

The Power of Witches Exhibited in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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ABSTRACT

Many people believe in witches, who with the power of devil could harm others by their strange actions and their powers. They could see into the future of anyone and could bring evil into any one's life. It is analyzed that in the Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, he used witches to foretell the future of Macbeth. It is made clear that witches do not create evil but they have a keen interest and delight in encouraging human evil. Here they tried to encourage Macbeth to carry out his own ambition with wrong motive. At the beginning Macbeth is a brave and honest general, loyal to the rightful king Duncan. But at the end Macbeth turns to be a cruel tyrant, who kills the loving king and others, whoever crossed his line. This shows that ambition and guilt have terrible effects on a man and he loses his good character.

KEYWORDS: Ambition, Destruction, Evil, King, Prophecy, Reveal, Witches

INTRODUCTION

Witches are often blamed as the cause of things going wrong such as illnesses or untimely deaths or any failure. People, particularly weak minded old women are accused of being witches and were burnt to death. Belief in witchcraft always exists in the world, past and present. Shakespeare used witches in his play "*Macbeth*" and shows us that these witches are used to motivate someone to do their own evil ambitions and check their own evil powers whether they could carry out what they had expected them to do.

THEMES AND VIEWS FROM MACBETH

The central theme of the play "*Macbeth*" is the destruction caused when an ambitious man seizes power and works against social and political order. Macbeth and Banquo are generals in the army of Duncan, King of Scotland. They just have defeated an army of Norwegian invaders and Scottish rebels. They meet the three witches on their way. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and prophecy that he will be the future King of Scotland.

Macbeth : Speak, if you can; what are you?

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, that shalt be King hereafter! (Act one Scene 3
:pg.no : 43, lines: 46-50)

The above lines clearly show the prophesy of the three witches.

Meantime Duncan hears the great victory done by Macbeth and sentences the Thane of Cawdor to death and confers the title on Macbeth. This news reaches Macbeth. He feels happy to know that one of the prophesies of the witches comes true. He is motivated to believe witches' prophesy. He writes a letter to his wife informing the witches' prophesies and the title that has crowned on him. He thinks about the words of the witches again and again, and starts to have the great evil ambition to become the King of Scotland. Macbeth has a very goodwill among the people of Scotland. The King Duncan also greatly admires his brave victory. As Macbeth already has some initial ambition to become the King of Scotland now his ambition is encouraged greatly as one of the witches' prophesies is fulfilled. He is now ready to carry out his evil ambition. Not only Macbeth has ambition to become King but also the witches have their spell on Macbeth and waiting to see its result.

Lady Macbeth, after knowing the news through Macbeth's letter, starts to have an idea to kill Duncan and to make Macbeth as the King of Scotland. She desires for the post of the King. She wishes to inherit all social and political powers by making her husband the King. She has evil thoughts and so she calls on the powers of evil to help her to carry out her wishes. Here even Lady Macbeth herself acts as a witch. To fulfill that great desire she calls upon evil powers to pour on her. The following lines from Act One scene five shows how lady Macbeth asks the spirits to fill her taking away all her female nature.

“ Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty!”

Duncan, in order to celebrate the great victory, decides to stay at Macbeth's Castle. Lady Macbeth takes this as a great opportunity to kill Duncan and tells Macbeth not to show his real plan out and asks to leave everything to her. Macbeth being alone thinks about why he should kill his loving king Duncan and then plans for how to kill him. Lady Macbeth with the help of Macbeth executes her plan on that night. Macbeth kills Duncan and puts the blame on the guards. Before killing Duncan he feels and fears about the bad deed he is going to do. As a wife Lady Macbeth uses her love and affection encourages Macbeth to carry out that evil deed. At last Macbeth kills Duncan to fulfill his wife's wishes. At once he kills the King he lost his peace and started to have guilty feeling for killing his loving King. Macbeth became the King of Scotland. What the third witch says fulfilled now in Macbeth's life. This also shows how the spell of witches has power on the man who is going behind evil ambition.

After becoming the King of Scotland Macbeth starts to think about the witches' words. They also say him that Banquo won't be a king but his line would get kings. So he

fears about it and has planned to kill Banquo and his son. He has arranged murderers to kill them. They murdered Banquo and his son Fleance escaped. He does all this evil things to retain his reign. Not only that but also he believed strongly the witches' words.

“Third witch: thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.”(act one scene 3 45: 67)

The above line shows that Banquo's line would have kings whereas Banquo won't be King. Macbeth also heard these words and haunted with the fear that he may lose his kingship soon. And this leads him to do lot of horrible mistakes. Macbeth meets the witches second time and asks about his future events. They tell him that to beware of Macduff, Thane of Fife; that no one born of woman can harm him; and that he will never be defeated until Birnam Forest moves to Dunsinane. So he believes that victory is on his side. He is sure of that these three things would never happen in his life. On knowing that Macduff has gone to England, to raise an army to fight with him, Macbeth kills lady Macduff and her children. Meanwhile Lady Macbeth suffers from sleepwalking and dies. Macbeth is left alone. The army which is lead by Malcolm and Macduff cut branches from the trees in Birnam wood and use them as camouflage as they walk to Dunsinane .

It looks as though the wood itself is moving, as the prophecy foretold. Macbeth fears about it and decides to fight with Macduff. The brave Macbeth doesn't wish to suicide but prepares himself ready to fight. He fights with Macduff. While fighting Macduff reveals that he was not born in the normal way but by Caesarean section. Thus the last prophecy of the witches comes true. As Macbeth believed the witches he loses his faith and strength. Macduff kills Macbeth and Malcolm becomes the King of Scotland. Thus the spell of the witches has come true in Macbeth's life. This shows that the spell of the witches have power to achieve its goals when someone fits for that. Here Macbeth fits for that spell as he fell into the desire of becoming King.

The guilt of killing Duncan and occupying his throne haunted Macbeth. He doesn't lead a peaceful life. He has a life full of tension and fears about retaining his reign. He kills everyone whoever has come on his way. Through Macbeth character it can be concluded that witches are not creating evil but motivating the evil in human being. Here Macbeth has his own ambition to become a King. His evil thought of killing Duncan is greatly motivated by the witches in different situation and so he lost his life. Witches always check their power. So here they check their power through Macbeth. Shakespeare also presented another event where a witch plays some tricks with a sailor's wife but not able to succeed. This also shows that often witches check their power. As Macbeth believed witches they are very happy to see the result of their power, their spell (the end of Macbeth).

CONCLUSION

Through Shakespeare's play Macbeth it is clear that witches don't have power to create evil but they have power to motivate the evil in human being. So it lies in the hands of human being to be good or to be evil. Witches try to play with the human beings who have evil in their thought. Witches are happy to do something to the people who have evil thoughts with the help of their devils. Jennifer Riedel in his essay "The Witches' Influence on Macbeth" states that "For most of Shakespeare's contemporary audience, Macbeth would appear to be at the mercy of the witches and therefore not entirely responsible for his actions. In my opinion, it is easier to muster sympathy for a person who is not entirely to blame for their actions;" . According to this it is clear that Macbeth commits mistakes because of these witches and their power.

WORK CITED

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