Good Versus Evil In Literature

The conflict between good and evil is a common theme explored in literature. Two works of literature that reflect this binary between good and evil are Doctor Faustus, written by Christopher Marlowe, and Macbeth, written by Shakespeare. Every day, a person is faced with the decision to choose between the two, whether or not there seems to be a solution to either decision. These stories represent characters that make the decision to hunch to a lower level in order to suppress their ideas of what they want in relation to religion. In these two works of Doctor Faustus and Macbeth, the characters are faced with what it is like to be entirely consumed by one's evil and the internal fight to choose between being a good humane individual or one that is abominable and inhumane.

The two literary works of Macbeth and Doctor Faustus were produced in the Elizabethan Era of the Renaissance. In this era, the leading religions were ones consistent with Christianity-based backgrounds (Hunter). These two works of literature incorporate the beliefs of Christianity and the Supernatural in order to support the underlying theme of deception versus reality (Nosworthy). Macbeth and Doctor Faustus both integrate this deception by incorporating the tragedy of one sinning and how it affects whether a person goes to heaven or hell (Nosworthy). In Marlowe's writing, the main character, Faustus begins to question and deny his beloved religion in exchange to "gain deity" (Marlowe). Whereas in Shakespeare's writing, the main character Macbeth is presented as a religious man whose religion is seen to play a key role in his destiny (Shakespeare). Though both of these two works of literature have incorporated religion into them, the difference between the character's religious views are made apparent.

In Christopher Marlowe's drama Doctor Faustus, Faustus is presented with two contradicting perceptions of good and evil (Marlowe). These being that God is located in Heaven on the good side and Lucifer in Hell on the other. This internal conflict that Faustus feels between good and evil is stemmed from his divided consciousness (Marlowe). Faustus is visited by good angels along with bad ones to serve him with his conflicting thoughts between his allegiance to familiarity and his craving for dominance. These angels most openly depict the characteristics of good against evil when the angel of goodness reminds Faustus to "think of heaven and heavenly things" whereas the evil angel encourages him to "think of honor and wealth" (Marlowe). These visits from the angels encouraged Faustus to question his whole religious and scientific fate. According to Sullivan's work, the topic of Faustus's inner conflict in regards to his religion and how the evil consumes him to sell his soul causes him to be damned to hell (Sullivan). Though Faustus was faced with many opportunities to repent his sins and turn back to his beloved God, Faustus continuously was faced with overbearing temptation to choose evil over good.

In Shakespeare's drama Macbeth, the main character Macbeth is an ambitious man who lets that ambition get the best of him (Shakespeare). This well-known drama is one that illustrates the evil and corrupt aspects of human nature, yet the drama also compares these evils to the power of good (LaBlanc). The main source of evil throughout this story is the witches along with Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth (Callaghan). The witches and Lady Macbeth use Macbeth's human weaknesses and religion to play mind games with him and encourage him to do such things against his morals (Shakespeare). Macbeth is a man of religion and believes it is his

religious fate to become Thane of Cawdor, but what he does to receive this title is quite the opposite. To achieve his “fate” of being Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth believes he must overthrow King Duncan by murdering him because that is what Lady Macbeth and the witches told him to do (Callaghan). LaBlanc perceives the appeal of Lady Macbeth being able to convince Macbeth to do such ungodly acts to fit in with her “strange amalgam of unrepentant evil, repressed ambition, diabolical sexuality, and maddening guilt” type of personality (LaBlanc). Though the negative influence that the witches and Lady Macbeth have over Macbeth is strong and overpowering, these negativities do have a sense of good in them because they give Macbeth courage and confidence.

These two works of literature, Macbeth and Doctor Faustus, somewhat mimic each other when it comes to the main character being overcome by evil due to the power of persuasion (Nosworthy). The power of one being persuaded to do something unthinkable in order to obtain a lifelong dream is exactly what happens in both of these literary works. Doctor Faustus and Macbeth are blinded by their own ambition, which causes them to become extreme in their thoughts and behaviors (Nosworthy). In Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, Faustus is easily persuaded into choosing a life of sin by the evil angel, Mesastopholes, in order to acquire fame and dominance (Marlowe). The power of persuasion can be seen in almost the exact manner in Shakespeare’s Macbeth when Macbeth is told everything he has longed to hear for so long from his wife and the witches (Callaghan). These negative energies exhibited in both of the dramas cause for the characters to question their religion and their overall beliefs. In the end of both of these two literary works, the evil that had now consumed the characters leads to their own damnation (Nosworthy).

Though in the end, the characters of both of these works of literature are entirely consumed by evil, do not forget that the characters had the chance to overcome and ignore these devilish tendencies (Nosworthy). The characters could have chosen to remain content with their current lives rather than letting ambition cloud their judgments. In Doctor Faustus, Faustus continuously contemplated turning to his God in a time in need claiming he had been “deprived of those joys” due to turning his back on his religion (Marlowe). With this being said, Faustus really had every opportunity to repent from his mistaken sins until the very end, yet he chose to fall for Mesastopholes claims that heaven is “ not half so fair as thou” (Marlowe). The same issue of evil overcoming one is viewed in Macbeth as well. Macbeth had every opportunity to stop allowing for his ambition to cloud his judgment and end his killing streak, yet he chose to continue until his life was the one being taken (Shakespeare). Each of these characters had a choice to choose between being a person of evil or goodness, yet they let the persuasion of evil cloud the choice of choosing to be good (Nosworthy).

The belief that there is a strong battle between the choice of good and evil within Macbeth and Doctor Faustus is undeniable. Faustus chose to waste his time suffering because he could not resolve the choice of choosing to long for power and the devotion he had for his knowledge (Sullivan). Faustus chose to be selfishly ambitious causing himself to be the reason for his own damnation (Sullivan). Macbeth and his wife fell victims to the consequences of having an evil soul (Callaghan). Macbeth started out with good intentions, but he fell a victim to his wife’s darkness that is associated with her evils (Callaghan). Many people are faced with a choice between good and evil daily. What a person chooses when faced with the choice between good and evil shows their true character. Though everyone can fall into the temptation of evil at times, it is what one does in response to that choice that shows their true colors. In the literary works of Macbeth and Doctor Faustus, the characters encounter what it is like to be truly evil and how

ambition clouded their judgment of choosing to be a good human being rather than being abominable and inhumane.