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WILL TO POWER: A NIETZSCHEAN READING OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*

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Abstract

The play, *Macbeth* was written by William Shakespeare and published in 1616 during the reign of James I. It was a historical tragic play which is set in Scotland. It contains five acts. Among Shakespeare's tragedy plays, it was the shortest tragedy play. The play portrays the collective greediness, cultural beliefs, temptation, and self-will that lead Macbeth in the way of ambition. The present paper attempts to read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with Nietzsche's concept of 'Will to Power'. The researcher argues that Macbeth's ambition to become King is driven by the human will to become powerful. The paper also argues that the reason for the excess ambition is the will to power within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Keywords: Will to Power, Nietzsche, Ambition, and Power.

Nietzsche's idea of Will to Power was influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's essay, "The World as Will and Representation". Arthur Schopenhauer's essay argues that human beings are biologically driven by two forces: Sexual drive and will to life. This notion influenced Nietzsche to postulate his own idea of driving force. For Nietzsche, the world is driven by the will to become powerful. For hum, every species is motivated by the inherent drive of Will to Power.

Though Nietzsche has already talked about desire to dominate others and control the environment, he explicitly starts to use the phrase "Will to Power" in his work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Nietzsche, in his book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, observes that "Wherever I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master" (93). Thus, Nietzsche finds the will to become powerful and the drive to climb on the ladder of social class is inherent to human nature. Nietzsche, furthermore explains,

"Only where there is life is there also will: but not will to life, rather—so I teach you will to power! Much is valued more highly than life itself by the living; but out of the valuing itself speaks—the will to power!" (96) thus, Nietzsche positions will to power above the will to life. Nietzsche, defines Will to Power as the fundamental force of all action in his Book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, thus: "Granted, finally, that we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one fundamental form of will—namely, the Will to Power, as my thesis puts it; granted that all organic functions could be traced back to this Will to Power" (43).

R. Lanier Anderson, in his article, "Friedrich Nietzsche", points out, "The will to power doctrine seems to claim that everything that exists rests fundamentally on an underlying basis of "power-centers", whose activity and interactions are explained by a principle that they pursue the expansion of their power." (33) Anderson's

argument delineates that the world, according to Nietzsche, is driven primarily by the motive to become powerful. Christian J. Emden, in his article entitled, "Living things and the will to power" articulates, "The will to power remains Nietzsche's most controversial philosophical concept, which began to emerge around the same time as the genealogical project had reached its climax in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the essays of *On the Genealogy of Morality*"(167).

Macbeth, from the beginning of the play itself is driven by the will to power. His desire to become powerful is instigated by the prophecies told by the Witches. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is the general of the King's army and also the Thane of Glamis. Banquo is the friend of Macbeth. Both of them are fighting in the battle to defeat their kingdom's traitor Macdonwald, Thane of Cawdor, and their enemy Sweno. A wounded soldier gives the battle's latest news to the king of Scotland, Duncan. He describes Macbeth's courage, bravery, and patriotism. The timely arrival of Ross, the nobleman of Scotland, brings the news of triumph on the battlefield. He says that their traitor and foe are defeated by our tribute Macbeth.

The Prophecies of Witches kindle the desire for power in Macbeth. The three Witches appear before Macbeth and Banquo in the heath, near the Forest. They are amazed to see the three weird witches. The first Witch talks about his past "HAIL TO THE THANE OF GLAMIS!". The second Witch talks about the present "HAIL TO THEE, THANE OF CAWDOR!". The third Witch talks about the future: "All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter". These wired prophecies induce Banquo to ask about his future. The first Witch tells him that "LESSER THAN MACBETH AND GREATER". The second Witch tells that "AS HAPPIER AS MACBETH YET MUCH HAPPIER". From the third Witch, he comes to know that his descendants will be kings: "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (30).

After all, Macbeth and Banquo are astonished, and the three Witches vanish. Then Ross and Angus were entered and told that he had needed to be made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan as a reward to honor him who had brought the

victory in the war. By hearing these words Macbeth blindly believes the confusing prophecy. He also firmly believes that he will be going to become king in the future which leads him to do cruel deeds toward his king and his nobles to achieve kingship.

The desire to become King is metaphorically denotes will to attain power. The Will even makes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to commit murder. In Duncan's palace at Forres, Macbeth, Banquo, Ross, and Angus enter. Duncan greets Macbeth for his triumph. After this, Duncan announces Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland before the court which makes Macbeth upset. He also starts thinking to gain kingship by doing dark deeds. Macbeth reveals his desire to become King in Act I, scene I, thus: "The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step/On which I must fall down, or else overleaps,/For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;/Let not light see my black and deep desires.(30).

