



Role of Fate in Shakespeare's Tragedy Macbeth

DR. Kirti Jain

Associate Professor- Deptt. Of English, Kr. R.C.M. Degree College, Mainpuri (U.P.) India

Received- 11.11.2019, Revised- 15.11.2019, Accepted - 20.11.2019 E-mail: aaryvart2013@gmail.com

Abstract: *It is obvious that these impressions about fate are seen in Shakespeare's tragedies. On the other hand, there is practically no trace of fatalism in its more primitive, crude, and obvious forms. Nothing makes us think of the actions and sufferings of the persons as somehow arbitrarily fixed beforehand without regard to their feelings, thoughts, and resolutions. What, then, is this fate which the impressions already considered lead us to describe as the ultimate power in the tragic world? The Macbeth's must both die before nature can be restored because, now that they have killed Duncan, they are both disturbances in nature. This is their fate and time will bring it, regardless of how hard they fight it. , he is fighting his inevitable fate. Macbeth also kills Macduff's entire family in hopes that he can somehow switch the cards that fate has dealt him. Macbeth does not begin to surrender to time until Lady Macbeth dies. This is due to the fact that fate has proven its dominion over Macbeth by pressing onward with time. . We should not greedily covet power and attempt to change our predestined fates through evil means. Otherwise, fate will make us its prisoner.*

Key Words: practically, more primitive, crude, sufferings, arbitrarily, beforehand, feelings, thoughts.

A Shakespearean tragedy is basically a tragedy of character. But, besides the character's tragic flaw, there is often a presence of a kind of operative controlling force which appears in the role of another character. It would be comforting if we could easily see the direct influence of a benevolent, personal God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Such, however, is not the case. Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular; and while Shakespeare was writing, he practically confined his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought, so that he represents it substantially in one and the same way whether the period of the story is pre-Christian or Christian. He looked at this secular world most intently and seriously, and he depicted it accurately without the compulsion to impose on it his own system of belief.

Tragedy, within the context of this dramatic world must be qualified by two points; first, the tragic actions appear piteous, fearful, and mysterious; second, the presentation of the tragedy does not leave us crushed, rebellious, or despairing. From the first point, it follows that the ultimate power in the

tragic world is not adequately described as a law or order which we can see to be just and benevolent-- in the sense of a moral order; for in that case the spectacle of suffering and waste could not seem to us so fearful and mysterious as it does. And from the second it follows that this ultimate power is not adequately described as fate, whether malicious and cruel or blind and indifferent to human happiness and goodness; for in that case the spectacle would leave us desperate or rebellious.

Still, the idea that some kind of fate or power controls the dramatic world of Shakespearean tragedy is hard to ignore. If we do not feel at times that the hero is, in some sense, a doomed man; that he and others drift struggling to destruction like helpless creatures borne on an irresistible flood towards a cataract; that their failings are far from being the sole or sufficient cause of all they suffer; and that the power from which they cannot escape is relentless and immovable, we have failed to receive an essential part of the full tragic effect. Many times we see men and women confidently attempting to survive the tragic world. They strike into the existing order of

Corresponding Author

PIF/4.005 ASVS Reg. No. AZM 561/2013-14



things in pursuit of their ideas. But what they achieve is not what they intend; indeed, it is terribly unlike it. They seem to understand very little of the world in which they operate. They fight blindly in the dark, and the power that works through them makes them its instrument. They act freely, and yet their action binds them hand and foot. And it makes no difference whether they meant well or illness. Consequently, everywhere in the tragic world what characters intend is translated into the opposite of what was intended. Their actions, seemingly insignificant, become a monstrous flood which spreads over a kingdom. Whatever they dream of doing, they achieve just the opposite and typically end in destroying themselves.

All this makes us feel the blindness and helplessness of man. Yet by itself it would hardly suggest the idea of fate, because it shows man as the cause of his own undoing, no matter how slight. But other impressions come to aid it. It is aided by everything which makes us feel that man is terribly unlucky. The hero acts in accordance with his character, but what is it that brings him just to the one problem that is most fatal to him and is presented to him when he is least likely to be able to handle it? Furthermore, why is it that the hero's virtues help to destroy him, and that his weakness or defect is so intertwined with everything that is admirable in him?

