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LADY MACBETH: A CHARACTER BEYOND INSTIGATOR

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Abstract

Macbeth is one of the finest tragedies of William Shakespeare. Lady Macbeth, wife of Macbeth in this play plays a significant role in the downfall of Macbeth. Macbeth has got ambitious with the prophecy of the three witches that he will be the future king of Scotland. When lady Macbeth has heard of this prophecy and also of Duncan's arrival at Castle Inverness to celebrate the victory of Macbeth and Banquo in the battle, they have fought she immediately plots a plan of killing king Duncan. Lady Macbeth instigated Macbeth to commit the crime raising questions of his manliness. After committing the crime of killing Duncan Macbeth commits several other murders to hide his sin. This tragic flaw in his character has separated him from his beloved Lady Macbeth and he ultimately meets with his death at the end.

Key words: Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Duncan, Witches, Tragedy.

Introduction

Macbeth is one of the finest tragedies of William Shakespeare in the history of English Literature. The names of other prominent tragedies to be mentioned by Shakespeare are Hamlet, King Lear and Othello. A Shakespearean tragedy basically deals with the sufferings and sorrowfulness of the hero or the heroin which ultimately leads him to his or her sufferings, separation from the beloved and death. The Shakespearean hero is a great person in the society who is a brave one and willing to go to any extent for the safety of the people if his people. It is the hamartia or the tragic flaw in the trait of the character of the hero which ultimately turns him to be a tragic hero and lead him to meet with his doom.

In the play Macbeth the tragic hero is the titular character Macbeth who has undergone the phases of sufferings due to the tragic flaw of his being ambitious after hearing the prophecy from the three witches he met that he will be the future king of Scotland. Macbeth who is a general under the kingdom of Duncan has now become overambitious with the instigation of his beloved wife Lady Macbeth and thought of killing his master Duncan and thereby become the king of Scotland. Till now due to his being a brave warrior, his loyalty towards the throne and love for the people of Scotland he is worshipped by all. His over ambitiousness has led him to go against his morals and own conscience. His spouse has knitted a plot to kill king Duncan and compelled Macbeth in many ways so that he remains influenced in performing according to the plot. Macbeth is now in his dilemma of going against his conscience to kill his master. Here comes the role of Lady Macbeth, who is often seen in the same scale of the witch, to allure her husband to remain static to their plot. Macbeth insists but her strong will overpowers.

Lady Macbeth is found to be stronger, more cruel and more ambitious than her husband. We meet her first in the Castle Inverness while she is going through the letter that she has received from Macbeth through a messenger. The letter reveals Macbeth's being prophesied to be the Thane of Cawdor and the future king of Scotland where is a General now. Immediately an insatiable desire is aroused in her to see herself as the queen of the State. After Macbeth reaches the Castle, she welcomes him as Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and the future king. She welcomes Macbeth in the similar way her husband was welcomed by the three witches. Here the dramatist hints at something bad is going to happen.

King Duncan reached at the castle of Macbeth to celebrate the victory of the war that was won by Macbeth and Banquo. When he reaches their Lady Macbeth pretends to be and honest and good host. Lady Macbeth's leading to Duncan into the castle images of her leading to the king to his death. Whereas, it is known to the readers and the audiences of the impending cruelty upon the king. Lady Macbeth informs Macbeth the plot she has knitted to commit the murder of their master. Macbeth though wishes to be the king but murdering the king at his own castle is all in against his moral conscience. We have noticed till now Macbeth remains to be loyal to the novelty. But here onwards the scene is going to be changed and Macbeth is going to be more guided by his wife than his own self and ambition.

In Act I scene ii we find Macbeth is roaming around the castle as he is in deep agony of doubt to commit the murder which may lead him to his utter destitution as the action is against the Nature. When Macbeth sees his wife, he tries to put a stop to their plan of murdering their guest. But lady Macbeth constantly tries to reinforce her husband's resolve. Here we see her to use a different tactic of going to the extent of comparing Macbeth to a coward whereas Macbeth himself has the glory of being one of the greatest warriors



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the land has ever produced. At the beginning of the play, it is stated that Macbeth is the worthy bridegroom for the goddess of war (Bellona). Macbeth tries to silence his wife. He knows that he can do all the bravest man can do. He doesn't want to go further to kill his guest and become a monster. Lady Macbeth scorns this idea of Macbeth and says that he proves to be a man when he plans to murder the king. Where as we know that the plot was actually weaved by her only. She further provokes him that it is their golden opportunity to execute their plan as the victim is in their own castle.

In her first soliloquy lady Macbeth reinforces her ideas of plotting the murder of Duncan when will be at their castle. She knows that her husband who is ambitious has the feelings of what is right and what is wrong. Her such explanation makes us realise that Macbeth is indeed a good man though he is not full of virtuous qualities. Here comes the fulfilment of the idea of a tragic hero who is not a great warrior but also a good man who has caught himself in the adverse circumstances. Here in this play the adverse circumstances are created by the three witches or the supernatural forces and they have been intensified by the role of Lady Macbeth.

To keep his planning static and keep Macbeth motivated Lady Macbeth even goes to the extent of saying that Macbeth is "too full o' the milk of human kindness". It is said when Macbeth expresses his denial of murdering his own master. For this we find her to be an evil personified, pitiless and iron-willed. Lady Macbeth wants to be one with magically murdering character and she goes to the extent of saying that far from offering the milk of human-kindness, she wishes that her breasts were full of poison. Lady Macbeth's appearance of total strength destroys the reality of her husband's conscience, his sophisticated moral sense.

With the instigation and provoking of his spouse Macbeth now goes to the extent of killing his master to whom he was earlier engaged as a General. Later Macbeth killed the two grooms as well putting the blames on them as they latter murdered the king out of bring drunkenness. When Macbeth finds that Banquo has become suspicious of his crime of killing the king, he sent two hired goons to kill Banquo as well. Later Macbeth committed several other murders as well to hide the truth of being involved in the murder of Duncan. The series of murder and bloodshed in the play Macbeth has left the people of Scotland in utter helplessness and insecurities. On the one hand people of the kingdom of Macbeth has become suspicious and on the other Lady Macbeth, who is highly motivated and instigated Macbeth to commit the crime, is now in the condition of mental disorder. Lady Macbeth claims that all the perfumes of Arabia is not even sufficient to remove the smell of the blood (blood of Duncan that is scattered in her hand) from her hand. She has also been attacked by the disease of sleeplessness and Somnambulism. The internal conflict has become more painful for Macbeth than the outer conflicts. The death of his wife has shattered him into pieces and ultimately after the separation from his beloved he meets with his death.

So, in conclusion it can be asserted from the above explanation that Macbeth, the hero of the play has met with his ultimate doom because of the insatiable desire of becoming the king of Scotland. Though the desire has been embedded in him by the part of the three witches but it has got its full swing by Lady Macbeth. If Lady Macbeth has not instigated him and planned the plot of murdering then the story might have developed in some other way and Macbeth might have not met with such destruction at the end of the play. No doubt Macbeth himself is responsible for going against his own conscience but Lady Macbeth is also can be held responsible for his downfall.

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