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The Aesthetic Response: The Reader in *Macbeth*

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Abstract: This article seeks to explore the different strategies the Bard uses in order to evoke sympathy in the reader for Macbeth who is so persistent in the path of evil. What strategy does Shakespeare use in order to provoke such a deep emotional response from his readers? By using paradoxes in the play, the Bard creates a world of illusion, fear and wild imagination. The paradoxical world in Macbeth startles us into marvel and fear, challenges our commonly held opinions, and reshapes our thought in the process (Platt 8). As the text involves the reader in the formation of illusion and the simultaneous formation of the means whereby the illusion is punctured, “reading reflects the process by which we gain experience. Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken so that the text becomes his present while his own ideas fade into the past. As soon as it happens, he is open to the immediate experience of the text” (Iser, *The Implied Reader* 290). Mesmerised by Macbeth’s powerful imagination and poetic language, the reader engages in a dialogical interaction with the play and eventually finds light in the murky world of the text. Regardless of Macbeth’s diabolical world, the reader ventures into it, shares it with him and ultimately wakes up from its dizzying stupor. In reading Macbeth, the reader leaves behind the familiar world of his experience in order to participate in the adventure the text offers him. The edifying effect of the tragedy in the end is the reward the reader reaps after eventually waking up from the nightmarish dream of the text.

Key Words: Iser, reader, Macbeth, Shakespeare, evil, paradox

Fear and Desire in Macbeth

Basically, there are two responses to Macbeth. Some readers may see him as a murderer, butcher and tyrant while there are some others who clearly see him as the personification of devil. Macbeth constantly vacillates between fear and desire. What he fears is what he desires and what he desires alarms him tremendously. It seems that part of him draws him to good and part of him pulls him with all force to evil. The soul of Macbeth in a word becomes an arena for the battle between the good and evil with the latter getting the better of him. He is an advocate of evil but he is perennially self-tortured. This quality in Macbeth makes the reader identify with him as a human being with all his

imperfections. This “Bellona’s Bride” who strikes fear into the hearts of enemies and smites them with no mercy becomes the personification of fear in the face of evil. Lady Macbeth berates him for being “too full o’ the milk of human kindness” (1.5.15) which is dramatically ironic. In reality, Macbeth is “too full” of “a lofty awareness of his own humanity” (Elliott 17). Fear manifests itself in Macbeth in his encounter with the weird sisters when he learns that he will be the Thane of Cawdor and the King hereafter. The “things that do sound so fair” (1.3.50) strike fear in the heart of Macbeth. Banquo is as surprised as the reader when he expresses his amazement at Macbeth’s horror at the news:

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? I’ the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? (1.3.51-54)

Macbeth’s reaction to the news should be one of joy as it heralds his kingship in future. Instead, he is seized with such great fear that he starts to shiver. There are two assumptions here as offered by Bradley: “Either this thought was not new to him, or he had cherished at least some vaguer dishonourable dream, the instantaneous recurrence of which, at the moment of his hearing the prophecy, revealed to him an inward and terrifying guilt” (344). Although Macbeth is overcome with fear, Banquo shows no psychological disturbance and demands the witches speak about him:

To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate. (1.3.55-59)

There is no logical reason for Macbeth’s fear unless we assume with Bradley that his psychological disturbance at the news stems largely from an aforethought which he had long entertained for murdering the king and taking his place. In a similar vein, Coleridge states:

The questions of Banquo are those of natural curiosity – such as a girl would make after she had heard a gypsy tell her schoolfellow’s fortune – all perfectly general or rather planless. Macbeth, lost in thought, raises himself to speech only by their being about to depart: Stay, you imperfect speakers! and all that follows is his reasoning on a problem already discussed in his mind, on a hope which he welcomes and the doubts concerning its attainment he wishes to have cleared up (qtd. in Wain 78).

