Camille Phaneuf

Mrs. Steelman

AP Literature

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*The Tragedy of Macbeth:*

Outward Actions Affect Inner Peace

In the haunting play *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1606), William Shakespeare explores the effects of ambition on a character’s lifestyle. Macbeth’s lust for power is incited by the witches’ speculations regarding his future royal positions. Macbeth desires the title of king, and along with his wife, is willing to commit any crime necessary, including regicide, to obtain the prestige. Originally unbeknownst to the Macbeths, a large death count is imperative to hide their growing faults. As a result, Inverness is established as a seemingly constant murder scene and subsequently assumes a hellish resemblance. The external hell within Macbeth’s castle is the impetus for the intrinsic tumult with his mind, allowing for a parallel between the character’s internal being and outward environment.

In order to analyze both Macbeth’s external and intrinsic hells, one must examine the original semantics of hell. In the King James version of the Bible, “hell” is translated from five different words: *Tartaroo* (Greek), *Sheol* (Hebrew), *Hades* (Greek), *Hinnom* (Hebrew), and *Gehenna* (Greek). King James held the crown in England when *Macbeth* was written, which is why the version used is the most applicable to the establishment of the meaning of “hell.” Contrary to popular opinion, the King James version, when translating the word *Tartaroo*, does not intend for the interpretation to indicate “a place of flames and torment,” but an abyss. Secondly, the adaptations of *Sheol* and *Hades* are considered to be closely related. *Sheol* signifies "the world of the dead” while “literally, *Hades* means ‘death’ or the ‘grave’; and figuratively, it means ‘destruction’” (“What”). Finally, *Hinnom* and *Gehenna* possess equivalent connotations. According to John Wesley Hanson, an American Universalist minister and a notable Universalist historian, *Hinnom* and *Genenna* refer to “a valley outside Jerusalem where garbage and the carcasses of animals were cast into and consumed by fire,” but which carried “not the meaning of post-mortem torment,” denoting that this diction was not in regards to the hell of the after-life(Hanson qtd. in “What”). Therefore, the King James Bible, based upon the aforementioned translations, identifies hell as a location for death, which is consistent with the application of hellish external and internal environments in *Macbeth.* Macbeth is responsible for the physical death of others, which is the provocation for the figuratively atmospheric change in his surroundings. Further, the environment alterations are the catalyst for the annihilation of Macbeth’s personal sanity.

The witches share their prophecies with Macbeth in the very first act of the play, thereby, as claimed by Amanda Mabillard, the founder of shakespeare-online, “[performing] the thematic function of introducing a significant presence of evil with which Macbeth is confronted.” The Weird Sisters indirectly proclaim that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor, which is accomplished without immoral actions on his behalf, but the prediction that Macbeth “shalt be king hereafter” plants seeds of immeasurable ambition in his mind, and as they come to fruition, bear the crop of evil doings (1.3.53). In order to obtain the throne, and subsequently maintain the respect of his wife, Macbeth feels compelled to kill the innocent, unassuming King Duncan. The regicide shakes Macbeth to the core, made evident by his betrayal of Lady Macbeth’s instructions to leave the lethal daggers with the guards. Despite the cognitive dissonance produced, however, he continues to attempt murder in order to rid of his acquaintances that may become suspicious. The body count rises in Inverness as Macbeth stabs both of Duncan’s guards, then hires murderers to pursue his close companion Banquo and his son Fleance. While Fleance escapes the murderers’ wrath, Banquo is not as fortunate. As Macbeth becomes increasingly culpable for numerous deaths, his castle comes to reflect hellish surroundings in which his guests cannot avoid the presence of malevolence.

Shakespeare unmistakably illustrates his development of Inverness as a representation of hell in the third scene of the second act, otherwise informally referred to as the Porter scene. The Porter, in medieval times, “[is] responsible for the main Castle entrance” and also “[insures] that no one [enters] or [leaves] the castle without permission” (Alchin). However, the Porter in the play was heavily intoxicated, pretending to be not the guard of Inverness, but occupying the entrance to hell, declaring, “If a man were / porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the / key” (2.3.1-3). The inclusion of the Porter’s unconscious awareness of the castle’s evil atmosphere, even while enveloped in a drunken stupor, demonstrates how drastically Inverness’ residents are changing, and therefore the magnitude of the alterations in the entire royal environment.

Macbeth’s newly murderous tendencies which cause the transformation in his property incite inner turmoil for the remainder of the tragedy. His tumultuous state of mind is prominently exemplified during the soliloquy in which Macbeth ponders the plan to kill Duncan. Macbeth has not yet fully agreed to his wife’s plan, so the future king experiences a hallucination and debates:

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? (2.1.47-51)

The occurrence of a hallucination epitomizes Macbeth’s innate struggle to balance ambition and the consequences of exceedingly immoral actions, particularly in the form of “fatal vision”. His mind, as the thought of potential murders occupies his thoughts, is representative of a hellish environment from which he cannot escape. The dagger, pointing toward Duncan’s chambers, is to Macbeth the irrefutable sign that will allow for not only the highest title, but an immense amount of guilt. Finally, the character’s mind expresses its culminating turmoil in a vision.

