

The Saga of Two Fallen Heroes: Establishing Parallel Between Shakespeare's Macbeth and the Biblical Adam

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Abstract

The present paper titled “The Saga of Two Fallen Heroes: Establishing Parallel between Shakespeare's Macbeth and the Biblical Adam”, strives to establish a parallel between the temptation and subsequent fall of Macbeth with the Biblical Fall of Man. The fall of Macbeth, the great Shakespearean tragic hero, has been in the center of discussion from different angles. The present Paper views it in the context of the mythical “fall” of Adam. Macbeth fell from righteousness after killing King Duncan to become the King of Scotland. One sin makes him commit another and he went on losing the grace of heaven, bringing damnation to himself and his soul. This is very much like Adam's loss of heaven to bring damnation to himself and his posterity on this earth.

Initially, Macbeth is presented as an ideal commander and the trusted lieutenant to King Duncan very much like Adam, whom God has created to teach Lucifer, the great betrayer, a lesson. Macbeth would be living in perfect bliss in his paradise of Glamis if he has not given to his overriding ambition. If Macbeth's flaw was his overriding ambition, Adam's frailty was his curiosity to know new things. Hence, when Eve, under the influence of Satan, tempted him to eat the Forbidden fruit, he cannot resist. In the case of Macbeth, three witches are the agents of evil who incite his hidden ambition and forced him on the path of damnation. In a way, the witches play the same role that was played by Satan in the context of Fall of Adam. Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's evil angel very much like what Eve was to Adam. However, the fact remains that as individuals endowed with free will; none of them can escape responsibility in their downfall.

Keywords: Temptation, Fall, Righteousness, Damnation, Loss of Heaven, Overriding ambition, Free-will.

Introduction:

Macbeth by William Shakespeare could be accessed in the context of renaissance socio-religious belief. His play has parts of the spiritual beliefs of England. The medieval age and Renaissance saw a connection between orders on earth and order on the larger scale of the cosmos. Macbeth is about a society in which the concept of honor of one`s word and fidelity to one`s superiors is absolute. At the peak, of this hierarchy is the king, god`s agent on earth. Other connections also depend on fidelity like a god and human relationship, loyalty between husband and wife, and loyalty between king and his people. In the Genesis story, it is the fault of Adam, convinced by his wife which leads to his damnation.

Macbeth and lady Macbeth`s acts are similar to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Macbeth is persuaded by his wife to do evil deeds in the same way Eve persuaded Adam to eat an apple which god prohibits them not to eat from the tree of knowledge. Adam`s deeds affected the world in the same way Macbeth`s deeds affected Scotland.

Discussion

Macbeth, the protagonist, and lead character of the play shares many similarities with Adam, the first man created by god. When Macbeth is first introduced, he exists in a prefall state of grace. He is a very brave and well-respected member of a social group, loaded with glory and living in perfect bliss in his paradise of Glam. He is the ruler of many people. He has a beautiful wife and a safe home in his castle at Inverness. He is a person “full of the milk of human kindness”(Shakespeare, Macbeth1. V.17). We saw his heroic deeds when he protected his kingdom. He earns the respect and devotion of all his lords by serving them faithfully in war. He`s portrayed as a “valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman”. He is brave, noble, gentle, loyal to the king, and loved by all. But when he hears that he will be the next king he thought nothing else but wants to attain the position of a king.

This relates to the story in Genesis in the same way when Adam is first introduced, he is loyal, obeys the command of God. Adam has all the great things that were given to him by god. He could deny eating from one particular tree and enjoying all the pleasures given to him by god. But he ignored the rule and ate from the tree of knowledge. We can explain this with a quote “in the hopes of reaching the moon men fails to see the flowers that blossom at their feet”. This explains the position of both Adam and Macbeth. Adam in the world of Eden (paradise) and Macbeth in the world of Scotland and how they fail to see what they already have.

In both Macbeth and genesis, the main female characters play a serious role in the action of sinning. Lady Macbeth and Eve act as temptresses. Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's evil agent very much like what Eve was to Adam. When lady Macbeth heard the news that Macbeth will be crowned as a king, she goes to a great extent to make sure that this becomes the truth. She even convinces Macbeth to kill Duncan, who was the king at that time. She uses all the techniques she can to persuade her husband to murder King Duncan. The meaning of 'Evil' and 'Good' becomes fully reversed to Lady Macbeth. The achieve the crown by murdering Duncan seems to her something marvelous. In her Soliloquy she says about Macbeth:

“yet do I fear thy nature.

It is too full o' the milk of human kindness.

To catch the nearest way; thou wouldst be great;

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it, what thou wouldst highly,

Thou wouldst thou holily.” (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1.V.16-21)

To Lady Macbeth 'aspiration' and 'ailments' are terms of glory and 'generosity' and 'devoutly' are terms of guilt. According to Bradley “Moral distinctions do not in this exaltation exist for her, or rather they are inverted: 'good' means to her the crown and whatever is required to obtain it, evil whatever stands in the way of its attainment” (Bradley 325). She used Macbeth's feelings, his courage, his determined nature, his indeterminate desires as a tool to form Macbeth to do what she thinks can bring success and satisfaction. At first, Macbeth is completely against this plan but eventually surrenders him in front of Lady Macbeth. He murdered Duncan and return with a bloody dagger in hand.

