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EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH AS METAPHOR IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper aims to explore the use of death metaphor in Shakespeare's tragedies. The objective is to analyze the various death metaphors employed by Shakespeare in his plays, their significance, and the impact they have on the audience. The paper focuses Shakespeare's use of death metaphor in six of his most famous plays: Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, and Othello. The article draws upon various critical sources to analyze the use of death metaphors in Shakespeare's works and provides a comprehensive overview of the subject. The article highlights the significance of these metaphors in shaping the themes and characters in his works, and demonstrates the enduring relevance and impact of Shakespeare's writing on contemporary literature and culture. The research methodology used is a qualitative analysis of the text of the plays, focusing on the use of language, symbolism, and imagery.



KEYWORDS: Shakespeare, death metaphor, tragedies, symbolism, imagery, power, corruption.

OUTSET:

As depicted In the Indian epic Mahabharata, in response to a fundamental question asked by Yaksha (a celestial being) in the guise of a white crane, 'What is the biggest wonder of life?', Yudhishtira (eldest among five Pandavas) famously answered 'Hundreds and thousands of living creatures meet demise at each second, yet the stupid man thinks himself deathless and doesn't get ready for death. This is the greatest marvel of life.' (अहन्यहनि भूतानि गच्छन्ति यमालयम् । शेषाः स्थावर मच्छन्ति कमाश्चर्यमतः परम् ॥).

CHARACTERISTICS OF METAPHOR:

A metaphor is a hyperbole that depicts something by saying it is something different. Metaphors are often used in literature and poetry to create vivid imagery and convey complex ideas in a more accessible way and deepen readers' understanding of the text. One of the primary ways in which metaphor enhances the quality of literature is by engaging readers' senses and emotions. Metaphors help writers to create vivid and evocative descriptions that can bring a text to life in the reader's mind. Another way in which metaphor enhances the quality of literature is by drawing comparisons between seemingly disparate concepts. Metaphors can also create layers of meaning and symbolism within a text.

INTRODUCTION:

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest playwrights of all time, known for his profound insights into human nature and the complexity of his characters. His tragedies depict the downfall of noble and heroic characters who are confronted with complex and often violent situations that test their virtues, passions, and reason. Shakespeare's tragedies also explore the universal themes of human suffering, fate, and mortality, and how they affect the individual and the society. Shakespeare's plays are known for their rich language, intricate plotlines, deep symbolism and dramatic themes. Death is not just a physical event in Shakespeare's plays but also a metaphorical one that symbolizes a range of emotions and experiences. One of the recurring themes in his tragedies is the use of death metaphor. Death is a universal theme that has been explored in literature for centuries. One of the reasons why death is such a prominent theme in Shakespeare's work is because it's something that all of us will experience at some point in our lives. Shakespeare's use of death metaphor in his plays adds a layer of complexity and depth to the themes of love, revenge, betrayal and power. The complexity and sheer originality of Shakespeare's metaphoric language have presented a challenge to translators, who have struggled to convey the multiple layers of meaning in his death metaphors. Shakespeare's death metaphors are not only artistic devices, but also a reflection of our fundamental understanding and perspective on mortality. Furthermore, Shakespeare's death metaphors are not limited to their literary value, as the post dramatic paradigm has highlighted their significance beyond language analysis. As we continue to explore and evolve our understanding of mortality, the study of Shakespeare's death metaphors remains a crucial aspect of literary and cultural analysis. It will be shown here how death metaphor is employed in different ways in each play to convey the specific themes and conflicts that characterize each tragedy. It will also be demonstrated how death metaphor enhances the dramatic impact and poetic beauty of Shakespeare's language.

