

Macbeth te realms of evil essay



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Macbeth: the Realms of Evil In Shakespeare's Macbeth ' The heavens, as troubled with man's act, / Threaten his bloody stage. By th' clock ' tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp. / Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame, / That darkness does the face of earth entomb, / When living light should kiss it? The natural order of the universe has collapsed giving rise to the realm of darkness where ' Men must not walk too late', since things are not what they seem and evil circulates at his ease.

So we have from the very beginning three nightmarish figures-The Weird Sisters-telling us that ' Fair is foul, and foul is fair: / Hover through the fog and filthy air'. In nightmares nothing is certain to keep its consistency. Forms shift, and what was solid becomes a fluid unexpectedly and vice-versa. Thus, ' The earth hath bubbles, as the water has, / And these are of them' says Banquo of the vanished witches. In fact, Shakespeare uses this opposition between light and night, between appearance and reality as a tool for exploring evil and its corrupting influence on humanity.

This exploration is aimed at providing an answer for one of the most debated issues around mankind; are human individuals good by nature? If not, how does evil start operating in the world? Let us now look at how Shakespeare faces this dilemma: Macbeth and his wife are not inherently malevolent. It is through the witches and their ambiguous prophecies that evil is introduced in their lives. However, the Weird Sisters themselves do not have the power to enact a diabolic course of events; rather, their power lies in tempting humans to commit sinful acts. So they deliberately wait for Macbeth and Banquo, as they wait for all men because the inclination to evil has always been within man since the original sin. In this light, we can infer that the

potential for evil is around us but it can only be generated through one man's moral choice. Thus Banquo, unlike the Thane of Cadwor, can resist their appeal.

He recognises the Satanic origin of the witches: ' What, can the devil speak true? ' or ' And oftentimes, to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence'. In Macbeth's fall into the pit of hell, the figure of his wife is central: once she has been stunned by dreams of glory-'Thy letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant'-she calls upon the forces of darkness to support her in her purposes: ' Come, thick night, / And pall me in the dunnest smoke of hell, / That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, / Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, / To cry " Hold, hold"! Further, Lady Macbeth can be considered as a second Eve. Her function is to ' water' his husband's growing ambition seed for the purpose of mitigating against those forces within him which are in opposition to evil. She encourages him to perform the murder: ' Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valour / As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that / Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, / And live a coward in thine own esteem, / Letting ' I dare not' wait upon ' I would', / Like the poor cat i' th' adage? In this play the woman is not portrayed as a symbol of life and nourishment-her traditional role in classical literature. On the contrary , they are depicted in an unnaturalistic way.

So Lady Macbeth cries: ' Come you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood" or ' Come to my women's breast, / And take

my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, / Whenever in your sightless substances / You wait on nature's mischief! The witches, as means of evil, are also depicted contrary to nature. They are women with the beards of men—'You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so'—, their incantation is a Black Mass, and the broth they stir consists of the disunified parts of men and animals. In sum, these women, in Banquo's words ' Look not like the inhabitants o' the earth, / And yet are on ' t'. Hence I will study Macbeth's inner struggle with his own morals paying close attention to how he is, step by step, eaten up by his unstoppable ambition: at the beginning he is the stereotypical Christian figure placed between good and bad angels—Banquo and his wife respectively. We can see him wrest with the idea of killing Duncan: ' He is here in double trust, / First, as I am his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door' or ' Besides, this Duncan 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'. But, in the end, he ends up being seduced by the side of his wife and, on killing Duncan, he gives rise to his own destruction whose implications he is able to see even before the act itself is committed: ' Thou sure and form-set earth, / hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear / Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts, / And take the present horror from the time, / Which now suits with it'.

