

# “Macbeth: Archetypal Shakespearean Tragedy”

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Shakespeare's genius has an indefinable energy, something mobile and dynamic. That keeps his vitality undiminished even at the end of three and half centuries and seems to increase with every reading. What Enobarbus describes to Cleopatra is perfectly applicable and true about Shakespeare himself:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale;  
Her infinite variety, other women do,  
The appetites they feed but she makes hungry;  
Where most she satisfies.

His uncontested supremacy rests on the spirit of his equal aptitude for tragedy and comedy, sentiment and burlesque, lyrical fantasy and character study of women no less than of men. Most of his characters possess the vital spark and signs of individual existence. Though they differ from one another in age, in sex, in condition, in virtues and in vices. They possess the common gift of animation and life. He is one of the most conservative writers who have only refashioned subjects already used. Half his plays are revisions of works already acted. All the others are taken from chronicles or tales which he had read.

Shakespearean tragedies are the most beautiful piece of work in English Literature. All are the highest achievement of the creative master dramatist. In writing his tragedies, Shakespeare did not invent only theory of his own views at the same time he followed basically what the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had laid down years back for the composition of a tragedy. Shakespeare wrote four great tragedies Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello. He has written on almost the same pattern. If I examine the four great tragedies of Shakespeare, I will certainly find that they resemble few common characteristics. Shakespeare's shortest and bloodiest tragedy, Macbeth is the story of Scottish General, named Macbeth, who receives a forecast from three inauspicious witches that one day he will become the King of Scotland. Overwhelmed with ambitious thoughts and spurred to do the action by his truly overambitious wife, Lady Macbeth. Macbeth murders King Duncan and seizes the throne for himself. He begins his rule but he was racked with guilt and fear and soon becomes a tyrant. As he is forced to commit more and more murders to protect him from suspicion. The bloodbath briskly took Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to haughtiness, guilt, madness, and death. Macbeth is not Shakespeare's most complex play, but it is certainly one of his most powerful and emotionally power packed ones. Whereas Shakespeare's other major tragedies, such

as Hamlet and Othello, in a quick manner explore the intellectual predicaments faced by their subjects and the different shades of their subject and characters, Macbeth's character tumbles up and down madly from its opening to its end. It is a sharp, shabby sketch of theme and character; as such, it has shocked and fascinated audiences for about four hundred years. It resembles Aristotelian Tragedy.

The model of an Aristotelian tragedy begins with the tragic hero. The protagonist must begin as someone of very importance or fortune. The usual example is someone of royalty. He cannot be a perfect one, though. The audience must be able to relate to the hero, so Aristotle said in the qualities of the protagonist that hero must have tragic flaws that balance his utmost good character. Aristotle usually made this flaw hubris (an all-consuming pride that causes the individual to ignore a moral tenant or a divine warning). These flaws over spark in the humiliation, defeat, and death of the protagonist. This should relate the audience to feel a great pity for the character because he can be related to them, and the audience can put themselves in his position and situation. The play must end in a catharsis. The catharsis is the event of the audience losing their feelings of anxiety and fear and finally reaching a sense of completion after many complexities. The Aristotelian model also follows the classical unities of time and place at any cost to fulfill the qualities of the work.

Tragedies of Shakespeare are playing with mind rather than the body. Shakespeare definitely followed some of Aristotle's ideas, but not all of them or consistently. Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth these are the four great tragedies and best follow the Aristotelian model in it. They are widely considered the Shakespeare "mind" tragedies. They all have a protagonist that has a tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall. In Shakespeare's plays, however, the tragic flaws are less perceptible. Aristotle had a tendency to overemphasize the flaw of the protagonist, while Shakespeare makes it more real and close to the life. This is just about the only thing it has in common with the Aristotelian tragedy though. Shakespeare loved to make a complicated plot with many sub-plots in order to make the play that much more real and full of life to the audience. That's why; he did not limit his tragedies to the classical unities. The catharsis is another difference between their tragedies. Shakespeare's plays do not end with the sense that everything is now over. Instead, the plays end with the audience remaining in apprehension at the complete elimination of the protagonist. There is just the feeling of astonishment at the utter anguish of the play. Among these tragedies of Shakespeare's Macbeth is a great and securing unique place. It shares some features with other

tragedies of Shakespeare but at the same time it has his own distinctive features.

The very first quality of Shakespeare's tragedy is his dominated hero and so it is named after them. In Act II, Lady Macbeth goes in the background and the centre of interest is Macbeth, the hero. In all the tragedies of Shakespeare, the heroes are persons of high status either a king or a prince or a commander. The Macbeth is a commander who afterwards becomes a king. In Shakespeare's tragedy not only is the hero a man of extraordinary qualities but also a brave commander and extreme courageous. And, he has many other qualities of head and heart. There is one great difference between Macbeth and other tragic heroes of Shakespeare. Other tragic heroes Othello, Hamlet and King Lear are noble persons but only Macbeth becomes a villain and murderer.

