

Role of the Prophecy on Macbeth's Character

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دور التنبؤ في شخصية ماكبث

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Abstract:

Macbeth is one of the most prominent tragedies written by William Shakespeare in 1606. The main character, Macbeth, is the tragic hero of the story. The play tells the tale of General Macbeth, a nobleman who knew through the prophecy that he would become a king, and he was seduced by the Witches, and his excessive ambition resulted in his downfall. This study aims to know how the prophecy plays the important role in shaping Macbeth's character and analyze the impact of the prophecy in his psychological and moral development, drawing on the play's text. The study used a qualitative research design to analyze the role of prophecy in changing Macbeth's character. The analysis showed that the Macbeth's believes of the Witches prophecy had a great effect on Macbeth character.

Keywords: Ambition, Macbeth, Prophecy, Tragedy, Witches

المخلص

تعد مسرحية ماكبث واحدة من أبرز الأعمال التراجيدية التي كتبها ويليام شكسبير عام 1606، والشخصية الرئيسية هي ماكبث، وهو البطل التراجيدي للقصة، وتحكي المسرحية قصة الجنرال ماكبث، وهو رجل نبيل عرف من خلال التنبؤ أنه سيصبح ملكاً، وقد أغوته الساحرات، وأدى طموحه المفرط إلى سقوطه، وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة الدور المهم الذي يلعبه التنبؤ في تشكيل شخصية ماكبث، وتحليل أثر التنبؤ في تطوره النفسي والأخلاقي، وذلك بالاعتماد على النص المسرحي، واستخدمت الدراسة تصميم البحث النوعي لتحليل دور التنبؤ في تغيير شخصية ماكبث، وقد أظهر التحليل أن اعتقادات ماكبث بتنبؤ الساحرات كان له تأثير كبير على شخصية ماكبث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطموح، ماكبث، النبوءة، المأساة، الساحرات.

Introduction

William Shakespeare is one of the important figures of English literature due to the large number of his publications. He is considered as one of the most important writers because of his extensive poems, sonnets, and drama. Macbeth is one of the most popular plays written by William Shakespeare. It was published in 1606 during the period of great tragedies.

Macbeth is talking about the man's ambition, desire for power, and all the devilish plans he is ready to go through in order to achieve his goals. The prophecy in Macbeth has a great effect on the development of events as well as in the plot. In other words, the prophecy plays a crucial

role in Macbeth in the sense, making the play tragedy. Besides, the prophecy is one of the supernatural elements in Macbeth that considered very important in the play.

Sir Arthur Quiller Couch (1986) focused on in the following words, “*let us exclude the supernatural for a moment. Having excluded it, we shall strait away perceive that the story..... has one fatal defect as a theme of tragedy*”. The study linked the power of the Witches magic to the development of actions in the play. In addition, the Witches represent the power of evil and darkness. This idea was mentioned in the following illustration:

*What are these,
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
And yet not look like the inhabitant o' the earth,
And yet are on it? Live you? Or are you ought
That man may question?*

The prophecy took place early in the play by the Witches. Hence, this prophecy deceived Macbeth for his true place in this world, making him believe he could be a king.

a. Statement of the problem

One of the problems that people suffer from today is excessive barbarity. Many people are killed without mercy or compassion. Moreover, they are killed by their brothers, relatives, and acquaintances. This aggression is an instinct present in many people. This aggression is either a result of greed or avarice, or a result of excessive human ambition.

This paper attempts to determine the extent of the influence of the prophecy presented by the witches in the play on Macbeth's flawed mind, and how the prophecy was able to control his thinking and lead him to kill the King Duncan without mercy, changing him from a hero in the play into a traitor and criminal.

b. Research Questions

- c. 1: Did the prophecy play a major role in influencing Macbeth's personality?
- d. 2: Was the prophecy the reason for Macbeth's transformation from decent, good, and heroic person into traitorous and deceitful one?

e. Significance of the study

Shakespeare is one of the most important writers who showed the truth and reality of people and the relationships between them, sometimes through people and symbols. For example, prophecy, the Witches, blood and other signs through which he tried to explain and clarify the social fabric of humanity.

Macbeth's play shows the conflict between good and evil, and that man is always in conflict with himself between right and wrong. Likewise, what man does is a result of his actions and thoughts, whether they are bad or good. This play teaches people how to use their minds to make sound decisions and to stay away from emotions that increase human ambition.

