

Psychological Approach to The Analysis
of The Fall of Macbeth

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ABSTRACT

Artikel ini menganalisis unsur-unsur yang ada dalam 'Macbeth'. Protagonis dalam tragedi karya Shakespeare harus seseorang dari kalangan atas, yaitu raja, ratu, pangeran, putri, atau bangsawan yang mempunyai kualitas yang sangat menonjol tetapi tokoh ini juga mempunyai kelemahan atau kekurangan yang luar biasa yang menyebabkan kehancurannya. Pada awal cerita, Macbeth dipuji sebagai seorang jenderal yang hebat dan gagah perkasa tetapi kemudian dibenci karena ambisinya yang jahat. Dalam tragedi karya Shakespeare, selalu ada kebetulan dan elemen supranatural yang membuat dramanya menjadi seru tetapi unsur-unsur tersebut bukan penyebab hancurnya sang tokoh. Ia harus mati karena perbuatannya sendiri. Karya sastra ini juga dianalisis unsur-unsur psikologinya seperti ego, id, superego, dan thanatos serta istilah-istilah kedokterannya seperti somnambulisme dan prematur.

KEY WORDS

Shakespearean tragedy, patrician, extraordinary traits, tragic flaw, coincidences, supernaturals

INTRODUCTION

What is meant by Shakespearean tragedy? According to A.C. Bradley, the Shakespearean tragedy is concerned with one person, or two at the most, namely the hero and the heroine. This hero or heroine must always die at the end of the play. If the hero remains alive when the play is ended, it is not a tragedy in the full Shakespearean sense. Julius Caesar, Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, Coriolanus, Romeo and Juliet, as well as Anthony and Cleopatra, all die at the end of the play. Furthermore, the death of the hero is not just any kind of death. If the death of the hero is a sudden one, it is not tragic in the full Shakespearean sense. (Even the deaths of hundreds of passengers in a plane crash may not be considered to be tragic.) The death must be the result of long suffering and calamity which are contrasted with previous glory, victory, or happiness. In this way, the audience feels how deep the tragedy is. The suffering and calamity are frequently so far beyond the hero that he is unable to do anything about his predicament. Moreover, the persons regarded as the heroes or heroines must be those of high degree, so that the sense of tragedy is felt by many people. The life of a king, a prince, a national leader almost always affects many people. Therefore, when they fall from their greatness, it is a greater tragedy than the ruin of a plebeian. (Compare Shakespeare's protagonists with the tramps in Harold Pinter's The Caretaker or Samuel Beckett's bums in Waiting for Godot or Willy Loman, the protagonist of Arthur Miller's Death of a salesman!) Furthermore, not every catastrophe happening to a

patrician is regarded as a tragedy in the full Shakespearean sense. The catastrophe must involve the inevitable result of the deeds of the heroes or heroines. In other words, tragedy happens not simply because it is their fate to be ruined; rather, it is caused by their own actions. Although the faulty actions of the tragic heroes or heroines are the chief causes for their destruction, there are at least three external factors that commonly heighten the tragic elements in Shakespeare's plays. One of the external factors in the tragedy is the existence of abnormal conditions of mind such as lunacy, hallucination (a psychological term meaning '*perception unaccompanied by reality*'), and somnambulism or '*noctambulation or sleep-walking*' (Webster:436). These morbidities, however, should never be the main causes of the tragedy. They are instead the result of the hero's conflict.

Another external factor is the appearance of supernatural beings. Spirits which send occult messages or witches who have supernatural enlightenment occasionally affect the actions of the characters since there is already something in the characters' minds forming the seeds of their own destruction. These supernatural beings have no power to force the characters into action. They appear to the characters in the play for the sake of the plot. If the supernatural beings are introduced as having compulsive influence, it implies that the characters are destined to have their unfortunate fate, and therefore, the tragic sense will be diminished if not destroyed.

