

A FORMALISTIC APPROACH TO MACBETH

Of all Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* is the most rapid, *Hamlet* the slowest in movement.

-Coleridge

K SAKTHI BALAMURUGAN,
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH,
PSG COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE.

Macbeth is considered to be one of the finest tragedies, praised for its artistic coherence and intense dramatic action. The interest in the tragedy of *Macbeth* is the perpetration of crime by a man whose magnificent qualities of mind, extreme courage and poetic imagination raises the villainies above common meanness and gives occasion for a superhuman conflict of images and ideas. This paper aims to give a formalistic approach of *Macbeth* considering the play as a autonomous unit consisting of components like plot, structure, imagery, symbols, metaphors, syntax, trope and metre. The paper analyses and discovers their relevance and significance in the integration of the play.

The play presents the audience with two worlds of reality through dialogues and stage presentation:(i) the world of royalty and the well-knit state and the world of Duncan, his two sons, Banquo, Macbeth and the whole of Scotland and England.(ii)the world of reality of the evil of witchcraft or spirits. In structure, *Macbeth* gives a dominant impression of an uncertain, unstable state where one world appears to 'dissolve' into and superimpose on the other.

Macbeth presents a series of situations exemplifying the conflict between good and evil, or the story of the fall of a great man. Structure in *Macbeth* can be best apprehended from the way poetry fills up and fills out everything given by plot, situations, persons and ideas. The play falls automatically into two parts, the rise and the fall of Macbeth. His rise is up to the murder of Banquo. He gradually falls until he meets his death at the hands of his rival Macduff. The action bursts into wild life amidst the sounds of a thunderstorm and the echoes of a distant battle.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the fallen angels divide into affinity groups to pass away eternity. Some go in for athletics, others for war-games.

Others apart sat on a hill retired,
 In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
 Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
 Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge, absolute,
 And found no end, in wandering mazes lost

(Book II, 567-71)

Macbeth tries to solve the puzzle of foreknowledge and fore will and torments himself with knowledge of his own unavoidable destruction. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer the consequences of their actions. The tragic protagonist in *Macbeth* is a man, a singular identity who rather than submitting to the regular pace of tomorrow tries to seize the promised future and violently wrench into the present.

The atmosphere of *Macbeth* is brooded over by darkness and blackness. The vision of the dagger, the murder of Duncan and Banquo, the sleep-walking scene of Lady Macbeth occur in a black night broken by flashes of light and colour, sometimes vivid and even glaring. The forces of darkness seem to be in conflict with those of light. The witches dance in the thick air of a storm or ‘black and midnight hags ‘receive Macbeth in a cavern. In the whole play, the sun seems to shine only twice: first in the beautiful, ironical passage where Duncan sees the swallows flitting round the castle of death and at the end when the avenging army gathers to rid the earth of its shame.

A tense atmosphere is created in the rapid monosyllabic exchange of question and answer between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act II, Sc ii. and the confrontation between Macbeth and Macduff in Act V Sc ii. The tension is relaxed by Porter’s bawdy humour in the Knocking-at-the-Gate scene after Duncan’s murder. The play is full of tumult and storm. Whenever the witches are present there is a thunder-storm. In their absence there are ship-wrecking storms, direful thunders, frightful hurricanes and tempests that blow down trees and churches, castles, palaces and pyramids.

The colour is the colour of blood. Lady Macbeth greets and prays the spirits of cruelty to thicken her blood that pity can’t flow her veins. Her shuddering cry, ‘Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?’ Banquo’s murderer appearing with blood upon his face, ‘blood-bolter’d’, Banquo , ‘with twenty trenched gashes on his head’, Macbeth imagining as holding a bloody scepter and Scotland as a country bleeding with wounds all soaked in blood. Repetition of words like ‘throne’, ‘blood’, ‘sleep’, ‘night’ and ‘fear’ emphasize the theme.

