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Soliloquies in Macbeth

The use of Soliloquy is very popular dramatic device with Shakespeare. He uses it very frequently and with great dramatic effect. Soliloquy is a kind of dialogue with the self. Etymologically it means “a speaking while one is alone”. In literary art , it is the solitary oral expression of one speaker. In drama it is used to reveal the innermost thoughts of the soliloquiser, or to convey to the audience information or moods not obtained either from the action or the dialogue. It is in the soliloquy that the speaker expresses his innermost feelings, his moral and spiritual torments, his emotional crises or his hidden secrets and line of action. Without the use of soliloquy, the inner or spiritual tragedy, which produces the real tragic effect , can not be expressed. Shakespeare uses this device of soliloquy very effectively and for the same purpose.

Soliloquies of Macbeth -

Macbeth’s first soliloquy comes immediately after his meeting with the three witches. Two of these prophecies – his becoming of the thane of Glamis and thane of Cowdor – are immediately fulfilled. Macbeth had long been thinking of capturing the throne of Scotland, but he had never given expression to this hidden thought either in words or action. The witches third prophecy seemed to have exposed his guilt in the presence of Banquo. Macbeth finds himself in acute mental torture. The prophecy is both good and ominous. A thought flashes across the mind of Macbeth that the throne could be captured immediately by murdering the old king. This thought of murdering the king shatters his mind and nerves. The very thought of murder makes his hair stand erect. His heart beats against his ribs. The horrible imaginings following the murder of the king frighten him more than even the actual deed of murder. All these sentiments are expressed by Macbeth in his first soliloquy.

Macbeth's second soliloquy occurs at the time when he meets with king Duncan after getting victory in 'Fife'. He feels that his guilty thoughts are peeping through his eyes and Duncan is reading them. Therefore he wishes to hide himself behind the thick veil of darkness. So he says –

*“Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires ;
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.”*

The third soliloquies reveals to us that Macbeth's heart is in between guilt and prick of conscience, between loyalty and ingratitude and between present fears and future consequences of the deed of murder. Here he is thinking upon the different consequences of the murder. If the murder of king were the end of all affair and were not be followed by evil consequences, he would do the deed and capture the throne of Scotland. But he knows that the murder can never be escaped from the consequences and punishment for his deed. Macbeth knows it very well that he should be loyal to the king as a trusted general and subject, when the king comes to his castle as a guest. Under these conditions, he should rather protect the king against the murders rather than hold the dagger himself. He himself says :

*“ I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on the other side.”*

Macbeth's last soliloquy comes a little before his final battle. It shows his real life and feelings . He has been completely disillusioned. All his hopes have been shattered. In spite of all his efforts he could not make himself secure on the throne. All his friends start deserting him one by one. He gets neither love nor respect, neither obedience nor loyalty. He repents that he followed a bloody career only to get dishonor and disillusionment in the end :

*“I have lived long enough : my way of life
Is fallen into sear, the yellow luf ;
And that which should accompany old age ,
As honour, love obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have ; but in their stead,*

*Curses, not loved but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor would fain deny, and dare not.”*

Lady Macbeth’s Soliloquy : Lady Macbeth also speaks a few soliloquies. It is these soliloquies due to which critics call her the fourth witch. The first soliloquy of Lady Macbeth is found just after receiving the news that the king Duncan is coming in her castle. Macbeth has already written her what the witches have prophesied. At once the idea of murder comes to her mind also. She knows that her husband, Macbeth, wants to be the king of Scotland but he is too noble to accept the wrong means to get his goal. She eagerly waits for her husband so that she may encourage and strengthen his otherwise tender and timid spirits to undertake the hazardous project. So she says :

“Hie thee hither.
That I may pour my spirit in thin ear,
And chastises with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown’d withal.

Further she invokes the powers of sin and guilty to dry up all womanly tender feelings in her heart, and fill her from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty. She also invokes the powers of darkness to throw around her a thick veil of darkness so that no eye should see the dagger in her hand. This soliloquy reveals that lady Macbeth is a monster in the human shape. She is as cruel and merciless and as mischievously blood-thirsty as the witches.

Banquo’s Soliloquy : Banquo is usually supposed to be very noble, honest and virtuous . But this is not the whole truth about Banquo. He is also guilty of unlawful ambition. His soliloquies proves it. The witches had forecasted that his children will be the heirs of the throne after Macbeth. H knows that Macbeth had killed the king, but he holds his tongue on purpose. He says :

“Thou has it now : king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and I fear,
Thou playd’st most foully for ’t : yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
But that myself should be the root and father

Of many kings.”

This statement of Banquo shows the inner feeling of Banquo. Thus, Soliloquies reveal the innermost working of the minds of the characters in a play. They constitute a kind of spiritual autobiography. Without them the character’s inner personality would remain closed to us, and their tales would remain only skin-deep.

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