

Macbeth concept of
imagination
philosophy essay



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Macbeth is the best example of Shakespeares use of imagination. Macbeth becomes very obsessed with an idea of becoming king and his imagination leads him to do horrible things.

The purpose of this paper is to show how powerful Macbeth's imagination was and how it served him. To successfully examine the concept of imagination in ' Macbeth' it was necessary to read ' Macbeth' itself, ' Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human' by Harold Bloom and ' O Sekspirovim tragedijama' by Shahab Yar Khan. Also, diverse critics gave their input on this theme which was helpful in finalizing this research. (Ian Johnston 1999, Henry Neill Paul 1938) Results show that Macbeth has freely chosen to embrace evil in his imagination. He has not resisted the impulse to imagine himself as a king. It is quite clear that Macbeth's ambition and commitment to his evil desires led him to brutally kill all those who he sees as a threat.

Introduction

Shakespeare has for the centuries thrilled most of the readers and spectators around the world. His works have been studied in many countries, thus making him hailed as the world's greatest writer ever. Someone once said that " the man, who has no imagination, has no wings". We are all aware of that. The imagination runs the show. We can't accept the modern literature without it. Shakespeare used it very often and with so much excellence that he brought it to the perfection. Macbeth is the best example of Shakespeare's use of imagination

Harold Bloom says that Macbeth himself can be called the unluckiest of all Shakespearean protagonists because he is the most imaginative. His power of fantasy is so enormous that pragmatically it seems to be Shakespeare's own. (Bloom, 1998, p. 516)

The universal reaction to Macbeth is that we identify with him, or at least with his imagination.

Shakespeare describes various types of symbolism and imagery that leads to the downfall of the main protagonist, Macbeth. The showings of darkness represent its evil and tragic moments. Blood symbolizes murder and guilt. The symbol of clothing is particularly used to suggest the hiding of the real faces and true itself and it is also widely used in order to achieve the general theme of evil. There are also Biblical references, witchcrafts, ghosts and many other imagery tools which made the story even more phantasmagoric.

Concept of Imagination

When we speak of imagination the first thing that comes up to our mind is something unnatural; something beyond our concept of reality. Imagination is a long lasting phenomenon. It has roots in mythology. Many people had spoken about it and gave their definitions. They can all be put in one: it is the formation of a mental image of something that is neither perceived as real nor present to the senses.

“ The witchcraft in Macbeth, though pervasive, cannot alter material events, yet hallucination can and does. The rough magic in Macbeth is wholly Shakespeare's; he indulges his own imagination as never before, seeking to

find its moral limits (if any). I do suggest that Macbeth represents Shakespeare, in any of the complex ways that Falstaff and Hamlet may represent certain inner aspects of the playwright. But in the Renaissance sense of imagination (which is not ours), Macbeth may well be the emblem of that faculty of Shakespeare, a faculty that must have frightened Shakespeare and ought to terrify us, when we read or attend Macbeth, for the play depends upon its horror and its own imaginings. Imagination (or fancy) is an equivocal matter for Shakespeare and his era, where it meant both poetic furor, as a kind of substitute for divine inspiration, and a gap torn in reality, almost a punishment for the displacement of the sacred into the secular. All of us possess, to one degree or another, a proleptic imagination; in Macbeth, it is absolute. Macbeth terrifies us partly because that aspect of our own imagination is so frightening; it seems to make us murderers, thieves, usurpers and rapists.” (Bloom, 1998, p. 516)

In the Act I Macbeth is already introduced with extraordinary nature of his imagination:

This supernatural soliciting

Cannot be ill; cannot be good: –

If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

Against the use of nature? Present fears

Are less than horrible imaginings.

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of man

That function is smother'd in surmise,

And nothing is, but what is not.