JULIUS CAESAR:

In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare uses death as a metaphor for the fall of a great leader. The play tells the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar, the Roman dictator. In Julius Caesar, death is used as a symbol of the struggle for power where Caesar's death symbolizes the transfer of power from one ruler to another. The play revolves around the assassination of Caesar and the political turmoil that follows. The use of death metaphor in Julius Caesar is prevalent throughout the play, and it reflects on the themes of ambition and the consequences of political power. For example, when Cassius says, "How many ages hence shall this our lofty scene be acted over in states unborn and accents yet unknown" (Act III, Scene I), he is referring to the everlasting impact of Caesar's death on the political landscape of Rome. Cassius's line "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings" compares death to an inescapable force which is beyond the control of mankind. "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired" (Act II, Scene I). "Death is a fearful thing" (Act II, Scene II). Cassius uses the metaphor of death to describe the horror of a life without purpose: "Why should that name be sounded more than yours? Write them together, yours is as fair a name; Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well; Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em, Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar" (Act I, Scene II). Here, Cassius is saying that the only thing that separates him and Caesar is death, and that death is an equalizer. When Brutus says, "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. / Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, / Than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?" (Act III, Scene II) Here, Brutus compares Caesar's death to freedom and life, emphasizing the power struggle between Caesar and his assassins.

HAMLET:

Hamlet is an example par excellence of a fully rounded dramatic characterization. His possession of the depth of interiority and consciousness of subjectivity are manifested in numerous soliloquies.

Hamlet himself is preoccupied with death, and his most direct consideration of it comes in Act 4, Scene 3. The frailty of human existence haunts Hamlet throughout the play, and it's a theme he returns

to in Act 5, Scene 1 during the iconic graveyard scene. Ophelia's death is the most tragic death in Hamlet is one that the audience doesn't witness. Suicide is also a theme in Hamlet, as several characters contemplate or commit suicide throughout the play. Death is a pervasive theme throughout Hamlet, and it permeates the play right from the opening scene where the ghost of Hamlet's father introduces the idea of death and its consequences. Death is humanity's great equalizer, and Shakespeare shows that it does not discriminate between the valiant and the cowardly, the motivated and the fearful, or the good and the wicked. One of the most prominent metaphors is that of sleep, which is used to describe death throughout the play. This metaphor allows Shakespeare to explore complex themes related to mortality and what it means to be alive. In Hamlet's soliloquy, Shakespeare creatively extends this metaphor to include the possibility of a dreaming state. Shakespeare's use of death metaphors is not limited to the conventional mapping of death as sleeping. Rather, he uses metaphor as a system to convey complex and nuanced ideas about mortality.

Another significant similitude is that of the undertakers, who give an actual portrayal of death in the play. They are a steady sign of the certainty of death, and their chitchat about the different ways individuals bite the dust features the purposelessness of attempting to get away from death.

In Shakespeare's plays, death is also used as a metaphor for decay and corruption. This is seen in Hamlet, where the graveyard scene serves as a reminder of the inevitability of death and the decay that accompanies it. Throughout the play, Hamlet wrestles with the idea of death, often using metaphors to express his feelings about it. In one of the most famous speeches in the play, he describes death as "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns."

In Hamlet death is used to represent the transformation of the protagonist from a young, idealistic man to a vengeful and cynical one. One of the most famous examples of this is the line spoken by Hamlet, "To be or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them." (Act III, Scene I). Here, Hamlet compares life to a sea of troubles and death to the end of those troubles, emphasizing the struggle of Hamlet to find his true identity. This metaphorical exploration of life and death continues to resonate with audiences today. This line is a reflection on the idea that death is a natural part of life, and that all humans must eventually face it. "To die, to sleep—To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub" (Hamlet, Act III, Scene I). "To die: to sleep; / No more; and by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to." (Act III, Scene I). Shakespeare uses the metaphor of sleep to describe death, suggesting that death is merely a form of eternal sleep. This metaphor allows him to explore complex themes such as the nature of consciousness and what it means to be alive.

Throughout the play, death is portrayed as a means of escape from the pain and suffering of life, as seen in the suicide of Ophelia and the final duel between Hamlet and Laertes.

MACBETH:

The play tells the story of a Scottish nobleman who becomes consumed by his ambition to become king. He murders the king and takes the throne, but his guilt and paranoia drive him to commit more murders.