The third factor is chance or coincidence. Shakespeare may have allowed coincidences to take place with the intention of building the plot smoothly. However, he has never included too many chances or coincidences in his plays. Moreover, coincidences occur only when the action is very advanced. (For example, it is unfortunate that Romeo never receives Friar Lawrence's letter. The messenger never reaches Romeo owing to the threat of plague in the city.) So far as the chances and accidents in Shakespearean tragedy are concerned, they add literary value to the tragedy since they make the play more realistic. In real life, such unlucky accidents frequently occur. To sum up, we can with certainty say that Shakespearean tragedy is a story of a person of high degree who suffers from exceptional calamity and eventually dies as the result of his own actions. Although several external forces may heighten the sense of overwhelming disaster, it is always the struggle and the final erosion of character that epitomize the true Shakespearean tragedy. By means of this definition, that is condensed from the Introduction to A.C. Bradley's '*Shakespearean Tragedy*', I propose to analyse the elements of tragedy in Macbeth. The method of the study is library research.

ANALYSIS OF THE TRAGIC ELEMENTS IN MACBETH

Scotland is in danger. King Duncan, the reigning king, is old and feeble, yet he must face an army of rebels led by Macdonwald and supported by soldiers from the Hebrides and Ireland. A country in such a situation needs dynamic leadership. Macbeth, Duncan's cousin, who is a Scottish general, could be an appropriate leader for Scotland at such a critical time, for he is extremely ambitious and valiant. (Remember that unlike nowadays, national leaders of that era needed unusual physical courage, since it was the king who led his army into battle.)

Strong ambition is a prerequisite for effective leadership. Ambitious leaders facilitate national progress. However, excessive ambitions have frequently been the cause of a ruler's downfall. Macbeth is ruined because of his own wickedness and selfish political ambitions.

In what way is Macbeth brave? Early in the play, in Act I scene ii, the wounded sergeant tells Duncan how brave Macbeth is, and how he manages to defeat a strong army of rebels. On several other occasions, Macbeth is also depicted as a man full of valour. He himself tells his wife: *'I dare do all that may become a man;'* (Act I scene vii) Although he is paralysed when faced with the ghost of Banquo, he is not a timid soul. Notice what he says to the ghost:

*What man dare, I dare:
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble.*
(Act III scene iv)

This is no idle boasting since Macbeth's bravery is evident even until the end when he has to face his own death.

Although he seems to lose courage now and then, nothing suggests that Macbeth is a coward. For instance, when he hesitates to murder Duncan, it does not imply that he is unduly afraid of blood or of facing the consequences of being discovered. Instead, it has something to do with his conscience. He can imagine the horror felt by other people when they have discovered the murder because his superego prompts him not to do the horrible deed. Superego is a term used in psychoanalysis referring to *'the idealized image that a person builds up of himself in response to authority and social pressures. Fundamentally unconscious, it rises to consciousness on critical occasions and serves as a kind of policeman of the personality.'* (Webster:993) After the murder, he is also horrified when he sees his hands covered with blood. *'This is a sorry sight'*, he says to his wife. He regrets what he has done because according to his superego, it is a cruel action. Id, ego, and superego are constantly in conflict, *'with the id continually trying to obtain expression of its instinctual impulses, and the superego setting (often unattainable) moral standards. The ego has to keep these forces in the appropriate balance; sometimes it collaborates with the id, sometimes with the superego, depending on the current circumstances.'* (Herriot: 25) However, Macbeth shows no signs of fear of being discovered. He does not think of washing his hands, nor does he remember to put on his nightgown. He even forgets to put the dagger on the pillows of the grooms as he and his wife have planned. He can only imagine the direct punishment from heaven when he could not say *'Amen'* as an answer to the words *'God bless us'* spoken by one of the king's chamberlains who awakes from his sleep. Thus it is apparent that he is not a coward. Macbeth hesitates to murder Duncan because such a deed is against his conscience. In psychoanalysis, it is his ego which makes him hesitate to carry out the assassination right away: *'the part of your mind which knows what is right and wrong according to the rules in the society in which you live, and which causes you to feel guilty when you do something wrong.'* (Cambridge: 1462) What is good in him is his perseverance to achieve his goal. When he murders Duncan, he must face his own conscience. Furthermore, in order to secure the crown, he never hesitates to employ murderers to assassinate Banquo. The appearance of Banquo's spirit later shocks him a great deal but does not restrain him from slaughtering Macduff's family and other people whom he regards as his enemies. He fears nothing, however evil it might be, so long as he can secure his position. After the death of his wife, who used to be his main prop, he continues to fight alone. When he realizes the fact that he has been deceived by the witches'

