

Maladjustment of Masculine and Feminine Traits as the Reason for the Tragedy of Macbeth

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Abstract

The Macbeths' is a tragedy through the complete reversal of the masculine-feminine constituents of the human personality. Macbeth surrendered his manhood to his wife instead of prompting her to surrender to him; and so their unnatural relation brought about terrible ruin. It is neither the woman nor the man who is responsible for the tragedy in each case; it is the peculiar relation between the couple that is ultimately seen to generate the tragic forces through the enhancement of the emotional factor in their personalities and through them in the tragic world at large. This study endeavours to apply the principle of the play of sex to Macbeth.

Keywords: masculinity, femininity, maladjustment, play of sex, tragedy

Introduction

The research paper is based on the analysis of *Macbeth*, one of the tragedies of Shakespeare with the psychological approach. On 14 September 2011, there appeared an article in The Hindu newspaper titled "The Real William Shakespeare". The article is an interview of K.S. Vijay Elangova with Professor Stanley Wells, president, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Prof. Stanley says,

"Shakespeare was a hard-working writer with an exceptionally acute understanding of human psychology and social circumstances...he wrote a lot about love and sex in his plays."

Human Psychology Presented by Shakespeare

The author of this paper developed an interest of human psychology presented by Shakespeare in his works, so the scholar examines the tragedy's atmosphere, climate and the tendencies that release the forces which are the interactional product of the masculine and

feminine traits of character found in every man and woman. These forces suspend, retard or accelerate the pace of the tragic action by affecting, in a peculiar manner, under each set of circumstances, both men and women and the events that happen in a particular province of the tragic world. Shakespeare had placed sex at the centre of human life. "It is true, as Mr. Masfield has said of Shakespeare, that sex ran in him like sea" (Knight 248). There are no men; there are no women, there are only sexual majorities, each human being bisexual. As T. Morgan and Elliot Steller say,

"The behaviour-pattern of the opposite sex is readily brought out under experimental conditions where hormones of the opposite sex are administered. But the occurrence of bisexual behaviour is independent of special hormonal conditions and is seen in all species of animal." (Morgan and Steller 420)

Maladjustment

The stage for the tragedy is set, when a great personality's maladjustment takes place, as a result of the unbalanced commixture of its two chief constituents, the masculine and the feminine elements. Morgan and Stellar continue,

"Thus, a woman whose anthropological measurements and physiological signs show a departure from the general norms in the direction of masculine proportions and characteristics would be said to have a weak feminine component and vice versa with the man whose measurements and other indications fall within norms regarded as feminine" (Morgan 109).

Further, when such a person meets another person, particularly, a maladjusted one, the maladjustment increases in depth and breadth.

This paper is intended to draw attention of the higher minds to the central fact of life with reference to its play in Shakespearean tragedies. "Shakespeare arraigns.... the relation between men and women. Each ruins the other" (Mackenzie 537).

Maladjustment of Sex in Macbeth

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (Macbeth I:1. 11). This remarkable line is the key to the tragedy. The key is the reversal of situations, and that of the relative major character traits in the personalities of man and woman. The Macbeths' is a peculiar case; since the tragic poignancy of their lives is brought about, among other things, by the situation of a complete

mutual reversal of masculinity and femininity in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. They are utterly unsuited to each other for a permanent successful companionship of any free, contractual, or sacramental type. They are no true counterparts of each other. Their union, consequently, will not be conducive to each other's spiritual development. On the other hand, the corporate human nature resulting from the blending of the two components in a false setting will more and more degenerate and in its turn, will operate to vitiate each contributing personality. Women in Scotland, in the period under review, incline more towards masculinity and if the principles of heredity, and environment be deemed as having operated in Lady Macbeth's case, there is nothing to show to the contrary. Then Lady Macbeth is only a perfected specimen of the type, which the spirit of the age was, slowly but surely, evolving, and whose course accident alone could obstruct, or accelerate, to its final culmination.

The accident in Lady Macbeth's case is her marriage with Macbeth, the type of a man well equipped by natural relative defects to precipitate the development of the personality of Lady Macbeth along her dispositional tendencies. If only she had married a man of stronger masculine endowments, the tragedy of her life would have been averted by the two inevitable alternative results. A male would have qualities like vigor, defiance and mettle; a female would have the qualities like Joyousness, tender-heartedness and self-surrender. Either her masculine traits would have been softened by the superior stronger qualities of her husband, combined with the further development of the essential feminine traits, which she undoubtedly possesses. She would, therefore, have developed to an almost perfect woman; since, we find in her to an extent the three-chief fundamental feminine qualities of joyousness, tender-heartedness and self-surrender or, the necessary clashes of mutual adjustability of the early married period would have eventually led to an inevitably unbridgeable gulf, resulting in divorce from her husband.