The witches choose “to meet with Macbeth” because he is fertile soil for the seed of evil. The prophecy of the weird sisters only serves to give an impetus to an idea long articulated and nurtured by Macbeth’s mind. An active reader may even visualize that Macbeth had already discussed the murder of Duncan with Lady Macbeth on a number of occasions. However, Dover Wilson argues that the murder of Duncan comes too quickly, indeed abnormally quickly. Empson argues that

the whole point about Macbeth is that he is hurried into an ill-considered action, or that he refuses to consider it himself: “Let not light see” – “the eye wink at the hand” – “which must be acted ere they may be scanned.” The play is crowded with such phrases and its prevailing darkness is a symbol of his refusal to see the consequences of his actions. (140)

As the play proceeds, we realize that he initially lacks the will to put this idea into practical shape on account of moral considerations. Macbeth is torn between evil as a necessary act for attaining his goals and a bitter consciousness of evil, which he knows, will catapult him onto the path of eternal damnation. In a Faustian way, he dallies with evil until he succumbs entirely to the overpowering temptations of the devil. From a religious perspective, he sells his soul to the devil when he stabs the “gracious Duncan” to death. Immediately after the murder, he expresses regret not because he “has sold his soul but because he has sold it so cheaply” (Lings 59):

For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder’d;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (3.1.64-69)

To the reader, these lines indicate that Macbeth is bitterly conscious that he has traded his “eternal jewel” (his soul) for something not valuable with the devil. This can be taken as a clear confession to the fall of his soul. Macbeth creates a hell within and a hell without: a hell within himself and a hell for others. In the hell he creates within him, he burns in the “murk and nightmare torment of a conscious hell” (Knight 140). Once man treads on the path of evil, he cannot easily get out of it. For Macbeth, evil comes with consciousness, remorse, fear and gradual realization of nihilism.

Fear manifests itself both verbally and emotionally. As a feeling it grips his soul from the beginning and as a word, it keeps appearing in virtually every

speech he utters after he has murdered Duncan. In other words, fear finds an entity, which becomes a perennial part of Macbeth's speech. The bipartite form of fear takes hold of Macbeth to the point where it becomes impossible for him to cast it out. The sense of fear is also conveyed to the reader and the play turns into a uniquely horrifying one among Shakespearean tragedies. The reader is made to feel fear from the beginning of the play with the appearance of the weird sisters and the feeling is intensified in him after Macbeth murders Duncan.

L. C. Knights calls the play a "statement of evil" and says that "Macbeth defines a particular kind of evil – the evil which results from a lust for power" (39). This kind of approach to Shakespeare limits the imaginative scope of the play. Macbeth's mind shows the stunning workings of an imagination hitherto unknown to any Shakespearean hero. In fact, he has Shakespeare's own imagination. Macbeth imagines things beyond the realm of the material world; his imaginings then turn into fear and he translates his fear into action by killing. He sees everything in its infinity. As Firkins says:

There is a grip, a clutch, an insistence, a tenacity, in his mental processes, which suggests the idea of possession. An image conquers, masters, enslaves, engrosses him; he is in its leash; he obeys and cringes. Sight has for him the power of touch: the crown sears his eyeballs; the bloody hands pluck out his eyes. He cannot rid himself of a visual image; the imaginary dagger side by side with the real one which he has drawn to disprove its existence retains its actuality. If the murderer had merely told him that Banquo was dead, Macbeth would have seen no ghost at the supper. (418)

The beauty of the play does not lie in the nature of evil but in how Shakespeare shows man's conscious subordination to it.

The weird sisters, I believe, forebode evil more than they can embody evil as some critics suggest. Evil in Macbeth is so overpowering that it alarms the reader. Macbeth symbolizes the human being with all his imperfections and the reader feels compelled to identify with him in order to know him and his motivations better. I am not suggesting that every reader can be Macbeth but that evil, when unleashed, can dehumanize every human being and turn him into a beast of a man. The experience of reading *Macbeth* can be very horrifying and edifying at the same time; horrifying in the sense that the reader may doubt the very force of evil within him and edifying in the sense that evil can be self-destructive and devastating. That is why Shakespeare provides necessary ambience for self-identification with Macbeth. In view of this assumption,

Macbeth comes very close to the Aristotelian definition of tragedy that it creates a cathartic effect in the reader/audience by arousing fear and pity.