prophecies, he never acknowledges defeat. Even when death is imminent, he is eager to fight. Committing suicide, as Marcus Brutus and Mark Antony have done, is quite alien to his character:

Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them.
(Act V scene viii)

Macbeth's instinct of Thanatos or death instinct is externalized onto other people instead of himself. Thanatos is '*death instinct, which accounts for mankind's innate aggression and destructiveness.*' (Herriot:22)

Macbeth's remarkable bravery in the face of certain ruin and imminent tragedy elicits the audience's sympathy throughout the play. Macbeth, like other heroes in Shakespeare's tragedies, is a man of adorable qualities. Bravery and ambition are prominent in him. However, they are not used in the right way, so that we feel pity not only for the fact that they have been wasted but also that they have been the cause of his complete undoing. If his bravery were used to fight the enemy or to overcome the problems of the nation, and if his ambition were employed to make Scotland a powerful country, Macbeth would certainly have been an admirable leader. However, the tragedy of Macbeth involves the fact that characteristics which could have been so appropriate to making Scotland strong are used in excess so that they bring about Macbeth's downfall. Ambitions are admirable only when they are altruistic. Personal ambitions become a vice and not a virtue whenever they interfere with the freedom of other people. It is obvious that Macbeth is basically wicked.

Some external factors which heighten the sense of tragedy can be found in this play. First of all, abnormal mental conditions will be discussed.

In this play there are two kinds of abnormal mental conditions, both of which heighten the tragic impact. One of them is Macbeth's hallucination, and the other is Lady Macbeth's somnambulism. Somnambulism is a term associated with '*brain condition inducing sleep walking. It is derived from two Latin words somnus and ambulare consecutively meaning sleep and walk.*' (Sykes J.B. :1092) Neither of the two abnormal mental conditions is responsible for the hero's action. The dagger which Macbeth sees in the '*Dagger Scene*' just before the murder of Duncan, is never introduced as an influencing factor; Macbeth sees the dagger hovering before his eyes because he already has something evil in his mind. Duncan's murder has been premeditated. Likewise, Macbeth's hallucination when the murder is done is also the product of a guilty conscience. For instance, when Lady Macbeth hears the owl and the crickets make a noise, her husband does not. What he hears is something else, as he tells his wife:

*Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep," - the innocent sleep;*
(Act II scene ii)

The ghost of Banquo, which he sees in the '*Banquet Scene*', may also come to him as the result of his own hallucination. However, Macbeth's hallucination is not the cause of Macbeth's action. Instead, it is the result of what he has done. Hallucination is present in the play most probably because Shakespeare wants to reveal Macbeth's inner mental turmoil.

Similarly, Lady Macbeth's somnambulism is obviously presented as the result of her own action. She is afflicted with that abnormal mental condition because of her role in the murder of Duncan, which she cannot forget. It is not a disease of the mind which she has suffered before the murder of Duncan. If that mental disturbance were the thing which leads her to her grim action, the tragic element would be decreased.

