Impact Of Guilt On Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

What is guilt and what major impact does it have in the play Macbeth by William

Shakespeare? Guilt is defined as the fact or state of having offended someone or

something. Guilt may cause a person to have trouble sleeping and difficulty in

relationships with others. The effects of guilt tie into Macbeth with the theme of night

and darkness. Guilt causes the main characters’ consciences to overcome them mentally

and physically causing their downfalls. In the tragedy Macbeth by William Shakespeare,

the recurring theme of night and darkness is used to symbolize guilt and conscience such

as when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth want the darkness to conceal their evil deeds and in

the end, when Lady Macbeth is afraid of the darkness and nighttime.

In Act I, after King Duncan names Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth

is already plotting to kill Duncan. He asks the darkness to come and hide his evil deeds

so no one would see the terrible thing he was about to do. He says “Stars, hide your fires;

let not light see my black and deep desires: The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be

which the eye fears, when it is done, to see” (Act I, scene iv, ll.50-53). This is

demonstrated again after the murder of Banquo when Macbeth says to Lady Macbeth

“Come, seeling night, scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day, and with thy bloody and

invisible hand cancel and tear to pieces that great bond which keeps me pale”(Act III,

scene ii, ll.46-50). This quote from the play also shows the importance of night and

darkness to Macbeth’s plot of killing Banquo. He is asking the night to come and hide

and cover up the things he has done to Banquo. These examples from Macbeth show that

throughout the play, Macbeth wants the darkness to conceal his evil deeds.

Lady Macbeth also asks the night to come upon her and hide her by the darkest

smoke of hell. She doesn’t want to be seen as she and Macbeth commit their terrible

deeds. She wants the night to hide her thoughts and actions about killing Duncan while

she is reading Macbeth’s letter. She says “Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest

smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, not heaven peep through

the blanket of the dark, to cry ‘Hold, hold’!” (Act I, scene v, ll.50-54). She is already

planning the murder of Duncan long before her husband’s return. Here, she is asking the

darkness to enshroud her so she can not see the damage that her knife makes as she kills

Duncan. She wants no one or nothing to stop her from committing this evil deed, and she

wants the darkness to cover and hide her while she commits her heinous crime.

Finally, towards the end of the play, Lady Macbeth’s conscience is starting to get

the best of her and she begins to fear the darkness and nighttime. One night, when she

has gone to sleep, the nurse and doctor are observing her. She begins to come down the

hall and the doctor says “How came she by that light?”(Act V, scene i, l.22). Then, the

nurse says, “Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually. ‘Tis her command”

(Act V, scene i, ll. 23-24). This shows that she fears the darkness because she must keep

a night lamp by her in order to sleep and feel safe. All of the guilt from Duncan and

Banquo’s murders has caused her to not be able to sleep well and to dread the nighttime.

She has become submissive and timid towards her husband, where before, she was

overbearing and domineering. Her attitude completely changes throughout the play and

causes her to eventually commit suicide during the battle between Macbeth and Macduff.

Throughout Macbeth, there are many examples of how guilt and conscience tie in

with night and darkness. A person’s guilt causes them to act differently and become a

totally different person, as we saw with Lady Macbeth. Night and darkness is a central

theme in the play, as it allows Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to murder Duncan, and then

allows Macbeth’s men to murder Banquo. It is used as a cover-up for all the evil things

that they have done and to hide them from everyone and themselves. Guilt and

conscience are present throughout the play and cause the main characters’ downfalls and

their eventual deaths. What is guilt? Guilt is an evil monster that tears away at one’s soul

until he can no longer bear it any longer. Guilt leads to death and destruction and is

present throughout Macbeth.