The latter alternative, however, is not likely to have arisen, since a stronger man, a woman invariably respects and admires, because it is consonant with the demands of her own nature, even though, she may, in the beginning, rebel against self-surrender. For the proper understanding of the tragedy, whose key is "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," we must examine Lady Macbeth in the light of the above three fundamental feminine characteristics which form the essential nucleus of woman's nature.

Lady Macbeth's Joyousness and its Maladjustment

The spirit of joyousness of Lady Macbeth has an eminently catching quality. The weightiest matter passing through her pleasant personality becomes a thing of joy: the gloom of Duncan's prospective murder is dispersed by the glow of Macbeth's Kingship in future which suddenly merges with the present, and this simultaneously rolls back to the past. Time loses all significance: he is King now; she herself the Queen!

Thy letters have transported me beyond

This ignorant present, and I feel now

The future in the instant. I:5. 57-59

She bubbles over with exuberance of joy. She is in a trance. She has become a spirit of the ethereal elements, free from the bondage of time! He himself feels the outgoing charm of her personality: he is entranced. The vision before him is the personification of joy. He would do anything to keep her in that state of bliss! The end is before him the means whatever, he shall adopt. The three words "My dearest love" are expressive of the rapt adoration.

Lady Macbeth is unquestionably a very solicitous person and she has a true feminine appeal. She finds her husband gloomy on the night of the great royal banquet to which late Duncan's "spongy officers" and turncoat courtiers flock to pay lip-homage to the new royal pair, but to Macbeth the event brings a keen feeling of oppressive discomfiture, and a heavy sense of forlornness. The blood of Duncan is gives him a relentless chase! In his utter despair of joy and peace he comes to Lady Macbeth in compliance with her request for a word with him. Immediately he catches her infectious joyousness and sweet content:

Come on;

Gentle my lord, sleek ov'r your rugged looks;

Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night.III:2. 26-28

His response is reassuring, and expressive of the dispersal of the blues. He assures her he would be "bright" and "jovial" if she should continue to be so.

So shall I, love: and so, I pray be you.III: 2. 29.

She teaches him the art of joyousness by tenderly and soothingly inducing in him the mood of cheerfulness. To live in the present; to forget the past; to take no thought for the morrow; "what's done is done" (III. 2. 12) is her oft-repeated refrain. Her strong incessant forceful doses of cheerfulness have succeeded in developing in him a habitual mood of joyousness. He can, at times now, even teach others the art including his mentor to be gay, at

least he makes the attempt however clumsy. He has been giving expression, to his fears with respect to Banquo and Fleance. She, by way of offering him comfort, reminds him:

But in them nature's copy's not eterne.III:2. 38.

This is in keeping with his own thoughts and with the decision that he has already taken of getting rid of them by hired assassins. He immediately becomes cheerful, and bids her "Then be thou jocund". He knows the murderers are about their black business at the moment, but he exhorts his guests in a gay mood; after she has injected a dose of gaiety into him:

Be large in mirth, anon, we'll drink a measure,

The table round.III: 4. 11-12.

It might be argued that Lady Macbeth's joyousness is a forced emotion. It may be conceded that on occasions she uses it as a device for keeping up the spirits of her husband, who needed constant enlivening; but it is worth remembering that nothing merely artificial is ever so continuously infectious as is her cheerfulness. It is only native buoyancy, which would last so long, and through so many variegated vicissitudes of such soul straining nature. In communion with a true counterpart, the sunny pleasantness of her disposition would have developed to a truly refined feminine volatility of the spirits.

Lady Macbeth's Tenderness and its Maladjustment

The next quality to be considered is Lady Macbeth's tenderness. The humanity of a person is alone rightly gauged in his social contacts, with reference to his behaviour towards his inferiors. We are reminded of Duncan's lack of favourable reaction to the "bloody man", who happened to be a brave warrior and the rescuer of his eldest son, besides being the harbinger of the great and glad tidings. Duncan was most insensible and indifferent to his woebegone plight. Lady Macbeth receives a messenger with the news of the King's visit that night. She is surprised, as well she might be: Macbeth should have been there in person with the news of the coming of the royal guest, and to look to the preparations, which must necessarily be made against his reception. She is, however, informed that

Our thane is coming;

One of my fellows had the speed of him,

Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more

Than would make up the message. I:5. 35-38

She herself clearly recognises the tenderness of her own feminine nature as a handicap, so that she needs to pray to the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts "to unsex me here" (I. 5. 42) She possesses indomitable will, and this, she now invokes to have herself unsexed, so that her urgent feminine nature might be deprived of one of its essentials tender heartedness.

