



IMAGES OF ANIMALS IN SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Images of animals working as signs and symbols and their relation with the deep recess of the human mind have become a big area of interest for not only researchers but also for the common educated man and woman. With the perspective of modern knowledge about symbolic values of animal images, Shakespeare's Macbeth may be revisited as the play uses a huge range of animal images. The play not only represents the biodiversity of nature but hints at the deep psychological relation we hold with diverse creatures of nature. This paper analyzes the key animal images used in the play and restructures our perception about Shakespeare's immortal creation.



KEY WORDS: *subconscious, dream, psyche, mythology.*

INTRODUCTION:

It is a well-known psychological fact that an individual may have...an unconscious identity with some other person or object.

Carl Gustav Jung

Identification of the self with the outer world has a symbolic dimension on which psychologists, scholars and researchers of social science are continuously enlightening the common man. Simultaneously, human societies in the twenty-first century are getting more and more inquisitive and curious about ancient symbols in religion, art and sculpture which reinstate the modern developments of the collective unconscious. There are diverse channels and websites in the electronic media which dwell on the symbolic-psychic significance of animals, birds and insects, of sun, moon and the stars, of dreams of the objects and creatures of nature. Some are zealous about shamans and totems while many are obsessed with the influence of the dragon and the laughing Buddha and end up befooled by clever practitioners of Feng Shui or Vedic Shastras. Jung was not a celebrity in his lifetime ¹ but today the common man has an intellectual hunger for knowledge of the relation between the human psyche and the natural world, about ancient cultural signs and symbols. From this modern perspective of inquisition which is informed with Freud, Jung and research works on myths of different cultures and which is available readily in innumerable websites, it will not be fruitless to review the images of animals and celestial bodies in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, although Shakespeare is more than three centuries older to Freud and Jung and more than four and a half centuries old today.

Macbeth is a play which explores the dark recesses of the human psyche through symbols and images. Caroline Spurgeon in her famous work *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* pointed out the recurrence of images of fear such as darkness, blood and animal images of fear such as the grey cat, snake and the Hyrcan tiger. Spurgeon highlighted the patterns of darkness and clothing imagery while the animal

images were mentioned as just reinforcement of the theme of fear; its relation with the human subconscious begs to be analyzed. This paper reviews the images of bio-diversity in the light of modern findings of psychoanalysis.

In the opening scene we are confronted with two very common but problematic images of animals with respect to psychoanalysis: 'Graymalkin' and 'paddock'. The image of a cat resurfaces in the very first line of the third and final appearance (Act IV scene i) of the witches: 'Thrice the brindled cat hath mewed'. People all over the world react with a variety of ways to confronting or dreaming of cats. In India, the cat is linked with the goddess of childbirth². In the west, the cat is not only ominous but also deeply interlinked with femininity. Julia Williams is of the opinion that 'An aggressive cat [in a dream] might suggest difficulty with the feminine aspect of yourself'. Now the witches obviously had a 'difficulty' with their femininity on several counts: their identity as witches and their apparently ambiguous appearance. Banquo points out the presence of beards on their faces. Although some women naturally do have a faint beard on them, patriarchal sixteenth and seventeenth century English society understandably had a narrow view of femininity and viewed them as witchlike. Even today, the huge global market of hair-removers points towards a stereotypical view of femininity which is still fashionable. It is interesting that the three women are not called 'witch' by the playwright throughout but 'weird sisters' which sounds softer. Shakespeare has liberated these three characters from their outcaste-like existence and humanized them with the term 'sisters'. As the first witch or the 'weird sister' responds to the call of 'Graymalkin', it becomes associated with her self. Jung pointed out that a person can have 'an unconscious identity' (24) with something else. In the opening scene, image of grey cat and frog become symbolical of the self of the witches. According to the website 'Best Dream Meaning', 'Frog in dreams typically relate to some form of transformation, renewal, or rebirth. However, if the frog appears in an unpleasant dream, the dream can point to uncleanness and diseases. Difficulty of sexual identity is further aggravated by a sense of uncleanness and an awareness of diseased existence. Altogether, the weird sisters are highly dissatisfied with themselves and can only dream of a transformation or rebirth.

