
Summary: The Role Of Witches In Macbeth Play

When Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, society in England was quite superstitious. People believed in witches, who came 'directly from the devil'. Witches were believed to be able to control the weather, see into future, vanish, hover, summon up apparitions..., and they were blamed for all ills, such as disease outbreaks. As they were seen as evil, their aspect had to be horrible as well: they were shown with beards, even though they were supposed to be women.

The moment when the Witches first meet Macbeth and Banquo, the two generals find their appearance appalling: What are these so withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like th' inhabitants o' th' Earth, and yet are on 't?—Live you? Or are you aught that man may question? You seem to understand me, by each at once her choppy finger laying upon her skinny lips. You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so. Shakespeare keeps the witches beyond the limits of human comprehension. They embody an unreasoning, instinctive evil. This is due to a mythological reference related to the Moiras.

In ancient Greek, the Moiras, often known in English as the Fates, were three apparent women who represented the incarnation of destiny (Parcas in Roman mythology). Their main purpose was to control the metaphorical thread of every human being's life from birth to death. The most striking similarity they have with the Witches from Macbeth is the number three. There are a few examples of the number three throughout the play: the sailor's wife «'mounch'd, and mounch'd, and mounch'd'»; when the First Witch repeats «'I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do'»; and there are, of course, three witches. Three is a number that is often seen as having a particular significance. In Christianity, for example, there is the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Bad luck is frequently thought to come in threes. Macbeth is hailed by three titles (Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and future King) and is later given three prophecies. During the play, the Witches can also be referred to as The Weird Sisters; this is because in Old English, 'weird' was written as 'wyrd', which means fate, destiny. For all these reasons, the witches are very important in Macbeth: they set the mood and the plot into the play by predicting Macbeth's future, causing everything goes in one direction from the very beginning. Macbeth is a play about morals and how people can be easily influenced. That said, we can certainly affirm that the most influential characters, together with Lady Macbeth, are the Witches. Shakespeare presents The Three Witches as mysterious, vindictive and even a little absurd creatures; but the truth is that they are the most dangerous, powerful and malevolent characters in the tragedy.

When the Witches initially interfere with Macbeth and Banquo's path, they proceed to call Macbeth Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and future King, before telling Banquo that, though he will not ever be king, his descendants will be. At first, Macbeth and Banquo are hesitant to believe these prophecies, but after the Witches vanish, Macbeth is informed to be the new Thane of Cawdor. This occurrence immediately incites Macbeth's ambition to become King of Scotland, doing things he probably would have never done if the Witches had not produced the encounter.

In Act IV Scene I, Macbeth meets with the Weird Sisters again, demanding answers. During the scene, Macbeth is visited by three Apparitions who tell him: to beware of Macduff, that nobody born from a woman will ever harm him and that he will never be defeated until Birnam Wood

marches to fight him at Dunsinane Hill. After hearing this, he thinks he is invincible; but Macbeth's death does, indeed, follow the Witches' prophecies. He is killed by Macduff, as the first and second prediction revealed, and Malcolm's troops tear down branches to screen them as they approach his castle, which fits perfectly with prophecy number three.

Despite all, the Witches were not really responsible for any of the events occurred in Macbeth. It is obvious that they do plant the first seed in the mind of the characters to lead the events on, but they never say anything about what to do to make them happen. The Witches give Macbeth the idea of becoming a king, but he himself thinks of murder since none mentioned anything about killing; it is entirely his own idea. Therefore, although The Weird Sisters are not necessarily driving the plot, their prophecies and desires definitely are, since they corrupt Macbeth to the fullest extent.

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