Tenderness calls for possessive tenderness in fond terms of childlike and childish endearments. Macbeth uses all sorts, from those of the formal husband, of the lover husband, of the purely romantic lover: "my dearest partner of greatness", "dear wife", "my dearest love", "love", "dearest chuck" and "sweet remembrance". She can work out the details of the murder of Duncan with consummate ingenuity; but faced with the actual fact of committing the deed, she recoils and fails to accomplish it, not, however, from any sense of fear like Macbeth, but because her tender nature would not steel itself to guide her hand to plunge the dagger into Duncan's bosom:

Had he not resembled

My father as he slept I had done't. II: 2. 14-15

We are reminded of her speech, in which she is hard at work to chastise all that impedes him from murder with the valour of her tongue. She assures him that she would have undertaken the relatively impossible task of killing her own babe, if she had promised to do so, and, consequently, Macbeth could, surely murder Duncan after having pledged himself to the deed, since, the relationship between himself and Duncan is of comparatively little account. She assures him that she knows what she is talking about; since,

I have given suck, and know,

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:

I would, while it was smiling in my face,

Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,

And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you

Have done to this. I: 7. 54-59

It is a clear case of tall talk. The quick movement, of the last four lines, with their easy iambic foot is affected by the rigorous exclusion of any heavier foot and is indicative of an undercurrent of the peculiarly tender emotion of the mother aroused in Lady Macbeth by the imaginative erotic experience, both physiological and psychological initiated by the tactual sensations of tantalisation and lacteal movement caused by the babe at her breast. Within the narrow compass first two and a half lines of twenty-five monosyllabic words, excepting three,

and all of the simplest, she has drawn a full-sized living picture of the all-absorbing tenderness of the woman for her child, which is inseparably linked with her sexual excitation, rendering her peculiarly helpless in this particular love. It is impossible for a woman, who is capable of imaginatively experiencing such depth of emotion to act the way Lady Macbeth professes to her husband that "I would". The abrupt break in the flow with the beginning spondee and the cataract rush of the succeeding anapaest is expressive of the hesitancy of the speaker and the hurry with which she must get over the expression of the terrible thought it contains. It is, therefore, clear that Lady Macbeth is merely making the statement with the express object of forcing her husband's hand to the murder of Duncan. It is noteworthy that though she "would chastise all that impedes" Macbeth from "the golden round" including Duncan, whose murder thus becomes a necessity for her, yet she is so horrified as to faint at the unnecessary and uncalled for, inexpedient murder of the Chamberlains! Macbeth himself now begins to recognise and regret her tender-heartedness that refuses to be killed along with Duncan.

From this point onwards, his own nature having dried up of "the milk of human kindness", Macbeth only takes her into half confidence; as in the case of plotting the murder of Banquo and Fleance; or, keeps her in the dark as when he orders the butchering of the innocent and helpless wife and children of Macduff in their abandoned state:

The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now? V.1. 46

Pathetically sings Lady Macbeth. This incident is what delivers to her soul a mortal wound. It is from this moment that her irreparably wounded heart parts company with her husband.

"The more painfully aware she (Lady Macbeth) becomes of being deceived in her husband, the more in loneliness she feels the growing estrangement, and the more active grow the suppressed feeling of her better nature, which drew back on seeing Duncan's likeness to her father." (C. C. Hense: Mental Diseases in Shakespeare, 1878). (Ralli 38)

The incomprehensibility of her husband's inhumanity for its own sake, as it appears to her, eventually unhinges her mind and makes her take refuge in death by suicide! If only she had been spared the horrifying sight of the blood, which in its profusion seemed to fly in all directions, with splashed and scattered drops of ruddy life, as if, straying and groping on its way to reach the murderer; "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (V. 1. 43-44)

