

Use of Images and Symbols in MACBETH

Images are the very life, blood of poetry since they comprise the non-abstract or the sensuous elements in poetry. Unlike the plays of a prose playwright like Shaw, the poetic dramas of Shakespeare abound in images. These are predominantly visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile suggesting a kind of symbolic kinship. The plays of Shakespeare in particular are saturated with one kind or another of similar images or 'clusters' such as of light and darkness in Romeo and Juliet, of animals in King Lear and of disease in Hamlet. In Macbeth, the images are more varied as pointed out by Caroline Spurgeon which include blood, darkness, storm, disease, clothes and children.

The contrast between the images ~~of~~ of light and darkness is part of the general antithesis between good and evil in Macbeth. Since, evil predominates, Macbeth's world must highlight a dark and desolate world, where "good things of the day begin to droop and drowse." Apart from Macbeth, his wife who is bound in one chord of sympathy with the witches makes a plea symbolizing evil and darkness - "Come thick night, / And pall thee in the darkest smoke of hell!" Thus both Macbeth and his wife make and association between darkness and black desires throughout the play.

The invasion of darkness in the natural world paralleled ~~world~~ by the spread of blood in the human world. This blood is not healthy or the vital blood that flows in the veins but it is the blood which is split with the murder of innocent men. Macbeth sees a blood-soaked dagger and Lady Macbeth is amazed that Duncan had "so much blood in him". Macbeth feels that his bloody hand will make the "multitudinous seas incarnadine", and Lady Macbeth who had earlier thought that "a little water" clears the marks of blood admits later that "all the perfumes of Arabia" will not obliterate its trace. Rightly did Kolbe point out in Shakespeare's Way that there are more than a hundred images of blood in the play.

The images of storm and of disease reinforce the impression that evil affects both the external and internal world of man, both the microcosm and the macrocosm. Prior to the crime of Duncan's murder, the witches only speak of tempests, but these tempests become actualized after his death. Trees and churches, chimneys and castles are blown down and abnormality reigns in nature. A missing owl preys upon the soaring falcon, horses devour each other and obscure birds clamour through the night. The

image of disease which find expression in the conversation between Malcolm and Macduff prior to their assault upon Macbeth reflect both the evil which is a disease and as Kenneth Muir points out, "Macbeth himself, who is the disease from which the country suffers."

The image which is particular to Macbeth is that of 'ill fitting' clothes, first pointed out by Caroline Spurgeon as showing Macbeth to be 'a poor, vain, cruel, treacherous creature, snatching ... at place and power he is utterly unfitted to possess' (Shakespeare's Imagery and what it tells us). Macbeth himself expresses surprise at being called the thane of Cawdor - "Why do you dress me / In borrow'd robes?" Others too realize that he is unfit to be a King, and that kingship conferred upon him as "a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief."

But Macbeth's world of evil is finally overcome by ^{that of} re-generation and of innocent babes. The regenerative world is that of vegetation and so Macbeth's defeat with the coming of Birnam wood to Dunsinane is appropriate. Rightly did Wilson Knight points out, ~~the~~ "the sovereign flower is bright-deeded in the bright-dawn, and the murk melts in the mists of the morning. the child is crowned and the tree of life in his hand."

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