Despite all his valour in the face of danger and his great victories against the enemies, Macbeth loses to the common enemy of man, the devil. The devil, Shakespeare hypothesizes, is not an external force (e. g. the weird sisters) but an internal one. Allusions to the fallen angel are galore in *Macbeth*. The Porter mentions “Belzebub” to convey to the reader an idea of the diabolical qualities which lurk in Macbeth’s soul. Elsewhere, Malcolm says that “Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell” (4.3.22). The opening scenes begin with a description of “two swimmers that do cling together” and depict Macbeth as a hero and a future traitor.

As two spent swimmers, that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald—
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villanies of nature
Do swarm upon him—from the Western Isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show’d like a rebel’s whore. But all’s too weak;
For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish’d steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour’s minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam’d him from the nave to the chops,
And fix’d his head upon our battlements. (1.2.8-23)

The language of this opening scene portrays Macbeth as a man of exceptional bravery. From the beginning of the play, the reader is introduced to a man who disdains fortune and is capable of journeying into the unknown. These opening scenes are partly responsible for the reader’s sympathy for Macbeth. The fast pace of the dramatic action, the darkness, war, blood and the weird sisters all contribute to the creation of a sense of sin and evil in such a way that the hero becomes somehow immune to the reader’s hatred and subsequently susceptible to his sympathy. Indeed, the opening scenes are “so arranged that we never know quite enough about the hero’s guilt, and he captures our sympathetic attention as it were under cover of darkness” (Honigmann 128).

Yet, the play is replete with references to devilish Macbeth (4.3.117). He is a “hell-kite” (4.3.217), and a hellhound (5.8.3).

Not in the legions
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damn'd
In evils to top Macbeth. (IV.iii)

In the first scene where the weird sisters meet to discuss their rendezvous with Macbeth, Shakespeare creates an atmosphere of horror by depicting a scene charged with fear, uncertainty and ambiguity. Textual ambiguities function like a puzzle that the reader has to solve for himself. Ambiguities stimulate the reader into

trying to balance all the more intensively the contradictions that we have produced. Just as the reciprocal disturbance of the gestalten brings about the dimension of the event, in which illusion-building and illusion-breaking are integrated, here too we have a need for integration. (Iser 1980: 129)

In *Macbeth*, fear is created in the reader even before he gets to know Macbeth. There is thunder and lightening. There is darkness and a desert scene. All these images function to create a prevailing sense of fear, anxiety and ambiguity. As for the weird sisters, they represent "a world of dire evil and disorder, of dubiety and incessant sudden questioning" (Elliott 35). Although they represent evil, they do not have any influencing power over Macbeth. They are vested with the power of prophecy. Every prophecy they make comes true. They foresee that Macbeth will be the Thane of Cawdor, and he is. They also foresee that Macbeth will become king and he does; that he should beware of Macduff and he should; that none of woman born shall harm Macbeth, and he murdered by Macduff who was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped" (5.8.16). They predict that "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him" (4.1.91-92), and in the final, terrifying scenes of the play, Birnam Wood does indeed come against him. Finally they predict that Banquo will be father to a line of kings: "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater" (1.3.63), "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (1.3.65).

That the witches can foresee the future, however, does not mean they control that future. As mentioned earlier, they have only the power of prophecy; they do not even try to seduce or tempt Macbeth into murder. The innate evil in Macbeth, which has been somehow curbed by the power of morality in him gradually goes unleashed and gets the better of him. It has been suggested by some critics that the weird sisters symbolize the devil while an active reader hardly finds any evidence suggesting that they are devils. As Professor Bradley rightly says:

Speaking strictly we must affirm that he (Macbeth) was tempted only by himself. He speaks indeed of their “supernatural soliciting”; but in fact they did not solicit. They merely announced events: they hailed him as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King hereafter. No connection of these announcements with any action of his was even hinted by them. For all that appears, the natural death of an old man might have fulfilled the prophecy any day. In any case, the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his own. (344)

Their limited power to harm is suggested to the reader in the first scene when one of the witches expresses her anger at a sailor’s wife for refusing to share her chestnuts with her. She is clearly seen to lack any power over the sailor’s wife but to cast a spell over her husband’s ship only with the help of other witches. She can prophesy, torment the man, or tempt him, but his bark cannot be lost. She cannot kill him. They only hail Macbeth as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and king hereafter.

