Macbeth:How The Magnitude And Horror Of His Actions Are Underlined Essay, Research Paper

In Shakespeare?s Macbeth, the repercussions of Macbeth murdering his King are very numerous. Through themes which include, imagery, soliloquies, atmosphere, and supernatural beings, Shakespeare enforces the magnitude of Macbeth?s crime. Most of these factors are linked together.One of the main ways in which the horror of the murder is underlined is through the Great Chain of Being. At the time this play was written, it was believed that there was a hierarchy in the universe, with God being at the top, then angels, then the King, then man, and finally animals. This meant that the King was God?s representative on earth, and so if a rebel were to attack the King, he would be seen to be attacking and rebelling against God. This is seen in Act One, Scene Two, when the Thane of Cawdor rebels against King Duncan, where the Sergeant says ? ?Ship wracking storms and direful thunders break? (L.26). This thunderous weather symbolizes God?s anger at his representative of Scotland being attacked. The darkness during the play (all but two of the scenes are set in darkness) shows how the night is strangling the earth, representing the anger of God at the events in Scotland. The ?Dark night strangles? (Act Two, Scene Four, Line Seven) the earth, showing God?s, overall grip on the world. The King at this time had an absolute monarchy (power of life and death over everyone in his kingdom). The belief was that God had passed special powers to all Kings, such as that for healing, which Malcolm identifies in Edward the Confessor (the King of England) in Act Four, Scene Three ? ?He cures?the healing benediction?he hath a heavenly gift of prophecy? (L.152-157). Shakespeare later uses Edward to compare a great King to Macbeth, in order to show what a bad King Macbeth is. Macbeth does not have the divinity as he is not a rightful King, and this is why his Scotland turns into chaos.In killing Duncan, Macbeth goes against the great chain of being. He attacks God through killing Duncan; he undermines God?s authority on earth, which will lead to God being very angry, and eternal damnation for Macbeth. By losing the rightful King, Scotland can only become a worse place, and this is what happens ? ?Poor country; It cannot be call?d our mother, but out grave? (Act four, scene three, line 164). Duncan was a great King, and for a king of his power and greatness to be sacrificed to the ambition of someone like Macbeth shows the magnitude of the murder.Duncan?s character backed up his status? he was very generous, such as in giving Macbeth the title of the Thane of Cawdor. But his naivety was his fault as a King, and it is partially what led to his downfall. When Macbeth defends him on the battlefield, he describes Macbeth as a ?Valiant cousin?Worthy gentleman? (Act 1 Scene 2 L.24). He praises Macbeth in a regal way ? ?More is thy due than more than all can pay?I have begun to plant thee, and will labour to make thee full of growing? (Act 1 Scene 4 L.21, 28). By nurturing Macbeth in this way, he builds up his confidence, and gives him the confidence to carry out his ambitions. Horror is built up here through Macbeth taking advantage of the King?s solitary weakness ? naivety. Horror is also built up from the irony which Shakespeare creates in Macbeth continuing what the previous Thane of Cawdor started ? a plot to over through the King. It is also created when Macbeth was defending the King in battle, yet he is the one who eventually kills him. Characters such as the Sergeant in Act One, Scene Two, build up a heroic stature of Macbeth, when he says ?Brave Macbeth?Valour?s Minion.? This again creates irony, as Macbeth turns out to be quite the opposite. In Macbeths? soliloquy in act one scene seven, Macbeth debates with himself as to whether he should carry out the murder of the king ? ?If it were done? (L.1). He works himself into frenzy, worrying about the horror of the deed. He describes the murder as a ?horrid deed? (L.24). This may not appear to symbolize the magnitude of the crime, for the word horrid has a meaning which is a lot less drastic now then it was when Shakespeare was alive; the murder would seem much worse to an audience at the time than today. Macbeth acknowledges that Duncan is such a good King, and that killing him would lead to eternal damnation ? ?The deep damnation of his taking off? (L.20). Macbeth is scared by this, as he says that if there were no repercussions to the murder, then it would be a good thing to do (L.1-2). Macbeth lists reasons as to why he could not go through with the deed as he is so aware of the horror involved: ?I am his kinsman and his subject?as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself?(L.13-16). In lines 16-25, Macbeth realizes that if he were to kill such a great king, then his virtues will, with voices like trumpets, blow news of the crime into every man?s eye. All these factors show the horror Macbeth would create in killing Duncan, and the magnitude of the results.In Macbeth?s second soliloquy (in the first scene of the second act), as he approaches Duncan?s? quarters, he shows that the business of the murder is giving him a very disturbed psyche. He uses very powerful language in this soliloquy to demonstrate his feelings ? ?Nature seems dead?witchcraft celebrates?wicked dreams.? The power of this language shows a metaphor for the magnitude of what will happen if Macbeth kills Duncan. It shows that the death will interfere with nature, indicating great magnitude. The visions of the dagger which Macbeth has show how the murder is spinning his brain into turmoil ? ?a false creation?from the heat-oppressed brain? (L.36). The dagger is not real, yet in fact it is more real than reality itself. Macbeth says that ?Mine eyes are made the fools o? the other senses, or else worth all the rest? (L.44), implying the eyes, even though they may be more foolish than the rest of the senses, and the most trustworthy. This shows that the supernatural world of imaginary is taking over Macbeth, and when he kills Duncan, he will enter that very world. Macbeth knows what he is about to do, and he shows this by saying ?hear not my steps? (L.57). This has the same objective as in Act One, Scene Four, when he says ?Stars, hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires? (L.50-51). Macbeth wants to keep his plans away from others, as he knows that they are of such a magnitude, that if anyone found them out, the consequences would be disastrous. Macbeth calls on darkness, which represents evil, to help him to succeed in gaining the crown. This shows that evil is Macbeths allay, meaning that the crime is of a very evil nature. In the same scene, Macbeth says ?Let the eye not wink at the hand? (L.52). This means that the eye (of onlookers) would be horrified to see what the hand (of Macbeth) is doing. This again shows the horror of the deed.In Macbeth?s scene with Lady Macbeth in Act Three, Scene Two, he is very disturbing and tense, due to the effect of his deeds on his mind. He has realized that what he has done is of such a horror that he is now committed to a course of murder ? he cannot turn back, as it is impossible to be forgiven for what he has done. The only way for him to go in order to escape without punishment if forward, meaning more murders, which builds more horror. Macbeth relates his theory as to crossing a river of blood, which is an image of great magnitude, and represents Macbeths? state of mind.Under Macbeth, Scotland has become a realm of murder and fear ? ?Poor country; It cannot be call?d our mother, but out grave? (Act four, scene three, line 164). One example of this is when Macbeth has Macduff?s family killed. Like Duncan, they represent innocence and good, yet in doing this, Macbeth shows that he now has become a serial killer, capable of killing anyone. Macduff has the choice of saving his family, or sacrificing his family for the welfare of his country. Macbeth made Macduff make that decision, which is unmakeable. To put someone in such a position shows how awful Macbeth is as a King, and what a horrid person he has become from killing. He even kills his best friend, Banquo, which again shows the enormity of the situation.Under Duncan, Scotland was a hierarchied society with good rule and no hint of chaos. Under Macbeth, it is quite different. A metaphor for this change is the banquet scene of Act Three, Scene Four. A banquet is supposed to be a warm, happy place, but at Macbeth?s banquet it is not. When the guests enter the banquet, they enter in an orderly fashion ? ?You know your own degrees; sit down? (L.1). This start of the banquet is a metaphor for the start of Macbeth?s reign, when everything was orderly. Yet due to Macbeth?s soliloquy during the banquet when he sees Banquos? ghost sitting in his chair, the banquet turns into chaos. When the guests prematurely leave the table, they do not leave in an orderly way. Lady Macbeth tells the guests to ?Stand not upon the order of your going? (L.119). She is telling them to leave without order, but in disorder. This end to the banquet is a metaphor for what Scotland has become under Macbeth ? chaos. His soliloquy during the banquet is a metaphor for his murders, and how they have disrupted the good order of the realm. Lady Macbeth sums up the situation in lines 108-110: ?You have displac?d the mirth, broke the good meeting, with most admir?d disorder.? Scotland has lost its formality due to Macbeth, and it has become chaos. An example of this is how Macbeth has implemented a totalitarian regime in Scotland, with spies in every major household, it has become a police state.Lady Macbeth plays an important part in the murder, and she also shows the great lengths that are needed to carry out a deed of such magnitude. In her soliloquy in Act One, Scene Five, she uses very powerful ideas. She recognizes the power and richness which will come with becoming monarchs ? ?The Golden Round? (L.27). She thinks that Macbeth will not be able to kill Duncan, because his nature is too kind ? ?I fear thy nature; it is too full o? the milk of human kindness? (L.16). This is how Lady Macbeth shows that she helps to push Macbeth into murder. She calls on ?evil spirits? to help her drive Macbeth to murder, which means that the whole deed needs evil to come to life, meaning the deed itself is full of evil. She doesn?t want to be kind, like women naturally are. She wants to have the mental toughness of a man ? ?Unsex me here? (L.40). This is very unnatural, and in asking for this, she shows that in some respects, she would like to become like the witches, as they too are unnatural. She wants to have her ?milk taken for gall? (L.47), meaning she wants her mother?s milk to be turned into something