

---

## The Witches in Macbeth, The Source Of a Terrible Tragedy

In the play, there are many interesting sections that concentrate on the suspense and the involvement of the supernatural. With the sense of the supernatural and interference of the spirits, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are led to dangerous, tempting things. The three witches are introduced right at the beginning of the play, on Macbeth's way home from fighting in the battle for his country. They recount to Macbeth three prophecies.

The first is that he will become the Thane of Cawdor, the second is the Thane of Glamis, which he already was titled as, and the third was stated by the witches as: "he shalt be King hereafter". These prophecies, two of them being very new to him, introduced Macbeth to new ideas of greatness. And, in knowing that in this time period, it was sometimes thought that the witches had the ability to reverse the natural order of things, Macbeth knew that he should be suspicious of the words of the Wëird Sisters. This scene brings into the play the idea of fate and the role with which it has in the play. One can ponder on whether Macbeth ever had a chance of doing what was right after hemet with the witches, because of how strong their words were, and because of how many great things they were promising to him. After the prophecies were given to him, Macbeth had a very strong reaction to what was stated: "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 smothered in surmise, And nothing is but what is not."

Obviously, Macbeth is not yet sure of himself as an evil man. Immediately after hearing the witches' prophecy that he will be king, Macbeth thinks that he must kill the current king, this being King Duncan, in order to take over the throne. Although he is not sure that he can follow through with this, he wants nothing more in the world than to have the amount of power and respect that he knows he will receive if he takes over the position. So, in returning home, and with the help of persuasion and instigation from his wife, he kills King Duncan. Prevoiusly to the murder and immediately after, Macbeth's "heat-oppressed brain" caused him to see images floating in the air, specifically the dagger that became bloody right before the bell rang as a signal to kill King Duncan. These images may have been messages from the witches, as yet another cause of Macbeth's insanity.

However, the witches made Macbeth believe that he was on the brink of becoming the most powerful, respected and dignified man, and they convinced him so well that he continued to end the lives of others to achieve his goal. After killing Duncan, Macbeth is aware of some people who might be too suspicious of him, and of others that he has to kille in order to be the individual who inherits the throne as a result of King Duncan's death. One of these men is his partner in war, Banquo. Macbeth hires three men to killhe and his son. Later on in act three, Macbeth and Lady Macbath are hosting a dinner when Macbeth notices the appearance of Banquo. Later on, it is discovered that instead of it being the deceased Banquo, it is his ghost, and only Macbeth can see him. Macbeth knows that the witches are trying to get the best of him, and as a result, Macbeth decides to make another visit to the witches to find out what is going on and to decide what his future actions will be. In his visit to his witches in act four, scene one, Macbeth is given four apparitions by the witches which include a floating head with a

---

crown on it, a bloody baby, a child with a crown on its head, holding a tree branch and a series of kings who all resemble Banquo, one of the people that Macbeth assigned to be killed.

Each of these apparitions has obvious symbolism and is the witch's next attempt in showing Macbeth his superiority and his inevitability. By the beginning of act four, the witches have a strong enough hold on Macbeth that whatever they tell him to do in order to get what he wants, he will do it. Macbeth has become so power-hungry that he begins to change as a person. He is no longer a pushover or easygoing, he is more demanding towards the witches, and in hearing these new apparitions, he becomes even more greedy, and eventually over-confident. The following quotes show Macbeth's confidence takes over: "Then live, Macduff; what need I fear of thee? But yet I'll make assurance double sure And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live, That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies, And sleep in spite of thunder". "That will never be. Who can impress the forest, bid the tree Unfix his earthbound root? Sweet bodements, good!"

The second two of these apparitions given to Macbeth tell him that he doesn't have to be scared of any human that was not born of a woman, and that he is not in danger unless the forest surrounding his castle comes and knocks on his door. In this case, the witches were once again a source of Macbeth's downfall because, by the witches boosting his confidence, they convinced him that he could do anything, and would not get in trouble for it, which caused him to want even more, and to feel that he could do anything to get at that point. After this scene, Macbeth returns home and no longer worries about what he has to come because he was originally worried that Macduff would kill him. Now he simply decides that Macduff was born of a woman. These apparitions are good news for Macbeth. The witches encouraged him to believe he was indestructible. He has found protection in the strength of the spirit's words and having possession of all the confidence in the world, he fears no one. Nearing the end of the play, Macbeth's castle is invaded by Macduff and Malcolm's army. Each person is carrying a branch from a tree, to form an illusion that they were a moving forest. Macbeth becomes nervous, because remembering the apparition, he knows that at this point, he has something to fear. Macbeth also discovers by asking to fight a man who was not born a woman, and suspecting that no man would speak up, that Macduff was not of woman born and that he was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb. This causes Macbeth to go into great shock. He is now positive that he will be killed. The end result of Macbeth's life could have been different, but the witches convinced him that he was safe and that no harm was in his future. All of the events following Macbeth's second meeting with the witches show the interference of the witch who tell Macbeth what his future holds. Even in his final uttered words before his death, Macbeth refers to two of the witch's apparitions, these being the second and third apparition concerning the Great Birnam wood knocking at his door and his inevitability to anyone born of a woman: "Though Birnam wood become to Dunsinane And thou opposed, being of no woman born" This quote is great proof that the witches are what brought Macbeth to his ultimate destruction. The witches were referred to throughout the play, right until the end, and even when Macbeth had only seconds to live. From the start of the play, Macbeth began to change as a character for the worse. He became completely different from the brave soldier and changed into an evil king and then to his tragic death where he discovers humility.

In my thorough examination of certain scenes of the play, I noticed that the supernatural was definitely a major factor on the play's tragic conclusion. The killing of Duncan started an unstoppable chain of events that ends with the murder of Macbeth and the suicide of Lady Macbeth. Macbeth, in the beginning had all of the qualities of an honorable gentleman who could become anything, but he took the wrong path to becoming what he wanted. Although

---

Macbeth may have questioned the validity of the witches' prophecies, he was tempted and refused to listen to his own reasoning. When the apparitions the witches give to Macbeth start to show their faults, Macbeth is right to blame the witches for deceiving him with half-truths. The witches are responsible for introducing the ideas to Macbeth, which, in turn, fired up Macbeth's ambition and led to a disastrous and unnecessary tragedy. Although there are other things, which contributed to the tragedy of Macbeth, such as Lady Macbeth's dominance, and his own personal ambition, without the witches there to convince him to commit these evil crimes in order to gain power. It would have never happened. Perhaps the witches were such a strong influence to Macbeth, that they became a part of his brain and worked with his own thoughts to form his new insane character.

eduzaurus.com