First Witch All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

Second Witch All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

Third Witch All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter! (1.3.48-50)

Immediately in the second scene, the reader learns about the bravery of Macbeth in war and how he split Macdonwald the rebel from gut to jaws and perched his head on the camp wall. In the next scene, the reader is given a clearer image of the weird sisters:

First Witch Where hast thou been, sister?

Second Witch Killing swine.

Third Witch Sister, where thou?

First Witch A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap

And munched, and munched, and munched. “Give me,” quoth I.

“Aroint thee, witch,” the rump-fed runnion cries.

Her husband’s to Aleppo gone, master o’th’Tiger:

But in a sieve I’ll thither sail,

And like a rat without a tail,

I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do. (1.3.1-9)

One of the witches has been killing swine and the other one who is angry with a sailor’s wife for withholding her chestnuts is going to hex the sailor’s ship as revenge. Therefore, the reader realizes that they are indeed only capable of petty mischief. Soon, he realises that they can see into the future. Macbeth’s

desire to ascend to the throne and take the place of the gracious Duncan is strengthened by his wife who helps dispel fear in Macbeth. His letter to his wife, if read carefully, casts light on his unconscious desire to kill the king. His intention in writing the letter to his wife is only to find an accomplice in his murderous reflections. To an ingenious reader, the letter misses a few important facts about Macbeth's encounter with the weird sisters.

They met me in the day of success: and I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all-hailed me "Thane of Cawdor;" by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time, with "Hail, king that shalt be!" This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell. (1.5.1-14)

His letter clearly shows a limited narrative of the events. Macbeth says how the witches "met me in the day of success," how "I burned in desire to question them further," "how I stood rapt in the wonder of it," how "came the missives from the king, who all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor'," and how the "weird sisters saluted me and "referred me to the coming on of time, with "Hail, king that shalt be!" Macbeth does not make any mention of Banquo and refuses to reveal that the weird sisters had made any prophecy about Banquo. The letter tells the truth but it does not tell everything. In fact, Macbeth proves to be an imperfect speaker. What more does Macbeth wish to hear from the witches when he demands: "stay you imperfect speaker!?" There are two assumptions here: either he seeks to know the means for becoming a king or he thinks that the witches are privy to his secret intentions and that he wants them to approve of them. In view of the content of the letter, the second assumption sounds more plausible. The reader is aware that Macbeth knows more than what he reveals in the letter to his wife. The letter leaves many gaps in the mind of the reader. The blanks designate a

vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns. In other words, the need for

completion is replaced here by the need for combination. It is only when the schemata of the text are related to one another that the imaginary object can begin to be formed, and it is the blanks that get this connecting operation under way. (Iser 1980:183)

What the letter lacks shows a mind loath to reveal the whole truth. Besides, the letter contains words such as “burned in desire,” “rapt,” and “rejoicing,” which indicate great desire in the writer. Therefore, temptation has crept into his soul even before he talks to Lady Macbeth. The letter is but meant to tempt the reader (Lady Macbeth) to goad Macbeth into choosing a path he does not desire to tread on alone. Therefore, Lady Macbeth’s response to the letter is one of temptation and murderous thoughts:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. (1.5.15-18)

She immediately broods on the “nearest way” but she is afraid of Macbeth being “too full o’ the milk of human kindness.” However, in the play the reader does not see any “milk of human kindness” in Macbeth. Be it as it may, Lady Macbeth cannot be seen as the embodiment of evil for she proves weak on the path and kills herself out of complete despair for what she has become. To see her thus in league with evil is only to shift the blame from Macbeth to her. Taking a radical view in this regard, Honigmann says, “Lady Macbeth appears to be somehow in league with evil and Macbeth its victim, a fly in the spider’s web who struggles mightily but cannot escape” (Honigmann 131). After all, the choice to kill Duncan comes from Macbeth who takes up the action consciously and resolutely:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat. (1.7.79-80)

