



Studying *Macbeth* through the lens of Bakhtin w.r.t Bakhtin's *Epic and Novel* and *The Problem of Speech* Genres

Arnab Das

Department of English Literature, Savitribai Phule Pune University, India

Received: 22 Jul 2021; Received in revised form: 28 Aug 2021; Accepted: 05 Sep 2021; Available online: 11 Sep 2021
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Abstract—The main motive of this paper is to draw a strong analytic study of Shakespeare's phenomenal masterpiece of drama and challenge the preoccupied notions of conventionality regarding the fluidity of drama as a genre in comparison to novel's superiority with reference to Bakhtin's two of the most quintessential modern texts that led to the deeper study of the literary evolution of novel along with the ground-breaking linguistic observations in literature.

Keywords—addressivity, genre, novel, speech, utterance.

"Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival." The aforementioned quote of Bakhtin states a strong viewpoint about the liveliness and existence of any subject, which might be beyond the periphery of our vision at some point of time and thus by establishing this line as the concrete base of our study we shall dwell deep into the discussion, which this paper aims at. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is prominently considered to be one of the greatest scholars to have existed in the history of literature and also one of the leading pioneers in the field of literary criticism and modern philosophy.

Bakhtin's iconic work *Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the study of the Novel* is undoubtedly considered to be one of the most influential works in the field of semiotics which not only paved a concrete path towards the vivid study of novel as a vast, unending literary genre but also enabled us to get the enriched idea of literary evolution of this genre through a much broader spectrum of thoughts and visions. The work focuses to differentiate and identify novel as a distinctive and never-ending genre, and how this solo literary form can be envisioned as a replica of the modern world. Keeping this work in mind, we will try to analyze the play *Macbeth* by drawing cross-comparisons of the characteristics of the

novel as stated by Bakhtin with the Shakespearean tragedy to see how far the play can be introspected to break its conventionality as a drama through this process of vivified literary evaluation. According to Bakhtin, the novel is said to be the only genre that seeks to provide a deep insight of the protagonist's psychological progression through not only external affairs but also internal affairs within himself/herself. In *Macbeth*, this characteristic feature is prominently evident because from the very beginning of the play till the very end we see a strong metamorphosed process in the progression of *Macbeth* the character's psychology which makes him go through different phases of psychological being, starting from the glorified description of being a valiant, undefeatable warrior, then gradually turning into a cunning conspirator which eventually leads him to become a coldblooded murderer who often turns into a philosopher through his intellectual dialogues depicting his deep awareness of his being of self-conscious and lastly being a treacherous dictator who goes on to hire serial killers to plot and execute a series of obnoxious murders. This strong metamorphosis of *Macbeth* the protagonist occurs not just through the external affairs but also through his inner psychic turmoil, which he suffers from until the very end of the play.

The next feature that we shall discuss puts limelight on the deep psychological insight of the novel from the perspective of its progression of plot and episodes. According to Bakhtin, novels try to explore a new realm of subjective experience and thus are able to portray the depth and complexity of human consciousness successfully. Such instances of psychological depth can be prominently traced in *Macbeth* the play by taking into consideration some of the most pivotal scenes of the play such as the dagger scene and the porter scene. The dagger scene is regarded to be a resemblance of Macbeth the character's homicide of inner morals and Shakespeare has portrayed the psychological being of the character in a trance situation through a mode of synesthetic vision. The scene tries to throw a destructive question towards the self-identity of Macbeth and tries to depict the psychological bleeding of the royal loyalist Macbeth that is synonymous to the blood of the killing of King Duncan. The sudden ringing of the bell symbolises Duncan's physical death and Macbeth's psychological death. Hence, it can be said that *Macbeth*, in spite being a tragedy, does not fail to provide deep psychological insight alike a novel. A very important feature of novel highlighted in the work Bakhtin states the portrayal of modern day and characteristic features of a modern man in the protagonist which simply tends to bring emphasis on the subject of contemporaneity and realism. The dagger scene in *Macbeth*, as crafted by Shakespeare, tries to portray Macbeth the murderer being stuck in the turmoil of his guilt conscious after executing the coldblooded killing of King Duncan, where he suffers from the infirmity of purpose, as quoted by Lady Macbeth, "Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers." (Shakespeare 2.2.55-56) This state of confusion can be regarded as a trait of modern man, being magnificently crafted by Shakespeare in Macbeth the protagonist. Another striking feature of modernism that can be found in *Macbeth* is the class-consciousness. The porter scene is considered to be one of the most significant scenes comprising of high philosophical and psychological gravity. Besides these, it represents the notion of class-consciousness of the contemporary age prominently through the portrayal of the farmer who is a replica of Macbeth's inner self who hangs himself over excessive greed, thus strongly symbolising Macbeth's own greed towards the throne. Shakespeare in his *Macbeth* has tried to portray and convey some deep influential messages of life through various characters; life lessons through cosmic messages has been prominently found throughout the parts of the play and this characteristic feature of strong connectivity with life is what Bakhtin mentions about in his features of novel. Some of the instances are: the speech of Duncan in scene IV of Act 1 about the betrayal of the Thane of Cawdor, as

