

Sleep Walking Scene (Act V, Sc. i)

The famous sleep-walking scene, which is a stroke of creative imagination, gives us an inkling into the real woman that lay hidden into the assumed mask of cruelty. The intense emotional disturbances Lady Macbeth has been through, have exhausted her nervous energy and she has suffered a complete mental breakdown. Her conscience has become a source of torment to her, and she is afraid of darkness.

The resolute, restless, masterful lady who was almost the ~~impression~~ impersonation of ruthless and undaunted ambition walks at last in sleep, mumbling incoherently the details of the crime. She rubs her hands and ejaculates: "out, damned spot!" She thinks of the blood stained hour of the murder. Furthermore, she chastizes her husband for his refusal to go back to the chamber. "Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier and a wife?" Then she mentions of the Thane of Fife and thinks of his wife. She painfully realizes that all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten her little hand. Here, the perfumes stand for the moral order and of course she means to suggest that the stains and stinks of her hand have infected her soul. Thus, at this stage of her life, external and internal darkness are intermingled and she stands on the border land of the conscious and the unconscious. This scene signifies the catastrophe of Lady Macbeth because she realizes after so much of nightmarish memories that "what's done cannot be undone."

contains the highest degree of anguish and horror from which she cannot disentangle herself.

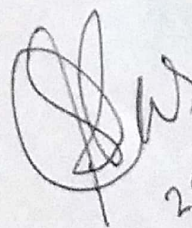
Verily suggests that the three main features of Lady Macbeth's delirium may be characterised as -

- 1) As the mere reproduction of the horrible scenes she has passed through.
- 2) The struggle to keep her husband from betraying himself.
- 3) The uprisings of her feminine nature against the soullessness of the deed. And we may add her fear of after death: "Hell is murky".

The scene is in prose as mad scenes in Shakespeare generally are. The scene is saturated with emotion and the idiom of emotion is undoubtedly verse. This prose medium of the scene in the poetic drama signifies a moral torpor in the heroine. Further, the scene is charged with irony, when Macbeth speaks of the voices whispering to him that "Macbeth doth murder sleep", Lady Macbeth does not even understand what is meant by it, she cannot anticipate that she has murdered sleep. It is here that she makes an ironic commentary on her sense of complacency just after this slaughter. To Macbeth's remorseful ravings that all great Neptune's ocean will not wash the blood of his hands, she cynically retorts:

"a little while clear us of this deed".
This scene exposed with grim irony
the hollowness of her earlier belief.

Thus, the 'Sleepwalking Scene'
one of the most terrible scenes in
Macbeth - makes an indelible impression
upon the audience by virtue of its
awe-inspiring quality. By its psychological
revelatory quality that makes the
readers exactly part with the horrid
waves in the mind of Lady Macbeth.
"For the first & last time in
Literature", says Grierson, "Sleepwalking
is used with the great and terrible
dramatic effect." It goes to the
credit of Shakespeare that he brings
out the sufferings of Lady Macbeth in
this scene and thus redeems her in
the mind of the audience.


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