Sanguinophobia is her trouble! Blood broke her nature! She cannot endure the sight of blood, not even in her imagination. The discovery of the murder brought through it, with the nauseating vividness, the enervating smell and sight of the blood with further mixing and thickening of it with that of the Chamberlains, and she had actually, definitely fainted away. This is easily understood and even expected, from her sleep walking and compulsive action of washing her hands every "quarter of an hour". In the nine speeches that she makes, she dwells on blood, and that, most pathetically, as if her heart would burst: "Yet here's a spot"; "Out damned spot out I say" "yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?", "The thane of Fife had a wife, where is she now?"; "What! Will these hands ne'er be clean?"; "Here's the smell of the blood still: All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand! Oh, oh, oh"; "Wash your hands"; "give me your hand: What's done cannot be undone"; and "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried, he cannot come out on's grave."(V. 1 69-70) There is blood enough here to drown a swimmer, leave alone, a tender woman of Lady Macbeth's mould! We agree whole heartedly with the "good" doctor's implied thought that she is not past redemption; since, in her subconscious mind she is truly repentant.

More needs she the divine than the physician.

God, God forgive us all! V:l. 81-82.

But Macbeth's, alas, is a divine-deserted court, with its resultant absence of the offer of the blood of the Lamb as a recipe that alone could "Sweeten this little hand."

Lady Macbeth's Self-Surrender and its Maladjustment

Last, the feminine quality of self-surrender is equally dominant in Lady Macbeth. But this and the other two essential feminine traits are rendered inoperative owing to the fact that they are under the control of her own will, which is far superior to that of her husband's. There is nothing in Macbeth to draw this quality out to himself. It is evident from her speeches that she longed to make a surrender of herself to him, but he is too weak to receive the burden; for burden it is; since, it implies the shouldering of the responsibility of projecting, guiding and even driving the personality of the woman, and for this in relation to Lady Macbeth he is the least suited; the operation of the requisite masculine qualities in him is either frustrated, or enfeebled, or made abortive through the interaction of his weak will. Lady Macbeth longs to surrender her personality to her actual husband, but not being a human automaton, she cannot

go the whole length, and the spiritual impotency of Macbeth forces her to fall back upon herself with natural disastrous results to both.

Macbeth, in short, lacks the necessary developed masculine character of essential manhood, delineated by Shakespeare in "Hamlet." "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason how infinite in faculty (mental power), in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals." Macbeth is truly a paragon of animals but on the bestial plane. The pattern of manhood being distorted in him, he is a fallen man, whom a woman of Lady Macbeth's parts could not long admire. Consequently, very early in the play, from the moment she discovers that Macbeth has murdered the chamberlains, not out of necessity, but because he is inured to the spilling of human blood, she begins to cool towards him. From Banquo's murder, the relation between them becomes taut, and with the news of her husband's extreme callousness in getting Macduff's wife and the children killed in cold blood, her psychological separation from him is complete. She never speaks to him unless the wifely habit surprises her into expressing her original attitude in the somnambulist's trance, when her will is inoperative. C.C. Hense's comments on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are searching, since they analyse their relationship which is responsible for the Macbeths' moral misfortune:

"Lady Macbeth....stands in an inverted relation of disposition and development to her husband. We expect the vacillating Macbeth to suffer mental derangement....The stronger Lady Macbeth is overpowered by the past in her sleep"

and,

"The more painfully aware She (Lady Macbeth) becomes of being deceived in her husband, the more in loneliness she feels the growing, estrangement, and the more active grow the suppressed feeling of her better nature which drew back on seeing Duncan's likeness to her father." (Mental Diseases in Shakespeare. Jahrbuch, 1878).

Looking back, we find that her very first speech to him is expressive of her rapt admiration for him;

Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!

Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter! 1:5. 55-56

She addresses him even in private with something akin to submissive respect: "Did you send to him, Sir?" (III. 4. 129) referring to the non-compliance of Macduff with his order of personal attendance on Macbeth, she sees to his creature comforts at great inconvenience and

discomfort to herself, when she prepares his nightly drink with her own hands. Macbeth speaks to his servant just after mid-night.

Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready

She strikes upon the bell. II: 1. 31-32.

Her solicitude in this respect must produce the soothing hypnotic effect of resolving any discordant jars that his soul might experience as a result of her overbearing disposition to a spineless husband:

You lack the season of all natures, sleep.III:4. 141.

She calls to his mind his urgent need of rest and sleep, but carefully keeps her own naturally worse plight, resulting from the same cause, in the background.