According to Harold Bloom, "my single state of man" plays upon several meanings of "single": unitary, isolated, vulnerable. The phantasmagoria of murdering Duncan is so vivid that "nothing is, but what is not", and "function", the mind, is smothered by "surmise", fantasy. Macbeth speaks to himself in a kind of trance, halfway between trauma and second sight. An involuntary visionary of horror, he sees what certainly is going to happen, while still knowing this murder to be "but fantastical". His tribute to his own "horrible imaginings" is absolute: the implication is that his will is irrelevant. (Bloom, 1998, p. 536)

The Witches

The witches interactions with Macbeth play a vital role in his thinking about his own life, before and after the murder of Duncan. Macbeth and Banquo recognize them as something supernatural, part of landscape, but not fully human. They have malicious intentions and prophetic powers. They do

nothing other than talk and offer visions. They are not involved in any action, yet they are important symbols in the play. They are essential manifestations of the moral atmosphere of Macbeth's world, just like the ghost in Hamlet. Macbeth so foresees an event that it seems to have happened already before it actually takes place. He is not aware of his ambition before he sees himself having performed the bloody crimes that fulfill his ambition. The witches exist to delusion people, to challenge their faith in themselves and the society.

Professor Khan thinks that Macbeth's evil-inner of himself attracts the witches:

"One namjerno Äekaju Macbetha i Banqua kao Åto zlo Äeka ljude. MeÄ' utim, one Äovjeku ne predlaÅu zlo: one radije spomenu object koji bi mogoao pokrenuti Äovjekovo vlastito nagingjanje zlu, a u ovom sluÄaju one to rade preko proroÄanstva. Dobar Äovjek kao Åto je Banquo, moÅe se oduprijeti njihovom pozivu, jer on u sebi ima milost BoÅju, kao i trag prvog grijeha." (Khan, 2008, p. 35)

Unlike Macbeth, Banquo doesn't let his desires outweigh his moral caution.

His response to the witches is different:

But 'tis strange,

And oftentimes to win us to our harm

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,

Win us with honest trifles to betray's

In deepest consequences

Macbeth cannot act on his awareness because his desires, kept alive by his imagination, are constantly mixed with his moral sensibilities. A part of Macbeth is fascinated with the possibility of being king. It's not entirely clear where this desire comes from. The witches put the suggestion into the play, but there is a strong hint from his wife that two of them have already talked about well before the play begins:

What beast was 't, then,

That made you break this enterprise to me?

When you durst do it, then you were a man;

And to be more than what you were, you would

Be so much more the man

In that case, the appearance of the witches may be a response to Macbeth's desires. He has not exactly invited them, but they are responding to his innermost imaginative desires. They don't tell him what to do; they don't say anything about killing Duncan. The witches cannot be responsible for Macbeth's actions. His actions are not controlled by the witches. He is always free to choose how he is going to act. Hence, we can say that these witches are there to constantly remind us of the potential for evil in the human imagination.

Blood

Blood is everywhere in Macbeth, beginning with the opening battle between the Scots and the Norwegian invaders, which is described in harrowing terms by the wounded captain in Act 1, scene 2.

Bloom in his *Invention of human* argues that "of all Shakespeare's plays, Macbeth is most 'a tragedy of blood', not just in its murders but in the ultimate implications of Macbeth's imagination itself being bloody. Macbeth's phantasmagoria of blood is constantly there: blood is the prime constituent of his imagination." (Bloom, 1998, p. 520)

Once Macbeth and Lady Macbeth embark upon their murderous journey, blood comes to symbolize their guilt, and they begin to feel that their crimes have stained them in a way that cannot be washed clean. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" Macbeth cries after he has killed Duncan, even as his wife scolds him and says that a little water will do the job. Later, though, she comes to share his horrified sense of being stained: "Out, damned spot; out, I say . . . who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" she asks as she wanders through the halls of their castle near the close of the play. Blood symbolizes the guilt that sits like a permanent stain on the consciences of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, one that hounds them to their graves. (<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/themes.html>)

Professor Khan discusses the sight of blood and its color in his book:

Ono što viđete upada u oči od boja svjetla i vatre, jeste boja krvi. I zaista, prizor krvi nam se konstantno natura, ne samo pukim slušanjem, nego

punim opisom i Äak ponavljanjem rijeÄi u neoÄekivanim dijelovima dijaloga. (Khan, 2008, p. 25)

Dagger scene

After discussing the crime he is about to commit with Lady Macbeth, Macbeth decided to go through with the “terrible feat”. He is sitting alone, waiting for some signal which would approve his evil act. The focus of this soliloquy, the invisible dagger, is one of first evidences of Macbeth’s powerful imagination; an imagination, which would later be the main reason for his lunacy, and in the very end, his downfall:

Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?

