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Shakespeare's use of Language in *Macbeth*

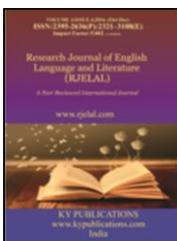
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ABSTRACT

Language is the medium through which a writer projects his thoughts before the readers. The language of *Macbeth* proves Shakespeare's greatness and pre-eminence as a dramatist. The writer makes a fine balance between synchronization of words and emotions. The beauty of words, originality of phrase, striking discourse of metaphor, similes and imagery left the readers spellbound. What makes this tragedy more distinctive is ambiguous use of language at critical junctures. The great warrior, General *Macbeth* becomes prey of this ambiguity and subsequently meets to his downfall. With the help of dubious language, Shakespeare becomes successful in keeping his readers under suspense till the end of play. Duality of meaning in witches' speech leads us towards deconstruction also. This paper aims to investigate all the linguistic patterns and forms of communication that eludes the hero as well as the readers.

Key Words: linguistic patterns, Forms of Communication, Synchronization, Ambiguity, Deconstruction.



Language has a significant role in success of a literary piece. For a writer it is important what he wishes to write but it is also noteworthy how the writer expresses it. To communicate effectively, it is not sufficient to have well structured ideas expressed in complete and coherent sentences but one must also pay heed to the style, tone and clarity of his/her writing. The compactness and lucidity of style speaks about the greatness of the writer and also attracts attention of literary giants. William Shakespeare is such an eminent writer whose works are in the annals of great writings even in the 21st century. There is only one reason why Shakespeare's plays are still alive and read 400 years after they were written; his mastery over clear and powerfully visual language. It is not without reason that Ben Jonson fondly called him "Soul of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage!" (Web)

Shakespeare's dramatic distinction which is universally recognized as the literary touchstone needs no introduction. His genius was flexible to a

marvelous degree. He adapted himself to the most diverse material and seemed to utilize the knowledge in all with equal ease and enthusiasm. His linguistic expertise to create bold and meaningful characters and plot is beyond comparison. V.S. Ravi in his literary review entitled "Written Melodies" affirms:

Shakespeare employs several figures of speech to create a greater musical effect than any other dramatist. . . . Shakespeare makes lavish use of metaphor, and imagery like no other. . . . when *Macbeth* realizes the ghastliness of his crime he cries in guilt: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand? NO; this my hand will rather/ The multitudinous seas incarnadine,/ Making the green one red. . .' one of Shakespeare's method of creating music with language is to accumulate words or phrases like a list. Shakespeare was acutely aware of the musicality of his powerful rhyme." Further the critic asserts "In 'Ode On a Grecian Urn' Keats says,

'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard sweeter'. Great art is no doubt 'sweeter' in the sense Keats means, but written melodies are the sweetest, if the author happens to be Shakespeare! (THE HINDU).

Macbeth is such exemplar of Shakespeare's well constructed tragedy which is considered as a tragedy of ambitions. It presents an interesting amalgam between natural and supernatural. The witches in *Macbeth* are key characters that serve as the impetus of Macbeth's ambition and his eventual decision to commit murder. As the story fore ahead the reader witness complicity in plot as well as in style. The impactful use of figurative language enhances the tinge of splendor and mystery to the play. Shakespeare's frequent use of metaphors comparing something to other things is quite noticeable throughout the play. Remarkable examples occur when Lady Macbeth refers to "the milk of human kindness," and Macbeth, in the end of play talks philosophically about life as "a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage (MB 5.5.24-25)." Although Shakespeare does not use similes as often as metaphors, they are a regular feature in this play. An instance of a simile appears when Macbeth calls pity "like a naked newborn babe (MB 1.7.21)." Further the fight of two warriors is described as "as two spent swimmers that do cling together (MB 1.2.9)." Apart from these, many more examples of simile and metaphors can be found in almost every page of this play. Personification is another weapon which is willingly used to dive deep into human imagination. Personification is used when Macbeth spells that "sleep ... knits up the raveled sleeve of care... chief nourisher in life's feast (MB 2.2.37-40)."

Like an intelligent artist, Shakespeare exploits every possible space in the play to color the imagination of readers with both mythological and Biblical allusions. The Bard of Avon seems to gratify the mythical and historical curiosity of the reader when the sergeant in the play compares a bloody scene of death on the battlefield to Golgotha which is the place of Christ's death in the New Testament. One of the mythological allusions is Macduff's

comparing the dead Duncan to a Gorgon of Greek mythology which could turn a person to stone because of the terror evoked. Several instances of ironical abstractions are observed which are offered knowingly to provide some humor and depth to the play. Situational irony is created when witches predicated protagonist's fate with their delusive prophecies. One of the prophecies of the witches' becomes true which intensify faith and passions in Macbeth. He often misinterprets their fortunes and is put in situations of irony. Dramatic irony is also used during the play. A good specimen of irony is provided when Macbeth plans Duncan's murder while feigning loyalty to the king. This is dramatic irony since while Duncan does not know of Macbeth's plans, the audience does.