A woman will make a man or mar a man: her power for good and for ill is tremendous. The woman coupled with the right partner will make him, and, the unequal yoke will mar the man, and, of course, herself. The story of Macbeth and his wife is illustrative of the latter part of the truth. Set the woman on the way she would go; and not on the one she should, and her emotional nature tends to go the whole length of the way! Once Macbeth had set the ball rolling with regards to Lady Macbeth's degeneration by influencing her impressionable nature by his "vaulting ambition", her whole personality becomes infected by it, and the frailty of her nature, falling back on the woman's bag of tricks, rendered subtle by her keen intellect, lend a further edge to his already urgent ambition. She has a quick and far-reaching apprehension. She is well versed in the male psychology. In her first soliloquy, she promises that she would intellectualise him, so that he might be replete with her liveliness and intellectual keenness. She would thrust all emotion out of him; she would argue him out of any intellectual or spiritual difficulties that he might feel on the score of Duncan's murder. She knows he is sluggish, a fearful suckling and an intellectual coward, because of the emotional defect of excess in his nature, resulting in his being too full of the milk of human kindness.

The trouble with Macbeth's mental make-up is that neither is he capable of leading his wife nor of being entirely led by her. She was hopeful that she would be able to manage to strengthen his intellect by pouring into it her own spirits:

Hie thee hither,

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear. I:5. 26-27

That is all right: as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough: in the first place, he needs constant doses of her 'spirits', which she administers having them with bitter disdainful

remarks, intermixed with out-bursts of ill-temper at his ignorance and lack of wisdom. The oft-repeated attacks on his manhood must lash him into a suppressed fury. She bemoans that womanlike he cannot hide his feelings:

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men

May read strange matters. I:5. 63-64.

Lucrece invites Tanquin to examine this thought which brings out the difference between, the sexes with regard to psychophysical activity in man as in woman.

"Though men can cover crimes with bold stern looks,

Poor woman's faces are their own faults' book:"

She towers over him as a she-Colossus and confronts him continually with "self-comparisons" both direct and implied; sometimes she forces the issue in a tone of final order!

and you shall put

This night's great business into my despatch: I: 5. 68-69

And when he offers a mild, spineless remonstrance "We will speak further" she abruptly turns upon him wagging a finger like at a naughty child, who has forgotten a lesson learnt recently:

Only look up clear;

To alter favour ever is to fear.

Leave all the rest to me. I: 5. 72-74

But he cannot face the ordeal of attending on Duncan at dinner, and unceremoniously leaves him. In the seclusion of his own closet he gives himself up to incisive introspection. He finds that his greatest fear proceeds not from the horror of murder, but from public opinion, forgetting that it is often superstitious, short-lived, capricious, vascillating and, at the most a nine days' wonder! He recognises that he is not animated by any strong motive of redressing a personal wrong. He makes a sound case against the contemplated action. The thought of the judgment to come never once enters the arena of his deliberation, which is wholly earthy. He can easily waive what may happen in the Hereafter, but alas!

We still have judgment here; that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return

To plague the inventor. I: 7. 8-10

And in conclusion he assures himself that he has no cause to act the way he has been contemplating he would. But he has forgotten that he had delegated the power to decide for

him to Lady Macbeth; inadvertently, suicidal, by exposing to her woman's naturally greedy gaze, the smouldering evil that lay live in his dark soul! He helplessly pleads,

We will proceed no further in this business: I: 7. 31

She literally pounces upon him, as a beast of prey when it is deprived of an almost made victim:

What beast was't, then,

That made you break this enterprise to me?

When you durst do it then you were a man;I: 7. 47-49

And by strong implication that without daring he is none! The argument is fallacious, and she knows it. She now seems to stoop to the woman's trump-card of unashamed lying. She brazenly tells him that he had pledged himself to the murder of Duncan, which there is nothing to show that he has, except her bare word! Is it a bare word though? Macbeth himself comes to support her; for instead of protesting against her assertion, his response to it is "If we should fail...". She brings home to him her plausible superiority by telling him that she could easily snatch the babe from her breast and dash his brains out, if she had made such a promise; and what is Duncan to him that he should hesitate to keep the pledge and thus perjure his soul? He gives the last helpless gasp and drops to the lowest depth of moral hell, as he shows himself in his true colours of those of a coward! For, he is prepared to do the deed, provided safety is guaranteed! The failure he refers to is not that of the complete performance of the deed, but the secretiveness of the crime. Immunity is all he asks, and immunity Lady Macbeth promises him: Duncan's "spongy officers" shall bear the blame. Her consummate ingenuity has left nothing out: It is they