Now discuss Catharsis, it is an emotional discharge through which one can achieve a state of moral or nonmaterial duplication or achieve a state of emancipation from anxiety and stress. Catharsis is a Greek word and it means purification. In literature it is used for the purification of emotions of the characters. It can also be any other subversive change that leads to emotional rebirth of a person.

Literally, the term was used as a metaphor (beyond physical senses) in Poetics by Aristotle explained the influence of tragedy on the audiences. He believed that catharsis was the ultimate end of a tragic aesthetic work and it marked its fantabulous. He further said in Poetics:

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; . . . through pity [eleos] and fear [phobos] effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions" (c. 350 BCE, Book 6.2) From Literary Devices.

Greatest writer of sixteenth century William Shakespeare drafted two very famous examples of catharsis. One of these catharsis examples is from his tragic drama "Macbeth". Macbeth presents an example of catharsis. The readers of Macbeth generally pity the tragic protagonist of the play because he was stone-blind by his devastative obsession with aspiration.

The tragic hero is another point of Shakespeare to discuss in detail. His all great heroes are man of high honor. Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, Othello is the Military General of Venice and Lear is the King of Britain. Although, Macbeth is the Military General of Scotland, in his position, he is renowned for his heroic exploits and personal valor. He is described as Valor's Minion and Bellona's Bridegroom. Shakespearean tragedy is the story of the fall of such a man. Macbeth is presented, "as a traitor, as a murderer as a base habitual deceiver, as a monster of unhesitating cruelty, a veritable fiend of Scotland.

Character and Destiny, Shakespearean tragedy is not imposed upon the hero. It is the result of his own actions and hero is solely responsible for all that. According to A.C. Bradley- "Shakespearean tragedy character is destiny". It means that

the hero of the downfall is brought out by his own character. The hero is a noble man but he suffers from some weakness or error which brings about the tragedy of the hero. Further, According to A.C. Bradley-This weakness is called "tragic flaw". In Macbeth this tragic flaw is his "Vaulting Ambition". However in his tragedies fate and chance also play some part.

Shakespearean tragedy is the conflict. Conflict is the essence of it. It manifests itself both in spiritual and physical forms. It may be of two types-external and internal. There is external conflict between Macbeth on the one side and Malcolm, Macduff etc. on the other side. But much more interesting and effective is the internal conflict which goes inside the Macbeth's heart, divided between lust for throne and ambition of witches thought to be fulfilled. Ambition is a leading quality in the character of Macbeth. He aspires to become the King of Scotland. The sharp of ambition is enkindled by the prophecy of the witches that he will become the King of Scotland but their prophecies do not create anything now in Macbeth's mind. Only they strengthened the evil which is already present in his mind.

The main spring of action in Macbeth is his ambition. It is ambition in the mind of a man who finally disassociates moral principles from his action, and even suppresses his imagination and sensibilities. Ambition is the cause of his crime and degradation. Of course if Macbeth has been left to himself he might have shrank from crime and kept a clean man. On the one hand is the supernatural soliciting of the witches, who exercise a subtle fascination on Macbeth. On the other hand Lady Macbeth's tongue is lashing him with desperate valour. Macbeth seems to be pushed on by blind forces. This cannot be any excuse for crime. In fact the tragedy turns on ambition. Macbeth could have easily resisted to the solicitation of the witches and the fatal persuasion of Lady Macbeth's tongue if he had not been ruled by ambition. Finally ambition blinded him completely from his moral responsibilities.

Both, ambition and imagination are equally strong qualities in him only. He had possessed imagination; he would not have committed the crime. Only, he had possessed ambition he would have been a hardened criminal and like a hardened criminal, would not have suffered in mind and soul. But he remains divided between ambition and imagination, between temptation and conscience. His ambition makes him commit the crime and his imagination makes him suffer in his soul. Therein lays his tragedy.

In this manner we can say that it is Macbeth's imagination that hastens his tragedy. According to Stafford A. Brooke "Imagination that is his trouble. We cannot understand Macbeth without realizing it". Indeed it is this lively shaping, various imagination continually multiplying new aspects of anything to be done, or that has been done which is at the root of his hesitation, his fears, his outburst of agony.

After discussing all the dominant points with their various aspects I came to the conclusion that "Macbeth", without any

second thought it's a quintessential Shakespearean tragedy of Elizabethan era.  
which model and represents all the attributes of great tragedies