much more bitter, showing the same idea of loosing her sex. This unnatural idea has great magnitude. The opening of the play is when we see the witches meet for the first time. This scene sets the mood for the play. The atmosphere is one of magic and mystery, yet there is also a sinister atmosphere. The scene is designed to set the atmosphere for the whole of the play. One way in which the atmosphere is created is through the number three ? there are three witches, and they meet in three different types of weather ? ?thunder, lightning, or rain?? (L.2). The number three is a magical and sinister number, for example, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The job of the witches in Macbeth is to spread confusion, and this is done in the opening of the play by repeating words in the reverse order ? ?Lost and won?Fair is foul, and foul is fair? (L.4, 11). Lost and won both mean different things, yet the witches try to state them in the same context, causing confusion. What they say does not seem to make sense, yet this is what Shakespeare. He wants to create an unnatural world which belongs to the witches and their Gods, which Macbeth enters when he kills. Macbeth enters this world of confusion ? he is enveloped into their world, and this is what brings the horror from the witches. The witches show how they control power in Act One, Scene Three, by taking a pilot?s thumb. A pilot represents good order, and by taking his thumb, they take that good order and replace it with their own order, which is of unnatural order. The sailor and his wife whom they control could be a metaphor for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who they also have power over. They reveal the intention to Macbeth, but they do not push him. The contrast between Act One, Scene Six and Act Two, Scene Three shows that magnitude of the murder of Duncan. In the former scene, Duncan and Banquo see Macbeth?s castle as pleasant place. There language is full of positive words describing the castle ? ?Pleasant seat?Nimble and sweet?Heaven?s breath smells wooingly here?procreant cradle?? This is very ironic, as this is the castle where Duncan will be killed. In Act Two, Scene Three, Duncan has been murdered, as the news is spreading around. The porter who guards Macbeths? castle describes himself as the gatekeeper of hell ? ?this place is to cold for hell? (L.17). This means that the castle has become hell, which is a very strong description. Macduff, when he sees Duncan dead body, says ?O Horror! Horror! Horror!? (L.64). As I said earlier, when the play was written, horror was a much stronger word than it is now, and the repeated use of the word to describe what has happened shows the magnitude of the horror. There are many negatives in this scene, which too build up horror ? ?nor?cannot?nor? (L.64-65). When Macduff says ?Confusion now hath made his masterpiece? (L.66), he is saying that Duncans? sprawled body looks like a piece of art, emphasing the horror pf the murder. The confusion is because without Duncan leading it, the kingdom is now in turmoil, showing the magnitude of the crime.Sleep plays an important part in the play. When Macbeth has made his first murder, he starts to experience problems with sleeping. He cannot get to sleep ? ?I heard a voice cry ?Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep? ? (Act 2 Scene 2 L.35-36). In killing Duncan, Macbeth murders his ability to sleep. Sleep is a natural end to the day ? ?Nature?s second course? (L.39), and if one is unable to sleep, then it is unnatural ? Macbeth becomes unnatural. Humans can restore themselves by sleeping, but Macbeth cannot, making him abnormal. He is punished by not being able to sleep. This abnormity again shows the disturbance of nature caused by the murder. In Act Three, Scene Two, Macbeth shows he is jealous of Duncan, as Duncan can sleep peacefully ? ?Duncan is in his grave?he sleeps well? (L.22). This shows the extent of how Macbeth wants his sleep and how it is affecting him, if his would prefer to be dead than not have sleep.Blood also shows the magnitude of the murders in the play. When Macbeth has killed Duncan, he says that nothing can wash the blood form his hands ? ?Will all Neptune?s ocean wash the blood clean from my hand. No? (Act 2 Scene 2 L.60). The blood stays with him and acts as a witness and a constant reminder as to what he has done. The blood on the hands will always haunt Macbeth. Instead of all the oceans washing the blood from his hands, Macbeth says that the blood will turn ?the multitudinous?green one red? (L.63). This shows that magnitude of the significance of the blood on his hands, if it unable to be washed away by all the water on earth. Nothing can cover up what Macbeth has done, not even the God?s. Macbeth is regretting what he has done at this stage ? he has realized the magnitude of the murder. Blood also is used to show magnitude when Macbeth uses it as a metaphor. He sees his conquest to become and remain King as crossing a river of blood ? ?I am in blood, stepp?d in so far, that should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o?er? (Act 3 Scene 5 L.136-138). The vision of a river of blood emphasizes the magnitude of the importance and meaning blood has in the play, and the magnitude of the problems it causes. The amount of blood in the river is the same as the scale of the horror created by the murders.