

The importance of irony in shakespeare's



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Irony has always been of vital importance to Shakespeare. He uses it as his aid in his plays because it builds up the anticipation of the consequences of the character's actions, reveals character and has also been used to comment on topical issues such as the gun powder plot and witchcraft, which King James I for whom the play Macbeth had been written and debuted for was deeply interested in. Shakespeare uses irony as a tool by which he combines treason and witchcraft to render a powerful play to the Elizabethan audience.

Among the various types of irony in the play Macbeth, is the usage of the irony of fate. Shakespearean agents of fate throughout the play are the witches who appear to be spinning the wheel of Macbeth's destiny. They plant in him seeds of ambition which spur on Macbeth's cause to gain the Scottish crown. They set the theme of the play, "fair is foul, and foul is fair". This line gives a hint to the audience of the witches' equivocal tone of talking by which they confound Macbeth.

The supernatural knowledge they possess destabilize Macbeth, they are ambiguous. They are integral characters in the play, who incite action by prophesying to Macbeth. Macbeth is drawn towards them after their prophecy of him becoming the thane of Glamis is fulfilled. He demonstrates a belief in the controlling force of fate. He decides if he truly is meant to be king it will happen without his efforts but later succumbs to his growing ambition and takes matters into his own hands.

As he confesses in his Soliloquy of the dagger that, "thou hast misled me the way that I was going". By this we know that the witches give a direction to the

ambition already present in Macbeth. Even later in the play Macbeth turns to the witches for guidance, during the apparition scene yet again the witches speak equivocally and give him false hope and make him overconfident, their double-talk proves to be the beginning and the end of his downfall. His relations with the witches ensnare him and tighten the noose around his fate.

There are several areas where there is irony in various situations used by the playwright to comment on topical issues. In the Porter's scene the porter of Macbeth's castle Inverness pretends to be the porter of hell gate ironically that very night Macbeth's regicide of King Duncan had made Inverness like a hell on Earth. In this scene the gunpowder plot is mentioned. One of the sinners happens to be an equivocator, with the introduction of the equivocator Shakespeare attempts to bring in one of the current issues during James's reign. The equivocator was a Jesuit priest by the name of father Garnet who was involved in the gunpowder plot. Macbeth and his wife also are equivocators who flatter Duncan and put up an appearance of sincerity and loyalty. Another sinner mentioned in this scene was a farmer who committed suicide because he suffered a severe loss after hoarded his grains on the expectation of plenty.