

Language and Shakespeare: An Insight into *Macbeth*

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Any intensive reading of a literary text often engenders a cardinal question regarding the actuality of literature. What is in it that has created all the difference? What baffles an inquisitive reader most is the nature of the relation between the language as an all encompassing system and a specific supply of linguistic apparatuses, arranged with the intention of producing efficacious emotions in the reader. This leads to a further speculation relevant to language. Are not some peculiar powers vested in language, when it is employed in a literary work; or is not language positioned specifically in a text endowed with literary merits? Shakespeare, the brightest fruit of renaissance has not only immortalized the English drama with his myriad minded genius but also enriched English language with coinages, phraseologies and literary terms. His plays, along with his sonnets are flooded with rhetoric devices with lavish use of metaphors, imageries, ironies, sarcasms, soliloquies, asides, metonymies, aphorisms and what not. This Surge further provides his oeuvre a grand symphony thus turning the written melodies the sweetest. *Macbeth* in spite being a splendid tragedy of ambitious Macbeth can serve as the ocean of literary devices too. The language employed in the play is appealing to the extent that some of the phrases of the play served as the titles to other texts like Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Rose Macaulay's *Told by an Idiot* and Robert Frost's *Out Out*. It is the charisma of the emotions conveyed through the impregnated language which makes him the master of the most quoted texts after the Bible. The purpose of this research is to delve into the play *Macbeth* to decipher it through linguistic perspective which otherwise was shrouded in mist of thematic and structural connotations.

At the very outset, linguistic device of antithesis is pronounced by the three witches:

ALL. Fair is foul and foul is fair (13)

which later in scene III becomes the first utterance by Macbeth. The common terminology between the two is instantly recognizable. It hints at the link between Macbeth and evil witches. And later it is evident when he is influenced by the illusionary fortunate charms of the witches and dreams of becoming king of Scotland by murdering King Duncan. During the planning of the murder of King, antithesis is again used by Lady Macbeth as a piece of advice:

LADY MACBETH. Look like the *innocent flower*.
But be the serpent under 't. (30)

Similarly Macbeth also advises her:

MACBETH. *False face* must hide what the *false heart* doth know. (36)

But Macbeth being a loyal and courageous noble deliberates upon the virtues of king. In a soliloquy he employs a beautiful simile:

MACBETH. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet –tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off;
And pity, like a new born babe
.....
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye. (33)

He honestly portrays the assets of Duncan and decides to give up his ambition. In his ‘infirmness of purpose’ (43) when he refuses to ‘proceed further’ (34), Lady Macbeth chastises

him with her influential rhetoric questions and provokes him to commit the horrific crime. Through the trope of rhetoric she asks a series of questions and doesn't let him reply. She plays a love card and questions his steadiness in love. She even attacks his masculinity and is finally succeeded in turning the game. Like witches she is equally instrumental in leading Macbeth to his tragic fate. She provokes him in a figurative language:

LADY MACBETH. Was the hope drunk

Where in you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since,

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely? From this time

Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire? (34)

Here she personifies hope and spurs him tauntingly to bring him out of the indecisiveness. Convinced by the witches and bitterly provoked by her wife Macbeth apostrophizes darkness. The device of apostrophe is fully exploited both by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. When two prophecies come true Macbeth's vaulting ambition leads him to dream the throne. To hide his 'black and deep desires' he addresses stars to hide their fires (27). And when he is about to accomplish the bloody deed in his hallucination he talks to a visionary dagger. Addressing the dagger a 'fatal vision' a 'false creation' he feels like losing his senses.(39) He further invokes the earth to be firm so as to hide himself from the stones which otherwise can hear his heinous steps and divert horror from his mind?(40) Lady Macbeth too invokes the spirits to 'unsex' her, to fill her with 'direst cruelty' and to thicken her blood.(29) She invokes the thick night to darken so as to cover their malefaction(30). Later in Act IV Macduff laments over the pathetic state of Scotland. Addressing Scotland as a bleeding and miserable country he tries to convince Malcolm to fight

for the country (94). Here along with apostrophe he uses personification too by calling it poor and miserable.