Macbeth did not personally kill his familiar acquaintance Banquo as he had Duncan, but the King’s order for contracted murderers to complete the task proved to weigh heavily on his conscience nonetheless. While at Macbeth’s own dinner party, a guest asks “What sights, my / lord?” as Macbeth speaks to Banquo’s ghost, which no one else can see (3.4.142-143). The supernatural presence is a reminder of Macbeth’s guilt for the commanded murder of his former friend, which haunts the king almost immediately after the deed is executed. Macbeth seems to know that Banquo cannot actually be in the room based upon the order: “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” (3.4.113-116). Yet, Macbeth’s mind continues to produce the hallucination as an outward projection of the inner hell he is experiencing. Evidently, his sanity continues to perish like his guests.

The final clue that Macbeth’s actions have affected his inner stability is found in the king’s ineptitude to sleep. A state of rest is only granted “to people with a clear conscience” (White). Macbeth, incontestably, does not possess this fortune. David Aaron White further asserts that Macbeth “is guilty of a heinous crime,” and will continue to suffer until his death for his immoral actions. Like the bothersome hallucinations, sleep deprivation is his mind’s response to the death toll in Inverness. According to Gerald S. Synder, a science writer contracted with the National Institute of Mental Health, “guilt can be associated with abnormal sleep patterns.” Indeed, Macbeth endures guilt in abundance and his mind reacts to the abhorrent emotion. Macbeth’s inward unpleasantries express themselves through his mental condition, which seeks to develop a hellish state for the purpose of mimicking his external lifestyle. As the body count rises, so must the intrinsic turmoil and the ensuing punishment, for murder is not without penalty, penalty by guilt, guilt through conscience. Conscience willing to punish, to parallel the outward horror produced. The unavoidable consequence is tumult that, like Macbeth, cannot be put to rest until “none of woman born / shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.91-92). The conflict between Macbeth’s internal and external hell is finally resolved when Macduff becomes the latest character responsible for regicide.

It cannot be asserted that Macbeth’s inner turmoil is innate, for the first vision, of the [bloody dagger](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pusU90ov8pQ) (0 to 45 seconds), did not occur until domestic bloodshed became an impending possibility. Likewise, continued hallucinations and sleeplessness occur following murderous behavior. Therefore, it can be concluded that the fatal deeds within Macbeth’s environment is the impetus for his cognitive dissonance and instances of insanity.

Macbeth’s original aside, that “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good” came to fruition over the duration of the play (1.3.143-144).The witches’ initial prophecies fostered a deathly ambition within Macbeth that would ultimately lead to his demise. His actions to obtain kingship, and maintain the title, would be murderous and weigh heavily on his conscience, until it could not withstand further guilt, and like a pressure valve, releases indecision and regret disguised as hallucinations. The audience of *Macbeth* learns much about the way in which outward actions affect inner peace. The tragedy exposes the fact that committed crimes cannot be erased nor mental punishment avoided. While sanity may be variable, consequences are constant.

Works Cited

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Prospectus

Thesis:

* *Edited (2):* The changes within Inverness, that cause the castle to emulate a hellish environment, are the impetus for the internal tumult with Macbeth’s mind, allowing for a parallel between the character’s internal being and external situation.
* *Edited:* The changes within Inverness that cause the castle to emulate a hellish environment commence internal tumult with Macbeth’s mind, allowing for a parallel between the character’s internal being and external situation.
* As his castle begins to represent hell itself, internal tumult develops within Macbeth’s mind, paralleling the changes in Inverness.

Ideas from Text:

* Inverness becomes a hellish environment
  + Rising death count
  + Porter scene
* Internal tumult
  + Mental tension between ambition and guilt
  + Hallucinations
    - Dagger scene
    - Banquo’s ghost
  + Macbeth loses the ability to sleep

Possible Quotes:

* “If a man were / porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the / key” (2.3.1-3).
* “Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn and cauldron bubble” (4.1.10-11).
* “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” (1.3.51-53)!
* “This supernatural soliciting / cannot…be good” (1.3.143-144).
* “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised” (1.5.15-16).
* “Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand” (2.1.44-45)?
* “I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. / Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain” (2.1.47-51)?
* “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” (3.4.13-16).
* “What sights, my / lord” (3.4.142-143)?
* “’Macbeth shall sleep no more’” (2.2.57).

Research Ideas:

* <http://www.humanities360.com/index.php/sleep-in-macbeth-47446/>
* <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/faq/macbethfaq/macbethdarkness.html>
* <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/hell.html>
* <http://www.ancientfortresses.org/medieval-occupations.htm>
* http://www.healthieryou.com/sleep.html

Online Citations:

* (Author’s name).
* (“First word of title”).
* For italicized words in quote: (my emphasis, author’s name).
* For italicized words in quote: (author emphasis, author’s name).
* Author quoted book: (Qtd. in author’s name).
* Author quoted another author: (Author’s name qtd. in author’s name).

Quote formatting:

* Quotes of 4+ lines = MUST block quote
  + Tab twice
  + No quotation marks
  + Period before citation