Shakespeare uses a lot of imagery in this play to develop atmosphere, mood, and characters. The images are clearly thought out and give and make a certain impression on the mind of the audience. Often, the images foreshadow something in the future. For example, the image of the bloody knife before Macbeth in the second passage foreshadows the brutal cold hearted murder that immediately follows. Blood is a recurring image in this play to denote guilt. Lady Macbeth frets in her sleep of not being able to wash the blood off of her hands since she feels so guilty about the murder. The image of the bleak sky continues through the play displaying the lack of order and peace within the kingdom.

The playwright resorts a lot of symbols to clarify incidents. Light and darkness represents good and evil in the play. The most frequent used symbol is blood symbolizing guilt. Blood is stained on Macbeth's imaginary knife before the murder. After the murder, both, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer from visions of blood. Lady Macbeth is driven insane due to it. Another symbol deployed in the play is 'the raven,' symbolizing ill omen. Often, the raven is referred to as a storm crow which announces an upcoming storm. It serves the same purpose in the play as it appears before the tense scenes of the play. Sleep is another recurring symbol which stands for innocence, purity and peace of mine. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth and his wife fail to

sleep as they have lost their innocence and overcome with remorse.

Use of rhetorical language is another important feature of this play. It is an invincible weapon in hands of Lady Macbeth with the help of which she turns an honest, loyal general into a tyrant murderer. She acts as a guiding force behind the murder of Duncan, the king of Scotland. When Lady Macbeth learns that Macbeth is not going ahead in executing his plan of committing the murder, with the help of rhetorical language she snubs him, challenges his manliness and persuades him to murder. She questions in sharp tongue:

Lady Macb. Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept
since,
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
(MB 1.7.35-38)

Shakespeare's use of language helps to peep into his characters also. His language is formal and his vocabulary 'honour', 'worthy', 'noble' associates him with qualities that are both admirable and kingly while language of Lady Macbeth shows her treacherous, cruel and faithless nature. The language used in soliloquies and asides give the audience the opportunity to see inside different characters' mind, to witness some psychological accuracy, the intentions, hopes and fear.

Antithesis is another major feature of Shakespeare's in the play and deserves our attention. It uses a parallel sentence structure to compare two opposing ideas. Shakespeare is very fond of this device and uses it often, for coherence and to point up the key ideas in the passage. Many expressions in the play like, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." (MB1.3.39), "Look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under 't." (MB1.4.63-64) are adequate examples of it.

Besides antithesis use of ambiguous language is another striking characteristic of the tragedy. The writer deliberately wrote confusing language. He makes use of ambiguity and contradictory statements in order to heighten dramatic interests of the play. In the opening scene the lines "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (MB 1.12), "When the battle lost and won" these statements are

the kind of riddles and suggest a paradox that runs throughout the play. The use of ambiguous language changes the direction of the play. In the beginning of the play Macbeth is presented as loyal and sincere warrior of the king but predications of three witches transform his character completely. After the first meeting with witches and their predictions, fulfillment of one prophecy out of three led him to actions which were violent and destructive, and which eventually led him to death.

Macbeth commits innumerable mistakes due to contradictory statements of witches. The most striking examples of ambiguity is the promises and assurance given to witches in which they tell him that no one born of woman can do any harm to him and that he can never be defeated until Birnam wood moved to Dunsinane. On the surface level, these declarations render Macbeth invincible and invulnerable. Macbeth takes these assurances literally and when he realizes witches' intended meaning at that time Macduff slays him with his sword. Language of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is highly ambiguous when they greet the king Duncan at their Inverness castle. She says:

Lady Macb. All our service/ In every point
twice done, and then done
double, / Were poor and single business to
contend / Against
those honors deep and broad wherewith /
You Majesty loads
our house. (MB 1.4.14-18)

With this announcement, Lady Macbeth states that if all she could do in his service had been done four times over, it still would not do honour to the king. The ambiguous nature of this statement is that it is true even though she has not done everything she could. So she gains king's trust and goodwill through ambiguous honesty even though she plans to help Macbeth murder him.

After analyzing Shakespeare ambiguous language in this play, we can assert that Shakespeare's use of double meaning for a word clearly anticipates deconstruction. Samik K. Dash in his book, *A Beginner's Guide to Modern Critical Theory* asserts: "A traditional reader believes that language is capable of expressing ideas without changing them..., that the author of text is the

source of its meaning... Derrida challenges the idea that a text has an unchanging, unified meaning (Dash 35- 36)." Further, Roland Barthes also argues that everyone is free to take meaning according to his/her understanding. So happens here in this tragedy also.

Thus after exploring the linguistic genius of Shakespeare, one can avow that Shakespeare is for all ages. With life like dialogues, catchy phrases and timeless impact the Bard of Avon has become immortal in his mortal world. World literature in English, today, is greatly enthused by Shakespeare's colossal contribution. There can be literary giants equal to Shakespeare in other languages, like, Aanis Moeen is for Urdu literature, Chikamastu Monzaemon, domestic playwright of Japan Theatre, Kalidas is for Sanskrit, Tulsidas for Hindi, but there can hardly be any who can exceed Shakespeare in English.

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