Shakespeare has vitalized the device of personification. In pre - renaissance era personification was used with abstract nouns of virtues and vices but Shakespeare adds action to it which works like a magic. As Frye aptly says, “The use of active verbs as predicates to these abstract nouns imparts living blood to what would otherwise be wooden personifications”(198). In the very first scene, the soldier’s ‘*gashes* cry for help’ (16). In fact there is scattering of personification throughout the play like ‘bell invites’, feverous earth, ‘undivulg’d pretence’, ‘naked frailties’ ‘troubled heavens’, ‘darkness entombing earth’ etc. It is really noteworthy how emphatically the bard personifies the sleep. Later after murdering the king Duncan the guilty conscience of Macbeth is reflected in such personifications of sleep.

MACBETH. Me thought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!

Macbeth does Murther sleep"--the innocent sleep;

Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,

Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,

Chief nourisher in life's feast. (42)

Sleep is personified here as an innocent victim to be murdered, as a weaver who entangles anxieties and as a healer of the hurt minds. And by committing the dreadful murder Macbeth has murdered the innocent sleep.

So appalling the death of Duncan; the person in ‘double trust’, is that even the murderous protagonist can’t bear the deed. Though his vaulting ambition leads him to murder Duncan but

his guilty mind reflects his burdened soul resulted from the realization of the heinous sin he has committed. The bard employs hyperbole for effective portrayal of his pricking conscience. Macbeth surreptitiously realizes that all the waters of great Neptune can't wash his bloody hands rather his wash can redden the green sea. (43) The similar guilt troubles Lady Macbeth. "Her hand is smaller than his, and so –relatively speaking –is her hyperbole" (Lawin, 279). The somnambulist in her lunatic musings realizes that all the perfumes of Arabia can't sweeten her little hand (104). It is quite ironical, earlier how clear headedly she tried to convince Macbeth, "a little water clears us of this deed" (44). But now all her efforts of purifying her sins prove futile as the 'damned spots' are now irremovable and fatal which finally lead her to demise.

Aside and soliloquies occupy a major place in a Shakespearean play. His plays are replete with these devices which provide a peep into the psyche of the character. In act I when two prophecies are proved true, Macbeth starts dreaming of the empire.

MACBETH. [Aside] Two truths are told

As happy prologues to the swelling act

Of the imperial theme. (23)

It shows the seeds of vaulting ambition in his mind. Equally important is the metaphor of a 'play' as suggested by the use of the theatrical words like 'prologues', 'act' and 'theme'. Again aside in act 1 scene IV reveals his developed 'dark' desire for throne and he apostrophizes stars to hide their fires. An important soliloquy appears in Act 1 scene VII when he meditates on the virtues of King Duncan. It reveals his innocence and his reverence for his majesty. In Act II scene I his soliloquy during a dagger hallucination reflects his guilty psyche and his awareness of the ghastly crime. In Act III scene I he soliloquizes his envy for Banquo as he was predicted to be the father of kings. This soliloquy discloses his fearful state in which he determines to eliminate Banquo. In Act IV scene I during his meeting with witches he is warned of Macduff. Then he comes to know about the escape of Macduff and rashly decides to kill his whole family. In Act V scene III he contemplates over hollowness of his life, devoid of happiness, trust and friends. And

in the last soliloquy he deliberates upon the futility of life in a nihilistic tone. After death of Lady Macbeth, he develops some pessimistic tendencies and in such a mood he spells perhaps the crux of life. It is one of the famous quotes by the master playwright:

MACBETH. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (113)

Here Macbeth philosophies on the futility of life in a metaphorical diction. The comparison of life first to a candle, then to a shadow, to an actor and lastly to a tale told by an idiot is outstanding. The brevity of life goes well with a brief spanned candle. Like a poor actor it makes a lot of fuss but finally proves meaningless like a tale by an idiot.

The play is replete with metaphors. In Act III Macbeth calls Banquo and Fleance , serpent and worm respectively.

MACBETH. There the grown serpent lies; the worm that's fled. (67)

The use of metaphor reveals his outrageous hatred for them. In fact now convinced with the prophetic witches the king of Scotland, Macbeth, is envious of Banquo and out of envy he plans his murder. Banquo is murdered but Fleance manages to escape. Macduff compares Scotland to a beast of burden:

MACDUFF. I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;
It weeps, it bleeds. (92)

and grieves over its pathetic state. Metaphors like 'Valour's minion' and 'Bellona's bridegroom' are used in Act I for the courageous Macbeth.