Death as a symbol of release: In Shakespeare's plays, death is also used as a metaphor for release from suffering. This is seen when Lady Macbeth expresses a desire for death as a release from the guilt she feels after the murder of King Duncan. Shakespeare uses death metaphors to convey the central theme of the play, which is the corrupting nature of power. For example, when Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to kill King Duncan, she says, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me: / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you / Have done to this" (Act 1, Scene 7, lines 54-59). This metaphor of death is used to illustrate Lady Macbeth's ruthless and calculating nature, and her willingness to commit murder to obtain power.

In "Macbeth," Shakespeare uses death metaphor to explore the themes of ambition, guilt, and the corrupting influence of power. The play is filled with references to death, including the famous line,

"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." (Act V, Scene V) Here, Macbeth compares life to a brief candle and death to the end of that candle, emphasizing the power struggle between Macbeth and his enemies. This line highlights the fleeting nature of life and the inevitability of death. Additionally, the play's many murders and killings are symbolic of the destruction and decay that come with the pursuit of power. The use of death metaphor in Macbeth is prevalent throughout the play. For example, when Macbeth says, "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself and falls on the other" (Act I, Scene VII), he is referring to his desire for power that is so great that it can lead to his own downfall. Shakespeare uses the metaphor of sleep to represent death when Lady Macbeth says, "The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures." This metaphor not only adds to the play's eerie atmosphere but also highlights the theme of guilt and the consequences of ambition.

ROMEO AND JULIET:

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of love and hate, in which two young lovers from rival families are doomed by fate to die for their forbidden passion. Death metaphor is prevalent throughout the play, as both Romeo and Juliet frequently associate their love with death. For example, when they first meet at a masquerade ball, they exchange a sonnet that compares their lips to pilgrims who kiss a holy shrine (1.5.93-110). However, this religious imagery also implies a sacrificial act that foreshadows their deaths. Later, when they part after spending their wedding night together, they see each other as pale as corpses:

"Juliet: O God! I have an ill-divining soul.
Methinks I see thee now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.
Either my eyesight fails or thou look'st pale.
Romeo: And trust me love: In my eye so do you.
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu! Adieu!" (3.5.54-59)

Here, death metaphor expresses their fear of separation and their premonition of their tragic fate. Their love is so intense that it consumes their life force and makes them resemble the dead.

In "Romeo and Juliet," Shakespeare uses death metaphor to explore the themes of love, fate, and the tragic consequences of impulsive actions. Throughout the play, the characters are aware of the fragility of life and the inevitability of death. For example, when Juliet says, "My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (Act I, Scene V), she is expressing her fear of death and how it is intertwined with her love for Romeo. The use of death metaphor in Romeo and Juliet is particularly poignant, as it reflects on the fragility of life and how love can be both beautiful and tragic. The play is filled with references to death, including the famous lines spoken by Juliet, "O happy dagger! This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die." This line is a reflection on the idea that death is the only solution to the problems facing the characters in the play. Death serves as a means of resolving conflicts and bringing about a sense of closure where the deaths of the titular characters bring an end to the feud between their families. Romeo's love for Juliet is expressed through his line "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear." Here, he likens Juliet to a precious jewel, which hangs upon the cheek of night, indicating the fleeting nature of life and love. "Death lies on her like an untimely frost upon the sweetest flower of all the field" (Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, Scene V). "To die by your side is such a heavenly way to die" (Act II, Scene VI). Death is used as a metaphor for love, with Romeo proclaiming that he is "fortune's fool" and that his love for Juliet is "death-marked." The famous balcony scene, in which Romeo declares his love for Juliet, is full of death imagery. He says, "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief". Here, Romeo is comparing Juliet to the sun, which brings life, and the moon to death. Later in the play, when Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he says, "Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight. Let's see for means. O mischief, thou art swift to enter in the thoughts of desperate men!". Here, Romeo is using

death as a means of escape from his pain. In Act 2, Scene 2, Romeo says, "With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls, / For stony limits cannot hold love out, / And what love can do, that dares love attempt. / Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me." Here, Romeo compares his love for Juliet to wings that can overcome any obstacle, including death. This metaphor emphasizes the intensity and passion of their love.

