

STUDY MANUAL FOR ENGLISH HONOURS SEM2

BANQUET SCENE (3, iv) *Macbeth*

- The Banquet scene located in the central position in the play marks its dramatic CLIMAX.
- The scene hinges on the theme of APPEARANCE and REALITY. The gruesome reality of Macbeth as a cold-blooded conspirator whispering secretly in a dark corner with a murderer shatters the illusion of harmony and goodwill with stupendous IRONY.
- A banquet symbolizes concord and social harmony. A royal banquet is also meant to be a show of the power and prestige of the monarch. The Macbeths had intended the banquet to be a formal stamp of their sovereign ascendancy over the Scottish nobility.
- The bright and spectacular scene stands as a stark contrast to the dark murder and witchcraft scenes.
- The grand entry of the royal dignitaries and their hierarchical sitting arrangement represent order and decorum, reminiscent of the banquet hosted by Duncan earlier. The courteous greetings of the hosts, the collective formality of the guests, terms like "welcome", "mirth", "gentle weal" distributed throughout the scene, create an aura of festivity and benevolence. Repeated use of food imagery with reference to nourishment and digestion compounds this effect.
- But the entry of the Murderer, the "best of cut-throats" wearing blood on his face as a mark of his profession taints the sanctity of the occasion. Detailed references to the gashes on Banquo's body and other blood imagery strikes home the reality that a banquet hosted by murderers is doomed to be a failure.
- The effect of horror is enhanced by the use of SUPERNATURAL element. Spectral visions are a characteristic feature of the Revenge Tragedy tradition. But Shakespeare deliberately keeps this ambiguous- like the air-borne dagger in the Murder scene, the Ghost could also be creation of Macbeth's paranoid imagination. The Ghost occupies Macbeth's chair of state, shakes his gory locks at him and cannot be seen by anyone else. Its presence ironically converts the banquet hall into the "maws of kites".
- The BLOOD MOTIF in the play also represents genealogy. As Macbeth learns about Fleance's escape, he squirms with fear from the "worm" that carries the "venom" of the "grown serpent". The scene thus anticipates Macbeth's ultimate overthrow by Malcolm, the son of Duncan. It is also a flattering tribute to the reigning British monarch James 1, who was a direct descendant of Fleance.
- The scene opens with Macbeth at the peak of his power, graciously hosting the banquet. But very quickly his towering personality starts to shrink as he feels "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in / To saucy doubts and fears". He loses his composure, cowers before an invisible presence, shouts at his nobles and makes a total fool of himself. The apparent degeneration in the great hero marks the beginnings of his tragic downfall and arouses PITY and TERROR.
- The crisis however brings out the REALITY of the protagonist. Fear hardens him. At the end of the scene he emerges out as a heroic fighter who consciously solicits for

the help of the WEIRD SISTERS to ensure “mine own good”. Like the typical RENAISSANCE MAN he is willing to override prevalent ethical norms in order to achieve his magnificent vision. the scene underlines his metamorphosis into a ruthless killing machine who diabolically nurtures his secret plan of eliminating the Macduff family even as he comments with self mockery: “We are yet but young in deed.”

- Macbeth’s decision to ally with the Witches is an error of judgement [HAMARTIA] which triggers his tragic downfall. Since it is his conscious choice , Macbeth here is carving his own destiny.
- Lady Macbeth makes her last glorious entry in the drama .She plays her role as the queen, hostess and wife with magnificence. She shows great presence of mind in trying to save the situation, reminding Macbeth about his duties as the host, reprimanding him for his unsocial behavior and soothing his ruffled nerves .In all appearances she is truly the serpent beneath the flower.
- Ironically this show of strength is only a façade and the bubble bursts in the Sleepwalking scene which later reveals her inner fears and suspicions about Macbeth which she desperately keeps locked up to herself over here.
- With great irony the dramatist spatters the scene with images of disease, filth and death emphasizing on the evil that has corrupted Scotland. Macbeth has a “strange infirmity”;he is “unmanned in folly”. He is deserted by the “season of all natures, sleep”. The ghost glares at him with lifeless eyes and marrowless bones.
- Ultimately the banquet becomes a total travesty .With its discord and mayhem it becomes just like the ghost –an “unreal mockery “,”a horrible shadow “ and has to be called off.

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