Another device employed in the play is pun which often is played in most serious events. Although Shakespeare is criticized for this but this certainly provides a soothing sigh amid the tumults. Porter scene is indeed a great relief for the audience. He has employed pun in the serious events so as to make it humorous. In Act III Macbeth has already planned to kill Banquo but he talks to him in a masked language and adieus him. He plays on the word grave:

MACBETH. We should have else desired your good advice,

Which still hath been both grave and prosperous. (56)

Here the word grave seems to imply –serious but it also refers to the deathly grave where Macbeth wants him to lay. Lady Macbeth also makes use of pun at a crucial time. During the planning of king’s elimination she plays on the word guilt/gild:

LADY MACBETH. If he do bleed

I’ll gild the faces of the grooms withal

For it must seem their guilt. (24)

Besides pun, employment of pleasant words which otherwise can sound malicious, is also the tactic of the bard. Either it’s of Duncan or Banquo, the planned ‘murder’ is substituted with the word ‘dispatch’ which creates an aura of euphemism. In Act I, Lady Macbeth speaks for the murder of King Duncan with the pleasant word. Again the same word is used for Banquo’s murder in Act III scene IV by Macbeth while inquiring of Banquo from hired assailers, "Is he *dispatch'd*?" (15) Metonymy too is employed in the text of the play. At many places in the text, the crown is used for the king, deed is used for the bloody act itself and country is used for its habitants.

Not only figures of speech prove charismatic, but the cautious use of pause also proves worthy. When Ross has to inform Macduff about his family, he is perplexed by latter’s blunt question. He answers with a pause which possesses an ironical impact:

MACDUFF How does my wife?

ROSS. Why, well.

MACDUFF. And all my children?

ROSS. Well too. (98)

The innocent children and wife of Thane are brutally slaughtered but Ross tells a lie. As David Crystal rightly asserts, one can almost hear the unsaid irony in the silent gulp (77).

The language of the play is flooded with surge of idioms coined by the playwright. When the two prophecies come true Macbeth ponders over the third one and then in an aside, thinks, 'come what come may' (24). Lady Macbeth doubts the assassination of Duncan as she knows Macbeth is full of 'milk of human kindness'(28). In his infirm state he deliberates over the elimination of Duncan which is the 'be all and end all(33). Macduff is horrified with 'a sorry sight' of Duncan's murder (41). Later he laments knowing how his family was murdered 'at one fell swoop' (11). Even after knowing the truth Macbeth displays his indomitable spirit by denying surrendering and says he lived 'a charmed life' (118). There are coinages of words like 'assassination' and 'vulnerable' too.

Shakespeare employs the tool of inversion in his plays which although hinders the clarity, but enhances the desired effect. He violates the subject verb agreement and places verb and even object before the subject.

LADY MACBETH. His two chamberlains

Will I with wine and wassail so convince. (35)

The usual structure should have been :

I will so convince

His two chamberlains with wine and wassail.

But now the beauty of the sentence is marred. Thus one can't change his poetic diction without hampering the rhythm and beauty of the text.

Surely the linguistic legacy of Shakespeare with his archaism, neologisms, idiomatic phrases and grammatical deviations is unsurpassable. But this very marvelous versatility made him prone to criticism and charged him with unintelligibility. Ben Jonson considers the play a 'horror' due to its 'bombastic speeches' (qtd. in 316) and John Dryden goes on to the extent saying:

He [Shakespeare] often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible...Tis not that I would explode the use of metaphors from passions...but to use'em at every word, to say nothing without metaphor , a simile , an image, or description , is I doubt to smell a little too strongly of the buskin. (qtd. in Braummuller, 316)

Whatsoever the criticism is, Shakespeare, the soul of English Literature, emerges triumphant despite all the accusations. After all a text is a platform for meeting of intellect; and when the minds are separated by 400 years of linguistic change, complexities are inevitable (Crystal, 67). And rhetoric devices quintessentially augment the literary worth of any text and when it comes to a Shakespearean play, it outshines all as it is the potency of language which enabled him to enliven 'All the world' on the 'Stage'.

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