Influence Of External Forces Or Internal Conflict Within Oneself In Shakespeare’s Macbeth And Hawk Roosting By Ted Hughes

Introduction

When influenced by external forces or internal conflict within oneself, the human mind can easily become corrupted by the desire for thriving power. In Shakespeare’s Macbeth, the themes of ambition and power corrupting are presented as vices of the protagonist Macbeth, and serve to cause his tragic demise whereas Hawk Roosting by Ted Hughes reflects the greed and power of humanity. While Shakespeare draws on his five-act-structure and dramatic techniques to explore Macbeth’s unchecked ambition, Hughes utilizes literary devices such as imagery and personification to exemplify the ambitious character that the protagonist portrays. Throughout this essay, the similarities and differences of the features and conventions between both texts will be examined in the instance of unbridled ambition.

Context/ Purpose/ Audience

Shakespeare’s Macbeth can be viewed as a ‘cautionary tale’ in relation to the Gunpowder Plot against the Scottish monarch, King James VI whereas Hughes poem Hawk Roosting was inspired by the metaphorical connection of nature to symbolise the plight of man. The arrogant and hostile tone of the poem reinforces the idea that animals were by nature victims of man’s aggressive impulses. Inspired by such rawness of the natural world, Hughes does not shy from explicit description that caused controversy at the time of its publication regarding the direct depiction of the hawk’s instinctive behaviour and perception of being fascist. In response, Hughes explained that what he had in mind was that “in this hawk, nature was simply thinking.” At the time of the publishment of Hawk Roosting in 1960, Hughes’s hostile relationship with Sylvia Plath may also have accounted for the sanicle views on life that infused his work. For Macbeth, the Elizabethan period current at his time of publication heavily influenced the play’s motifs to cater for the spiritual beliefs of the time. Hence, Shakespeare incorporated aspects of supernatural activity that posed constant threats as well as dedicate and portray Duncan as a reflection of King James VI, whom Shakespeare admired.

Conventions

The undeniable power of unbridled ambition and its ramifications are extensively portrayed within Shakespeare’s tragedy as well as Hughes poem. Within both texts, ambition is portrayed as a corrupting and unquenchable force through the main concepts of mental imbalance, self-arrogance, and supernatural behaviours. Throughout various scenes, the prophecies of the witches are quickly unravelled before the audience and are an external driving force that foreshadows Macbeth descent into madness. Eventually, Macbeth found himself unable to differentiate between right and wrong, ‘fair and foul’. Furthermore, the impacts of unnatural evils are again echoed through Macbeth’s imagination, a factor which comes back to torture him throughout his life. In Macbeth’s soliloquy before executing his first murder, it presents the

insomnia that plagues Macbeth hence demonstrating the consequences of ambition. For Hawk Roosting, the poem immediately establishes the hawk's power. It 'sit[s] in the top of the wood', a vantage point that suggests authority and control over 'creation'. Its eyes are 'closed', highlighting its confidence that nothing poses a threat, similarly in conjunction to Macbeths sense of invincibility. The hawk seemingly grasps ownership and complete mastery over its environment. It explains that '[it] kill[s] where [it] please because it is all [his]'. The hawk is not depicted in the same way Shakespeare's has characterised King Duncan; a strong and good monarch. Instead, its authority gives it the right to abuse and murder all in its domain. The words 'convenience,' 'buoyancy,' 'advantage,' and 'inspection' are all examples of elevated, sophisticated inflection. In its tone, the poem displays a sense of self-importance that matches the hawk's physical position above the world. Ultimately, this depicts that supernatural forces and self-arrogance are a pivotal element in both texts that cannot withstand the simple morals of society.

Features

Both Hawk Roosting and Macbeth concern ambition and how a character's persona is formed by their self-belief, and what they are prepared to do in order to secure maximum power. In both texts, insight into the protagonists' most inner thoughts is depicted from the use of symbolism in Macbeth and dramatic monologue in Hawk Roosting. Hughes's poem, is heavily based on personification and hence, is written as a dramatic monologue through the mind of the hawk. Similarly, in Shakespeare's Macbeth, symbolism exemplifies the corrupting nature of rampant ambition deployed through Macbeth's struggle between inner conflict and morals expanding his idea of invincibility. Hallucinations serve as a vital motif throughout as it not only shows the warning against the dangers of ambition, but also the mental effect that this has on the character. When Macbeth ponders on the ethics of killing Duncan, he witnesses a dagger floating in front of him. Covered with blood and pointed toward the king's chamber, the dagger represents the bloody deed on which Macbeth has attended. For Hughes, the hawk's manifestation of the cruel force of nature is thus, the symbol of a powerful, ruthless, deadly force that goes unsupported by any kind of morality, humanity or humility. This reinforces that the speaker is arrogant and self-centered in the poem highlighting their egotistical nature. According to the hawk, 'the earth face['s] upward for [it's] inspection' and therefore emphasises the hawk's claim over domination and assertiveness through the use of dramatic monologue and first-person narrative.

Features extra: Similarly, Hughes in Hawk Roosting embodies the same idea of an all-encompassing ego within its protagonist through the use of imagery. In lines 19-20, the hawk reasserts itself with an arrogant tone that it 'hold[s] creation in [it's] foot'. This establishes the clear connection of human attributes to the bird, that can easily be depicted as an implicit satire on a tyrant that the bird represents. Broadly, the bird is a symbol of the human evils of arrogance, conceited and egotistical attitude, obsession of power and tyranny; overall, a symbol of inhumanity as a result from gathered ambition.