quoted, "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face" (Shakespeare 1.4.12-13) represents the inability of man to read one's inner motives through his/her face. The speech of Lady Macbeth in scene V of Act 1 addressing to Macbeth, as quoted, "look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" (Shakespeare 1.5.63-64) clearly mentions the motive of beguiling oneself into good by hiding the bad within, is also one of the strongest messages of the play, depicting the whole course of Macbeth's mode of being throughout the play. Other such instances are in scene II of Act 3 where Lady Macbeth suggests Macbeth to not to doubt their preoccupations and rather suggests that what cannot be cured must be endured, by quoting, "Things without all remedy should be without regard; what's done, is done." (Shakespeare 3.2.11-12) In scene V of Act 5 Macbeth expresses himself as a story of ingratitude making himself appear vulnerable through his dialogues to the readers and his sudden self-revelation and acceptance of reality makes this work of Shakespeare a multidimensional text that can be studied from various perspectives, thus breaking the conventionality of drama as a genre, leading to its diversity and abstractness and providing answers to Bakhtin's negations against its superiority when compared to novel. All these attributes of high complexity, organized, artistic and socio-political mode of diction lead us to encapsulate this drama as a secondary genre, as new and as progressive as a novel, exposing a clear shift from idealism to realism.

Another phenomenal text that paved the path for the widened study of linguistic approach w.r.t speech and language is Bakhtin's *The Problem of Speech Genres* published in 1979, which mainly focused on the study of the subsystems of language known as 'utterance'. The work studies the role of utterance, its characteristics and functioning in our daily life and how the impact of utterance plays a pivotal role in language to broaden the dimensions and perspectives of a literary text. Now, we shall be trying to decipher the text *Macbeth* w.r.t Bakhtin's work *The Problem of Speech Genres* and challenge the stereotypical prerequisites imposed on the genre of drama. Bakhtin has laid a strong emphasis on the study of utterance and its impact on language and diction in different literary texts that help to widen the scope of the study of a text through multi-layered perspectives and if we consider *Macbeth* as the literary text to study through this perspective, we shall be able to find a wide range of new dimensions. Considering utterance, if we go through a deep analytic study of Macbeth's various modes of diction as crafted by Shakespeare throughout the whole text, we can find a multi-dimensional mode of language coming out of the various dramatic devices used by Shakespeare such as the soliloquies, asides and normal monologues. For a

better understanding of this point, let us take instances from the play and analyse them. One of the most important soliloquies of Macbeth in the play is the one that occurs in scene VII of Act 1, as quoted, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well..." (Shakespeare 1.7.1-2) it portrays the transmogrification of Macbeth the royal loyalist into a heinous murderer who is about to execute the most horrendous of his deeds. This long soliloquy also forecasts the id of Macbeth which tends to be his state of confusion and also portrays a different self of Macbeth as a skilled poetic philosopher who consciously takes into account of all his dos and don'ts against his King and also clearly expresses his power of prudence by his vivified imagination of the aftermath. Likewise, the soliloquy in the dagger scene plays a very significant role in the progressive development of Macbeth in the whole course of the play. As quoted, "Is this the dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand...?" (Shakespeare 2.1.33-34) the speech tends to have a great psychological and philosophical depth w.r.t Macbeth's psychological misbalance of morality and the destructive unconscious working within him. The speech tends to have a polyphonic vibrancy as the state of trance of Macbeth leads him go through a series of synesthetic visions allowing him to act accordingly of his situation and overcome his psychological oscillations forecasting his inner motifs.

