



LADY MACBETH'S SLEEPWALKING SCENE 2017

notes taken from *MACBETH LANGUAGE AND WRITING*: EMMA SMITH; ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

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THE SLEEPWALKING SCENE: 5.1.1 - 80

SCENE I. Dunsinane. Ante-room in the castle.

Enter a Doctor of Physic and a Waiting-Gentlewoman

DOCTOR

I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive
No truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

GENTLEWOMAN

Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen
Her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon
Her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it,
Write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again
Return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

DOCTOR

A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once
The benefit of sleep, and do the effects of
Watching! In this slumbry agitation, besides her
Walking and other actual performances, what, at any
Time, have you heard her say?

GENTLEWOMAN

That, sir, which I will not report after her.

DOCTOR

You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should.

GENTLEWOMAN

Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to
Confirm my speech.

Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise;
And, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

DOCTOR

How came she by that light?

GENTLEWOMAN

Why, it stood by her: she has light by her





Continually; 'tis her command.

DOCTOR

You see, her eyes are open.

GENTLEWOMAN

Ay, but their sense is shut.

DOCTOR

What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

GENTLEWOMAN

It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus
Washing her hands: I have known her continue in
This a quarter of an hour.

LADY MACBETH

Yet here's a spot.

DOCTOR

Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from
Her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

LADY MACBETH

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why,
Then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my
Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we
Fear who knows it, when none can call our power to
Account?--Yet who would have thought the old man
To have had so much blood in him.

DOCTOR

Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH

The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?--
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o'
That, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with
This starting.

DOCTOR

Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

GENTLEWOMAN

She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of
That: heaven knows what she has known.





LADY MACBETH

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the
Perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
Hand. Oh, oh, oh!

DOCTOR

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

GENTLEWOMAN

I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the
Dignity of the whole body.

DOCTOR

Well, well, well,--

GENTLEWOMAN

Pray God it be, sir.

DOCTOR

This disease is beyond my practise: yet I have known
Those which have walked in their sleep who have died
Holily in their beds.

LADY MACBETH

Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so
Pale.--I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he
Cannot come out on's grave.

DOCTOR

Even so?

LADY MACBETH

To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate:
Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's
Done cannot be undone.--To bed, to bed, to bed!

Exit

DOCTOR

Will she go now to bed?

GENTLEWOMAN

Directly.

DOCTOR

Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
More needs she the divine than the physician.





God, God forgive us all! Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night:
My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight.
I think, but dare not speak.

GENTLEWOMAN

Good night, good doctor.

Exeunt

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SLEEP IN *MACBETH*

The innocent sleep peacefully at night in Macbeth.

- The guilty are tormented by a lack of sleep.
 - As Macbeth passes from normal life to the realm of darkness by murdering Duncan, he realizes that sleep will one of the casualties. He states,
 - the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care
 - No longer being able to get a good night's rest because he is haunted by what he has done and worried about who might know is part of the price that both Macbeths pay for being overly ambitious and crossing into evil to fulfill their desire for power.
 - Ironically, though she had the bravest talk, Lady Macbeth ultimately suffers the most from lack of restful sleep.
 - While Macbeth's conscience hardens so that he loses the ability to feel anything but a dull misery, Lady Macbeth's conscience suffers more and more acutely over what she has been a part of.
 - Rather than experience the peaceful sleep of the innocent, she passes into a troubled, restless sleepwalking in which she expresses her guilt and tries repeatedly to wash her guilt away by washing off the blood she imagines on her hands.
 - Perhaps, Shakespeare wants his audience to think about all the simple pleasures that come from living within ethical boundaries:
 - these include peaceful sleep, the ability to have friends, and a strong relationship with one's spouse, all of which the Macbeths give up to have the crown.

RETROSPECTION

Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is the play's other major instance of retrospection

- It echoes the tense of the Captain's report of the battle in 1.2



- It figures the past through the shards of her fractured memory
 - But the tense is instantly present
 - 'no more o' that, my Lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting' (5.1.45 - 6)
 - These memories are a trap, and Lady Macbeth is compelled to relive them in her somnambulist agonies

LANGUAGE OF THE SCENE

It is one of Macbeth's few examples of prose

- Only 6.5% is in prose
 - This is an unusually low proportion for plays of this period
 - For example, Coriolanus has 23% prose and King Lear has 27%
 - The other instances of prose are the reading of Macbeth's letter in 1.5
 - Here, in 5.1, it is almost as if the verse-line, already strained by the events of the play cannot cope with her fractured memories
 - In other words, the complete absence of verse in this passage reflects Lady Macbeth's loss of control of her mind and body as a result of being tormented by guilt.

