

Dramatic Relief in Macbeth

(5)

Shakespeare's tragedies mark a progressive revolution in the traditional concept of Tragedy. In defiance to the Greek tradition, he has made a greater use of dramatic relief in his tragedies. By dramatic relief is meant changes of scenes or situations which show emphatic contrasts. It provides emotional relief to the audiences. The change of scenes is required to pacify the feelings of the spectators when they are over agitated by intense actions. In other words spectators' emotions are regulated so that they may not be disgusted. A good play is like a good feast where different dishes provide a rich variety of tastes and together give a delightful satisfaction.

Shakespeare's usual practice is to introduce a fool or a jester to provide comic relief. The babblings of the fool, in King Lear, and irreverent jokes of the grave diggers in Hamlet, are successful dramatic relief. Macbeth is also full of dramatic relief. There are comic, ironic, supernatural and other relieving scenes. Relief is also provided by non-comic scenes. They are only set in the lower or higher key ^{to} that ^{which} ~~these~~ precede or follow them. For example, the domestic happiness in the dialogues of Lady Macbeth and her son is contrasted with one of Macbeth's bloody resolutions.

The very first scene opens with the entrance of Witches and creates an atmosphere of horror and suspense. The same suffocating atmosphere continues till the end of the 5th scene. The audiences are emotionally tensed by the Witches, battles and murderous resolution of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare enjoys a thorough knowledge of human nature. That is why he introduces the 6th scene with a variation that provides dramatic relief from the preceding ones. In this scene, the audiences pause with Banquo, Duncan and others who are about to enter Macbeth's castle. It is poetic, one of sweetest songs that tell us saddest thoughts.

M.A. HAQUE

It is full of sweet summer images, contrasted with strange incantation of the Witches and murderous thoughts of Macbeth. Banquo sings lyrically:-

"This guest of Summer M.A. HAQUE

The temple hunting martlet does approve
By his loved mansionary, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here."

The murder of Duncan creates an atmosphere of unbearable horrors. So, the next scene is intended to relieve the audiences from the overwhelming sense of disgust. Shakespeare introduces the Porter, who seems to be a gate keeper of Hell. His speech, though it is an ironic comment on human nature, produces an effect of bitter mirth and pungent laughter. See the ironical murmur of the Porter:-

"Knock! knock! knock! who's there? Faith here's an English tailor come hither for steeking out of a French hose. Come in tailor here you may roast your goose."

The whole of the third scene is charged with a kind of hectic movement. A number of characters enter and depart that gives an impression of rush, speed and horrifying excitement. At the discovery of Duncan murder. Then the 4th scene comes as a resting space in which the audience survey what has happened. It seems as if the audience are brought out of the suffocating atmosphere of the castle to breathe fresh air and listen to the people who are not involved in the ghastly deed. The old man comments on the murder as a simple citizen:-

"It is unnatural

Even like the deed that's done On Tuesday last
A falcon, lowering in her pride of place
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and killed."

The ghosts of Banquo and hallucination of Macbeth produce

(7)

a sense of terror from which a relief is sought. The wit and banter in Lennox's speech is intellectually relishing and emotionally relieving. A similar relief is provided in scene II Act IV. Through the domestic discussion of Lady Macduff and her little son. Besides the specific scenes, there are smaller touches of poetry and lyricism that also serve the same purpose.

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Thus, Shakespeare is an eminently practical dramatist who makes his audiences bear the effect of terrible horrors by providing dramatic relief whenever required.