Oblivious to the effects the murder will have on his mind, he translates his desire into action and kills Duncan and his servants in cold blood. Man is free to choose between good and evil and he will have to bear the consequences of his own actions. Macbeth chooses the path of evil consciously and becomes increasingly aware of his own existence and true self. This horrible awareness which he achieves as a result of his own deeds terrifies him to the point of despair: “To know my deed, ‘twere best not know myself” (2.2.70). This is the point, I believe, where the reader starts sympathizing with Macbeth as a man

who brings about his own downfall. The reader gradually sees in Macbeth the fall of a man who could have achieved great success in view of his valor and merit if he had not chosen evil as his company. In killing Duncan, he does “murder sleep, the innocent sleep, Balm of hurt minds.” (2.2.36). His agony starts to isolate and alienate him from his surroundings. The great degree of his agonized fear echoes in the sounds he hears: “Methought I heard a voice cry: Sleep no more!” (2.2.32). By making his hero refer to himself by his three titles, “Shakespeare shows a sense of dispersed identity in him” (Honnigmann 128):

Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more. (2.2.39-40)

From the beginning, he is depicted as a warrior who does “memorise another Golgotha” in the battlefield. It is true that warriors are warriors and they kill without mercy. However, apart from that, he is not presented throughout the play with any mercy for anyone. Strangely enough, McAlingdon suggests that the

Tragedy of Macbeth is that of a kind man who degenerates into a butchering tyrant; but since a tyrant is almost by definition a man who lives in dread of those whom he terrifies, his tragedy is also that of a courageous soldier who becomes cowed by fear. (133)

There is no obvious reason for McAlingdon to say that Macbeth is a kind man as we are barely given the chance to see him in the light of human compassion or kindness and that no such thing has been ever suggested or evinced throughout the play.

Of great importance in the character of Macbeth, which makes the reader sympathize with him, is his consciousness of the evil act he has committed. In fact, readers respond to and sympathise with Macbeth because he is torn like any human being between evil and desire and creates an internal hell by consciously choosing evil and losing his very human essence. He makes deliberate choices and determines his life. According to the existential view, the human agent is “endowed with rational potencies and determines his existence by deliberate choice” (Guignon 53).

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare deviates from the normal morality play by depicting a hero who “begins evil doing with complete understanding of the course he is laying out for himself and with complete willingness to sacrifice his soul in the next world in exchange for the gifts of the world” (Farnham 79). Shakespeare also breaks away from the Elizabethan view that man is part of the divine order and that any political, social or religious violation of this order will

be punished. This view does not apply to Macbeth. The reader is shocked to learn about Macbeth's full understanding of the nature of the crime he is about to commit. His apocalyptic vision of his crime becomes manifest in his reflections before the crime:

this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. (1.7.16-25)

In his projection of the deed, Duncan

becomes the Christ-like victim, and Macbeth the Judas-like traitor and Herod-like judge who will himself be judged. With its winds, weeping, pleading, and trumpet-tongued angels, the imagined scene conflates features of several typologically related cycle plays, notably those of the Crucifixion and Last Judgement. (Felperin 130)

His biblical allusions are an indication of his inward battle between good and evil. What happens in the mind of Macbeth is more than temptations. When one is tempted into evil, he becomes oblivious to its consequences but he can imagine horrible imaginings afterwards. The reader is constantly shocked and even appalled by Macbeth's dedication to evil which comes from his unquenchable thirst to know the limits of his soul. Also suggestive of the horrid deed he is about to commit is the objectification of his evil thought in the form of a dagger:

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw. (2.1.33-41)

The dagger he sees in his fatal vision seems to him as palpable as the dagger he soon draws. What he desires, he imagines, what he imagines he objectifies and what he objectifies he translates into action.