Lady Macbeth's somnambulism is not an influencing factor upon Macbeth's action, but her strong will is. The moment she has received and read her husband's letter, which informs her about the witches' prophecies and what has happened to him, she begins to think of murdering the reigning king because in her opinion that is the fastest way to reach kingship. When Macbeth tells her that Duncan will come to their castle that night and leave the following day, her answer is very direct. She says:

*O! Never
Shall sun that morrow see!*
(Act I scene v)

This places him in such a situation that he seems to have no other choice except to murder Duncan without delay as she wishes him to do. When it is almost time for Macbeth to perform the deed, he hesitates. He points out to her that for a number of reasons, they have to call off what they have arranged. However, Lady Macbeth's arguments compel him to murder the king. She calls him a coward. This is clearly very insulting for a general who is depicted as '*the Bellona's bridegroom*' (an extremely brave soldier). She even refers to his love for her, which comes and goes so quickly like his decisions. In order to show that he is not a coward and that he still loves her, he is forced to prove it by murdering the king. Moreover, when he says that he dares to do everything that is suitable for a man to do, and that the man who dares to do more than that is not a man at all, her answer is again very brilliant. She places him in a very awkward position saying:

*What beast was it then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were,
You would be so much more the man*
(Act I scene vii)

There is evidently no way for Macbeth to escape, except to perform the deed because her argument does sound reasonable. That later Macbeth regrets what he has done also proves to us that without Lady Macbeth's instigation, he may not have committed the murder. As Laurence Lerner puts it, '*the ambitious Lady Macbeth refuses to let her husband falter in carrying out her plot.*' (1968 : 159) Obviously, Lady Macbeth has a strong will and she has a final deciding

influence upon her husband in the murder of Duncan. However, her role in the murder has nothing to do with somnambulism.

Somnambulism in this play heightens the sense of tragedy. Lady Macbeth's role in the murder of Duncan is revealed in the '*Sleep-walking Scene*'. After the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth manages to calm her husband by saying '*A little water clears us of this deed*', but in the '*Somnambulism Scene*' she must admit '*all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand*'. The '*Somnambulism Scene*' also reveals that Lady Macbeth has no part in the slaughter of Macduff's family. The following lines prove her innocence:

*The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?
No more o' that, my lord,
No more o' that: you mar all with this starting.*
(Act V scene i)

Unlike her husband, who slaughters the helpless family of Macduff without the slightest compunction, towards the end of the play she becomes repentant. Unfortunately, it is too late. Macbeth's doom is sealed. Lady Macbeth's guilt-ridden conscience allows her no rest. Somnambulism in the play has a function of its own. It shows Lady Macbeth's softer nature.

Another external factor in the play is the existence of the supernaturals. The presence of Banquo's ghost, together with the apparitions and the witches are important external elements in the tragedy of Macbeth. However, since the appearance of the ghost and the apparitions is evidently the result and not the cause of the assassination of Banquo, only an analysis of the witches' influence will be presented.

Macbeth is excessively ambitious and too easily tempted to get the things he wishes by any means he thinks possible whether fair or foul, so that when he hears the witches' prophecies, evil intentions come into his mind. Thus the witches are meant to tempt Macbeth, but they are never intended to have a compulsive influence. They prophesy that Macbeth will be Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and king of Scotland, but they never say how Macbeth is supposed to reach his kingship, nor do they say that the only possible way for Macbeth to get the throne is through the assassination of Duncan. When Macbeth kills Duncan, the witches cannot be held responsible for the crime. Macbeth's own evil ambition is much stronger than the witches' influence. Now compare Macbeth's reaction with that of Banquo when they first hear the witches' prophecies. When Macbeth finds out that he has been appointed Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor, he begins to think of the possibility of murdering Duncan. This can be deduced from an aside after Rosse and Angus have given the message from the king in which Macbeth speaks his thoughts aloud.

*My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that function
Is smothered in surmise,*
(Act I scene iii)

Macbeth gets the idea that the witches' words cannot be evil because if they are evil, why has their promise of success, at least parts of it, come true?

