

Life tables. would i
had met my



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Life poisoned with a drop of despair is truly unbearable. Spreading like cancer, the feeling grips body and mind without letting one take a breath. This haunting emotion is something that one cannot deal with on his/her own - the incredible tension within breaks the person down, crushing the very stem of what makes a man - the belief.

With his incredible ability to see the truth under the thick layer of lies, Thoreau managed to notice that despair is the integral part of what makes a man. Considering Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, Hamlet and Macbeth, one will inevitably see that Thoreau was speaking the sad truth. Despite the power and the fortune that the lead characters of the plays possessed, they were still seized by the tormenting feeling that was devouring their very self. Hamlet is completely desperate, there can be no doubt about that. Surrounded by lies and treachery, with not a single person to trust in, he becomes an outcast, willingly isolating himself from the society. It is evident that the life with the people who have betrayed him once is completely impossible for him. The very strain of the situation that Hamlet got trapped in is burst out together with his lonesome cry: " O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, Seem to me all the uses of this world!" (Shakespeare).

Torn apart by the conflict within, Hamlet is in the pit of despair, and, like a fox pursued by the hound, he cannot stop being cautious even for a moment. Together with his father's murder, he faces the necessity to live with the traitors and pretend to know nothing, which his grief and despair stems from. Shocked by the lies that his mother and his uncle were trying to feed the prince with, Hamlet seeks his consolation in his friendship with Horatio, yet

even this one true friend cannot take away the pain within: Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio! My father! – methinks I see my father (Shakespeare) However, because of the threat that the prince is subject to, he must keep silent, which is why his despair is silent – as Thoreau said, this is the “ quiet desperation” that is already interwoven into Hamlet’s pattern of life. This splinter cannot be extracted from Hamlet’s heart, and he is doomed to bear this dull pain till the day he dies. However, together with the anguish, there is one more feeling that makes the despair even more unbearable, though it seems impossible, and that is the sting of revenge. Tramped into mud and stamped on with the feet of his own brother, Hamlet’s father honor must be restored, which the prince understands – or, it should be said, feels – well enough.

All pierced with helplessness and rage, Hamlet’s words show clearly that his despair is doubled with the need to take revenge on his uncle Claudius: “ If it assume my noble father’s person, I’ll speak to it, though hell itself should gape. And bid me hold my peace” (Shakespeare). With his hands clenched in fists of rage, the lead character of the tragedy can do nothing; all that he is left with is waiting for the day of his own death to come.

Growing increasingly suspicious, Hamlet becomes the prisoner of his own fears, which only makes his despair grown stronger. Another specimen of how easily people get caught into the trap of despair is Shakespeare’s famous Macbeth. Although the feeling that nudges on the heart of the lead character is caused by different reasons, the diagnosis stays the same –

Macbeth is destined to live with despair in his heart until he rests in peace. Despite the entirely different settings and plot, this play proves Thoreau's idea of a man doomed to living with despair in his heart as well. This is even more incredible because of the dramatic gap between the characters, one of them a haunted victim of treachery, another being a cold-blooded murderer himself. Even though Macbeth is definitely a man of great vice and a traitor, there is still something that makes one sympathize with his fate. What can be the route of this unnatural compassion? Perhaps, the character of Macbeth is much more than skin deep.

One might seek the root of Macbeth's despair in the fear that the crime committed by his wife will finally come out; like a prisoner trying to escape, he knows his guilt, and the guilt presses on him hard. Yet the fear to be caught, punished and dishonored is to the only reason for Macbeth to feel desperate. Considering the following passage: They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, But, bear-like, I must fight the course.

What's he That was not born of woman? Such a one Am I to fear, or none (Shakespeare), one can figure out that Macbeth fears not only the legal punishment, nor being lynched by the crowd. If tracing the roots of his despair more thoroughly, one can come to the conclusion that Macbeth is afraid of the twists of fate. Indeed, the feeling of being lead by the hand of the fate and commit the most terrible crimes as it has been prescribed by the almighty Parcae. Because of the sin that is looming over him, Macbeth must bear this burden for the rest of his life, which actually brings this character closer to Hamlet. However, another fit of despair that seizes

Macbeth comes after the news of his wife's death. This is quite a different feeling, with the air of recklessness and the will to end the sufferings.

As Macbeth learns the news about his wife's death, it seems as if he would gladly share her fate: She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day To the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death (Shakespeare) Indeed, there is a distinct wish to end the vale of life and rest in peace in Macbeth's words. Another trap of despair, this unwillingness to live roots both from the lack of inner strength and from the exhausting lies that Macbeth was entangled in. Like a man who is tied hand and feet, he struggles and knows that he is destined to lose. Like Hamlet, Macbeth finally comes to the idea that life is merely a poorly written play, and that he has already played his part. The curtain closes, and the time has come for the final scene: " Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (Shakespeare). Both characters played their part and decided to leave. Thoreau was right - each man is destined to suffer, bearing his own share of despair till death takes him/her away.

Both tasting their share of suffering, Hamlet and Macbeth are perfect proof to Thoreau's wise remark.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William." Hamlet." The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.

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