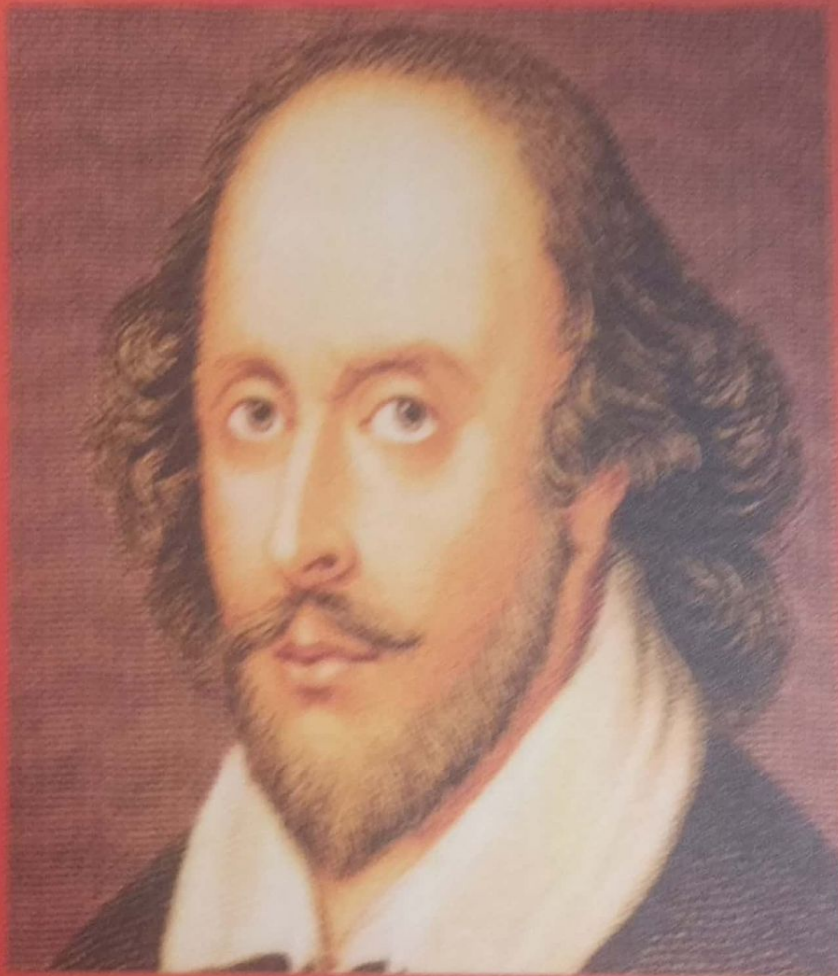


SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

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MACBETH'S DAMNATION THROUGH "THE INSTRUMENTS OF EVIL"

Mrs. T. UMA RANI

"And such was Shakespeare, whose strong soul could climb Steeps of sheer terror, sound the ocean grand of passions deep"

- W.W.Story

Shakespeare dissolves the ready distinction between virtue and vice in his tragedies. Shakespeare's unique distinction lies in his absolute command over all the complexities of thought and feeling, by piercing to the hidden centres of character. That is why T.S.Coleridge said,

"The greatest genius that perhaps human nature has yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare"

All the four tragedies, Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet and Othello deal with the damnation of evil characters. "Macbeth" can be categorized under the religious play. Its main theme is the mental conflict in a man's soul, between good and evil forces, where the choice of good leads to salvation whereas the choice of evil ends in the damnation of the soul. Bradley is right as he says, "Darkness, we may even see, blackness broods over this tragedy 'Macbeth'. The Macbeth world is insubstantial, an emptiness, its bottom knocked out of it, a hideous nightmare falling, like Satan dropping in his flight through chaos. John Parker notes "The play is not the story of a villain, but of a good

man who terrifyingly collapses- morally, psychologically and spiritually. Jane Jack explains, "Macbeth is a study not only of regicide and tyranny but of a damned soul, of a man, who, having destroyed his own conscience is capable of acting in defiance of the restraint of both of human nature and religion."

As Macbeth meets the witches, in the wilderness, they hail him with great titles. An evil seed planted in the heart of Macbeth is watered by the fulfillment of the first prophecy. When the witches appear on the heath to, both Macbeth and Banquo, their reactions are not the same. Ironically, the first prophecy is thus no prophecy. But the remark, 'The greatest is behind' is the negative factor which disturbs the peaceful bliss of Macbeth's heart. Banquo is strong in his mental make-up, as he calls the witches,

**"The earth has bubbles, as the water has
And these are of them."**

He also questions the reliability of the prophesy, by uttering,

**"... But 'tis strange
The instruments of darkness tell us truths"**

Hence Banquo does not fall into temptation, as he is aware of the fact that the witches are an illusion, and they can tell truth to make the soul trap. The moral sense and caution shown by Banquo is stressed by Shakespeare to highlight the freedom of choice both men enjoy.

Unlike Macbeth, Banquo refuses to surrender his 'eternal jewel' to the 'common enemy of man'. But Macbeth falls into the trap, by yielding to the human weakness, the lust for power or 'Vaulting Ambition' which leads to the total damnation of the

soul. Unlike Banquo, 'Macbeth fails in the spiritual battle, by facing a moral confusion through the words of the witches,

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"

St. Thomas Aquinas' defines, the root cause of sin is the commitment of the self to a good which is changeable and imperfect and every sinful act stems from an uncontrolled desire for some such good. The sinner loves himself before all other things. Macbeth's inordinate ambition of which he is fully conscious, makes murder a lesser evil than not enjoying the kinship. When he faces a spiritual conflict, Lady Macbeth's emphatic and assertive declaration,

"I may pour my spirits in thine ear

And chastise with the valour of my tongue.