The King, Prince, and his Nobles are ready to go to Macbeth's castle at Inverness for his banquet. So Duncan sends Macbeth, before them. Macbeth conveys the happy news to his wife in a letter by his messenger.

The hospitality of Lady Macbeth to Duncan and his noblemen impresses Duncan and he offers a valuable gift to her. But, behind the hospitality, there is a dark motive intended by Lady Macbeth. She also tempts Macbeth to do dark deeds. Though Macbeth has a desire to become a King, he does not want to do any dark deeds to attain kingship. Lady Macbeth continues to tempt Macbeth by touching his ego and she also tells him that now the time and place are both fit. Lady Macbeth also plans how to escape from this case by falsely blaming the King's chamber servants.

Banquo and his son Fleance walk around the courtyard. The sudden entry of Macbeth surprises Banquo. Banquo wants to discuss his dream of the three Witches' prophecy. He also wants to discuss it with Macbeth but Macbeth advises him to talk about the whole matter when it's time comes.

After the talk, Macbeth asks his servant to tell her mistress to ring the bell when the drink is ready. Lady Macbeth gives the drugged wine to the officers

to sleep. During this time Macbeth stabs Duncan with the dagger. At the time the two officers awake and the one crying "GOD BLESS US" and the other said "Amen", but they are not conscious. Lady Macbeth takes the bloodstained daggers and put them into the hands of the drugged officers, to the thought that it was his officers who murdered Duncan. Though Lady Macbeth is bold, Macbeth is anxious about his dark deed. Maudemarie Clark, in his research article, defines will to power thus: "will to power, an instinctive striving toward an 'optimum' of conditions that will allow them to vent their strength or power (Kraft) and achieve their maximum feeling of power Macht" (5).

Macduff and Lennox entered the castle in the early morning to summon the king. Macduff alone goes to the King's chamber where he finds that king Duncan was dead. By hearing the dreadful tidings of the murder of King, Macbeth and Lennox rush to Duncan's chamber where he was killed. Macduff calls an alarm and awakes the whole palace. Macbeth falsely accuses the two officers who have done the murder, so they are killed to avenge Duncan's death. Christian J. Emden in his article, "Nietzsche's Will to Power: Biology, Naturalism, and Normativity", delineates, "

The King's two sons decide to flee from Scotland because they know that what has happened to their father, may well happen to them. Therefore, Malcolm goes to England and Donalbain to Ireland. Finally, by doing the dark deeds Macbeth became the King of Scotland, which makes Ross and Macduff suspect Macbeth.

Banquo thinks the prophecy of the Witches, which is about his descendants, would become king. His thinking is interrupted by the arrival of king Macbeth and queen Lady Macbeth. Macbeth invites Banquo as an honorary guest at the banquet, but Banquo wants to go that afternoon. Macbeth beseeches Banquo, not to fail to arrive on time for the banquet.

Macbeth knows that Banquo is the only hurdle. He was the only one who stood in the way of attaining kingship, so again Macbeth starts his dark deed to kill Banquo who is the obstacle to the fulfillment of the Witches prophecy. Macbeth hires

two murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. Macbeth convinces them by saying that killing Banquo is a good deed, doing for your country's wellness and prosperity. Macbeth induced them by saying, because of Banquo only they face so many hardships in their life. Finally, the two murderers are convinced by Macbeth and they are accepted to do the dark deed. Macbeth tells that the time and place of the murder spot will be revealed by his messenger. After the dismissal of the murderers, lady Macbeth sees that Macbeth is full of anxiety and sorrowful thoughts. Macbeth tells her that there could be no peace in his mind until the danger completely vanishes.

Macbeth is unwilling to tell her about his plot against Banquo. At the night, the third murderer joins with the two murderers who are sent by Macbeth. He has the details and way of Banquo's arrival. While they were talking, they heard the trampling of horses and sensed that it must be Banquo and Fleance. The murderers fall on Banquo and kill him, but fortunately, his son fleance flees away from their hands. The banquet is celebrated in the palace at Forres. Macbeth welcomes his guests and makes them sit according to their ranks. At that time the first murderer appears there and reports Banquo's murder and Fleance's escape. By hearing this Macbeth gets fear because the danger can come in the form of Fleance for his kingship.

