

Significance of the Banquet Scene:

The Banquet Scene which is nothing but the coronation feast of Macbeth marks the climax or crisis of the play. Macbeth, whose nefarious schemes of rising to kingship through the murder of the legitimate and reverend Duncan has so far proceeded in a facile manner, has in fact attained his dreams. He has now also designed the murder of another man, who might, according to the prophecies of the witches supplant his children. It is in the Banquet Scene that the first stumbling block to Macbeth's meticulously planned scheme occurs. Not only does Banquo's son Fleance escape the murderers hired by Macbeth, but Macbeth himself kills when he has the vision of the ghost of Banquo in the midst of the ceremonial feast.

The moment the guests sit down for the feast, the murderer approaches Macbeth to inform him about the death of Banquo and the escape of Fleance. When the murderer affirms that he has cut Banquo's throat, Macbeth is pleased. But when Macbeth came to know about Fleance's escape, he describes his condition in metaphorical expression. According to him, from this state now he is "Carved, cribb'd, confin'd and bound in / To cruel doubts and fears." ^{Further} Now, the appearance of Banquo's ghost in the Banquet scene disturbs Macbeth because the ghost is visible to none except him. The presence of the ghost unnerves him —

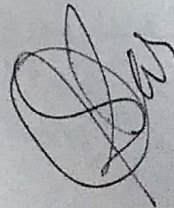
"Thou canst not say I did it, never shake thy gory locks at me." In this context, when Lady Macbeth taunts him with not being 'man' enough, Macbeth's assertion that he is indeed man is also emphatic - "Ay, and a bold one that dares look on that which might appal the devil." So far as the ghost of Banquo is concerned, Shakespeare has presented it as the reality, and that the stage direction and Forman's account reveal that the ghost was presented on the Elizabethan stage to be seen by the audience.

The Banquet Scene is also important as the revelation of the character of Lady Macbeth. The scene comprises Lady Macbeth's last act of fortitude before she wanes away through the rest of the play. In the sudden emergency of the Banquet scene, she makes a prodigious and magnificent effort to save her husband from an open desecration. She adopts the dual strategy to taunting her husband of womanliness and placating the disquiet among the peers.

Although many critics are of the opinion that the ghost of Banquo is only a product of Macbeth's hallucination and that its nature is akin to the "air drawn dagger" which Macbeth has already seen, a touch of reality regarding the ghost has also been pointed out. But what is more important is that, the presence of the ghost clarifies the fact that Macbeth's crime is essentially

an act of disorder. That is why, the Banquet scene which begins with the social concord of feast and friendship is concluded with the discord of death, destruction and chaos. Rightly did Wilson Knight point out regarding the ghost of Banquo that it "smashes life ~~forms~~ with phantasms of evil and guilt, creating chaos of order and reality, dispersing a social unit" (The milk of concord).

Thus the Banquet scene of the play works like "nemesis" in case of Macbeth, adds a touch of supernaturalism by means of the ghost of Banquo and also throws some light to analyse the character of Lady Macbeth. So, the coronation feast in Macbeth, ^{appropriately} serves as a turning point within the texture of the play.


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