Through this article, the researcher wanted to explain how the prophecy affected Macbeth and his personality, as well as how this prophecy controlled him. Thus, people realize how they can deal with outside world, which enables them to protect themselves from psychological conflicts. Moreover, Macbeth's play embodied and clarified issues related to morality, and the excessive ambition that led Macbeth to bloodshed.

Literature Review

Macbeth was a tragic play written by William Shakespeare between 1599-1606. It is also considered as one of the shortest tragedies of Shakespeare. It narrated a story about a hero named Macbeth who was courageous and strong Scottish general, he succeed in a battlefield against enemies for his country protection with his military forces. When he returned from the battle, he encountered b three witches; telling him a prophecy that he will be the king of

Scotland. Their prediction influenced on Macbeth's mind and became full of greed and ambition.

Macbeth has been widely studied and analyzed because of its powerful dramatic set up and deep psychological ideas. Many researchers have explained the main characters, particularly Macbeth through different critical perspectives. Bradley (1904, pp. 287-290) mentioned that Macbeth faced a dilemma between his ambition and reality, in other words, between evil and good. At the beginning of the play, he appeared as a loyal and a brave soldier. However, after he knew the prophecy, his desire for power increases, leading him to commit murder. Moreover, Bradley's study highlighted that guilt deeply affect Macbeth's mind, that is illustrated in his visions and speeches. Selimoğlu (2013) added that the witches appear in scenes where no other characters are present, and therefore can be seen to have an independent existence. Moreover, Chakrabarti (2021) mentioned that the witches are deprived of their basic rights to live because of their bodily features which are different from the common mass and deemed undesirable. It is quite evident that these witches were extremely evolved at the spiritual, intellectual and psychological level. Both, Macbeth and Banquo become enthralled by the sorcery skills and seek to know more about their future. However, even while approaching the witches, the two men do not refrain from insulting them. Banquo says:

What are these?
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o'the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? Or are you aught
That man may question? (Shakespeare 2019, 15-16)

With reference to Freud, (1957, pp. 241-245), Macbeth play discussed the idea of fate and free will. It claimed that the Witches prophecy does not make Macbeth do things, but they bring out his hidden desire. As a result, Macbeth was responsible for what he did even with supernatural elements in the play.

Ferdous (2017) discussed the idea of how being a man (masculinity) influences the actions and motives for the characters. It was claimed that Shakespeare shows masculinity as more than just a male quality, it also serves as a mental impact to power and privilege. It was also stated that Lady Macbeth and the Witches appear more Masculine characteristics than Macbeth does. This influences his choices and pushes him towards violence to prove his masculinity and put back his honor in front of others.

Panda (2017) focused on the idea of evil and how Macbeth's personality changed. It highlighted the corruption and power abuse that manifested in his behavior once he became a king. The study explained how Macbeth changed from a courageous leader to a ruthless tyrant, driven by the need to keep his power at all costs, raising questions about the nature of evil and the motivations behind human actions.

Moreover, Fainuddin (2021) concentrated on the psychological and moral parts of Macbeth character, particularly his internal drives like avarice and violence. The research highlighted that Macbeth did not just commit murder, but also struggled between his immoral desires and deeds. This led to the breakdown of his character, ethics, and humanity.

Salim (2023) mentioned Macbeth through the lens of tragic hero, using Aristotle's theories in Poetics. The study asserted that Macbeth's downfall is primarily attributed to his insatiable ambition that led him to betray King Duncan, engage in a series of immoral acts and commit many crimes, eventually resulting his own death. This was the cause of Macbeth transformation from a respected courageous man to a lonely killer, highlighting his tragic character and moral corruption.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to analyze the role of prophecy on the Macbeth's character. The main method of the study is a textual analysis method, which focused on the essential scenes and sentences related to the prophecy and how Macbeth was influenced by it.

Analysis And Discussion

The main idea of the play Macbeth is about the ambition. Macbeth is an ambitious man. Macbeth started with the appearance of three Witches in an awful way and in a desolate place under a stormy sky. The Witches were talking with themselves in riddles in Act 1, scene 1:

“Fair is foul and foul is fair” (Macbeth, p.521).

