

Key Themes from Macbeth

William Shakespeare used themes in his plays and poetry to deepen the meaning of them and to help the reader have another way to compare imagery in the play to what was really happening.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* includes many cases of metaphorical as well as literal themes. Some examples of these types of themes deal with blood, clothing, illness and medicine, sleep, nature, and the overall mood of the play. There is a mixture of emotional, metaphorical, and literal themes. In many ways the themes in *Macbeth* are a form of imagery.

Blood plays a key role throughout *Macbeth*. Starting off the second scene, "What bloody man is that?" sets the imagery of blood in motion throughout the play and is a literal image of a dead soldier. Later, after King Duncan's murder, Macbeth explains to Malcolm about the death of his father with the metaphorical phrase, "The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood is stopped: the very source of it is stopped." This is used to portray blood as a symbol of relation. Later, Macbeth uses the more revealing image: "I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er." This image of blood is used in an emotionally metaphorical way of saying that he has done something that is eating away at him so badly that stopping would be the worst thing to do. Many other images of blood appear, but many different kinds of themes appear as well.

Shakespeare was clever in his usefulness of ill-fitting clothing. A great example of this is Macbeth addressing Ross in confusion about his title with, "The Thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" Unfit clothing was a common way of saying that someone was not really what he or she appeared to be. A more literal clothing image is made in Banquo's confrontation with the witches. "What are these so withered, and so wild in their attire, that look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth, and yet they are on't?" is Banquo's literal interpretation of the unusualness of the witch's clothing and appearance. When Angus states "Now does he feel his title hang loose about him, like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief." he is referring to Macbeth and how he is unable to control what he put in motion with his great power as king. As though clothing was not the only deep metaphorical theme in the play, illness and medicine play a key role, too.

Many references to illness and medicine in the play meant anything but a plague or cure. It all started with Banquo in the beginning after he and Macbeth talked with the witches. (Read Quote and explain) The next quote is when With Lady Macbeth's cruel way of words, she says, "Thou wouldst be great, art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it." (Second pink slip) This image of illness represents an evil nature that Macbeth must attain in order to carry out his deadly duty. An image of mental illness is made in Ross's statement, "Gentlemen, rise, his highness is not well." This is one of the few literal illness images in the play. It is again noted when Malcolm says "page 366" (read quote) ... "Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal, and with him pour we, in our country's purge, each drop of us." is a deeply metaphorical image of medicine. It means that the rebels must find Malcolm in order to gain the ambition to overthrow Macbeth.

There are many more themes in *Macbeth*, but these seemed to have stood out the most. In all cases, Shakespeare sets a transcendental mood of what is happening. Blood is more than a fluid. Illness is more than a hindering parasite, Medicine is more than a cure for that illness. Clothes are more than flesh covers. Darkness is more than black. Shakespeare does a great job of using themes in *Macbeth* not only to set the mood of the play but to better help the reader to use metaphors to form a better understanding of the play.