
Summary: The Reality Of Shakespeare's Macbeth

In the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible, a tough lesson the character Eve receives is to not always trust what is readily seen. Because she went against God's orders, she accepted a lifelong punishment for eating the forbidden fruit, doing something realistically harmless. Because Eve fell under the deceptive appearance of the fruit's true reality of sin, she had to pay the ultimate price of eternal punishment. Since then, this theme of Appearance versus Reality has been recreated in countless works of literature and continues to educate readers of the presence of deception in everyday life. This theme is most significantly used in works of Shakespeare and has a pivotal role in his famous play, Macbeth. In this play, we find the character of Macbeth, a moral soldier who is delivered a prophecy by seemingly amicable witches that would make him the king of Scotland. However, little did he know that this prophecy would take him on a journey of murder, betrayal, and his ultimate death. This theme can be readily seen in the deceptive characters of the three witches, the hospitality given to King Duncan, and in the Dagger of the mind.

In the first scene of any play, there needs to be an introduction to the significance of the play that will hook the audience into it. In the first scene of Macbeth, the first characters introduced are three hideous witches who decide when they are to confront the character, Macbeth. Before they exit the scene, they chant in unison saying, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air". Before even introducing the main protagonist or conflict, Shakespeare is presenting the main theme of this play with this truly eerie statement. This paradox of "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" sets the tone of the tragic play, prompting the audience to remain alert of what they are about to see, for it may not be what it seems. This also lays the suspenseful tone that will soon build throughout the play, while foreshadowing foul behavior by witches' part when soon meet Macbeth. With this statement, Shakespeare introduces the theme of appearance versus reality, bonding the appearance of fairness and true evil while the audience acknowledges deception as the foundation of the play.

The opening paradox is integral for the entirety of the character of the three witches, for every moment of their presence is painted with deception. Their main contribution to the story is their demonstration of the prophecy to Macbeth, which presents him becoming the thane of Cawdor and ultimately receiving the title of King of Scotland. Upon receiving this information, Macbeth is clearly startled by the idea of his future in which he holds such power and questions the validity of their words. Yet, after Ross and Angus come to tell him of his title as Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth accepts this prophecy as truth as he states, "Glamis, and thane of Cawdor! The greatest is behind". After one of their predictions came true, Macbeth is so quick to accept their prophecy as true, believing that the best is yet to come. However, Banquo is eager to have Macbeth recognize the deception this prophecy may contain due to its introduction by these witches, saying, "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 consequence". Banquo immediately recognizes the falsity hidden behind the witches' words, for he understands that those who seem to help us may actually desire to cause great harm. He sees how implausible the character of witches is, for he recognizes their supernatural abilities as instruments of evil that only bring darkness to people's lives for their personal enjoyment. Yet, Macbeth chooses to ignore this, seeing this prophecy has a golden fortune that he must fulfill to obtain the power

of King. However, he is unaware of this future being true Fool's Gold, which will bring him to his loss of self and ultimate destruction.

Finally, the reality of the witches' character is shown in the final moments of the play, where Macbeth is confronted with the true reality of their prophecy. In Act four scene one, the witches had revealed to Macbeth that any man born from a woman is forever unable to harm, which secured his confidence remaining in power forever unharmed. Yet again, Macbeth holds absolute confidence in the words of these deceitful witches, unaware of the half-truth they really hold. He ultimately faces this half-truth when he finally confronts Macduff, who has come to battle him for the grave murder of his father. Macbeth proudly asserts his dominance by saying, "Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests; I bear a charmed life, which must not yield, To one of woman born". In response, Macduff explains what the witches never did to Macbeth, that since he was cut from the womb of his mother, he was not naturally born from a woman. This is a devastating reveal that punctures the solid ego of Macbeth, who finally realizes the true deception of the witches' prophecy. He states, "For it hath cowed my better part of man! And be these juggling fiends no more believed, That palter with us in a double sense, That keep the word of promise to our ear, And break it to our hope". At this moment, Macbeth recognizes the true consequences of his actions, realizing what he wanted to believe as true was only a horrific sham that brought him to this moment. In the end, The Three Witches were deceitful puppeteers of Macbeth's actions that he believed would grant him immense power, only to bring him his death. Another example of the theme of Appearance versus Reality is found in the hospitality given to King Duncan while staying in Macbeth's home. After winning the battle against the Irish, King Duncan is invited to Macbeth's home for dinner in celebration of their victory and for Macbeth gaining the title of Thane of Cawdor. Once he arrived, Duncan believed that he was in the lovely home of two hospitable hosts stating, "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air

Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses". This clearly demonstrates dramatic irony, for King Duncan has no knowledge of what is in the minds of his hosts, who are planning to kill him. Unbeknownst to Duncan, Lady Macbeth has orchestrated a plan for Macbeth to secure the title of kingship that involves murdering Duncan while he is in their home. To do this, Lady Macbeth tells her husband that they must not show their true intentions while portraying themselves as hospitable hosts stating, "Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye, Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under't. He that's coming must be provided for". In this statement, Lady Macbeth explains that in order to deceive Duncan into trusting him, Macbeth must portray himself as an innocent ally, but remain aware of what he must do to take his role as king. Although he is at first fearful, recognizing himself as a moral man and has lived devoted to King Duncan, Macbeth willfully agreed to kill him to fulfill the prophecy given to him by the three witches. To Duncan, the Macbeths are trustworthy allies of his loyal kingdom of Scotland. Yet, If he had paid closer attention, he would have seen under their evil facade and see their true plan to kill him for his crown. Ultimately, King Duncan falls under the deception brought before him and faces his unjust death.

Finally, the most significant example of Appearance versus Reality is found in the hallucination Macbeth experiences before murdering Duncan. In Act one scene seven, Macbeth struggles to agree to Lady Macbeth's plan for him to kill Duncan, for Lady Macbeth chastises him by labeling him less than a man. Lady Macbeth states, "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". Here Lady Macbeth scorns Macbeth by saying if he were really a man, he would follow his word and do

what is needed to be done. By these words, Lady Macbeth not only mocks the strong character of Macbeth but devalues his manhood that he has earned up to this moment. Macbeth is a strong soldier who rightfully earned his title as Thane of Glamis and the respect of King Duncan, yet he allows Lady Macbeth to take his control as a man away from him. This is explored further once where Macbeth finds a floating bloody dagger is facing him, a dagger similar to the one planned to be used in the murder of Duncan. In this, Macbeth finds this dagger to be only a hallucination, brought on by his fear carried out to kill Duncan. This “Dagger of the Mind” can easily be seen as a representation of the declining mental state of Macbeth, where this irrational plan of murder has now plagued his mind with delusions. In reality, this dagger is a phallic symbol of Macbeth’s masculinity that forces Macbeth to assert his manly dominance. The dagger at this moment is asking for Macbeth to accept it in asserting his dominance as a man, similar to the social dominance the penis gives to a man. Accepting this dagger, he will be proving his manhood that Lady Macbeth and that his internal voice have questioned. In the end, this hallucination only secures Macbeth’s choice of murdering Duncan, proving to himself of his strength as a man and as King of Scotland.

At the end of this play, the audience and reader watched as the main protagonist falls to his death as he continually pursued in the search of power. The character of Macbeth began his story as a successful soldier, only to lose himself in the immoral story of power crafted by others. On the surface, it is shown that Macbeth is the victim of deception from others. Yet in reality, he was a victim of his own mind that was thirsty for undeniable power. What Shakespeare is demonstrating is that we must look deeper into what is seemingly appealing to the eye and mind. We have to recognize that what may look fair is indeed a foul trick, that we must not fall privy to. We must not change the contents of our moral character in order to obtain power or feed the temptation of our minds. In Macbeth, we learn that what appears as great fortune can actually be a Fool’s Gold of the mind, waiting to damage our true reality of life.

Works Cited

1. Shakespeare, William. Macbeth. Global Grey, 2018, globalgreybooks.com, www.globalgreybooks.com/macbeth-ebook.html.