

Commentary act 3  
scene 6 essay  
sample



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This extract from Shakespeare's Macbeth is a choric scene, where the two speakers, the lord and Lennox examine the current situation where Banquo was just murdered and Fleance just escaped. The tone of the entire scene is unsure, because it depends how the actors say their phrases. The two characters slowly reach an accord through careful, cautious language.

Lennox starts the conversation with careful and elastic language. He begins with " Things have been strangely borne", the meaning of it starts a suggestive suspicion. Using adjective such as " gracious", and " right valiant", he describes Banquo and Duncan honorably, but not to Macbeth. This omission adds the sense of suspicion to Macbeth because that Macbeth's name is mentioned, but strangely without honorable adjectives.

A sense of irony is presented in the passage that contributes to the suggestiveness of the passage. " the gracious Duncan was pitied of Macbeth, but the fact was Macbeth never pitied Duncan. The irony is strengthened by the contrast that Duncan is gracious and Macbeth has killed graciousness. What Lennox is talking on the surface level is heavily contrasted with Macbeth's evil actions. This contrast is done so that on the surface, the meanings seem reasonable but implicitly, they are suspicious. The descriptions are told in a narrative way, in third person, which provides an overview of events, and a sense of examining the current situation from another person. The third person perspective supports for the irony and sarcasm contained in his speech.

Up to the point where Lennox says " damned fact", the speech is moved in gentle and calm pace, but Lennox turns to suddenness and rage in the

following passage. The word “tear” suggests the violence in ripping things apart and a sense of suddenness in his words. The suddenness is added with other facts of irony and sarcasm, which all suggest suspicion. An oxymoron is presented between the words “pious and rage”, suggesting an oddity in Macbeth because he cannot have both religious feelings and rage at the same time.

The words thralls and slaves have the same meaning, that by mentioning it twice, Lennox stresses and enriches their innocence. This further shows sarcasm towards Macbeth’s violent action. The slave’s innocence is shown when Lennox mentions the slaves of being guilty of sleeping, suggesting that they cannot avoid being guilty anyway, since them being sleeping has the same consequences of them as running away. However, blaming the slaves also contrasts that Lennox never blames Macbeth. This omission to blame him suggests that he has fear over Macbeth, and allows him to show sarcasm towards him.

Lennox’s meanings are shown to be clear, but some meanings are only shown through implication. His question “was not that nobly done?” shows sarcasm, because the spoken voice of done is going upwards. At the same time, Lennox’s speech contains heavy religious feelings. He calls on heaven, “as, an’t please heaven, he shall not—they should find what ’twere to kill a father.” “Heaven” is significant since it echoes the before mentioned “pious”, “peace” “pitied” and “gracious”, these are words meaning moral goodness.

Lennox describes Macbeth using the word “ tyrant”, a word which has negative meanings, since a tyrant deserves to be thrown off, and also the word suggest further murders beyond. But the lord’s response, in contrast, contains rightful religiosity. He mentions Duncan’s sons, which gives a sense of legitimacy. The phrase itself contains a legalized definition that they are the sons of Duncan, but in contrast, Macbeth is referred to a tyrant. The word “ grace” adds the rightful religiosity because it suggests the meaning of manners and gift from god.

There is the symbolism of good verses evil, the former shown by the descriptions of duncan’s sons, who live in grace, and the latter from the word “ malevolence”. The ordinary and domestic work that can be done if work is ratified, mentioned as “ give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights, supports the sense of good and rightful religiosity. There is also a sense of subtleness in “ free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives”, suggesting murder is everywhere, at the same time echoing Macbeth’s earlier’s speech stating “ I am stepped in blood”. Bloody knives suggest danger and his worries. The receiving of “ free honors” is a quality of life, and ties together with the ordinary work that can be obtained. The lord gives out the benefits of having an ordinary, good quality life to show his desires for rightful religiosity, legitimacy in the country and the dissatisfaction for bloody murders. By doing this, he clearly shows anger in his speech, and this contrasts with the careful language Lennox used earlier on.

The changing in syntax in lines 48-49 allows the ed in the word “ accursed” to be stressed. Line 49 is enormously powerful, with the words “ under” and “ accursed” The word “ under” suggests that there’s a weight on top, and

this weight clearly indicate the fact that a tyrant is ruling. Accursed with a stressed ed strengthens the sound, making the blame on Macbeth even more powerful. The scene ends with a prayer, “ I’ll send my prayers with him”, which is an optimist ending to the fear and worry of the country both people had in the conversation.

My personal response to the passage is that the two people first start the conversation extremely carefully, because they could risk their lives if they are not. They are both afraid of Macbeth, but they could only speak consciously about it. The fear is dominating the first part of the passage that it is filled with sarcasm and irony. Both people have their internal thoughts about the current event, and they had been intelligent to speak in such a way that they themselves are not harmed.