However, he then strives within himself; he wonders why, if he has to believe the witches' words, the thought of murdering King Duncan, which is apparently evil, should occur to him that very instant. The witches' words affect him so much that he is deeply engrossed in his own thoughts considering the possibility of murdering Duncan, so that it is necessary for Banquo to say to Angus and Rosse: '*Look, how our partner's rapt*'. (Act I scene iii) However, Macbeth is so much carried away by his own thoughts that even when Banquo draws attention to his state, he fails to notice it. As a matter of fact, Banquo has reminded him saying:

*That trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you to the crown.* (Act I scene
iii)

Banquo suggests that Macbeth should not believe everything the witches have said right to the end because if Macbeth does so, he might be consumed by his own ambition. He also reminds him that something given to us frequently makes us unaware of other things which follow. Thus Banquo warns Macbeth that the witches' words which promise him the crown must not be trusted fully, notwithstanding the fact that parts of them have proved to be true, i.e. he has received the titles Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor in accordance with the prophecies. Therefore, it is unreasonable to believe that the witches are responsible for the murder of Duncan. The crime is prompted by Macbeth's own wickedness and uncontrollable ambition. As a matter of fact, Shakespeare already gives a clue that Macbeth is virtually wicked; his wickedness is revealed through the witches' remark at the beginning of the play: '*by the pricking of my thumbs / Something wicked this way comes*' (Act I Scene i).

With regard to Banquo's reaction to the witches' prophecies, which say that he is not so happy although much happier than Macbeth and that he will be the father of kings although he himself will not be king, he does not think very much about it. Unlike Macbeth, who orders the witches to explain the meanings of the prophecies further, Banquo does not demand anything else. Moreover, he does not expect eagerly that the witches' prophecies about him and his children will come true although he may be glad of it. It clearly shows that the witches do not influence Banquo. They only influence Macbeth, who is over ambitious.

The witches' prophecies about Birnam Wood do not influence Macbeth's action, either. The witches only deceive him about what the future will hold. They are never intended to decide his fate. Birnam Wood does not really move. It seems to move because each of the members of the enemy's troop carries a bough to conceal the real size of the army. Furthermore, Macbeth's conviction that he will never be defeated by anyone born of a woman is finally futile because Macduff proclaims himself that he was born premature. Obviously, the witches' prophecies are appealing because of their equivocal nature. Medically speaking, a premature infant '*is born before the 37th week of pregnancy or weighing less than 5.5 lbs*' (Webster :790).

Shakespeare generally uses coincidences very sparingly in his tragedies. Nevertheless, we can find some in Macbeth, for example, it is very unfortunate that Banquo should return to the castle when it is already dark so that the murderers can perform their task without much difficulty,

However, whether he returns early or late, his fate is sealed. While noble Banquo is still living, Macbeth does not feel secure. Macbeth has also decided to kill Banquo because the witches have foretold for his descendants a line of kings. His ego is responsible for the decision to kill Banquo. *'The view of human nature, called egopsychology, constitutes a radical change from earlier psychodynamic thought in that it depicts persons as much more rational, and, therefore, conscious in making decisions and solving problems'*. (Hjelle :188)

It is also a coincidence that Macbeth should meet the witches when he is returning from a victorious battle. However, as has been discussed previously, it is Macbeth's ignoble ambition that brings him to his own destruction. This is supported by the following statement *'In Macbeth, Shakespeare is concerned with the corroding effects produced when his protagonist chooses Evil as his goal. The struggle between good and evil angels for the soul of man was a perennial theme in morality drama.'* (Wright: 301). These coincidences are presented only as facts; Shakespeare does not allow coincidences to act as fateful elements.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis, it is evident that Macbeth is a man with sterling qualities. Audacity is his most remarkable trait. However, his wickedness and excessive ambition cause his own destruction. Despite the fact that morbid mental conditions, supernatural beings and several coincidences are to be found in the play, it is his tragic flaw that finally leads him to his tragic undoing. The protagonist of the play is a character who really elicits admiration and sympathy. Nevertheless, the audience desires his defeat on account of his wickedness and evil ambition.

Through the fall of Macbeth, who is *'hungry'* for power and high position, revengeful, and eager to secure his position, 'Shakespeare conveys a good moral lesson. As a human being, however ambitious we are, we are reminded that we should be able to control our Id, namely (according to psychoanalysis) *'the deepest part of the unconscious mind that represents the most basic natural human needs and emotions such as hunger, anger and the wish for pleasure.'* (Cambridge: 712)

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