Who shall bear the guilt

Of our great quell1:7. 71-72

It is a great business and requires a man of great courage; and he is that man! He is floored! He crawls to her as a worm to do her bidding. He has surrendered his manhood to the woman, unconditionally, happily and voluntarily: he is breathless with rapt adoration:

Bring forth men-children only;

For thy undaunted mettle should compose,

Nothing but males.I:7. 72-74

They shall be immune, she assures him again:

Who dares receive it other,

As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar

Upon his death? I:7. 78-79

Immunity having been assured, there is nothing further to worry about: no qualms of the conscience, no social scruples, no "compunctious visitings of nature". Macbeth is elated, he is transported to the happy atmosphere of security. For once his nature has become radiant from the fusion of Lady Macbeth's with his own! He shouts for joy!

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent in this terrible feat.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:

False face must hide what the false heart doth know. I: 7. 79-82

But wait; Time shall have his revenge! Hecate says to the witches

And you all know security

Is mortals' chiefest enemy III: 5. 32-33

So, Security, the bane of human existence shall become his hidden rock on which his immortal soul shall crash! The final decision of Macbeth is merely a reiteration of the one he had made earlier on the fulfilment of the prophecies of the witches. Two-thirds of the prophecy having been fulfilled, Macbeth was naturally led to gloat over the certainty of the fulfilment of the last one-third.

He begins to feel now that his wife's optimistic exhortations have been silly self-deceptions or deliberate evasions. He is nowhere nearer the joy and calm that she had repeatedly led him to expect after "the attempt." He recalls how sometimes, she had spoken with the very tongue of prophecy, that after Duncan's murder they should control events, and not events, them:

And you shall put

This night's great business into my despatch;

Which shall to all our nights and days to come

Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom. I: 4. 68-71

It does not seem convincing to him even then, for his unenthusiastic response is "We will speak further". But she has led him on through coaxing and cursing, fawning and flare-up, cavilling and snivelling; praise and blame; deification and disparagement; aggrandizement and abasement; and pouting and paying! Above all, by incessant doses of subtle suggestibility, she had induced in him a spirit of emulation with reference to herself. She seems ever possetting

with him. She somehow manages to place him in a setting, beside herself, so that the contrast awakening in him a sense of disparagement might goad him on to the suggested line of action. Sometimes she is downright shallow as in the beginning of the knocking-scene, with its awful sense of impending ruin!

A little water clears us of this deed;
How easy is it, then! II:2. 68.

He knows the consolation offered by her has no depth; but he cannot help leaning on her, for, she looks and speaks so strong. One wrong leads to another wrong as he confides in her that his real fear now proceeds only from Banquo and his son.

O! Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife;
Thou knowest Banquo and his Fleance lives. III: 2. 36-37.

She shows him the way out. Yes, she knows that, but

In them nature's copy's not eterne.

He repeats the thought in a spineless line:

There's comfort yet; they are assailable; III:2. 39.

Later on, when his 'comfort' has turned into action, so that before dawn "there shall be done a deed of dreadful note," she is greatly surprised, and asks him to explain himself: "What's to be done." She has not expected him so soon to develop the ingenuity to plan for executing the "deed of dreadful note" independently. He gives her back her own guardedly and enigmatically expressed thought in a clearer language:

Thou marvell'st at my words', but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill: III: 2. 54-55.

She is convinced now that he is well on his way and will soon cease to need her. She makes a frantic effort to keep him dependent on herself. She now suddenly takes on the role of a submissive unobtrusive wife. Macbeth informs the guests that they shall soon be welcomed by his wife, the Queen; but she immediately offers a self-abnegating alternative with flattering obedience to his own royal request:

Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends;
For my heart speaks they are welcome. III:4. 7-8.

The expected word of courtesy to thank her is not recorded. She makes another attempt to win some sort of a remark, a hint, suggestive of her old spell still unbroken over him. As he is busy with the murderer of Banquo she reminds him with sweet self-abandoned blandishment.

