

The influence of predictions in psychological behaviour: the case of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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Abstract: In this project, I will analyse the behaviour of the character of Macbeth in Shakespeare's play of the same name, taking into account the events that unfold in it and the ambition that drives the character. In addition, I will emphasize the factor of predictions as an object of great influence on Macbeth's behaviour. Furthermore, I will investigate the different studies of other authors on the same point. Taking my cue from the playtext, the most relevant events will be drawn for analysis, in order to consider them chronologically and to examine the character's behaviour in greater detail as studied by the different thinkers and scholars who have studied the play (Coleridge, Bradley, Muir, Bloom, Nuttall). Finally, I will conclude with a review of the figure of Macbeth in a prophetic context in which diction and action are, in the temporal unfolding of the play, profoundly determined by prediction.

Keywords: Macbeth, Shakespeare, behaviour, witches, prediction

Resumen: Este trabajo llevará a cabo un análisis sobre el comportamiento del personaje de Macbeth en la obra de teatro de Shakespeare con su mismo nombre, teniendo en cuenta los acontecimientos desarrollados en ella y la ambición que caracteriza al personaje. Además, primará el factor de las profecías como objeto de gran influencia en la conducta de Macbeth. Asimismo, se investigarán y compilarán los distintos estudios de otros autores en este mismo punto. Partiendo de la obra, se extraerán los sucesos más relevantes para este análisis, con el fin de considerarlos cronológicamente y observar la conducta del personaje con mayor detenimiento según lo valorado por los diferentes estudiosos de la obra (Coleridge, Bradley, Muir, Bloom, Nuttall). Finalmente, se concluirá con una reconsideración de la figura de Macbeth en un contexto profético en el que dicción y acción están, en

el desenvolvimiento temporal de la obra, profundamente determinados por la predicción.

Palabras clave: Macbeth, Shakespeare, comportamiento, brujas, profecía

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I. Introduction

In this work, I am going to analyse the character of Macbeth from Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. The work of some Shakespeare scholars will be read and summarized in order to collect different perspectives on this character. Then, I will examine the tragedy in detail to focus on the main sections and parts in which Macbeth is shown as a real human being acting in thrall to fate and psychological deterioration. I was moved to this topic because of the persistence today of belief in cosmological forces and astrology. In addition, I was intrigued by the fact that a famous writer such as Shakespeare could be also interested in this kind of belief, as might be also observed in his allusions to the stars and the firmament, for instance, in *Romeo and Juliet's Chorus*: "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life."

However, in order to accomplish this investigation, I am aware I must describe some conventions of tragedies such as the hero, his excess and the weakness that provokes an inevitable failing contributing to his downfall (Bayley 1982: 198).

At this point, we must also take into account that the tragedy of *Macbeth* is built somewhat simply upon a plain plot and that Shakespeare lays much of the weight on the principal characters (Bradley 1991: 356). This is why Macbeth's figure is even more relevant. Not to mention that, focusing on his psychological aspect, we must take into account the fact that it is a "tragedy of imagination" (Bloom 1998: 517) or "visionary drama" (Bloom 1998: 521) too. From this point, our character is on the basis of being one of the unluckiest of all protagonists in Shakespeare's plays. His imagination or intelligence, scholars agree, is fired with a rare power of fantasy (Bloom 1998: 516).

On the other hand, the Three Weird Sister play a major role. According to Nuttall (2007: 285): “Weird or *wyrd* in Old English means ‘fate’. The sisters are three in number like the classical Fates.”

This invites us to find in these three a supernatural power or chance. We start from the idea of “the violence of evil” (Bloom 1998: 525) in which our character could be involved or not and in which this analysis is going to focus mainly just to prove the extent to which Shakespeare created the play because of letting chance influence him.

2. Objectives

This project attempts to achieve the following goals:

1. To enquire into the significance of the tragedy of *Macbeth*.
2. To learn more about Shakespeare’s tragic writing and the philosophical presuppositions that sustain it.
3. To examine and contextualise the existing scholarship on the play and to focus on the psychoanalytical reading of its hero.
4. To provide more critical elements to the discussion of *Macbeth*.
5. To analyse the play in detail, looking at the moments of decay in *Macbeth*’s mind and actions.
6. To observe the degree of impact of the protagonist’s ambition on his actions.
7. To test the influence of the Sisters’ predictions on *Macbeth*’s actions.
8. To determine whether *Macbeth*’s fate is the result of his character or of chance.
9. To establish a relationship between the outcome of the play and the predictions.

3. Methodology

The analysis carried out in section four is based on two specific theoretical frameworks: the psychological approach to literature and the question of time from a philosophical perspective.

Despite being an old-fashioned aspect, the psychological approach in literature is a widely explored field with numerous studies, especially when it comes to the analysis of Shakespeare's characters and their psychology. In line with this approach, two thinkers are the main exponents of it and on whose work, I will draw extensively for my arguments.

