

Macbeth



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Macbeth The passage for a critical analysis here is from Macbeth, Act Scene V11, lines 35 to 59. The passage is broken into parts to examine the internal structure, to see how it moves from beginning to the end. The artistic style of the passage, its relation to the entire play, the literary and thematic significance, and the lasting impression the passage makes on the reader are also considered briefly for a better evaluation.

The main characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear in this passage and through their conversation the complete plot of the play come to light, exposing the complexity of it along with the hidden motives of the characters. The lady here unsexes herself and questions the manliness of Macbeth. A powerful witch in her is active now to tempt and unsex a powerful nobleman, to lead him into his tragedy. The devices she uses make the lines highly poetical. She plays upon words like hope, drunk, dress, pale, love, valour, and coward. She knows that Macbeth's strength is in his valour. His weakness is his ambition, overvaulting ambition. Using the metaphor of dress, which pervades throughout the play, she questions the rationale behind cherishing a hope for which either Macbeth is not courageous enough to fulfill, or it was merely a hope in him born in a drunken moment. Whatever the case is, she cleverly hurls the words like desire, valour, fear, and love and waits for his reaction.

“ I dare do all that may become a man”, answers Macbeth. This answer compels his wife is to resort to stronger spurs. Still harping on the word “ man”, Lady Macbeth now asks whether he was not a man when he had cherished a beastly ambition. She now strikes upon the most sensitive chord of a gentle character by asking Macbeth whether breaking an oath is manly or beastly. Unsexing herself, she tells him that “ had I so sworn as you”, she

would have plucked her nipples from her smiling baby and “ dashed the brain out”. The structure of the passage under discussion here is clear; it is used by Shakespeare to reveal the true character Lady Macbeth. She is shown as a witch, a monster, whose concern as a wife is selfish and mechanical. The passage also shows that Macbeth is dominated by his wife, which precipitates his tragedy. At the same time, the metaphors in this passage reverberate again and again in the play to heighten the qualities of the character in Macbeth. He admits that it is “ better be with the dead” than live a tortured life.

Macbeth, like Hamlet, is aware of the predicaments from which a man cannot escape, if he acts against his conscience. A. C. Bradley (1963) says that Macbeth’s imagination “ is not the universal meditative imagination of Hamlet” (169). The sense of guilt weighs upon him even before he commits the crime. That is why he tells his wife that “ who dares more” is not man. As Cleanth Brooks (1963) pointed out, “ under the weight of her reproaches of cowardice, however, he has dared do more, and has become less than a man, a beast” (210). Here lies the significance of the passage. It marks the downfall of Macbeth, as he succumbs to the great provocation coming from his wife. In the larger context, this passage shows Shakespeare’s insight into human nature. It shows that even a powerful man like Macbeth falls if he goes against his conscience to please his wife.

The words in the passage ironically refer to Macbeth’s earlier utterances and his future deeds. While it reflects the entire plot, the passage not only serves to make it complicate, but also reveals the inner nature of the characters. Its impact on the readers is terrific, particularly when Lady Macbeth speaks like a monster.

Works Cited

Barnet, Sylvan (ed.) 1963, *William Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, New American Library, New York.

Bradley, A. C. 1963, “*Shakespearean Tragedy*”, edited by Sylvan Barnet, *William Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, New American Library, New York.

Brooks, Cleanth. 1963, “*The Naked Babe*”, *William Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth*, New American Library, New York.