The violence of imagery contributes to form. The babe torn smiling from the breast and dashed to death: of the earth shaking in fever: of sorrows striking heaven on the face: of the mind full of scorpions: of the tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury. The recurring images of echoing song, light contrasted with dark and sickness are facets of the unifying insight into the nightmare world which results from the confusion of the two worlds of reality. *Macbeth* deals with the offence done to the natural order.

Shakespeare’s style in *Macbeth* fuses diction, syntax and characterization with evolving mental degeneration of Macbeth and his wife. Macbeth is written in blank verse(iambic pentameter). The rhythm of lines creates an atmosphere of urgency and violence. The tropes used are representations of specific moods and things: witches-pure evil; witch’s potion-corruption of good; bloody dagger seen by Macbeth-wavering ambition; Birnam wood-a witness of death; “irremovable” blood-eternal guilt.

There is a great concentration of language in Macbeth's presentation-the extended simile into metaphor and whole phrases condensed into a single word.

My way of life

Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf (V,iii. 22)

Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark.(I.v. 54)

Macbeth's description of his feelings after Duncan's death range from simple statement; "all is but toys" to the complex image of the "wine of life". Shakespeare deliberately plays upon the associations of words and draws out their emotional significance. Macbeth's words

Come ,seeling night,

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,

...light thickens... (III. ii. 46-50)

'Seeling' as image is connected with all the images of blood and violence which runs through the play.

The figures of speech used in *Macbeth* add to the intense effect. Macbeth uses foreshadowing in Act I ,Sc I where the setting is described as thunder and lightning. This foreshadows the chaos and darkness that will come. Macbeth's soliloquy in Act I, Sc vii expresses Macbeth's uneasy feelings whether he should kill Duncan or not. The pathetic fallacy in Act I, Sc I ,”Hover through the fog and filthy air” reflects the mysterious atmosphere. The hyperbole in Act II, Sc ii, Macbeth says after he killed Duncan; “will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?” reflects Macbeth's sense of guilt. Dramatic irony in Act III,Sc v, Hecate is brewing a potion that will make apparitions. Macbeth does not know that the witch is making this for him but the audience knew.

Shakespeare has subtly constructed the plot of *Macbeth*. He has interwoven in it nemesis and destiny. Macbeth's rise involves Banquo's fall; Macbeth's fall leads to Macduff's rise. Throughout this elaborate plot, the three forms of action-Nemesis, the Oracular Irony and Destiny are seen perfectly harmonized and complete. Over this is thrown the supernatural interest of the witches, who are agents of nemesis working by means of ironical oracles. Through its strong simplicity of plot, flattening of stage by subsidiary characters, working out of vengeance by agents who are mere puppets in the hand of Heaven, Macbeth bears a resemblance to Greek tragedy. The traditional tragic irony in Macbeth resounds in echoes.

The chief symbolic idea in *Macbeth* is that sin is a disease-Scotland is sick. Malcolm speaks of his country as weeping, bleeding, wounded and later urges Macduff to

Make us medicines of our great revenge,

To cure this deadly grief.

The dramatic poetry works by exhibiting Macbeth's state of mind, his horror and fear. The phrase 'bloody and invisible hand' recalls the scene of Macbeth's awareness of his crime-'bloody' and the feeling it is not seen, 'invisible'. It is conveyed in an evocation of a particular moment of time-twilight, when darkness is engaged in overpowering and destroying the day. It implies the world of evil soon to assume control over the world; 'light thickens'.

Macbeth has its own unmistakable individual nature, colour, atmosphere, diction, imagery and the dramatic unity binds each separate element of the play into a real organic structure. *Macbeth* is a fine musical composition wherein the themes, plot are enunciated and co-ordinated to symbolic interpretation. The play, primarily a "structure of meanings" develops through the plot and evolving thematic imagery and symbolic action. The linguistic elements are organized around a central theme to manifest 'tension', 'irony' and 'paradox' within a structure which is a 'reconciliation of diverse impulses'.



JETIR

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