My royal lord,

You do not give the cheer: III: 4. 32-33

The thriftiness of the response in just two words! "Sweet remembrance" further suggests to her, her waning influence over him. Her reminding him of his remissness on two occasions, in point of social courtesy, has not elicited any responsive warmth. She now invites his attention to a state necessity of Macduff's death. She, apparently, invents the lie to bring home to him her usefulness: she is indispensable: she knows everything; and offers the solution of all his problems. He is surprised at what she tells him, for he disbelieves her, and for the first time boldly offers to cross-examine her. He seems to be reminded of her earlier two fibs: that he had initiated the subject of Duncan's murder in a conversation with her; and that he had pledged himself to his murder. He knew then, as now, that she was lying, but then they happened to fall in with his mood so that he had accepted the falsehoods, which contributed to his male sense of self-glorification. His need being different now, woman like, he changes round and blames her for what he praised her for before. Be that, as it may his mind does seem to be probing her character to its very depths,

How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person,

At our great bidding? III: 4. 128-129

She cunningly evades the issue by cross-examining him in return: a question for a question:

Did you send to him, sir? III:4. 129.

He is amazed! She has placed him on the horns of a disconcerting dilemma. To say 'yes' would be inviting humiliation, and the loosening of her lashing tongue, normally never too sweet; for, he anticipates her further question as to what steps he had taken in the matter, and, he would have nothing whatever to say. To answer in the negative would imply that he is either light headed or evasive. The third is to admit that he knows nothing about the matter; but this would lay him open to the humiliating charge of knowing less than his wife about matters of special importance to himself. So, he makes up an over-elaborate reply to show to her that there is nothing that he does not know, for he has taken steps that all information should speedily and at first-hand come to him. This of course she does not know and the object of making her feel small compared to himself is well-served;

I hear it by the way; but I will send.

There's not a one of them but in his house

I keep a servant fee'd. III:4. 130-132

Precisely from this point onwards, they become spiritually divorced. The end of Act 2 scene 4 is the end of their conjugal life. She knows she is no longer wanted, as also her woman's nature rebels against the diabolic maliciousness, which his transformed nature sought to express habitually in some "deed of dreadful note." He turns from her, a lone man, and ceases to be human! It is significant, because only in society, of which the union of man and woman is the basic unit that a man is, or can remain, fully human, for, apart from society he is either an angel or a beast! C. H. Herford's misplaced generosity with reference to Macbeth's degeneration is sharply contradicted by the text:

"The witches stimulate Macbeth's unborn thought, and his life becomes henceforth a terrible dream. His nerve hardens as he commits crime after crime, but to the last he retains some vision." (Shakespeare, People's Books, Vol. I. 1912)

Macbeth, unconsciously, but naturally now identifies himself with pure evil in the moral universe.

"It is perhaps because the idea of beatitude is strange to the modern mind that for the last hundred years or so the critics have only sentimentalised Macbeth ignoring the completeness with which Shakespeare shows his final identification with evil." (Knights 54)

He is now the antitype, the traditional Satan, the Arch-enemy of mankind! He will not consult her, who is still something of a human being, but would turn to the Witches the units of pure evil, to whom he justly traces his kinship now:

I will tomorrow

And betimes. I will—to the weird sisters:

More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know,

By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good

All causes shall give way: I am in blood

Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more.

Returning were as tedious as go o'er. III:4. 132-138

But tomorrow has no significance now in the moral universe, with reference to Macbeth, or for Lady Macbeth for that matter. He shall bemoan this "tomorrow" again when he receives the news of her death; but there shall be no tomorrow, for that shall be only in the 'hereafter' then he is no more! Tomorrow implies change, change front night to day-born moral benightments to spiritual enlightenment through moral regeneration by repentance. Lady

Macbeth had herself initiated the cease of her own "tomorrow"" with her vow to cut off Duncan's, when her husband informed her in response to her query, that Duncan planned to leave "tomorrow."

Of never,

Shall sun that morrow see. I:5. 62

There is now no 'tomorrow' or change for Lady Macbeth too, for she has lost the active will to goodness. Her repentance, if her expressions of it in her somnambulist trances may be given that dignified name, is involuntary and not the act of her volition as such. And, for Macbeth more so. He himself recognises that for him repentance is out of the question. Retracing his steps and carrying on are nicely balanced, except that his evil nature now makes it easier for him to continue on the way to ultimate, utter moral degeneration.