In his excellent book, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Goddard makes a fine analogy between *Macbeth* and *Crime and Punishment*:

Macbeth, like *Crime and Punishment*, is a study of evil through a study of murder. Each is its author's most rapid, concentrated, terrific, and possibly sublime work. Each is a prolonged nightmare lifted into the realm of art. *King Lear* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are also studies of evil; but if they sound no lower depths, they do climb to greater heights than *Macbeth* and *Crime and Punishment*. All four fight through again the old war between light and darkness. But in *Macbeth* and *Crime and Punishment* we have "night's predominance," as Shakespeare phrases it, and the light is that of a star or two in the blackness, while in *King Lear* and *The Brothers Karamazov* the stars are morning stars and there is dawn on the horizon. I know how preposterous this will sound to those who consider *King Lear* the pessimistic masterpiece of the ages. (108)

To sympathise with someone who ignorantly falls on evil is not difficult but to sympathise with one who has complete understanding of his evil actions is difficult. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, an impoverished student kills a hated, unscrupulous pawnbroker for her money in order to solve his financial problems and rid the world, as he argues, of an evil, worthless parasite. However, he is later seized with pangs of conscience and remorse although he keeps justifying his action. The reader can easily sympathise with Raskolnikov for two apparent reasons: 1. He is seized with great remorse after the murder. 2. He does not persevere in evil. Dostoyevsky wrings sympathy from the reader on the strength of the fact that Raskolnikov kills because he is miserable and not because he is evil and since he is miserable, the reader sympathises with him. In *Macbeth*, however, the hero deliberately takes evil to be his good and consciously sinks deeper into evil by committing crime after crime. How can such a character create any sympathy in the reader? It may be objected, however, that *Macbeth* alone of Shakespeare's great tragic figures is fully aware of the evil of the act by which he sets in motion the train of events leading to his ruin. His consciousness of crime seriously weakens the sympathy of many.

Macbeth is endowed with an exceptional poetic gift, which suffices to arouse the interest of the reader in this character. Although Duncan is said to be a goodly king, the reader knows no particular details about him. So the interest of the reader is reserved for *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*. Wayne Booth argues that everything necessary for a complete response is given to the

reader. A highly individualised noble person, he says, is sent to complete moral, intellectual and physical destruction.

In order to maintain our sympathy for Macbeth, Shakespeare tries to “keep two contradictory dynamic streams moving simultaneously: the stream of events showing Macbeth’s growing wickedness and the stream of circumstances producing and maintain our sympathy for him” (Booth 28-29). The first instance is Shakespeare’s treatment of Duncan’s murder. He takes great care in avoiding any representation of the murder itself. It is not even narrated. The reader only hears details of how the guards reacted to the murder. We see nothing. We hear nothing. What appals the reader is not the murder itself but Macbeth’s later response:

Me thought I heard a voice cry ‘sleep no more!
Macbeth doth Murder sleep”—the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast— (2.2.46-51)

From this onwards, Macbeth knows that repose will be denied him and a self-conscious hell is created within him. This feeling of self-conscious hell makes the reader sympathise with Macbeth. A second precaution is Shakespeare’s treatment of Duncan before the murder. Duncan is known as a good king and that is all we hear about him. The reader never sees him do any noble thing and he is compelled in a sense to take Shakespeare’s words for granted that Duncan is indeed a good king. So the reader never really finds any chance to become emotionally or intellectually attached to Duncan. Therefore, there is “little personal interest for him at the time of his death” (Lyndon Shanley 30).

Desire is generally accompanied by a feeling of fear. Macbeth’s critical moment comes when he says that he has “almost forgot the taste of fears”(V.v.9). In other words, he is left with no more desires and his being is consequently pervaded by a bitter realization of absurdism which finds painful echoes in his “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” speech upon the news of Lady Macbeth’s death:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
Out, out, brief candle.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V.v.19–27)

The reader may wish to dissociate himself from this view of life and say that life may be meaningless to Macbeth because he has brought meaninglessness to it. As Bloom aptly says in this regard:

In his isolation Macbeth feels like an actor without an audience. The idea touched on in earlier plays, that we see ourselves only in the eyes of others, is taken deeper here. The actor exists only in the perception of the audience, and when there is no audience to hear him there is nothing of him left. At the personal level, Macbeth's speeches (and therefore Macbeth) have been meaningless without Lady Macbeth to hear and reply. Finally, he is not even an actor, with the freedom and the initiative an actor has to conduct his own performance. Everyone is a character in a story, with no existence outside the voice of the narrator; the story's language is meaningless noise, and the narrator is an idiot. But if life is a tale told by an idiot, who is the idiot? Iago mischievously imagined God as a peeping Tom; Macbeth's blasphemy cuts far deeper. With Lady Macbeth he took part in a dialogue, a drama, in which each had a voice. Now there is only one voice, neither hers nor his, but the voice of a cosmic idiot telling a story that means nothing. (382)

