark in its subject matter, and the mood is dark in its essence.

Macbeth in particular, is very dark in his actions. To prove this, we will look at the beginning of the play. In act 1, scene 3, the witches, who met Macbeth on a dark heath, gave him some truths and some lies – “All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane/ of Glamis!”, “All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane/ of Cawdor!”, “All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!” (I, iii, 49-53). The witches in their evil way prompted Macbeth’s ambition to be king. They planted the thought that he could be king if Duncan died.

… My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of man

That function is smothered in surmise

And nothing is, but what is not. (I, iii, 151-154)

Once Duncan is killed, Macbeth can’t stop. He must kill everyone and anyone who stands in his way. He even kills Banquo and Macduff’s family. (News of Banquo) “My lord, his throat is cut. That I did for him.” (III, iv, 18) (News of Macduff’s family) “Your castle is surprised, you wife and babes/ Savagely slaughtered.” (IV, iii, 233-236) He then thinks that he is invisible because the witches told him “…The power of man, for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth” (IV, i, 88-89) and “ Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill/ Shall come against him.” (IV, i, 101-103) But then at the end of the play Macbeth gets what’s coming to him and they actually do kill him – “He’s worth no more. / They say he parted well and paid his score, / And so God be with him! Here comes newer comfort.” (V, viii, 61-63).

The theme of Macbeth is very dark in its subject matter. The main theme throughout the whole play is death, death, and more death. First, as said above, we have Macbeth killing Duncan because the witches told him that he would be king – “I have done the deed. / Didst thou not hear a noise?” (II, ii, 17-18) Then, later on, we have the murder of Banquo – “O, treachery! / Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! / Thou mayst revenge. O slave!” (III, iii, 25-27) Next, we have the murder of Macduff’s son – “He has killed me, Mother. / Run away, I pray you!” (IV, ii, 97-98), which is followed by Lady Macduff running off stage, crying “Murder!” pursued by the Murderers (IV, ii, end). Later on, while preparing for battle, Macbeth gets news of his wife’s death – “The Queen, my lord, is dead.” (V, v, 18), which didn’t even sadden him because he was too preoccupied in preparing for his confrontation with the attacking forces. Continuing with Macbeth’s murdering streak, the Young Siward is killed in a fight – They fight, and young Siward is slain. (V, vii) Then, finally, in the end, Macbeth got what he deserved and was murdered by Macduff – They re-enter fighting, and Macbeth is slain. (V, viii, b/w 39-40). In total, there ended up being about 7 deaths in a five-act play, proving that the theme of Macbeth definitely has to be death, which is very dark.

The mood in Macbeth is very dark in it’s essence. Starting from the beginning, we are introduced to the three Witches – in a desert place with thunder and lightning (I, i). As the play goes on, every time the Witches are introduced, pathetic fallacy is used making the mood very dark. For example, when the Witches meet Macbeth for the first time – in a heath, thundering (I, iii). When the Witches meet Hecate – in a heath, thundering (III, iv). In act four, the witches are huddled around a boiling cauldron, preparing a spell – in a cavern, thundering (IV, i). Every time they make an apparition, thunder is heard. This makes the mood very dark. Another time where Shakespeare made the mood pretty dark could be when Banquo remarks that the night is especially dark – “…There’s husbandry in heaven, / Their candles are all out…” (II, i, 6-7) The dark night, in other words, reflects Macbeth’s dark desires – “…And take the present horror from the time, / Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives. / Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.” (II, i, 67-69) Then, for a final example of the dark mood, we have the banquet scene, which should be fun and happy, but there is no joy because Macbeth keeps seeing the ghost of Banquo –

Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!

Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;

Thou hast no speculation in those eyes

Which thou dost glare with. (III, iv, 111-114)

Shakespeare’s Macbeth is definitely a play of darkness. By looking at the characters in the play (Macbeth in particular) and their actions, the theme’s dark subject matter, and the mood’s dark essence, Shakespeare made it very clear that this is play of darkness. Whether it had been intended or not, it is very obvious that he was very successful in doing so.

Bibliography

Shakespeare’s Macbeth