1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge's work established the English tradition of Shakespearean criticism. The originality of his approach rests on the focus on psychology (Coleridge 1960: 15), applying sensitiveness to every character, treating him or her "as if he were not merely a character in a play but also a real human being" (1960: 20). He converted what at the beginning seems to be just a "product of the imagination" to mental operations working in the mind (1960: 22). For Coleridge, Shakespeare could not be judged by the ancient standards of the Aristotelian unities since the conditions of theatrical practice were then different (1960: 26-27). Based on the rejection of the Aristotelian unities of action, place and time, Coleridge recognised how Shakespeare used his intellect to play with words following the Elizabethan fashion, but not justifying him through historical argument (1960: 29). However, he did justify Shakespeare with philosophical arguments, for instance, by focusing on the way in which he played with morals and manners of speech to represent laughter in impure moral contexts (1960: 30). Coleridge mentioned how Shakespeare worked with manners of speech creating characters thinking and speaking as a pure human being. He noticed it especially when he treated love themes. Coleridge's analysis of Shakespeare's women characters showed him the way in which Shakespeare projected women ideally in the real as they should be, meaning also that they made themselves liable to a charge of impurity (1960: 30). Coleridge pointed out how this author expressed a kind of passion giving it a sense of purity, building characters living a life mixed "with joy and sorrow" (1960: 31). At this point, I must highlight the importance of this argument since many other scholars rejected the possibility of art imitating real life (1960: 31). Coleridge highlighted "A play read affects the mind like a play acted" (1960: 33).

Coleridge was able to demonstrate how the human mind is under the influence of what is read: "There is no rational belief in a dramatic action, [...] but there is an imaginative belief" is the perfect summary to project how this psychological elaboration of Shakespeare's characters had a point on mind (1960: 33). Coleridge perfectly expounded Shakespeare's interest in "individual personality", the richness of his style and his decision on changing how the play was going to have an impact over the audience (1960: 35).

2) Andrew Cecil Bradley was a scholar who also dedicated much time to explore how Shakespeare built his tragedies and his characters. Bradley explained how tragedy takes its principal argument through “action issuing from character, or character issuing in action” (1963: 29). He also described that Shakespeare wrote confining “his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought” (Bradley 1963: 40).

Bradley portrayed Shakespeare’s characters as an observation of real people and the real world, taking them as a product of fidelity through which the audience could have felt identified with, but also exposing Shakespeare’s own ideology through them.

Following G. W. Friedrich Hegel, Bradley compared Greek tragedy characters as not “personified abstractions” or French tragedy ones as “genuine individuals” with characters presented in Shakespeare tragedies, who have “intricacy” (Bradley 1963: 78). Additionally, he explained the relation between the construction of the character’s personality and the introduction of “characters more or less evil” in modern tragedy such as Macbeth’s instance (1963: 78). He [Macbeth] is represented with an egoistic and anarchic personality, committing crimes with “full knowledge of their wickedness” (1963: 78). Despite this evilness, Bradley adds “but to the modern mind the greatness of the personality justifies its appearance in the position of hero” (1963: 78). This character’s image is involved with “the end pursued by the hero” and at the same time with “his particular end” (1963: 79). Again, Bradley uses Macbeth as an example of tragedy in which the conflict is not between two ethical powers like good and evil, but in which the main point is the essence of the characters (87). Finally, he expresses the influence of personality in the structure and end of the tragedy as “the more spiritual value, the more tragedy in conflict and waste” (1963: 89).

The second framework is related to the question of time from a philosophical viewpoint. Three thinkers are the main exponents of it: Michael Bristol, Anthony David Nuttall and Rhodri Lewis. My analysis will strongly rely on these author’s work.

1) Bristol studied the doctrine of historicism and how far it can influence literature (2011: 644). He mentioned the idea of reflecting standards of time, preconceptions and the stability of class society, because of the difficulty of eliminating them from the play (2011: 644-645). Furthermore, he also studied New Historicism as a mere contextualization and shaping on literary texts (2011: 648). Moreover, Bristol highlighted the importance of context because of its historical

meaning: if it is not already given, story has to tell its frame (2011: 652). He used the example of *Macbeth* to show how context limits our time from the story's viewpoint but also for our conception of time since we do not know what happened with the baby Lady Macbeth nursed or what happened with Macbeth's state of mind to finally decide to kill Duncan, for instance (2011: 652). Bristol mentioned how time helped both readers and audiences to think that this type of things occurs in the real world, and that, thanks to some elements of the stories, we "recall vivid details from their own experiences that signify strongly to us" (2011: 653).

2) Nuttall also studied Historicism but he had a clearer vision of it since he described it as a way of focusing on the actual world and eliminating the fictional universe created within poetry (2007: 9). So, he proposed the possibility of "instead of permitting historical events to determine and limit the meaning of the text, they allow the later fiction to modify the earlier history" (2007: 6).