It is obvious that these impressions about fate are seen in Shakespeare's tragedies. On the other hand, there is practically no trace of fatalism in its more primitive, crude, and obvious forms. Nothing makes us think of the actions and sufferings of the persons as somehow arbitrarily fixed beforehand without regard to their feelings, thoughts, and resolutions. Nor are the facts ever so presented that it seems to us as if the supreme power, whatever it may be, had a special spite against a family or an individual. Neither do we receive the impression that a family, owing to some hideous crime or impiety in early days, is doomed in later days to continue a career of portentous calamities and sins.

What, then, is this fate which the

impressions already considered lead us to describe as the ultimate power in the tragic world? It appears to be a mythological expression for the whole system or order, of which the individual characters form an inconsiderable and feeble part; which seems to determine, far more than they, their native dispositions and their circumstances and action; which is so vast and complex that they can scarcely at all understand it or control its workings; and which has a nature so definite and fixed that whatever changes take place in it produce other changes inevitably and without regard to men's desires and regrets. And whether this system is called fate or not, it cannot be denied that it does appear as the ultimate operating power in the tragic world.

Whatever may be said of accidents, circumstances and the like, human action is presented as the central fact in tragedy and as the main cause of the catastrophe. That necessity which so much impresses us is chiefly the necessary connection of cause and effect. For his own actions we tend to hold the hero responsible. The critical action of the hero is to a greater or lesser degree bad or wrong. The catastrophe is the return of this action on the head of the hero. Another way to say this is that the ultimate power in a Shakespearean tragedy is a moral order. Thus, what a man does in violation of the moral order must be inevitably paid back to him. Even if we confine our attention to the heroes who are not guilty of overtly monstrous sins, even if they are comparatively innocent, they still show some marked imperfection or defect—irresolution, pride, credulousness, excessive simplicity, excessive susceptibility to sexual emotions, and so on. These defects are certainly in the widest sense evil, and they contribute decisively to the conflict and catastrophe.

Shakespeare was not trying to justify the ways of God to men or to show the universe as a Divine Comedy. He was writing tragedy, and tragedy would not be tragic if it were not a painful mystery. Nor can he be said even to point distinctly in any direction where a solution might lie. Good and evil



are both present in his tragedies, first one in control and then the other. Perhaps it is his faithful presentation of these two conflicting forces as they affect man that makes his tragedies so fascinating and compelling.

"Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day"

Shakespeare places tremendous emphasis on time in his tragedy Macbeth. At a glance, most of the references to time that Shakespeare uses seem irrelevant to the plot of the play. However, Shakespeare emphasizes time in this tragedy with good reason. Shakespeare indirectly and directly suggests in Macbeth, in several instances, that time is Macbeth's enemy. This is because time inevitably brings his fate.

Time plays such an important role in Macbeth that Shakespeare opens the tragedy with the time related question of the first witch. To the inquiry of a time

**"When shall we three meet again?" the second and third witches reply in unison:
"When the hurlyburly's done, When the battle's lost and won. That will be ere the set of the sun"**

On the surface, it seems that the witches are planning to meet at sunset, but there are deeper underlying messages in their response to the first witch's question. First of all, the reference to the sunset suggests that the natural order of time is about to be knocked out of sequence. "Time is measured by the sun, and the irrationality and disorder associated with night are also associated with the obliteration of regular temporal sequence" Also, there is another very significant meaning in this reference to the sunset. According to the author of Shakespeare's Tragedies, a compilation of essays written about Shakespeare's tragic plays, this line uses the sun to convey a greater message. "In Shakespeare's day the King was traditionally associated with the sun, and sunset was a typical image for his death or overthrow." Therefore, the reference to the sunset is a foreshadow of King Duncan's death.

Importantly, time is Macbeth's invincible enemy because it is impossible to escape it. Macbeth tries to defy time by procrastinating. When Banquo tells Macbeth that he had a dream of the three witches, Macbeth stops their discussion short. He thinks:

"Not of them. Yet when we can entreat an hour to serve, We would spend it in some words upon that business, If you would grant the time."

After the following chain of events, there is no time to have that promised conversation, and despite his efforts, time has beat Macbeth.

Time is Macbeth's enemy because it delivers, without delay, the moment that he must kill Duncan. This is evident when Lady Macbeth, after realizing her husband is changing his mind, pressures him into killing Duncan by challenging his manhood by telling him, in several different lines, that he is a coward.