With the opening of the drama he appears to be already well on his way to unmitigated evil. But for a comprehensive summing up of the evil career or Macbeth's soul, we must go way back to discover the seeds that lay in his initial demoralisation, before he is brought on the stage. A character is inconceivable in a vacuum and so Shakespeare places relevant hints in the play as to what major traits a certain personality comes to develop before the character in question is brought on the stage. From Act I:5 it is quite clear which of the two partners to the marriage wields the greater influence on the other with resultant shaping of character of either. Before the Witches appeared, Lady Macbeth was there! What Lady Macbeth had initiated, the witches accentuated. But in either case, it is Macbeth's response that is the crux of the tragedy. In view of the above remarks E. E. Stolls' statement seems rather arbitrary:

"Hamlet, like Macbeth, is by supernatural influence involved in an enterprise, little in keeping with his nature. He is led into it." (Stolls 109)

They are both great in their own respective spheres. The evil that he had freely willed under the guidance of his wife eventually killed his human nature. He was killed, desperately fighting, unrepentant, challenging even the Fates to come into the lists with him! When Macduff tells him that he is not born of a woman since he was ripped out of his mother's womb, Macbeth knows simultaneously that he is being killed on a lie from the Witches; but nothing daunted, he fought on to the bitter end: which reminds one of Milton's Satan.

What though the field be lost?

All is not lost – the unconquerable will.

The woman is the weaker vessel, but her potentiality for good or ill with respect to the man is comparatively more tremendous and expresses itself through the instrumentality of the man.

"Perhaps as with some physical diseases (e.g., colour-blindness, etc.), that man must transmit them through the female, the woman in her turn must operate and transmit spiritual maladies to others through the male." (Doncaster 6)

Helped by her true counterpart, she radiates good and the wrong partner brings evil on her, on himself and on the society at large. The tragedy of their lives and of those who come in intimate contact with them springs from the reversal of the natures of the woman and the man in Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. They were ill-mated and could not but ill act and were undone.

"...no doubt, the direction which intellectual development takes is to a considerable extent determined by circumstances, but the kind of mind is irrevocably decided before the child is born." (Caster 50)

A Tragedy of Human Nature

Lady Macbeth's and Macbeth's is a tragedy of human nature. In "Macbeth" we are allowed the great privilege of looking on two souls displayed in their nakedness with the forces of external and internal evil, acting directly and indirectly on them through interaction. They seem to be caught up in the unholy grip of circumstance. Persons and events all contribute to their degradation. Nothing and none guides them to goodness; when, momentarily, they went towards it, in pursuance of their own inner light, which comes from their conscious recognition of the demands of human nature. But as Wordsworth says "the world is too much with us; late and soon" and the good combating forces in persons and events storm in and the light is extinguished, leaving them to their own groping in the resultant moral darkness! For a satisfactory understanding of the causes that led to their fall we must sum up the forces that worked against them.

Among the events which contribute to their moral prostration, the foremost is his marriage with a woman of Lady Macbeth's masculine cast, with his false sense of true valour heightened by an excess of emotion his participation in a war between his weak King and another of proves personal prowess, whom he defeats; and his being made a host of the inadequately attended King in the moment of his giddy triumph, without any mid-alive on his

part in the matter, besides the King's, public recognition that he was the best of the lot, including himself who deserved more than all can pay.

"Perhaps the good Duncan had planted ambition which was to be the cause of his own death in Macbeth." (Sitwell 27)

Severally the part, played by the persons and the events is insignificant; but their cumulative effect is overwhelming, and this combination of the seemingly inconsequential forces is what brings about the frightful event of the moral misfortune of the Macbeths.

"He (Macbeth) and his wife are immensely potent, but their tragedy is a tragedy of sterility. Macbeth is such a man, exposed to exceptional emotional stresses. He is imaginative without the release of being creative." (Stewart)

Conclusion

The Macbeths' is a tragedy caused by the complete reversal of the masculine-feminine constituents of the human personality. Before the witches appeared, Lady Macbeth was there to prompt, direct, and drive Macbeth to "catch the nearest way" to glory. The text is quite clear that after Macbeth had confided a passing thought of his ambition, in Lady Macbeth, she stood by him as the concrete form of ambition.

The poison that Macbeth injected into Lady Macbeth's soul was re-injected into his own with the virility of the contagious disease, moral, or physical. Each ruins the other, but his is the greater spiritual degeneration. After Lady Macbeth, he keeps his eye fixed on his ambition in its two aspects the usurpation of the kingship and the retaining of it within his grasp. Macbeth surrendered his manhood to the woman instead of prompting the wife to surrender to himself; and so the unnatural relation brought about their terrible ruin.

In sum, it is neither the woman nor the man who is responsible for the tragedy in each case; it is the peculiar relation between the parties that is ultimately seen to generate the tragic forces through the enhancement of the emotional factor in their personalities and through them in the tragic world at large. The same men and women, brought into such relations with different persons differently constituted, would live happily ever after.

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