He explicitly mentioned how having the immediate context does not mean that the meaning is already determined (Nuttall 2007: 11). Nuttall explained one of the ideas that the scholar Gary Taylor mentioned, which is the fact that "Shakespeare decided to produce a body of work expressly designed for reading across centuries" (2007: 22). He did not mean that Shakespeare's plays are completely separated from historical context, but the idea that the limit of real time is not exactly as it seems just because Shakespeare lived and created them several centuries ago (2007: 22).

3) Lewis addressed different temporalities (2020: 323). He used the term 'polychronic' (2020: 324) to refer to different time periods. He emphasises the distinction between 'historical time' and 'eternity', in other words, between the time in which human beings live and the orders of time and space of the *theatrum mundi* (2020: 334). At this point, Lewis proposed for *Macbeth* a third temporal order between history and eternity, this is why the framework of time is so extravagant and different in this play (2020: 336). As Lewis described "Macbeth imagines himself able to connect the past, the present, and future" (2020: 337). Or in addition to that, he has this power of imagination because "Time here does not have an existence of its own, and is merely and accident arising from matter in motion as perceived by human beings" (2020: 340).

From now on, these two frameworks are the base of this project in order to carry out the analysis of *Macbeth* and observe how the psychology of the

character works and how the play is built so that he can really be under the influence of the Three Weird Sisters.

4. Readings

4.1. Analysis of different scholars

In order to check whether the influence of the Weird Sisters over Macbeth was real or not, there are some facts to consider before reaching a conclusion. The Three Witches are characters invented by Shakespeare. Nevertheless, it is also important to consider that all the characters of the play are potential objectives for the Sisters; this is why they may all have “yielded to the temptation and forfeited [their] free-agency” (Coleridge 1960: 61), especially Macbeth as the main character. As Coleridge mentioned, “then the link of *cause and effect more physico* would commence” (1960: 61).

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *prophecy* means: “a statement that says what is going to happen in the future, especially one that is based on what you believe about a particular matter rather than existing facts.” Meanwhile, *prediction* means: “a statement about what you think will happen in the future.”

Taking into account both definitions, the character of Macbeth may be analysed in order to discover how far these predictions could be said to be part of the motivation for his action. The protagonist is someone whose imagination goes beyond. Macbeth’s behaviour is “overdetermining the events of the play” (Bloom 1998: 535), that is to say, “his imaginative coherence overcomes his cognitive confusion” (Bloom 1998: 521). Should someone be such an inventive person, he just needs proofs to think that it might well occur what he wants. This is when “our capacity for anticipating futures” we want and we do not, goes bigger (Bloom 1998: 536). Not to mention that until the very first moment the protagonist is presented to the reader, there is an aura of ambition hovering around him, connecting his imagination with his own dreams and “shared dreams” with other characters such as Lady Macbeth (Bloom 1998: 530). In addition, there is a mix of aspects that allows us here to understand Coleridge’s analysis of Macbeth’s actions from a psychological point of view “Hope is a master element of a commanding genius, meeting with an active and combining intellect, and an imagination of just that degree of vividness which disquiets and impels the soul to try to realize its images” (1960: 73).

Reached this point, not only does he seem as not responsible for his actions and influenced by the witches, but also by other characters and “portent or apparitions”, or in other words, by fate and agency (Bayley 1982: 191). However, in order to talk about anticipating the future, an analysis of the temporal line of the tragedy must be completed. Macbeth’s obsession to reach what the Weird Sisters have said is a struggle to break the historical time boundaries and reach his fate as soon as possible (Lewis 2020: 324). The prophecies open a new or third order of time. History has a beginning and an end; eternity is the measure of things that have neither beginning nor end; then, according to Lewis, *ævum* is the measure of things that have a beginning but no ending (2020: 336). Macbeth tries to connect the past, the present and the future, acting through the guide of his history to reach promptly his future (Lewis 2020: 337-338). This is called “polychronic instant” according to Lewis, in which “memory, foresight and present” mixed to act or decide in a particular manner (2020: 338). The tragedy consists of this temporal line; it is imposed by Macbeth’s mind, which explains why we seem him as the main character. He is supposed to be directly influenced by the Weird Women, who according to George Wilson Knight “met Macbeth as voices of past, present and future [...]. Macbeth’s crime is an attempt to dislocate time, to wrench the future into the present. The death-aspect of time, and so catch the ‘future’ in the instant’ would destroy the present” (1972: 150).

