Macbeth

Banquet Scene

There are scenes in Macbeth, one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare, which does not only acts as a pivotal point of the drama, but also they are some of the best known scenes that cast a permanent impression on our mind. Act III, sc iv is such a scene of Macbeth. This particular scene is famous as ‘Banquet scene’ as it is set against a background of banquet which was given in honour of Banquo and meant to celebrate the crowing of Macbeth.

In this scene we see Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are welcoming the guests to the feast, one of the Murderers arrives and tells Macbeth of the death of Banquo and the escape of Fleance. Macbeth turns back to the table and comments on Banquo’s absence. Banquo’s ghost enters and occupies Macbeth’s place; he is visible only to Macbeth. Lady Macbeth tries to calm her husband and keep control of the situation but after the ghost has disappeared and Macbeth seems to be recovering, suddenly, again on Macbeth’s mentioning his name, Banquo’s ghost reappeared and Macbeth is rendered helpless. After the ghost has gone for the second time, Lady Macbeth brings the feast to a hurried end. Macbeth informs Lady Macbeth that he intends to visit the Witches and press on with eliminating all opposition.

This, the half way scene of the play, is a central scene in the analysis of Macbeth’s career in crime. The newly established King holds a lavish feast to show his authority and at the beginning of the scene we have the ceremony of guest and hosts and civilized order interrupted by the sly appearance of Macbeth’s hired killer. The façade of decency has a murderous heart and the appearance of Banquo’s ghost is the harsh reminder of Macbeth’s wickedness. The ghost is the externalized form of Macbeth’s guilt and fear of discovery, invisible to the others but a terrifying reality to Macbeth himself. His wife loyally and resourcefully tries to protect him and shake him out of his obsession but, as she says, Macbeth is ‘quite unmanned in folly’. Macbeth, a man celebrated for his courage in battle, cringes before the creation of his troubled conscience. When the ghost and the guests have gone, Macbeth’s mind is not restored to calmness or repentance or even full trust in his wife. He can seen now way out of his dilemma but by crushing everyone around him who questions his will. Fate, including the Witches, must be bullied into disobedience. This is the final appearance of a sane Lady Macbeth. Her iron self-control, loyalty to her husband, organizing skill, apparent callousness—all evident in this scene—are qualities she possesses, but, as we shall see, she has paid dearly for them.

This scene is particularly important both for Macbeth’s character and Lady Macbeth’s character. In the beginning of the scene Macbeth’s desire for the order is evident from his pleasure of having both the sides of the table equal. “Both sides are even”. But as we say earlier, immediately the decorum of feast is broken by the appearance of the murderer. Now we see Macbeth is more practical minded. He is well aware that the escaping of Fleance will pose as a threat. And he is more dangerous than Banquo.
There the grown serpent lies; the worm, that's fled,

Hath nature that in time will venom breed,

No teeth for th’ present.

The animal imagery is evident. We notice that the more Macbeth wades in crime, more he utters the gems of poetry. When the feast goes awry Lady Macbeth assumes power, for the last time, and instructs “Gentlemen, rise; his Highness it not well.”

The ghost of Macbeth is really a problem for the later stage managers and the directors of the play. The dilemma is whether to show the ghost or not. We have to remember that the ghost is only scene by Macbeth. Even Lady Macbeth cannot see it and she thinks that it is a product of overtaxed brain of Macbeth. “That is the very painting of your fear” and he links it the murder scene where Macbeth had scene an imaginary dagger. The scene ends in chaos which will prevail in Scotland till the killing of Macbeth. Macbeth declares resolutely

I am in blood

Stepp’d in so far, that, should I wade no more,

Returning were as tedious as go o’er.

Macbeth, thus has attained hubris and leading towards cathersis. Though Lady Macbeth cannot fathom the depth of agony in Macbeth and declares simply and bluntly “You lack the season of all natures, sleep.”

This scene shows the emotional depth of Macbeth and shallowness of Lady Macbeth’s character. Before the murder of Duncan, Macbeth got the inspiration from Lady Macbeth, but in this scene we come to know that Lady Macbeth was not at all informed of the murder of Banquo. So Macbeth is assuming now the sole authority. And Lady Macbeth will disappear gradually into insignificance. So this scene is a pivotal scene for the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth apart from being an important scene of the whole drama.