I see thee yet, in form as palpable

As this which now I draw.

Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going,

And such an instrument I was to use.

Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,

Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still,

And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,

Which was not so before. There's no such thing.

It is the bloody business which informs

Thus to mine eyes

When he goes out to commit the murder, he is hallucinating the sight of a dagger leading him toward the deed, and he is filled with a sense of horror at what he is about to do. He is, it seems, in the grip of his imagination and is not serving some conscious rational decision he has made. But, in the very act of letting his imagination lead him on, he is aware that what he is doing is wrong. It's as if the dagger is pulling him toward the murder (against his will)–he's following an imagined projection of his desires, rather than being pushed into the murder by some inner passion. (<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/eng366/lectures/macbeth.htm>)

It's important to stress the imaginative tensions in Macbeth's character before the murder and to appreciate his divided nature. That's why summing up his motivation with some quick judgment about his ambition is something one should resist. That resolves the issue too easily. Macbeth, in a sense, is tricked into murdering Duncan, but he tricks himself. That makes the launching of his evil career something much more complex than a single

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powerful urge which produces a clear decision. (<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/eng366/lectures/macbeth.htm>)

After all, one needs to notice clearly how he is filled with instant regret at what he has done. If driving ambition were all there was to it, one would think that Macbeth and his wife would not become morally confused so quickly. Macbeth's entrance after the killing brings out really strongly a sense that if he could go back to the speech about the imaginary dagger, he would not carry out the murder. Lady Macbeth thinks a little water will solve their immediate problem; Macbeth knows that that is too easy. He cannot live with what he is done and remain the same person. (<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/eng366/lectures/macbeth.htm>)

Macbeth and Banquo's ghost Encounter

Another instance in which Macbeth's imagination comes into play again is when he sees Banquo's ghost and he begins talking to him:

Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee.

Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold.

Thou hast no speculation in those eyes

Which thou dost glare with!

Macbeth and only Macbeth can see Banquo's ghost. Many critics say that Banquo's ghost is not 'real' but a delusion of his evil sub-conscious and the fear and guilt that have completely overwhelmed and paralyzed him. So Shakespeare uses the appearance of Banquo's ghost as a means of

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revealing to his readers the mental turmoil of Macbeth. We know how Macbeth's reacted to Duncan's murder, when he said he will never sleep again, that he is capable of guilt. The ghost is a manifestation of that, just as the dagger was a manifestation of his ambition.

Conclusion

Macbeth's ambition is driven by a number of factors including prophecy and Lady Macbeth. The witches foretell that Macbeth will become King. Macbeth believes them and the various prophecies come true during the play.

Witches appear three times, but as a fruit of Macbeth's imagination. Lady Macbeth is the driving force that encourages Macbeth to overcome his strong sense of guilt and take action. Macbeth's ambition soon gets out of control and forces him to murder again and again to cover up his previous crime.

The last prophecy Macbeth hears from the witches is:

Macbeth shall never vanquish be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill

For none of woman born shall harm Macbeth.

The supernatural force speaks the truth, but by obliquity and by double meaning. They have blinded Macbeth by extending his pride. The Shakespeare's use of the apparition to represent the powerful evil spirits is effective to demonstrate the power of image over word.

It is through the strengths of his imagination that Shakespeare's characters have withstood time. They are played on every stage in the world. In the end, Shakespeare's ingenious usage of themes and symbolism creates, as A. P. Rossiter calls, " a play about the disintegration of the state of man, and the state he makes his". Without the witches, the ghost, the visions, and the apparitions, Macbeth would have been a dull and tiresome play.