After doing the ' deed', Macbeth breaks his bonds both with humanity and nature: he becomes an iconoclast who defies both the laws of God and the laws of man. His voluntary choice of evil, moreover, closes the way of redemption to him: he will end up in total destruction and despair. In

Shakespeare, once evil is unleashed, it corrupts all the planes of creation, not only those of man and the state, but those of the family and the physical universe as well. With regard to the effects of evil on human beings, we can see a Macbeth entirely aware of the evil he embraces, and like Satan he can never renounce his free-willed moral choice, once it has been made.

The Thane of Cadwor, through love of self, sets his own will against that of God, chooses a lesser finite good—kingship and power—rather than eternal salvation. Now there is no turning back and Macbeth has overtly rendered to darkness: ‘ Come seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day; And with thy bloody and invisible hand / Cancel and tear to pieces the great bond / Which keeps me pale! ’. Steadily Macbeth moves farther and farther from God and his fellow men, and his bonds with nature is weakened. He becomes an alien to himself: ‘ For mine own good, / All causes shall give wrong: I am in blood / Stepp’d in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o’er’.

However, Banquo’s ghost returns to him as a reminder that, as man, he cannot easily extinguish the human force within himself, that the torment of fear, the ‘ Terrible dreams / That shake us nightly’ and the ‘ Full of scorpions is my mind’ will continue till his own final destruction. Later his dehumanisation becomes obvious in his unwillingness to live, which is in itself a denial of the mercy of God: ‘ I have almost forgot the taste of fears; / The time has been, my senses would have cooled / To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair / Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir / As life were in’t: I have supped full with horrors; / Direness, familiar to my slaughtereous thoughts, / Cannot once start me’. This apathy will not let him commit

suicide; that way of dying is too honourable for him. He must die in an ignominious way: his head is cut off and shown as a mark of triumph over the ' Watchful tyranny of this dead butcher, and his fiend-like queen'. Lady Macbeth also succumbs to the principle around which this play goes; evil inevitably must breed its own destruction. So she is the first to collapse, since she cannot stand the harm she has triggered: ' Here's the smell of the blood still.

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!! '. Evil also affects the realms of the family and, thus, the relationship between Macbeth and his wife steadily deteriorates. At the beginning of the play their relationship is very close-'This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promis'd thee'. But as the force of evil separates Macbeth from the rest of humanity, it breaks also the bond which ties him to his wife and this is all the concern he shows after knowing his wife has died: ' She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word'. On the level of the state the Thane of Cawdor sets free tyranny, civil war, and an invading foreign army.

The tyranny of Macbeth's reign is set off by the initial description of the gentility of Duncan's previous rule. However, the disorder in the state is the source of its own extinction and the restoration of political harmony: the very tyranny of Macbeth arouses Macduff against him and causes Malcolm to assert the justice of his title. Another relevant territory on which the influence of the forces of darkness can be seen is nature: its order is reversed. A falcon is killed by a mousing owl and ' Duncan's horses-a thing

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most strange and certain- / Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race, /
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out, / Contending ' gainst
obedience, as they would make / War against mankind'.

But this perversion of nature contains within itself the means of restoring harmony: Macbeth believes himself invincible in the light of what a ghostly apparition says to him: ' Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The pow'r of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth'. However, there comes Macduff, the saviour: ' Despair thy charm; And let the angel whom still hast serv'd / Tell thee Macduff how was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd'. So Shakespeare uses the very perversion itself—a child unborn of mother—to overthrow the tyrant and restore the physical universe to its natural state of perfection. In sum, Macbeth is a play about the eclipse of civility and manhood, the temporary triumph of evil and the final victory of virtue and justice.

Going back to the question I brought about at the beginning of my essay—are human beings good by nature? -it seems that Shakespeare, at least in this play, is quite optimistic in this respect: once evil has been eradicated, a radiant hope emerges like a sunrise in the arduous path of human existence. So the play ends with Malcom's speech about the restoration of order in Scotland: ' We shall not spend a large expense of time / Before we reckon with your several loves, / And make us even with you. / My Thanes and kinsmen, / Henceforth be Earls, the first that ever Scotland / In such an honour nam'd! '.