....

To have thee crowned withal," penetrates deeper into the heart of Macbeth.

Her prayer to the powers of evil, to cover her with the blanket of darkness, reveals her evil nature. The mental conflict in the mind of Macbeth, is expressed in Macbeth's soliloquy and he has his own doubts about the disastrous consequences of the bloody act. But as a result of Lady Macbeth's persuasion by the unfair attack of his self-dignity, his manliness and his love for her, he consents to murder Duncan. Thus Lady Macbeth becomes an agent of devil as she stops Macbeth from following the passage to remorse. Lady Macbeth's invocation to the dark forces to 'unsex' her and fill her "from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty shows that she is ready to lose her spiritual values of a mother. Her invitation to 'the murth'ring ministers to

come to her woman's breasts' and take her milk for gall", reflects her determined hardness and the ruthless assertion. Lady Macbeth's audacity in using her tongue cruelly makes the critics comment upon her fiendish character. The devilish thirst to take away the life is stressed by Shakespeare when she says,

**"Have plucked my nipple from his to boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out"**

Just like Eve, who tempted Adam through the wickedness of the serpent, Lady Macbeth induces Macbeth to undertake unlawful means, because of the witches. The horror at what he has done is compounded by the awareness that his bodily and spiritual rest is destroyed forever.

When Macbeth shouts

**"Mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,**

To make them kings, the seed of Banquo king," he realizes his deprivation of heavenly virtues, as he is betrayed by the common enemy of man, Satan. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a tragic misuse of his free will leading to the eternal damnation of Macbeth's soul. Lady Macbeth also goes blind with guilt. She walks with a 'taper continually for though her eyes are open, their sense is shut'. The intensity of the royal blood of Duncan is so strong that she cries

**"All the perfumes of Arabia
Will not sweeten this little hand"**

The powers of darkness have completely robbed her inner light the image of God and as a result she cannot face outward darkness. The inner darkness of the soul makes her lose

her peace of mind and makes her almost mad. In this famous drama of damnation, Macduff says,

“Not in the legions of horrid hell can come a devil more damned

In evils to top Macbeth”

Macbeth loses all the qualities of a Godly human being as he is addressed as ‘a devil’.

When Macduff shouts,

“Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope

The Lord’s anointed temple, and stole thence

The life of the building” (Act II –III), Shakespeare strikes at the religious view that one’s body is the temple of God. But the horror and terror created by Duncan’s death, make Macbeth feel that he has gone completely away from the kingdom of God by marching towards to the kingdom of Satan.

“Had I but died an hour before this chance

I had lived a blessed time: for from this instant

There’s nothing serious in morality

All but’s toys renown and grace is dead

The wine of life is drawn.”

Macbeth believes that he is already damned to hell. The spirit of God, which resides in him has left his temple, hence he starts his journey towards hell by a crashing fall. When Macbeth says

“I could not say ‘Amen’

.....

But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’”, we understand that Macbeth realizes the urgent need for God’s

blessings and prayer but his inability to approach God due to his choice of the evil.

Just like Marlowe's Dr Faustus who is ready to sell his soul by making a bond with Lucifer, for materialistic pleasures and cries to God at the last moment, he could not pronounce the word 'Amen'. Hudson calls this vice of Macbeth, "his long and fatal course of self-delusion". Sin is the block that divides God and man. The dichotomy of good and evil is strongly present in the apparent strengthening of evil at night. Throughout the play, the darkness of Hell cloaks Macbeth with evil. 'Bellona's bridegroom', and Valour's Minion is reduced to a timid, and weak villain who shelters himself under the instruments of Evil. While Macbeth commits murder after murder, unknowingly and unaware he murders his spiritual self and is eternally damned. When Macbeth becomes a tyrant by murdering Banquo, Macduff's children Malcolm, depicts the pathetic condition of the court,

**"It weeps, it bleeds and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds"**

'The wage of sin is death' says the scripture. Lady Macbeth becomes spiritually dead, because the doctor says that she needs more divine care. The stain in Macbeth's soul results in a holy war to save the soul of Scotland. Shakespeare takes pains to establish the virtue of Malcolm as a righteous heir to the throne. With the companionship of Macduff, who is a righteous man.

The Heavenly Kingdom is associated with bright angels who worship with bliss and joy, protected under the mighty

wings of the awesome God. Hence there are two kingdoms working simultaneously in this planet Earth, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. God blessed man with the free will to choose good or evil, virtue or vice, blessings or curses, light or darkness, salvation or damnations which leads to Heaven or Hell. When Adam disobeyed God by listening to Eve, who was captivated by the temptation of Satan, the fatal fall of man occurred. The downfall of Satan as portrayed in Milton's '*Paradise Lost*', predicts clearly the disastrous consequences of opposing the omnipotent creator, God. The kingdom of Satan is associated with the "instruments of darkness" who are imprisoned by the chains of destruction and damnation who reside in the 'fire of Hell'.

Shakespeare brings out the eternal truth of Life, in '*Macbeth*' through the protagonist Macbeth whose 'deep and dark desires' lead towards his damnation, through the witches, the instruments of Darkness. Macbeth becomes a 'poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage' by sacrificing so much for so little, and he foreshadows his own demise as he says

"And be these juggling fiends no more believed".

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