
The Correlation Of Ambition For Power And Guilt In The Play Macbeth

“From now on, as soon as I decide to do something, I’m going to act immediately”. William Shakespeare’s tragedy ‘Macbeth’ explores Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s ambition for power and how it leads them to guilt. The fight between Macbeth’s ethics and desires eventually leads him to justify his actions in his mind so he can be at peace with his conscience.

Macbeth’s ambition to become king leads him to battle with his conscience over what he must do to achieve his aspiration. When Macbeth is outside Duncan’s room soon to murder him, he sees a vision of a bloody dagger and asks himself “are you nothing more than a dagger created by the mind, a hallucination from my fevered brain?” Macbeth questions seeing this dagger as it foreshadows what he is about to do. The bloody dagger can be seen as a symbol of his ambition and a guilty conscience.

Further to this, at the dinner table where he sees Banquo’s ghost - “(to the GHOST), You can’t say I did it. Don’t shake your bloody head at me. “Macbeth is hallucinating seeing Banquo’s ghost criticising him. Macbeth uses murderers to kill Banquo, as he thinks it will keep his mind clean from the inner guilt that he experienced when he murdered Duncan.

It is clear that Macbeth’s conscience is the battle between his guilt of deceiving Duncan and his good friend Banquo and justifying his actions that led to the murder of Duncan and the role he played in having Banquo assassinated, he sees it as not having blood on his hands.

After the murder of Duncan Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are plagued with guilt. This is demonstrated when Macbeth expresses such things as, “Will all the water in the ocean wash this blood from my hands? No, instead my hands will stain the seas scarlet” Macbeth saying that he can’t wash the blood off his hands even with all the water in the ocean is used figuratively to say that he cannot get over the sin he has committed.

Another example of this regret is stated as “Rather than have to think about my crime, I’d prefer to be completely unconscious. Wake Duncan with your knocking. I wish you could!” Macbeth is contrite for his actions and wishes that he hadn’t gone through with the killing, he wishes that Duncan could still be alive. Similarly, is Lady Macbeth’s situation of guilt, “the smell of blood on my hand. All the perfumes of Arabia couldn’t make my little hand smell better.” Lady Macbeth says this when she is sleepwalking and it is clear that her mind is infested as she displays agitation.

These examples clearly illustrate that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have their demons (so-called scorpions) to face. Macbeth uses murderers to do his bids for him.

When Macbeth organised with murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance we don’t see Macbeth’s conscience being expressed. Before and after killing Duncan Macbeth was hesitant about the undertaking of the deed, he needed his wife to spring himself to action. But now he experiences no indecision and doesn’t refer to his wife. I believe this is because he is using murderers to relieve his guilt, and as long as he believes he didn’t do it by his own hands, his mind won’t be

full of scorpions.

This is unchanged as when he raided Macduff's castle and seized the crown of Fife. This happened just after his second encounter with the witches when he declared that "From now on, as soon as I decide to do something, I'm going to act immediately", he bared no remorse for MacDuff's family. Using murderers to do his dirty work. Macbeth's desires overshadow that of his morality.

In summary, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are diseased with guilt after the murder of Duncan. Macbeth's battle with his morals drives him into hallucination, and he lessens his remorse by using killers to do his deeds, eventually getting his loyal friend assassinated.

In the end, Macbeth was a ruthless killer, and for that reason, I believe that a good conscience can't be ignored, but it can be justified in one's mind so that they don't face the guilt of their actions and it isn't seen as immoral to them. You could say that the main message of Macbeth is that devastation follows after ambition isn't questioned by the conscience.

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