The Weird Sisters may well disrupt the temporal order, anticipating the “events that have not yet taken place” (Lewis 2020: 334). From the point in which Macbeth starts worrying about the future, he is being as human as possible with a conviction of ongoing success through the prophetic words (Lewis 2020: 339-340). There is a development in the psychology of this character, perhaps one of the biggest developments in Shakespeare’s tragedies, and it all starts with Three Witches at the beginning (Bradley 1991: 330). Macbeth is a character clearly characterised by ambition, for whom defeat is never an option (Bradley 1991: 331). However, he has actually listened the predictions, so his mind is up to a point under their influence (Bradley 1991: 353). Macbeth is self-controlled and practical, at least when this tragedy begins. His character starts changing whenever his imagination and his reason become very much a power of betrayal for himself. He is under “the most improbable untruths” (Bradley 1991: 327).

To begin with the real influence of the prophecies, they could actually be considered as effects translated into action (Nuttall 2007: 284). Their naturalness could be questioned, i.e. whether they are a reflection of nature in the mind or otherness (Knight 1972: 145). However, at the same time, their supernatural status provides them a capacity to read the future and also be right (Nuttall 2007: 288). Macbeth is not really influenced by witchcraft but by hallucination (Bloom 1998:

516), creating an overlap between what the words of the Weird Sisters said (Lewis 2020: 341), and what he already wanted (supposing that Macbeth already thought about being king or killing Macduff). According to Nuttall:

everything in the subjective motivation of the protagonist is in direct opposition to the prediction, but the prediction holds firm. In *Macbeth* the Weird Sisters trigger a pre-existing tendency in Macbeth's mind. They are telling a man to do something he had already considered doing, something he partly wants to do in any case (2007: 289).

With a thought already in mind, there is no way of knowing for sure whether that was a hallucination departing from a previous desired belief, or a really hypnotic practise (or at least hypnotic suggestion) done by the Weird Sisters (Nuttall 2007: 289). As an astonishing power, it is not relevant for this analysis to see whether their hypnotic system or their witchcraft comes from the vilest world or not, but just the influence between what Macbeth imagines and what he does, and how much time passes between them, as well as his will. Clearly, the Weird Sisters' prediction is part of the protagonist's desire, and it does accelerate the rhythm of the tragedy, also contributing to the terrifying atmosphere of the play (Bloom 1998: 525). Nevertheless, "they place nothing in his mind that is not already there" (Bloom 1998: 532). They are contributing to his "ambitious imagination", maybe developing Macbeth's behaviour from a passive to an active one (Bloom 1998: 532). In other words, what Harold Bloom (1998: 535) summarises as "our universal sense that the dreadful is about to happen, and that we have no choice but to participate in it."

Or what Muir, following Kittredge, explains thus:

the Weird Sisters were Norns, 'great powers of destiny, great ministers of fate. They had determined the past; they governed the present; they not only foresaw the future, but decreed it', 'Weird Sisters' was Gavin Douglas's translation of *parcae*. Witches, devils, fates – the conflicting interpretations reflect the elusive ambiguity of Shakespeare's creations. It should be noted, however, that the Weird Sisters tempt Macbeth only because they know his ambitious dreams – and 'in dreams begins responsibility' – and that even so their prophecy of the crown does not dictate evil means of achieving it – it is morally neutral (1984: 54).

Once reached the point in which Macbeth could have thought about the idea later expressed in the prediction, plus the fact that the prophecy was actually said, the combination tilts the balance toward action. Julián Jiménez based his study on a

famous Popper essay, explaining “the interconnection between predictions and the predicted events” (2016: 3), being the first influencing the second with high probability. The influence does not necessarily have to be positive, but it may “bring about the predicted event, or prevent it” (Jiménez 2016: 3). As it was mentioned above, it is definitely proved with the play that the Sisters were right and they predicted what later occurred, so there is no need to question their reality, but to question the prophecy as a “speech-act” and its causal projection in the play. Even those reading the tragedy are highly influenced by the expectation of the prediction as the marker of the events (Jiménez 2016: 4). From now on, the agency of the events is once more questioned. Readers are expecting providence to become fact, as much as Macbeth turns “chance” into occurrence (Jiménez 2016: 6). The action reminds us of Frye’s allusion to the “wheel of fortune”, mentioned in Jiménez (2016: 7), as a future decorated by a present under the effects of an efficiency of the prediction, idealizing the available past and the living present in order to reach a glamorizing future. The result is having a prophecy as “many times the principal cause of the events foretold”, allowing the past to be a confirmation of what happens in the present, and allowing the future to be swayed by the prophetic present (Jiménez 2016: 8-9). According to Jiménez, “the prophecy realises a providential wisdom that is but the projection of human intentionality on the unpredictable realms of historical occurrence” (2016: 10). Perhaps, Shakespeare was aware of the irony behind prophecies as the unreason processes of time “between past words, present thoughts and futures deeds”, in addition to the influence that the combination that realism and fantasy may suppose on the behaviour of people (in this case, on Macbeth’s) (Jiménez 2016: 9).

