
Ambitions, Guilt And Gender Roles In Macbeth

Literature stages as a form of expression for individual composers. Some works mirrors our modern society, as they continue to shape and teach individuals. Playwright, William Shakespeare, with his 1606 Macbeth, tragedy play as a representation of the 17th century Jacobean era, explores the atrocities within the darker side of humanity. Many of these aspects have transcended time, staying relevant to modern society, due to their similar notions of connected and didactic messages in regard to potential human downfalls and frailty from manipulating and conflicting morals. The representations of unrestrained ambition and guilt, from regicide in Macbeth expresses the severe consequences as a teaching. Also, the challenge of gender roles, portraying masculinity and femininity, conveys the moral issues of the conflictions between these roles. Shakespeare, through sophisticated characterisation, dramatic language and symbols, represents these dogmatic issues within Macbeth, simultaneously interconnecting them with modern society and the Jacobean era, thus Macbeth has transcended time, remaining pertinent to the current audience.

Ambition, mostly thought as a driving sense of success and light, can lead to severe consequences. This exorbitant desire can become unrestrained, as individuals urge for achievement, as a result become corrupted. Through the progressive characterisation of Macbeth from honourable to evil, Shakespeare successfully conveys the dangers of blind ambition to his audience, as due to human nature, majority succumb to temptation. Macbeth's rise to "Thane of Cawdor", honoured by King Duncan, "brave Macbeth...he is full so valiant and...his commendations I am fed...it is a banquet to me" metaphorically communicates Macbeth's initial honourable figure with minimal corruption. After Macbeth, successfully murders Duncan, and repeated acts of sins, he becomes "I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er". Through this metaphorical statement, emphasising the visual imagery of Macbeth's demoralisation, Shakespeare comments upon the effects of unrestrained ambition, as he represents Macbeth's need to pursue his evil psyche, due to his inability to prevent his desire. To further urge his ambition, the witches manipulate Macbeth, "I bear a charmed life which must not yield to one of woman born". The use of "woman born" adds a sense of triumph for Macbeth, highlighting his virtually unconquerable state, as everyone has to be born from a woman. Moreover "woman" were seen as weak during the 17th century, reinforcing Macbeth's dominant stature; simultaneously revealing a sensation of corruption. Ultimately, in a battle with Macduff, he suffers his demise. Through this scene, Shakespeare demonstrates the resultant corruption of Macbeth due to his relentless ambition.

Thus, from Macbeth's transition from honourable to evilness, Shakespeare powerfully conveys the hazards of vaulting ambition. Though, not everyone yields to desire, one's inability to exercise restraint during temptation, highly resonates in contemporary times, hence, Macbeth transcends time.

Guilt, an unavoidable feeling of human nature places us in a conscience of being remorseful, especially after committing unnatural acts, diversely affects individuals. Within, Macbeth, Shakespeare clearly demonstrates the suffering consequences behind nature's inescapable guilt, as a result, Macbeth transcends time. The recurring motif of blood, establishes Macbeth's

guilt, seen in the hyperbolic description “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand making the green one red”. Through the use of visual imagery, “great...ocean, wash this blood from my hand”, Shakespeare powerfully demonstrates Macbeth’s remorse as he attempts to remove the “blood” of Duncan, hence the immoral act committed, even after premeditated murder. In addition, the mythical allusion, “Neptune’s ocean” reveals a god’s purest substance cannot cleanse the guilt from Macbeth, thus conveying the permanent dangers of guilt. The hallucination of Banquo’s ghost, also manifests his guilt. The metaphorical statement, “This is the very painting of your fear” followed by the harsh language, “Avaunt!...and quit my sight!”, exemplifies Macbeth’s aggressiveness to rid his hallucinations, thus communicating he is psychologically unstable and haunted from guilt. This remains transcendent, as due to human nature, individuals become unstable in times of remorse. Lady Macbeth, Macbeth’s counterpart in the regicide, likewise experiences guilt. At the beginning of the play, Act 1, Lady Macbeth is represented as a strong, great lady as seen in her language. Her blank verse speeches, combined with a powerful rhythm of iambic pentameter “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor...shalt be what thou art promised”, accentuates her notion of purpose along with initial assertiveness. However, by Act 5 her authoritative character has deteriorated, evident in her abrupt figures of speech, during her sleepwalking “Out damned spot! Out...I say! One, two...tis timed”. Through truncated language, Shakespeare highlights the destruction of an individual, as Lady Macbeth becomes crippled of thoughts and identity, due to guilt. Therefore, through the exploration of the enduring nature of guilt within Macbeth, Shakespeare effectively communicates the diverse severe consequences it brings. This guilt we encounter remains as a relevant aspect concerning our modern society due to human nature, as a result, Macbeth transcends time.

Gender roles, in society, greatly, determine individuals’ perception of their own life. Our sceptical nature in classifying a man and woman, derives from the conflicting intergenerational roles of masculinity and femininity. Through, Macbeth, Shakespeare explores and challenges traditional gender roles, in relation to masculinity and femininity, and the consequences as a result. Due to human nature, this conflict remains prominent in modern society, thus Macbeth has transcended time. After Macbeth receives the prophecy of becoming king, Lady Macbeth, reads Macbeth’s cowardness in pursuing his ambition. Her masculine character emerges, as a result, “Come you spirits...unsex me here...no compunctious visitings of nature shake my purpose”. Through her soliloquy, Shakespeare reveals, Lady Macbeth’s feminine love for Macbeth, as she asks spirits to extinguish her femininity and imbue her with masculinity required to push Macbeth into committing the deed. Her masculine figure is reinforced, when she resists to Macbeth, “We will proceed no further in this business”, demonstrating her adoption of a dominant male persona, as she manipulates him to do what she wants, contrasting the conventional role of a woman. She eventually loses all the male power, as she is driven to insanity, and eventual suicide. Similarly, Macbeth’s adaption of masculinity from femininity fuels his corruption. The characterisation of a manipulative and mocked Macbeth, with a vicious ambition for king, illustrates his accepting of masculinity full of violence. His fear of Banquo overtaking his throne, “Upon my head they have placed a fruitless crown, and put a barren sceptre in my grip, thence to be wrenched...no son of mine succeeding” leads him to murder. Through this metaphorical statement in conjunction with Macbeth’s characterisation, Shakespeare effectively demonstrates the cruelty and violent nature of his adopted masculinity. Overall, Shakespeare’s distortion of gender roles clearly communicates the conflicting gender identities and norms of masculinity and femininity that are still present in modern society, and the severe consequences it brings, corrupting of individuals. Thus, Macbeth has successfully transcended time, remaining relevant to modern audiences.

Through Macbeth, Shakespeare didactically communicates issues, that played an integral part of the 17th century society, as it distinctly interconnects with modern society. The themes of, unrestrained ambition, guilt and conflicting roles of masculinity and femininity, remains transcendent due to its notions of causing corruption and frailty of individuals, as a result of human nature. Thus, Macbeth transcends time, remaining applicable to a modern audience.

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