What is left for Macbeth is a deep sense of isolation and emptiness. For him, the meaning of life is that "there is no meaning. Macbeth's fear of becoming insensitive to suffering and transgression is fully realized here. Once again, the existential significance of moral vocabulary is deepened" (Mousley 105). Thus he becomes emotionally dead even to the news of the one he used to love. His sense of absurdity deepens even more a few lines later when a messenger arrives and tells him that while guarding on the hilltop, he had seen the Birnam wood moving. Upon hearing these words, he begins to "doubt the equivocation of the fiend/That lies like truth" (V.v.43-44). And he expresses his utmost desire for the sun to stop shining and for the world to come to standstill:

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,
And wish the estate o' the world were now undone. (V.v.49-50)

By showing a character who traverses the realm of fear and desire by treading onto the path of evil, Shakespeare ingeniously effects a catharsis in the audience/reader. Macbeth's "doubts and fears" turn into certitude and spiritual submission when he identifies himself with evil:

I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me. (V.v.13-15)

Now he knows that he is the devil himself and establishes an honest relation with his surroundings. That is the limit from which he cannot go any further. As Wilson Knight comments:

He has won through by excessive crime to an harmonious and honest relation with his surroundings. He has successfully symbolised the disorder of his lonely guilt-stricken soul by creating disorder in the world and thus restores balance and harmonious contact. This mighty principle of good planted in the nature of things then asserts itself, condemns him openly, brings him peace. (156)

In the end, Macbeth proves a poor player who has done a lot of strutting and fretting on the stage of the world "but is heard no more" on account of his deplorably poor performance as a human person.

With the death of Macbeth, the hero and the reader are liberated from the feeling of dread that haunts and startles them from the beginning.

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Intertekstualne varijante u savremenoj makedonskoj priči: vakantna citatnost

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Apstrakt: Predmet interesa ovog teksta je vakantna citatnost u savremenoj makedonskoj priči. Konkretni predmet analize je priča *Ракописот од Крџаб-ан* makedonskog autora Vlade Uroševića. Interpretacijom dominantnih postupaka ovog citatnog modela (pseudocitatnost, deduktivna naracija, mistifikacija, paradoks), potenciraju se i njegove metatekstualne funkcije: funkcija implicitnog komentara intertekstualnosti, ali i komentara koji se odnosi na proučavanje fenomena intertekstualnosti. U tom smislu, Urošević sugerira stanje epistemološkog skepticizma u nauci i stanje ontološkog relativizma literature, ali i u literaturi.

Ključne reči: intertekstualnost, vakantna citatnost, metatekstualnost, epistemološki skepticizam, ontološki relativizam.

Naturalmente, un manoscritto.
Umberto Eco

Preliminarije

Interes za intertekstualne varijante u savremenoj makedonskoj priči kontekstualizuje naš interpretativni fokus u dvostruki okvir:

1. *citatnost*, kao osobito frekventna intertekstualna praksa, koja u tipologiji Žerara Ženeta predstavlja tipičan primer restriktivno shvaćene intertekstualnosti kao „efektivnog postojanja jednoga teksta u drugome” (8);
2. *vakantna citatnost*, kao jedna od citatnih podvrsta.

Teorijski ram, relevantan za daljnje tumačenje, vezuje se za teoriju citatnosti, afirmisanu u hrvatskoj intertekstualnoj paradigmi od strane Dubravke Oraić-Tolić. U njoj teoriji, književna citatnost, kao deo šire kulturne citatnosti, označava citatnu relaciju kao dominantu jednoga teksta, autorskog idiolekta, umetničkog žanra, stila ili kulture – u okviru kojih se postavlja kao ontološki i semiotički princip (Oraić 5). Vakantna citatnost, koja tipološki spada u grupu