When the play begins, the context of Macbeth might be easily affected by the prophetic words because of the coincidence of the prediction and his promotion (Clark and Mason 2015: 5). He interprets the prophecy so that he can decide, act and conduct his life accordingly (Clark and Mason 2015: 9). This reaction could be said to be part of the disappointment and frustration due to the imposed future by the Sisters, especially because the succession issue does not satisfy him (Clark and Mason 36-37). Macbeth is aware of how his consciousness is under the effects of the prophecy (Clark and Mason 2015: 50), and from the first moment of hearing the Sisters’, he starts moving into the future (Clark and Mason 2015: 72). Agency is predetermined by his own will and his desire to accept one part of the prediction and deny the one he dislikes. In other words, he does not acknowledge to be “without any intervention”, choosing to have “a choice in the matter” (Clark and Mason 2015: 73). His trigger is acting as having some kind of power over the future (Clark and Mason 2015: 74), until a moment of obsession in which the present is removed by the future, exaggerating Macbeth’s imagination as the main reason for his fatal destiny (Clark and Mason 2015: 76). He is willing to

have success thanks to the Sisters' prediction, but avoiding a part of it whatever it takes (Clark and Mason 2015: 79).

In order to summarise our discussion so far, we may have recourse to Bradley's (1991: 316) acknowledgement of the Weird Sisters as "merely announced events." They are "an influence and nothing more." He is not "forced by an external power". "The prophecies of the Witches are simply as dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal." "In either case not only was he free to accept or resist the temptation, but the temptation was already within him."

The Weird Sisters contributed to the play's atmosphere, but their role is mainly symbolic in a representation of the "unconscious" of Macbeth (Bradley 1991: 313). They are required since natural agencies would never be as strong as the witches to drive a character as Macbeth (Bradley 1991: 317). Moreover, he never charged the Witches for deceiving him. "The Witches did foreknow Macbeth's future; and what is foreknown is fixed; and how can a man be responsible when his future is fixed?" (Bradley 1991: 317-318).

On the other hand, there is a character who must be mentioned because of her relevance in the tragedy. "The Witches are practically nothing to her" (Bradley 1991: 341) or "Her ambition for her husband and herself proved fatal to him, far more so than the prophecies of the Witches" (Bradley 1991: 346) are some of the descriptions of her by scholars. Lady Macbeth is never regarded as the most important character of the play. She never overshadowed her husband, and her "insignificance" in the story could be proved just by looking at the play's end (Bradley 1991: 322). Indeed, she is one of the protagonists, however, she just works as a temptation to Macbeth and his ambitions (Muir 1984: 58). Both characters share a "dream of 'greatness'" (Bloom 1998: 530). The main aim of Macbeth's first crime is ambition, and his wife is determined to reach it, even more than Macbeth himself (Muir 1984: 54). She is part of the agency of action since she succeeded in changing his mind, which connects her with the Sisters (Clark and Mason 2015: 10). It might be said that without Lady Macbeth, the purpose could have not been reached. Macbeth's ambition and the Weird Sisters' prophecies would not have been enough (Bradley 1991: 329). The bond of the couple rests mainly upon the desire for glory, or at least, for an envied position of reign, titles and luxury (Wilson Knight 1972: 339). Despite their political and dynastic ambitions, their mutual desires are not enough, so that they are a broken marriage (Bloom 1998: 522). Precisely, such objective is the only cause for their union, and when Lady Macbeth "loses control of him, she loses her own roles" (Bayley 1982: 198).

What must be emphasised of her character is her “feeding with day-dreams of ambition”, her “mind deluded by ambition” and “accustomed only to the shadows of the imagination” (Coleridge 1960: 64-65). She is the will, the power, the real ambition, the determination and the action, while Macbeth is nothing, the nothingness (Bloom 1998: 522).

Finally, Macbeth could be under the influence of his lack of spirit and envy of others, especially of Banquo’s royal fate (Wilson Knight 1972: 131). Even Banquo may well be described as a character much more influenced by the Witches’ prophecies than Macbeth. He wonders if they are much more than simply imaginative thoughts, and in spite of his implication, he never mentioned them until Macbeth did (Bradley 1991: 348-349). Banquo is a character whose mind is satisfied, unlike Macbeth, who just wants to confirm half of the prophecy and his only concern related to Banquo is his royal destiny (Coleridge 1960: 61-62). Surely, Macbeth is a courageous man and soldier, and he is rewarded by a title (Wilson Knight 1972: 125). Nonetheless, his ambition and his desire to have more, drives him to a fatal destiny and condition, until death is reached. He fears dishonour, and this is the vilest thought that can chase him (Wilson Knight 1972: 127).

From now on, all this information must be taken into account and summarised, so Macbeth has three main suggestions in his mind: 1) his own ambition and ideas; 2) the Weird Sisters’ prophecies; and 3) Lady Macbeth’s ambition.