In comparison, Eve also acts as a temptress in the tale of genesis. God especially told Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge. Hence, when Eve, under the influence of Satan, tempted her to eat the Forbidden fruit, she cannot resist. After she is persuaded, she tells Adam. Like Macbeth, he is doubtful at first but his curiosity to know new things forced him to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge.

The man themselves does not decide to sin but are forced to do so by the influences of their wives. In both Macbeth and genesis, the main female character plays a major role, in the action of sinning.

At this moment, Macbeth is prepared to take the help of witches to achieve the upcoming information about the future and their words guide him to do the most horrifying act, of murdering Madoff's family. Here the three witches are the agents of evil who incite his hidden ambition and forced him on the path of damnation. At the starting of the play, evil had come to Macbeth unsolicited, but towards the end, he accepts evil knowingly and without any terror. The evil which was undiscovered in him has now come out in its most terrifying shape. He indulges in despotism and Scotland suffers:

“Each new morn

New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows Strike heaven on the face.”

(Shakespeare, Macbeth IV.III. 4-6)

It takes Macbeth to the path of damnation through vices of the most detested nature. Malcolm says:

“I grant him bloody,

Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, Sudden, malicious.”

(Shakespeare, Macbeth IV.III.58-60)

In a way, the witches play the same role that was played by Satan in the context of Fall of Adam.

The notion of regret is another instance of how these two stories can be compared. when Macbeth killed Duncan, he was not in his state of mind. He did many acts like brought the dagger with him and saw the spirit of Duncan. By killing Duncan, he has the notion of regret throughout his life. Here Macbeth’s sense of guilt, his poetic mind, and his premonition of his incoming damnation in the hell is presented. This loss takes away his mental-spiritual peace and has made them lose the grace of Heaven, earth, and even their own experience in the world could bring him to glory in it or make his peace in it, or to forget what he once was. His feeling of anguish can be heard in his speech:’

“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.”(Shakespeare, William:2002)

His suffering is extreme and intolerable at this moment. His sufferer’s ghost is evocative of him, his wrongdoing is bothering him, and his wife has gone insane. In comparison, the story of Adam and Eve no longer naked but they were covered with ivy. Adam says to god “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid” (Genesis 3:10). This is also a clear indication that how humans feel regret for an offendable crime that they executed.

Finally, the sin of crime is death and that is mentioned in Christian theology “but you must eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die” (bible, James’s version) and this is what happens with Macbeth and he says to Peyton that “I am sick at heart...I have lived long enough”(Shakespeare, William: 2002). And from here we can see the downfall of Macbeth and he decided that he will not live any longer because he refuses god’s will and therefore the only way to get salvation was through death.

Conclusion

In this paper, I strive to establish a parallel between the temptation and subsequent fall of Macbeth with the biblical Fall of Man. William Shakespeare summarizes the entire design of this study from the opening line of Macbeth. The three witches convey the entire idea “fair is foul and foul is fair”. This starting line can apply to both the main character (Adam and Macbeth). Macbeth assumes that whatever the witches told

him is only fair. Although it is too late when he realizes the uncertainty of their words and realizes that whatever the witches told him is only foul. Contrarily, Adam is led by his wife. He also assumes that whatever he is performing is right and again it is too late when he realizes that whatever he is doing is foul. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's evil angel very much like what Eve was to Adam. At the same, she is the selflessly devoted wife whose sole aim was to see her husband at the pinnacle of power and glory. In Shakespeare's emblematic poetic vision, the image of Macbeth fits very well as that of "The Fallen Man". Was the 'Fall', the result of his own free will or the unexplained circumstances-may be a matter of debate. But this was imminent, nevertheless. Shakespeare, by use of allusions and images from various mythical, religious, and literary sources instills meanings to his seemingly simple plot. Unlike the 'Fall' of the Biblical Adam, which ends with the motif of 'Paradise Lost, Shakespeare leaves hints of the possibility of 'Paradise Regained' motive as well. This is presented by Macbeth's sense of guilt, his poetic mind, and his premonition of his incoming damnation in Hell. True, Biblical Adam is not presented as ruthless as Macbeth. He remains noble even in his fall. However, in the case of Macbeth, it is his loss of nobility that is symbolic of his 'Fall'. Macbeth's downfall may well be placed parallel to Adam's Loss of Paradise. In the same way, Macbeth's deceit to his benefactor Duncan may be put parallel to the deceits of Adam, Lucifer, and Judas. As he has mentioned, "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell". Hence the Fall of Macbeth from his Prelapsarian existence in Scotland is similar to Adam's loss of Eden. This loss takes away their mental-spiritual peace and makes them lose the grace of Heavens, earth, and even their own. The saga of both Macbeth and Adam gives the impression of good lives wasted under the influence of sinister forces over which man has no control. It is appropriate to see in the image of "the brightest stars of their respective firmaments before their falls and afterward, they are darkest".

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