

'In Gothic literature, Death is always the Punishment for Sin'. Discuss this in relation to the texts you have studied. (40 marks)

In literature, death is a punishment often associated with sin. This applies not only to the gothic, but indeed any literature in which justice prevails over evil. Gothic literature actually contradicts this statement more often than not because of the way that gothic writers turn convention on its head, and shock their readers. In both "Macbeth" and "Wuthering Heights", death is shown as a preferable escape to the punishment of half-existence, being mentally consumed by what has passed. Life and death are concepts that appear in much of literature; the realm between the two is specific to the gothic. This is the truly punishing state of existence, something that Carter also explores in stories such as "The Lady of the House of Love".

This is not to say that gothic writers never comply with the idea of death being a punishment for sin. In "The Bloody Chamber", our heroine watches her mother "put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head". We have witnessed the horrific sin committed by the vile Marquis, such as his lurid exploitation of women and "stark torture chamber". Death almost does not seem punishment enough for such an inconceivable inhuman creature. It could be said that this is the typical "happy ending" of a fairytale, however Carter remains true to the gothic genre by mixing in some unorthodox ideas. For example, the heroine goes on to marry and prosper however she is forever tainted by the supernatural "red mark" on her forehead, which "No paint nor powder no matter how thick or white, can mask". The darkness of what has happened can never leave her and her purity is forever stained. It is a cruel reminder of the fact that perhaps she was not entirely innocent of sin; her subtle complicity in spite of an obvious awareness seems strange. Human nature is complex and intricate, thus making her a realistic character, and the story retains an element of spine-chilling mystery. Carter also looks at the the relationships between death, punishment and sin in "The Lady of the House of Love". The vampire undeniably commits a stream of sins throughout the novel, with teeth that are "sharpened on centuries of corpses". However, death is not depicted in the light of a punishment for her. Rather, it would be a welcome escape from her current undead state of existence. She is repulsed by her "disorder", her "soullessness" and has a "horrible reluctance for the role". To be able to die would mean that she is human; humanity is her deepest desire and is shown through her pining for sexual "consummation", and the appearance of lovers on her fortune cards. The reader feels empathy for this sinful "queen of the vampires" because of the poignant way that she trapped as "a girl who is both death and the maiden". They wish death upon her, not as a punishment, but to release the bird from its cage.

"Macbeth" integrates murder of the innocent, with deserved and almost pre-ordained death of the guilty. For example, when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth die, justice seems