Although the Sisters’ prophetic words are the main object of study for this investigation, the other points needed to be mentioned and explained in order to evaluate accurately the psychological decline of the main character throughout the tragedy, and this is what is to be done in the next section.

4.2. *Analysis of the tragedy*

Reached this point of the analysis, we should take a look into different scenes or concrete speeches that take place in the play. The character of Macbeth is rambling between his own ideas and what other people tell him. In order to reach a final conclusion of whether Macbeth is really under the Three Witches’ influence, I have chosen three parts of the play which are going to be analysed in terms of motifs, utterances and linguistic resources.

4.2.1. Act I Scene 3 (118-147)

MACBETH [*aside*] Glamis and Thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind. – Thanks for your pains.
 [to Banquo] Do you not hope your children shall be kings
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

BANQUO That, trusted home,
 Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
 Besides the Thane of Cawdor. 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.
 Cousins, a word, I pray you.

MACBETH [*aside*] Two truths are told
 As happy prologues to the swelling act
 Of the imperial theme. – I thank you, gentlemen. –
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 smothered in surmise,
And nothing is, but what is not.

BANQUO
 Look how our partner's rapt.

MACBETH [*aside*]
If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me,

Without my stir.

This fragment belongs to the same scene analysed above. However, we are after the moment in which Macbeth is also mentioned as Thane of Cawdor. Indeed Macbeth's "The greatest is behind" makes the reader think that his mind is actually in the path of achieving his desires or, from another point of view, in the path of achieving what the Weird Sisters told him. "Do you not hope your children shall be kings / When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me / Promised no less to them?" is directly related with Banquo's later response. Macbeth feels envy for the destiny of Banquo since his children being kings is the meaning of no offspring and no reign for him (in spite of the Three Witches' words). Banquo's response "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" is an anticipation of what our main character will suffer. It may well be said that it is somehow the biggest proof that Shakespeare shows the reader to let them know that Macbeth will follow these 'instruments of darkness' and would lead him into 'deepest consequence' and also harming him. It is the exposure of a mind influenced by others. It then continues with questioning how the Weird Sisters were right and how Macbeth is actually starting thinking that everything would happen as they three said, in "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill, / Why hath it given me earnest of success, / Commencing in a truth?". In addition, it is very important to pay attention to the next sentences in which Macbeth acknowledges the fact that his mind is beginning a different reasoning. "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." He is accepting how he cannot stop his mind 'in surmise'. This word could be another relevant clue of how Macbeth himself admits that he is under the continuous thinking of the prophecies.

On the other hand, he changes his main point of view when saying "If chance will have me king" talking about chance instead of talking about destiny, which is supposed to be the reason why a prophecy is expressed according to Cambridge Dictionary definition of it: "a statement that says what is going to happen in the future". Understanding future as destiny, a prophecy could be said when there is certainty of it, not by chance. However, taking into account the ambition of Macbeth, the concept of 'chance' gains importance from the first moment in which he overthinks the predictions and starts forcing his destiny and the situation as a whole.

4.2.2. Act 3 Scene 1 (46-71)

MACBETH

Bring them before us.

Exit Servant.

To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus:

Our fears in Banquo stick deep,And in his royalty of nature reigns thatWhich would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,

And to that dauntless temper of his mind,

He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour

To act in safety. There is none but he,Whose being I do fear; and under himMy genius is rebuked, as it is saidMark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sistersWhen first they put the name of king upon me,And bade them speak to him. Then, prophet-likeThey hailed him father to a line of kings.Upon my head they placed a fruitless crownAnd put a barren sceptre in my gripe,Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;For them, the gracious Duncan have I murdered;Put rancours in the vessel of my peaceOnly for them; and mine eternal jewel

Given to the common enemy of man,

To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.

Rather than so, come fate into the list,And champion me to th'utterance. Who's there?

This excerpt continues the pattern of envy and ambition due to Banquo's potential future. "Our fears in Banquo stick deep, / And in his royalty of nature reigns that which would be feared" or "There is none but he, / Whose being I do fear; and under him / My genius is rebuked" are examples of how Macbeth, instead of just achieving his goals and taking into account his prophecy, is also paying attention to a possible snatching of "his throne".

On the other hand, even if it might be very influenced by his own and ambition and possible commentaries done by other people, for instance, Lady Macbeth, our main characters pronounces words in which he directly shows his own convention of the Three Weird Sisters predictions: "He chid the sisters / When first they put the name of king upon me, / And bade them speak to him. Then, prophet-like / They hailed him father to a line of kings. / Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown / And put a barren sceptre in my gripe, / Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand, / No son of mine succeeding. If't be so, / For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind; / For them, the gracious Duncan have I murdered; / Put rancours in the vessel of my peace / Only for them." These words are another proof of his influence since he is not only acknowledging the fact that he will not have children in a future in order to follow his line of king, but also admitting that he believed Banquo's destiny because of the prophecy. He is extremely obsessed with this since he 'for Banquo's issue has filled his mind' and even tries to justify his actions of murdering. Here, we can speak of a clear moment of decay in his mind and his acts. Macbeth is recognising he has murdered and is knocking his mind over those thoughts related to the Witches and chance (or a forced chance).

