



Role of Reason and Emotion in Personality Development: An Analysis of Characters in *Macbeth*

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Abstract— This paper deals with the study of the role of faculties of mind i.e. reason and emotion in the development of personality of various characters in *Macbeth*. William Shakespeare, a keen analyst of human psyche, penetrates into the very psyche of his characters and owing to his superb dramatic acumen reveals their intentions through various stylistic devices like dialogues, soliloquies and asides etc. The dramatist seems to suggest that a proper combination of both reason and emotion is necessary for a mature and balanced development of personality. Some characters in the play, who are solely driven by reason, having no concern for emotions, turn out to be rigid and sinister kinds of personalities; whereas, those who are very emotional at heart turn out to be gullible and naïve ones. The mature, flexible and successful characters are those who are able to judge the situation with reasoning and make decisions after evaluating all the pros and cons of ethics, morality and human emotions also. Those, who are able to maintain equilibrium, become wise and successful during the course of their journey. In contrast, those who stick to the rigidity of their perspective fail to comprehend the situation and compromise in their lives and become victims in one way or the other.



Keywords— psychological, stasis, gullible, insomnia, equilibrium perspective.

This paper deals with the study of the role of reason and emotion in communication which eventually determines the very course of personality development of characters in William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Macbeth*. William Shakespeare is a literary genius par excellence and his dramatic acumen lies in the fact that he deftly handles the universal themes in a superb style. The range of his thematic scale corresponds to his stylistic variations, adequately reflecting the aesthetic, intuitive, emotional and rational faculties of his mind. Through the variety of characters, Shakespeare reveals a moral order of deep kind and fulfils the aim of drama in Aristotelian terms which is to “hold the mirror up to nature with the actors not indulging in extravagant passions rather they should suit the action to the word and word to the action and should not overstep the modesty of nature” (1.7). In fact, the very language they use reflects their inner selves, their emotions, motives, reasoning and subsequent external behaviour.

The communication of the characters in the form of dialogues, soliloquies and asides reflect the very facets of their personality. In this respect, Shakespeare seems to suggest that modesty of nature implies an appropriate combination of rational, emotive and intuitive faculties. The characters who are solely driven by reason having no concern for emotions are embodiments of evil, lacking all ethical and moral concerns, whereas those who are merely driven by emotions easily fall into the trap of others. The former kind of characters show a gradual reduction of their communication with the outer world of nature, society and ultimately, with their inner selves. On the contrary, those characters who have moral concerns act logically, tend to develop their own personality as well as establish harmonious social relations. In *Macbeth*, some minor characters reflect stasis in their traits; whereas we find remarkable flux in the personality of major characters.

In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare as in case of his other famous tragedies applies all stylistic devices of soliloquies,

asides and dialogues to reflect the very flux of *Macbeth*, the protagonist and his wife Lady *Macbeth*. At the beginning of the play *Macbeth* appears as a laudable personality comprising unique combination of rational and emotional characteristics:

For brave *Macbeth*, — well he deserves that name,

Disdaining fortune with his brandish'd steel,
(*Macbeth* 1.2.16-17).

He is a “Bellona’s bridegroom” (*Macbeth* 1.2.55), who easily snatches victory and Duncan praises him as a “valiant cousin” and “worthy gentleman” (*Macbeth* 1.2.24), but due to the tragic flaw of his over-ambitious nature, he falls a prey to evil machinations of witches nature. A.C. Bradley considers Macbeth’s ambition as a “fatal flaw leading to his downfall.” S.Z. Abbas also points out that Macbeth as a play “reveals the allures and complexities of evil as well as the negative consequences of giving into the temptations of evil.” His greed plunges him into the trap of witches, the irrational and emotionless creatures and eventually the very fair in his persona starts turning into foul. On the other hand, his counterfoil Banquo tries to remain reasonable and is not swayed by these instruments of darkness. In each Shakespearean drama, we find lots of contrasts and parallels. King Duncan’s innocence and emotional purpose of life gets reflected through his statement :

There’s no art

To find the mind’s construction in the face :
(*Macbeth* 1.4.11-13)

Lady *Macbeth* is an epitome of dry reason – totally devoid of “milk of human kindness” (*Macbeth* 1.5.16). She pleads with the moral spirits to unsex her and thicken her blood. She altogether rejects the superior emotional and ethical aspects of human personality:

And fill me from the crown to the top full

Of direst cruelty: make my blood thick.

Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
(*Macbeth* 1.5.41-43)

Sigmund Freud writes about Lady *Macbeth* that her sole purpose throughout the play is “that of overcoming the scruples of his ambitious and yet tender minded husband.... She is ready to sacrifice even her womanliness to her murderous intention....” (Wikipedia)

Although Macbeth tries to judge the situation that this idea of regicide is shutting all doors to peace of mind :

We still have judgment here: that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which being taught, return

To plague the inventor. (*Macbeth* 1.7.8-10)

Moreover, Duncan’s virtues also plead like angels. But Lady *Macbeth* discards all his vacillations, inclinations and motivates him to keep himself away from all pangs of conscience if he wants to fulfil his aim. While scolding Macbeth, she encourages him to follow her vision of life: She says that for a mother a sucking baby is the dearest one, but she has the guts:

Have to pluck her nipple from his boneless gums,

And dash’d the brains out. (*Macbeth* 1.7.57-58)

Macbeth is utterly shocked at the loss of her tender feminine instincts and emotions and he declares that women like Lady *Macbeth* should do:

Bring forth men-children only;

For thy undaunted mettle should compose

Nothing but males. (*Macbeth* 1.7.72-74)

Eventually, the very step of regicide disturbs the innocent sleep of *Macbeth* and the subsequent guilt results into his psychic turmoils:

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand. (*Macbeth* 2.2.61-62)

Macbeth knows it very well that he himself is mainly responsible for this murder. A.C. Bradley also opines that in “any case the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his own” (Bradley 45). Banquo gives a very wise statement in this context:

And when we have our naked frailties hid,

That suffers from exposure. (*Macbeth* 2.3.111-112)

Macbeth is afraid of Banquo’s wisdom that guides his course and to act in a safe way. But Lady *Macbeth* does not even show any iota of guilt:

Things without all remedy

Should be without regard: what is done is done.
(*Macbeth* 3.2.11-12)

Quite contrary to Lady *Macbeth*, Lady *Macduff*’s sheer emotional perspective lands her ultimately into death. Owing to her innocence and naive sort of personality, she fails to understand the intrigues of society. When she realises her mistake, it is already too late:

I am in this earthly world, where to do harm

Is often laudable, to do good sometime

Accounted dangerous folly: (*Macbeth* 4.2.73-75)

But her husband *Macduff* is a figure of goodness, truth and honour, a child of integrity, who no doubt feels like a man when he hears the news of murder of his wife and son, but

he is mature and sensible enough to transform his personal grief into a significant revenge:

Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;

Within my sword's length set him. (*Macbeth* 4.3. 232-33)

Unlike Macduff, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are unable to channelize their energies in a creative way and eventually there is great perturbation of nature. Evil machinations devoid of all kinds of emotions bounce back on Lady Macbeth. Her insomnia, sleepwalking and ultimate suicide aptly symbolise that unnatural deeds result into unnatural troubles.

Endless murders and countless intrigues i.e. a life of dry reasoning and calculations ultimately thrust Macbeth also into whirlpool of depression and he loses contact with the outer world, i.e. general populace, his friends and ultimately with his natural self and he is quite sick at heart:

I have lived long enough: my way of life

It has fallen into the sea, the yellow leaf: (*Macbeth* 5.3. 23-25)

He doesn't expect any love or any kind of obedience and allegiance from his friends, rather he has to face curses from all. He, ultimately comes to the conclusion about life:

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth* 5.3.25-26)

Wilson sums up Macbeth's last stage: "He is plunging deeper and deeper into unreality, the severance from mankind and all normal forms of life is now abysmal, deep (155)." But being a brave fighter and like a typical Shakespearean tragic hero, he decides to fight like a genuine fighter in the battlefield. His ultimate realisation reveals the sanctity and relevance of a combination of both reason and emotion in life.

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