PURPOSE OF THE SLEEPWAKING SCENE: A REVIEW OF EARLIER SCENES

It reviews events we recall from the scenes around Duncan's death, and others not shown to us

- This scene reminds us of how we came to this point in the play and how Lady Macbeth has ended up in the psychological turmoil that she has
 - The recalled scenes together draw a desperate portrait of Lady Macbeth's attempts to support her husband through the crime and its aftermath, while coping herself with the trauma
 - We are also reminded of how far away Lady Macbeth has come from the pragmatic 'A little water clears us of this deed' (2.2.66) and, by contrast, how it echoes 'These deeds must not be thought After these ways. So, it will make us mad.' (2.2.33-34)
 - Lady Macbeth's quote in 2.2.66 acts as a direct contrast to Macbeth's question in 2.2.60, 'Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood / Clean from my hand?'
 - In (5.1.36), Lady Macbeth's 'Here's the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand' offers her own version of Macbeth's hyperbolic question in 2.2.60, 'Will all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood / Clean from my hand?'
 - Both characters imagine the scale of their crimes
 - Macbeth imagine it in a visual sense
 - Shakespeare constantly uses Macbeth to convey the consequences visually
 - Particularly through his hallucinations
 - Lady Macbeth imagines it in an olfactory sense



- The antithesis generated between the two lines prompts the question as to which mindset will bear witness to the reality of the crimes they have committed
 - The sleepwalking scene reminds us that 'a little water' does not 'clear' them of 'this deed' and 'all great Neptune's oceans' cannot 'wash this blood clean'
 - Perhaps it can be seen as a pivotal moment of the play's moral teachings and is therefore a reminder to the audience of the eternal damnation that results from regicide
 - In this way, it could be said that the scene acts as a kind of warning to anyone attempting a 9th assassination attempt on King James I that their punishment will not be in this life, but in the life to come
 - It could also be a warning about the consequences of going against human nature, just as Lady Macbeth did when she called on the 'spirits' to 'unsex' her

PURPOSE OF THE SLEEPWAKING SCENE: SUPPRESSION OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Just as Macbeth's hallucinations of the daggers and Banquo's ghost may reveal the subconscious that he has had to suppress in order to go through with the 'deed', the sleepwalking scene may be designed to expose the subconscious that Lady Macbeth has had to suppress in order to:

- Support her husband's ambitions
- And fulfill her own ambitions of being queen
 - She is now stuck in the same world of wild imaginings as Macbeth was
 - 'Here's the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh.'

PURPOSE OF THE SLEEPWAKING SCENE: RECALLING THE PAST

The Sleepwalking scene displays for us Lady Macbeth's imperfectly suppressed memories,

- but it also serves to recover the play's own structural unconscious, reliving the moment of Duncan's death as a kind of primal scene, just as the English forces are massing to reinstate the rightful heir of the murdered King.
 - It recalls Duncan,
 - (5.1.39 - 40)
'Yet who would have thought the old man
To have had so much blood in him?'
 - It was believed that the supply of blood dried up with old age
 - Lady Macduff



- (5.1.43 - 4)
'the Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?'
- And Banquo
 - Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so Pale.--I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he Cannot come out on's grave.
 - it thus functions structurally as a kind of fulcrum between past and future.
 - what has been sacrificed, as Lady Macbeth's agonies make clear, is any kind of secure present and future.
 - Here's the smell of the blood still: all the Perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little Hand. Oh, oh, oh!
 - To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate: Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's /Done cannot be undone.--To bed, to bed, to bed!

THE TWO PROTAGONISTS SWAP POSITIONS

She, the one who looked forward who urged Macbeth to look to the future to success and triumph, cannot stop looking back at what they have done (especially the murder of the Macduff family),

- and he who before and immediately after the murder of Duncan, looked back longingly at a life of wholeness and camaraderie, can do nothing but move forward without learning anything from the past.
 - the future is empty.
 - 'and that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, group of friends,
I must not look to have' (5.3.24 - 6).
 - This sense of meaninglessness is encapsulated Macbeth's final soliloquy
 - (5.5.18 - 27)
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.

APOCALYPSE AS THE CONSEQUENCE OF ACTION

all Shakespeare's tragedies have a kind of apocalypse as the consequence of the action.

- to be alive at the end of a tragedy is a mixed blessing:





- it is to have survived the play's turmoil, but to have therefore been too uninteresting, too puny, to be involved in it.
 - thus the literal corpse on stage in the final moment is metaphorically the corpse of the future,
 - which is now either too compromised or too inadequate to be viable.
 - In Macbeth the recognition is explicit from the play's beginning.
 - by rushing headlong into the future and making the witches 'shalt be' into 'is now', Macbeth's murder of Duncan becomes a murder of proper linear time.
 - he tells Lady Macbeth that 'strange things I have in head that will to hand,/ which must be acted ere they may be scanned' (3.4.138 - 9):
 - the tenses enact a forward movement from present ('have') through future ('will') and imperative ('must'), and the end rhymes emphasize the same pitching onwards.
 - what Macbeth here wants is to act before scanning ('to scan' has a number of meanings including to discern metre in poetry, to judge or consider deeply).

he turns away from the natural seasonal imagery of time passing - banquo's 'if you will look into the seeds of time,/ and say which grain will grow, and which will not' (1.3.58 - 9) - and instead into a vortex 'which o'erleaps itself/ and falls on th'other' (1.7.27 - 8).