In the last lines of this fragment, Macbeth mentions that "Rather than so, come fate into the list, / And champion me to th'utterance." He is directly appealing to fate and fortune in order to get his desires, but also this third order of time of what could potentially happen.

4.2.3. Act 4 Scene 1 (49-131)

MACBETH

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
 Though you untie the winds and let them fight
 Against the churches, though the yeasty waves
 Confound and swallow navigation up,
 Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,
 Though castles topple on their warders' heads,
 Though palaces and pyramids do slope
 Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure
 Of Nature's germen tumble altogether

Had I three ears, I'd hear there.

2 APPARITION

Be bloody, bold and resolute: laugh to scorn

The power of man, for none of woman born

Shall harm Macbeth.

Descends.

MACBETH

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.

Thunder.

[Enter] THIRD APPARITION: a child crowned,
with a tree in his hand.

What is this,

That rises like the issue of a king

And wears upon his baby-brow the round

And top of sovereignty?

ALL

Listen, but speak not to't.

3 APPARITION

Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care

Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirators are.

Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until

Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill

Shall come against him.

Descend[s].

MACBETH

That will never be.

Who can impress the forest, bid the tree

Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements, good.

Rebellious dead, rise never till the Wood

Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth

Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath

To time, and mortal custom. Yet my heart

Throbs to know one thing: tell me, if your art

Can tell so much, shall Banquo's issue ever

Reign in this kingdom?

ALL

Seek to know no more.

MACBETH

I will be satisfied. Deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you. Let me know.
Why sinks that cauldron, and what noise is this?

Hautboys

I WITCH

Show.

2 WITCH

Show.

3 WITCH

Show.

ALL

Show his eyes, and grieve his heart;
Come like shadows, so depart.

*A show of eight kings, the last with a glass
in his hand; and Banquo.*

MACBETH

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo; down:
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs. And thy hair,
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.
A third is like the former. Filthy hags,
Why do you show me this? – A fourth? Start, eyes!
What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?
Another yet? A seventh? I'll see no more;
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more; and some I see
That twofold balls and treble sceptres carry.
Horrible sight. Now I see 'tis true;
For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me
And points at them for his. [Exeunt kings and Banquo.]
What? Is this so?

I WITCH

Ay, sir, all this is so. But why
Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?
Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,

And show the best of our delights.
 I'll charm the air to give a sound,
 While you perform your antique round,
That this great king may kindly say
Our duties did his welcome pay.

Music. The Witches dance and vanish.

In the last of the eleven selected fragments, we attend to the beginning of the end of Macbeth as character and play. He met one more time the Three Weird Sisters in order to know more about what is about to happen. The first part of this excerpt is a little introduction of the following apparitions that will come. Macbeth is desperate for knowledge about his sovereignty and power. He extremely appeals to their powers and spells in order to be certain of what would happen. A proof of this is the sentences "I conjure you, by that which you profess, / Howe'er you come to know it, answer me." Up to this point, the Three Sisters are willing to offer him their virtues so that he can get what he wants. It must be taken into account that not only are the speeches relevant for our analysis, but also how the apparitions look like or what they represent.

· The first apparition, *an armed head*, may portray the imperial theme of this tragedy. The image of Macbeth is highly related to army and means of power. Moreover, in this case, it might well be more than that. The presence of power and ambition in Macbeth's mind could be represented through it, and the highest rank is the main objective from the beginning of the play. Continuing with the dialogue of the characters, the "prophecy" itself "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth. Beware Macduff, / Beware the Thane of Fife. Dismiss me. Enough." is the needed indication to create a sense of envy towards Macduff. Indeed, Macbeth is the one confirming with "Thou hast harped my fear aright."

· The second apparition, *a bloody child*, is also a kind of anticipation related to Macduff and especially to his family. "Be bloody, bold and resolute: laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth." is the needed evidence once again in order to make Macbeth killing the required mean to obtain his power, in which no human, no child and no other kind of future perceive could obstruct his path. Again, he is indeed the one validating these words and next action with "I'll make assurance double sure, / And take a bond of fate." Before continuing with the last apparition, it must be taken into account that Macbeth seems to be very influenced and obviously listening to what they are saying since it is what happens lately. Moreover, there is again evidence of it when he says "Had I three ears, I'd hear there."

