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“Macbeth” is a play by William Shakespeare where a wide range of human and social issues are depicted. For better understanding of its themes, it is important to pay attention to a variety of motifs – ideas, symbols and objects that appear repeatedly throughout the work. These motifs enhance the story and bring it into one peace that promotes a certain point that the author implies. The leading themes of a play are lust for power and moral decay. Such motifs as nature, equivocation, hallucinations and blood help the readers to comprehend the mood and topics of the play fully and clearly.

Nature, namely weather, time of the day and birds, is one of the most vivid motifs in the play. Weather enhances the whole atmosphere of the play and separate scenes. Every time witches appear with thunder and lightning that symbolize their evil nature. Later, Lennox describes the night when Macbeth murdered King Duncan, “The night has been unruly: where we lay, / Our chimneys were blown down…/… some say the earth / Was and did shake” (Shakespeare 2.3.59-60, 65-66). Such weather emphasizes how awful and unnatural Macbeth’s deed is. When murders, sent by Macbeth, are preparing to kill Banquo, he says, “It will be rain to-night” (Shakespeare 3.3.19), as if the heaven itself mourns his future death. Such rebellious state of the nature indicates the collapse of moral and political order in the country.

Most of the play takes place at night or in the darkness as if Macbeth and his wife hope that this will hide their evil deeds. Moreover, night is often connected with mysterious death. Lady Macbeth has no doubts that King Duncan should be killed at night, “and you shall put / This night's great business into my dispatch, / Which shall to all our nights and days to come” (Shakespeare 1.5.68-70). Besides, these nights are very dark, either too silent or filled with groans, “The moon is down; / I have not heard the clock” (Shakespeare 2.1.2), “There's husbandry in heaven; / Their candles are all out” (Shakespeare  2.1.5-6), “…and, as they say / Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death…” (Shakespeare 2.3.60-61). Night is a time when cruel murders stay undiscovered and evil rules the world, “Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day… / Good things of day begin to droop and drowse; / While night's black agents to their preys do rouse” (Shakespeare  3.3.47-48, 52-53). The more ill-natured Macbeth becomes, the stronger the gloom is. The day after Duncan’s death, Ross notices, “Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act, / Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock, 'tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp: / Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame, / That darkness does the face of earth entomb, / When living light should kiss it?” (Shakespeare 2.4.6-10). All cruel actions are done behind the stage, so that they are hidden, and the dark veil of the night makes them even less visible and at the same time more treacherous and dreadful.

It has been an ancient practice to foresee the future events by discovering birds’ behavior. In “Macbeth” birds are mentioned many times, mostly to enhance unnatural and ill actions. Lady Macbeth tells about Duncan’s arrival, “The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan” (Shakespeare 1.5.39-40). For a long time ravens have been considered to be a messengers of troubles and death. Owls presage misfortune as well. The night of King Duncan’s murder Lady Macbeth says, “It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman, / Which gives the stern'st good-night” (Shakespeare 2.2.4-5). An old man sees how “On Tuesday last, / A falcon, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd” (Shakespeare 2.2.13-15) – this scene is similar to how the King was killed by his general. On the other hand, there are birds bearing positive meaning. Banquo says that Macbeth’s land is good one because “This guest of summer, / The temple-haunting martlet does approve, / By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath / Smells wooingly here…” (Shakespeare 1.6.3-6). These lines mean that Macbeth was not evil from the start, his soul was perverted with foul prophecies. Lady Macduff compares her orphaned son with a poor bird, “Poor bird! thou'ldst never fear the net nor lime, / The pitfall nor the gin” (Shakespeare 4.2.35). To the contrary, her son thinks that he will be safer now, “Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set for” (Shakespeare 4.2.36). Birds hold an important place in the play as they predict future events and brighten features of the characters.

Equivocation is one of the main motifs of the play as many times good turns out to be evil, truth becomes lies and vice versa. At the very beginning of the play, witches declare, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (Shakespeare 1.1.12), and thus set mood for the entire play. After Macbeth wins the battle he describes the day “So foul and fair a day I have not seen”. In the prophecies witches often say ambiguous things to confuse Macbeth, for instance about Banquo, “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater / Not so happy, yet much happier. / Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none” (Shakespeare 1.3.67-68). These words perplex and scare Macbeth, and lead to his best friend’s murder. After father’s death, Donalbain leaves the country as he feels that “where we are, / There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody” (Shakespeare 2.3.146-147). Lady Macduff feels the same, “I am in this earthly world; where to do harm / Is often laudable, to do good sometime / Accounted dangerous folly” (Shakespeare 4.2.75-76). Such equivocation can be seen not only in the messy life of a country but in the characters as well. Macbeth was a prominent general, who turned out to “look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't” (Shakespeare 1.5.66-67). His wife seems to have even harder and more masculine character, “For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (Shakespeare 1.7.73-74). This motif enhances the unnatural messy state of the country and its people.

Magic and hallucinations make the play more mysterious and perplexing. Lady’s Macbeth’s sleepwalking and Macbeth’s visions create a fearful and tense atmosphere, and prove that supernatural powers, which cannot be predicted and tamed, influence the events. Before Macbeth kills King Duncan, he sees a vision, “Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand? ... Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going; / And such an instrument I was to use” (Shakespeare 2.1.33-34, 42-43). It seems that some vicious power reminds Macbeth of his plan and forces Macbeth to kill. Later only Macbeth sees the Banquo’s spirit as a reminder of his betrayal. When Macbeth comes to witches for another prophecy, they call for ghosts to answer his questions. Lady Macbeth cannot sleep at night and wonder along the castle, trying to clean her hands from imaginary stains of blood. These visions of ghost and blood imply that horrible actions of Macbeth and his wife left an eternal filthy imprint on their consciousness and soul that cannot be removed.

One of the most vivid motifs of the play is blood. In the first act King Duncan hears the story of the battle from a bleeding Sergeant. Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to “make thick my blood” for strengthening her firmness. There is a clear idea, that once a person kills, then the life will return this murder to the assassin: “…that we but teach / Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return / To plague the inventor” (Shakespeare 1.7.10-12). In the final of the play, Macbeth is killed by Macduff, though their battle was fair. When Macbeth sees dagger, its blade is bloody, indicating the murder. Macbeth and his wife suffer from the visions of their hands in blood, “Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas in incarnadine, / Making the green one red” (Shakespeare 2.2.75-78) and “What, will these hands ne'er be clean?” (Shakespeare 5.1.48). Blood seems to be everywhere and symbolizes cruelty and guilt.

To sum up, the great variety of motifs in “Macbeth” enhance the gloomy atmosphere. Repeating images, ideas and symbols such as nasty weather, darkness, blood and equivocation are only some motifs that create the mood of the play and make the characters and events brighter. For a full comprehension of a play it is important to notice and understand them.

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