Coming next to the asides, the asides are relatively shorter but are of great importance as they provide deep insight of character's later motifs and hidden desires. For instance, the aside in scene III of Act 1 of Macbeth the protagonist, as quoted, "Glamis and Thane of Cawdor: The greatest is behind." (Shakespeare 1.3.115-116) tends to highlight the later penultimate ambition of Macbeth i.e. to acquire the throne of Duncan. Similarly, the aside in scene IV of Act 1 of Macbeth the protagonist, as quoted, "The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step on which I must fall down..." (Shakespeare 1.4.47-48) represents the deep hidden desires of Macbeth to get closer to his ultimate ambition not by unveiling them rather by hiding them deep into his wicked darkness of conspiracy. Thus, we can clearly see that the difference in the utterance of speech in both the dramatic devices can lay a huge difference in the portrayal of a character and his/her inner psychology. The role of utterance cannot be neglected in the psychological development of Macbeth's character where the mode of utterance changes in accordance to his state of being. The diction of Macbeth the warrior in the very beginning of the play when compared to the diction of Macbeth the conspirator and the coldblooded murderer, portrays a very different scape of utterance w.r.t language and speech. The conspirator-self of Macbeth is found to have a fearful,

confused and wicked state of utterance whereas the murderer-self of Macbeth seems to have a stable, prosaic and judgemental state of utterance but when compared to the warrior-self of Macbeth, it represents a strong, confident and glorified tone of utterance. Bakhtin came up with the theory of 'addressivity' in his work of *The Problem of Speech Genres* which means the quality of turning to someone and he elaborately describes the importance of this theory and its impact on literature. According to him, novel is the only existing literary genre to practice the wide spectrum of addressivity and this practice has led to widen the dimension of novel as a genre in modern day. However, if we give a closer reading to the play of *Macbeth* we can evidently find the functioning and existence of addressivity, which has been brilliantly crafted and infused by Shakespeare through the character of Macbeth. Some of the instances are: in the scene II of Act 3 Macbeth goes on to express his "human milk conquered" which still is working within himself to develop his inner psychic as a character and the guilt conscious that keeps on striking him every single moment. This speech has been addressed to the readers of Shakespeare to let them realize that, in spite of the heinous crime committed by Macbeth, there still lies an existence of a moral consciousness within himself that keeps him reminding of his deeds, thus making his crime look only like a black spot on his white crystal-clear character. Another similar instance can be drawn from the scene V of Act 5 where Macbeth goes on to show himself as a wise philosopher who speaks about the philosophy of life and death, as quoted, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player..." (Shakespeare 5.5.23) which is an integral part of human existence. The speech is clearly being addressed to the readers by Shakespeare, which tends to symbolise the demise of Macbeth due to his destructive ambition and greed. Thus, the addressivity portrayed through the character of Macbeth challenges the conventionality of language in the genre of drama and brings a new perspective towards the study of drama as a wider genre alike novel.

CONCLUSION

After such a detailed and analytic aforementioned study of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* w.r.t Bakhtin's statements, we can reach the conclusion that the negation of Bakhtin towards the flexibility of other genres in comparison to novel's superiority is not completely valid, particularly in case of a drama, because alike novel a drama too can be looked into and studied through various perspectives with the help of a detailed, analytical approach and this can lead to the demolition of all the preoccupied and stereotypical notions of conventionality, thus giving rise to a new spectrum of

thoughts and visions, that can widen the scope of literature.

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