This quote means that the Witches will change actions. In other words, they will change Macbeth from a good, truthful person to a bad and untruthful deceiver. This analysis is consistent with Selimoğlu (2013), who also assured that Macbeth and Banquo took the prophecy of the Witches seriously.

In Act 1, Scene 3, the Witches upon a heath in Scotland intended to inform Macbeth that he will be made the Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawder and will be a king hereafter and Banquo's sons will be kings, but not Banquo's himself. Macbeth was astonished for the prophecy and had a desire to know more details about it.

In Act 1, Scene 3 *“Stay, you imperfect speaker, tell me more”* (Macbeth, p.522), Banquo was different from Macbeth because Banquo was quieter and knew that his line will be king. In other words, the reaction of Banquo is different from Macbeth. It gave the hint that Macbeth actually was ready to change and to believe the prophecy. While Macbeth followed his ambition, Banquo preferred to think more carefully, used his mind and was convinced by the truth.

Subsequent to Macbeth knowing that The King honors him, the Thane of Cawdor, he was surprised and asked whether the evil creatures could predict the truth: he said *“what! can the devil speak true?”* Macbeth could not believe what he knew and heard. After he was the Thane of Cawdor, the action completely started to change, and Macbeth was thinking about the first step to be the king of Scotland. Macbeth said *“Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor/The greatest is behind”* (Macbeth, p.522). In other words, from now on, Macbeth began to think about the prophecy.

Moreover, the following quote showed how Macbeth believes the prophecy and how he thought about it. *“My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical/ Shakes so my single state on man”* (Macbeth, p. 522). He was thinking about the prophecy and what preventing the other prophecies from coming true. He thought that the prophecy cannot be evil because the first one was true.

Macbeth was in dilemma because he must choose between the good or evil. Furthermore, he wondered if this prophecy was good, why were all these evil thoughts coming to his mind. Here, the prophecy began to fully influence his personality.

In Act 1, Scene 4, Macbeth was thinking of getting rid of the King Duncan and took the decision about the killing. In addition, Macbeth asked the star to hide fires because he did not want anyone to know what he was thinking about.

*Star, hide your fires
Let no light see my black and deep desires
the eye which wink at the hand let yet that be,
which the eye fears, when it is done to see.* (Macbeth, p. 523)

In these lines, he wanted to achieve the prophecy, and it has taken Macbeth the resolution to get rid of the King Duncan. The prophecy has motivated Macbeth to be more ambitious and to be more disloyal. Moreover, the prophecy changed the thoughts of Macbeth. He believed the Witches that he was going to them whenever he found himself in a problem. Hence, after Macbeth being a king, he faced many problems like the suspicions that led him to kill more and more. Moreover, he tried to stop the second part of prophecy by seeking the Witches once more. Ekman (2024) also verifies this result as he mentioned that If Shakespeare had wanted witches either for their own or for James's sake, he had plenty of source material to use. But Duncan is not killed by witchcraft; he is killed by a man who makes a terrible decision. It could be claimed that the literary version of real-world divination is prophecy; the function of both is to reveal the future (or the will of the gods), and they are thus both connected to the deep-seated human desire to be able to affect one's own future; consequently, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides abound with omens, oracles, and prophecy and in Macbeth, it is the prophecy of kingship that sets off the chain of events which lead to Macbeth's tragic end (Ekman, 2024).

Conclusion

William Shakespeare is a famous English author all over the world. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, on April 23, 1564. As most people know, literature often serves as a way to express the cultures and traditional values of the community it represents. It is also seen as a reflection of various aspects of human life and experiences. For instance, Shakespeare's tragedies focus on the darker and bad sides of human existence, our flaws and uncovering the true nature of people. Correspondingly, Macbeth explores themes of ambition and desire for power, showcasing the evil actions one might to achieve their goals. This study demonstrates that the prophecy of the witches in Macbeth do not represent a fatalistic force compelling the protagonist's actions, but rather plays the role of a psychological catalyst that reveals and fuels his hidden ambition.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended to carry out more analysis on Macbeth's play as it can deduce many moral issues.
2. It is recommended to do an analytical study of the obscure words in the witches' prophecy and how they influenced Macbeth's character.
3. Studying how prophecy changed from an aspiration into a source of Macbeth's fear.
4. Studying the impact of prophecy on other characters in the play, such as Lady Macbeth.
5. It is recommended to do a study on the influence of Lady Macbeth and the witches on Macbeth's decisions.

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