· The third apparition, *a child crowned, with a tree in his hand*, looks like the inevitable destiny he tries to stop. Even he had killed Banquo, whether their children are going to be kings or not does not depend on Macbeth's actions (even if he thinks so). This apparition is an anticipation of the play's afterlife. "Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care / Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirators are. / Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him." is the speech given by the apparition. It could be interpreted as the final of the tragedy itself, and it is indeed. We know that the Witches were right since things happen exactly as they said, not just in this prophecy but in all of them. It is a circle in which something is said and then it occurs. However, Macbeth is not able to know it until it really happens.

Our main character's mind is not changing so much up to this point because he stills consuming his arrogance, "Who can impress the forest." However, despite this behaviour of superiority, he continuously asks "tell me, if your art / Can tell so much, shall Banquo's issue ever / Reign in this kingdom?" This is the moment when we can most think that Macbeth does believe the predictions. Were he not to believe them, he would not ask. Moreover, his fears and insecurities are denouncing the belief he has in prophecies.

At last, in the final part of this fragment, Macbeth faces the truth jointly. He observes how power is unified and he is not there. "Now I see 'tis true; / For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me / And points at them for his." may be a possible instance of approval and realisation. The mirage of the kings might symbolise Banquo's prophecy related to his children and dynasty. The First Witch's intervention is somehow comical since the Sisters are convinced of their truth and Macbeth is supposed to obey the destiny as it comes, not looking for a different direction through which manage a new alternative. "But why / Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?" is the prove of their 'innocence.' The final lines "That this great king may kindly say / Our duties did his welcome pay" are the way of magnifying their work with the prophecies, as whether they were actually doing a favour to Macbeth because of anticipating him his fate. They even honour his figure as "great king" like taking into account that he has given them a place and made them part of his destiny.

5. Conclusions

After the summary of the different scholars' interpretation and my analysis of the play, there are several ideas that must be highlighted so that we could reach a conclusion.

First and foremost, I have tried to show how the Three Weird Sisters are always present in Macbeth's mind since he is extremely obsessed with the aim of reaching the fulfilment of the prophecy.

Secondly, the mixture of past, present and future may be conscious or unconscious, but it is present anyway. Macbeth tries to focus on his past achievements in order to be respected in the present so that he can reach the future goal announced in the prediction. In other words, he is living the present, having the future in mind, basing himself in past actions and thoughts.

Thirdly, the combination of both, the prediction and his thinking on time, creates the perfect atmosphere for us to say that Macbeth is influenced by the prophecies. We have talked about obsession since he is the one and only character who is constantly nursing this hope of becoming more and more, leading his mind to it. Our character listens to other people and pragmatically responds extempore by taking action as problems arrive and he finds himself bound to deal with them. Of course, the decadence of his mind is just another production of his own imagination and confusion about what the Witches have told him, as well as his own death. Moreover, subproducts of his behaviour are all the other deaths and evil outcomes surrounding Macbeth since he is just acting resolutely but regardless of the consequences.

In other words, I may well say that the objectives of this work have been successfully completed, especially those devoted to the contextualisation and examination of Shakespeare, its writing and philosophical presuppositions, and the scholarship and critical elements on the play. Furthermore, those objectives related to Macbeth have also been satisfactorily completed, but it is important to mention that audience might differ with this conclusion when reading the tragedy. Despite own thoughts, it is important to highlight once again the obsession of Macbeth with achieving what predictions said to him, thus linking the outcome of the play with the prophecies and proving the Sisters' influence on him, but all this could not be reached without Macbeth's ambition.

Finally, when I chose this topic, I was actually curious to learn how Shakespeare could represent, by means of the behaviour of a medieval character, elements of our current society and of all those other societies that have evolved

until the one we have now. There are many fates and beliefs that impress people until they become mad and their minds are consumed. We could talk about religion, but it is not the kind of faith we are talking about since Macbeth could also be analysed in a religious way, so it is not our topic now. However, we may well present the comparison of prophecies with astrology and horoscopes. They are the ones that could have a similitude with the Three Sisters' powers of paganism and the unknown. We, as Macbeth, are exposed to daily "prophecies" with Tarot and reading the horoscopes. We, as Macbeth, have the choice to believe or not what they are saying. Even people who profess not believe in anything of the kind, are exposed to their influence (and sometimes they believe it). In addition, who has not lived some kind of event and has not thought about what was written in the horoscope? All in all, we, as Macbeth, are constantly influenced. In addition, with the previous stage of this analysis, we might think about the possibility of many other influences, people and facts, reaching Macbeth's mind. However, there is only one real influence that is Macbeth's mind giving credence to what he hears, as we do when we read the horoscope, have our palm read or just believe in chance. We are the ones choosing what we want to believe; or it may only be fate.

This work has made me learn the value of literary works as a philosophical study full of meanings beyond the intrinsic meaning of the words. Shakespeare is an example of how many interpretations sentences, characters and plots can have. I will remember every time I start reading that I can apply it to my life or see it from another point of view depending on the situation.

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