In one instance, it appears that Macbeth escapes his prison of destiny. When questioned by his wife about the time of Duncan's departure, Macbeth replies:

"Tomorrow, as he purposes"

Lady Macbeth, now obsessed with her disgusting plan, insists that:

"Never shall that morrow see"

They succeed in making sure that Duncan never sees another light of day, but their disturbance of nature does not change fate in their favor. Instead, they have caused chaos in Scotland, and what should be light and good is now dark and evil.

Immediately after Macbeth kills Duncan, nature is pushed off balance. After the death of Duncan, Shakespeare paints us a picture of disorder. While talking to an old man, Ross states:

"Thou Seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act, threatens his bloody stage. By the clock 'tis day And yet dark night strangles the travellings lamp."

The old man points out that the state is "unnatural, even like the deed that is done." This is yet more evidence that what Macbeth has done has



disturbed the natural order of time. In order for nature to be put back on course, two things must happen. The Macbeth's must both die before nature can be restored because, now that they have killed Duncan, they are both disturbances in nature. This is their fate and time will bring it, regardless of how hard they fight it.

Fate has a tight grip on Macbeth, and there is nothing that Macbeth can do to loosen that grip. When asked by Banquo about the time, Fleance states that "The moon is down. I have not heard the clock." Time is going by this night so fast that the moon has been out for quite some time and Fleance hasn't even noticed. This is an illustration of the strong hold that fate has on Macbeth. While he is dreading his horrible fate, and is attempting everything within his power to conquer it, time is pressing forward. The time has come for Macbeth to kill Duncan, and the moment has crept up on him regardless of his sad efforts.

Macbeth is well aware that he has lost his battle with fate, but he is so power hungry that he will not surrender while he thinks he can have it controlled by means of power. In a jealous rage, he hires murderers to kill Banquo. This is mainly due to his fore-knowledge of Banquo's blood lines holding the crown of Scotland. Again, he is fighting his inevitable fate. Macbeth also kills Macduff's entire family in hopes that he can somehow switch the cards that fate has dealt him.

Macbeth does not begin to surrender to time until Lady Macbeth dies. This is due to the fact that fate has proven its dominion over Macbeth by pressing onward with time. When informed of Lady Macbeth's death, he states:

"She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace from day to day To the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no

more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."

His reaction to Lady Macbeth's death is a realization that time is moving so slowly when he is suffering, and that his life means nothing now. After Macduff finally kills Macbeth, and after Malcolm is made king, Malcolm delivers the last speech of the play. He proclaims:

"We shall not spend a large expense of time Before we reckon with your several loves And make us even with you."

In this line, Shakespeare makes Malcolm a friend of time instead of a foe, which in turn makes him a suitable king. Malcolm makes known his intent to return things back to their natural state when he announces:

"What's more to do Which would be planted newly with the time, As calling home our exiled friends abroad That fled the snares of watchful tyranny...."

This is still more proof that Malcolm is a suitable king and that natural order is falling back into place. This brief play ends now because time has won and Macbeth's fate has finally caught up with him. This tragedy conveys a strong message in it shows that we should not make enemies with time by challenging our destiny as Macbeth did. We should not greedily covet power and attempt to change our predestined fates through evil means. Otherwise, fate will make us its prisoner.

The hand of Fate factors greatly in shaping the fortunes of every literary character. The role of providence is constantly in flux, fate does not necessarily play an active role in controlling a character's destiny. There are extremes of such aid, as seen in the Goddess Athena's continued protection over Odysseus and his loved ones in Homer's The Odyssey. Although without the physical presence of any Gods, Divine Justice plays a prominent role in Shakespeare's King Lear. Ironically, some beneficial changes stem from the afflictions. Furthermore, with the death of nearly every major character, why do the innocent die with the guilty? Some perceptions of innocence are



inappropriate.

REFERENCES

1. Macbeth
2. Phyllis Rackin, Shakespeare's Tragedies.
3. Brooke, Nicholas, Macbeth. London: Edward Arnold, 1963.
4. Elliott, G.R. Dramatic Providence in Macbeth, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1958.
5. Halio, Jay, L. ed. Approaches to Macbeth, Belmont, California: Wordsworth, 1966.
6. Harvey, John, Macbeth, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960
7. Hazlitt, William, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, London: C.H. Reynell, 1817.
8. Wain, John, ed. Macbeth: A Casebook, London: Macmillan, 1968.