KING LEAR:

In "King Lear," Shakespeare uses death metaphor to explore the themes of madness, betrayal, and the human condition. Shakespeare uses death as a metaphor for the destruction of the natural order. The play is set in a world where the old order is breaking down, and chaos is taking over. Lear, the king, is betrayed by his daughters and loses everything. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport" (Act IV, Scene 1) - In this famous quote, Lear compares humanity to helpless insects, easily toyed with and killed by the whims of higher powers. The image of the gods as cruel children suggests that human life is meaningless and disposable in the grand scheme of things. "The wheel is come full circle" (Act V, Scene 3) - Edmund uses this metaphor to describe how his own actions have led to his downfall. The "wheel" represents the cycle of life and death, and by saying that it has come "full circle," Edmund acknowledges that he is now facing the consequences of his actions. "Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither" (Act V, Scene 2) - Edgar uses this metaphor to reflect on the inevitability of death. He suggests that just as we must endure the journey of life from birth to death, we must also accept the fact that death is a natural part of that journey. He says, "I am a man more sinned against than sinning". Here, Lear is using death as a metaphor for the end of his reign and the destruction of the natural order. The play is filled with references to death, including the famous line, "When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools." This line highlights the idea that life is full of suffering and that death is a release from that suffering. Additionally, the play's many deaths and murders are symbolic of the chaos and destruction that come with the breakdown of society. when King Lear laments the loss of his daughter Cordelia, he says, "And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life! / Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" (Act 5, Scene 3, lines 307-309). This metaphor of death is used to express Lear's despair and his realization of his own mortality.

OTHELLO:

In Othello, death is used as a way to convey the tragic nature of the play. The characters in Othello are consumed by jealousy and revenge, and their actions ultimately lead to their own downfall. The use of death metaphor in Othello is particularly powerful, as it reflects on the tragic consequences of human emotion. For example, when Othello says, "Put out the light, and then put out the light" (Act V, Scene II), he is referring to the finality of death and how it can extinguish all hope and life. The metaphor of death is used to describe the emotional turmoil of Othello as he becomes consumed by jealousy and betrayal. For example, in Act 3, Scene 3, Othello says, "I had been happy if the general camp, / Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body, / So I had nothing known. O, now, for ever / Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content! / Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars / That make ambition virtue! O, farewell, / Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump, / The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife, / The royal banner, and all quality, / Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!" Here, Othello compares his previous happiness to death, emphasizing the emotional turmoil he is experiencing.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, Shakespeare's use of death metaphor in his tragedies is a powerful tool that adds depth and complexity to his plays. He uses it to explore the themes of mortality, love, and power and to express the power of the afterlife. Through his use of death metaphor, Shakespeare is able to explore the depths of human emotion and the struggles of life and death which contributes to the depth and complexity of characters. The use of language, symbolism, and imagery in his plays allows the audience

to connect with the characters on a deeper level and elicits a range of emotions from the audience. Death is used as a powerful symbol to explore themes of ambition, love, mortality, and the struggle for power. Through his use of death metaphor, Shakespeare reminds us of the fragility of life and the inevitability of death, and how it is intertwined with the human experience. As such, his works continue to be relevant and resonate with audiences to this day. Moreover, the post dramatic paradigm has reinvigorated the study of Shakespeare's death metaphors by highlighting their importance beyond just linguistic analysis. As theater and performance evolve, it becomes increasingly important to understand how Shakespeare's metaphors remain relevant in contemporary society. In other words, Shakespeare's use of death metaphors transcends the boundaries of language and time, delving into the very essence of what it means to be human, and will continue to fascinate scholars and audiences alike for centuries to come. Shakespeare's use of death metaphors is an enduring testament to his literary prowess and a valuable resource for insights into human understanding and interpretation of mortality, as well as a means for understanding the evolution of language and culture over time.

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