Macbeth returns to his celebration and wishes his guest a healthy appetite and good digestion. When Macbeth regrets the absence of Banquo, the Banquo ghost appears at the banquet and sits in the Banquo's seat. Which was only visible to Macbeth. By seeing this Macbeth gets disturbed and begins to act like a person suffering from delusions. At the time, Lady Macbeth is there and says that Macbeth's health was poor so he should take a rest from the party.

The three witches are called by their queen Hecate. They are punished by their queen Hecate because of revealing their confusing prophecies to Macbeth without consulting her. She tells the witches that in the following Macbeth will come to hear the future destiny of his life, so they must make

some amends for their faults of the past confusion by making to him ambiguous prophecies.

Lennox met other nobles, suspecting that both Duncan and Banquo have been murdered by Macbeth very cleverly. The nobles say to Lennox that Malcolm and Macduff are living in England to seek the aid of Edward and other English allies. Lennox and other nobles wish success to Macduff's mission of deliverance of the country from the yoke tranny.

On the following day, Macbeth came to the witches, to hear his future destiny. Witches instruct that Macbeth prefers to hear them from the mouth of their masters. The witches hurl strange ingredients into the boiling past. From the boiling caldron, an apparition arises with an armed head. It warns Macbeth, beware about Macduff, the thane of fife, the spirit descends.

The next apparition arises in the form of a bloody child. It prophesied that Macbeth can be killed by the man who was not born in his mother's womb.

The third apparition arises in the form of a crown child with a tree in his hand. It prophesies that you would be never defeated until the great Birnam wood comes to high dunsinane hill. This brings peace to Macbeth's mind.

Macbeth is anxious to know whether Banquo's descendants will succeed him or not. There is a procession of eight apparitions, all of them Scottish kings are followed by the ghost of Banquo, carrying double balls and triple scepters. Macbeth could not understand what it was. Without explaining the strange prophecy the witches were flying away in the air by saying we had done our loyal duties to the mighty king. As James I. Porter demonstrates, "The so-called theory of the will to power is one of the most contested aspects of Nietzsche's writings, and rightly so. The theory presses the idea of naturalistic moral psychology to startling extremes. It flatly disposes of traditional metaphysical categories and beliefs passed down" (548).

Macbeth came to know that Macduff files to England by Lennox. Macbeth plots to kill lady Macduff and his son by the murderers. Malcolm and

Macduff met each other at the palace of Edward, king of England. Macduff complains of Macbeth's tranny under which Scotland is groaning. He also swears to Malcolm that he will give his fullest support to him. Seeing Macduff's patriotism, Macduff accepts his request. King Edward lent to Malcolm the services of noble Siward with ten thousand brave soldiers to fight against Macbeth. At that time ross brings the sad tidings about the murder of lady Macduff and his son, done by Macbeth. Macduff becomes very sad and curses himself for his carelessness in leaving them unprotected in Scotland. He converted his grief and sorrow into a rage. His veins are boosted up full of vengeance against Macbeth for his mercilessness and deeds for what he has done for his wife and son.

In the Birnam wood, the combined armies of the Scottish nobles and the English army under Malcolm, Macduff, Siward, and young Siward are moved forward towards the dunsinane castle. To conceal the real strength of the armies Malcolm orders the soldiers to cut the branches from Birnam wood and bear this as their leafy shield. Macbeth is preparing for the battle. He hopes that the enemy will be beaten up, for he had inward confidence in the witch's prophecy. Seyton, an officer of Macbeth who brings the news about the queen, Lady Macbeth, is dead to king Macbeth, but it does not startle him as his heart is now hardened to emotions. Meanwhile, a messenger enters with strange news. He tells Macbeth that Birnam wood is moving forward towards the castle. Which makes us remember the prophecies of the third apparition.

The English and Scottish armies have started to attack the fortress. Young Siward was killed by Macbeth on the battlefield which makes his victory easy, but as time goes by the castle has surrendered without any resistance. The victory is almost all about Malcolm. On the battlefield, Macbeth is encountered by Macduff. Macduff challenges him with his sword. But Macbeth is still confident and tells him that he does not need to fear him because he will never be killed by any man born of a woman's womb. Knowing this, Macduff reveals that he is the rarest monster that didn't ripen timely.

Hearing this Macbeth's heart begins to sink. At last, Macduff kills Macbeth. Because of the ambiguous prophecies, Macbeth tempts to do dark deeds which leads him to an unreasonable death. Thus throughout the play the Will to Power drives Macbeth to do all the deeds he intends to do.

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