From the time Macbeth utters his first dialogue: 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen', a telepathic link between the witches and the hero of the play is established as he echoes the mantra of the weird sisters in the opening scene: 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'. In Act I scene iii, Macbeth is 'rapt withal' on listening to the prophecy of the witches which betrays the fact that he had nourished evil designs and that the witches' prophecy were also a sort of echo of his innermost desires. Hence the difficulty and dissatisfaction of the witches may be considered as alter images of the psychological problems of Macbeth himself.

Before Macbeth and Banquo enter the stage, they are associated with two animal images symbolical of courage and royal nature: the eagle and the lion. The injured soldier in Act I scene ii compares the two heroes with their enemies in terms of animals of prey and their victims:

Duncan: Dismay'd not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

Captain: Yes, as sparrows eagles, or the hare, the lion.³

Till the end, Macbeth is not afraid of the 'rugged Russian bear, / The armed rhinoceros, or the 'Hyrcan tiger' (Act III scene iv, lines 100-101). All these images are symbolical of strength and ferocity which are a part of Macbeth's nature. But the animal images which disturb and frighten him are that of insects, birds and reptiles: scorpion (Act III scene ii, line 36), 'shard-born beetle' (Act III, scene ii, line 42), snake, crow, 'maggot-pies, and choughs, and rooks' (Act III scene iv line 125). According to globeviews.com, dream of a scorpion may suggest of a new acquaintance which might result in sudden infliction of pain and danger. Apparently, when Macbeth exclaims 'O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife', it suggests his guilt-stricken soul, but being informed with the analysis of dreams, scorpions also stand for the stings of threat that Banquo's existence poses for Macbeth. Since the weird sisters prophesied that Banquo will beget a line of monarchs, Banquo is the useless (although not new) acquaintance which might cause sudden infliction of pain and danger. Macbeth does not dream but the spontaneous exclamation hint at his subconscious.

Macbeth himself paints a frightening atmosphere with 'black Hecate' and the 'shard-born beetle'. According to auntyflo.com, the beetle represents 'respect for authority, but also protection and gaining more acceptable standards. According to Stephen Klein beetle represents respect for or lack of authority. Even after becoming king, Macbeth is never sure of his power and authority and is constantly suffering from insecurity, which results in his devilish designs against Banquo and Macduff. Hence the image of beetle is symbolical of Macbeth's crisis of authority.

Lady Macbeth advised the hesitating Macbeth to 'look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't (Act I scene v, lines 63-64). The archetypal image of evil and temptation returns to haunt the tragic hero after he is crowned: 'We have scorched the snake, not killed it' (Act III scene ii, line 13). It is the same scene where Macbeth speaks of scorpions and beetle. Edward Capell, as quoted by Braummuller in his annotations in the New Cambridge Edition, argued that the snake is 'Duncan, alive enough in his sons, and his other friends, to put his wounder in danger' (169-70). The tragic irony is that instead of being the serpent beneath the innocent flower, the protagonist is haunted by the 'scorched' snake, which will heal itself and return to put Macbeth into danger:

She'll close, and be herself, whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth. (lines 14-15).

The snake has symbolic values beyond Freudian implications. In many cultures in east and west, it is associated with healing and medicine. The rod of Asclepius in Greek mythology supports a snake and is still an international symbol associated with medicine and cure; in Indian mythology, Lord Shiva holds snakes in his neck which represents freedom from fear and control over the self and knowledge of the *kundalini*. Hence this aspect of the symbolical significance of the snake is part of collective unconscious globally. Macbeth defied nature and is now afraid of natural process of healing which undoes all his actions and efforts; his effort to burn the snake comes to no use as it returns to its former self.

In the banquet scene, we find Macbeth is afraid on realizing that truth cannot be suppressed for ever and this realization is expressed through images of birds:

MACBETH:... Augures, and understood relations, have
By maggot-pies, and choughs, and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood (Act III scene iv, line 124-126).

Both the terms 'choughs' and 'rooks' mean crow; while the former is a common term for crow, rook is an Eurasian crow with black plumage. In the Bible, the cock, another common bird, betrayed the truth. Braummuller annotates that maggot-pies or magpies can imitate human speech and the image also recalls stories from Ecclesiastes where a bird betrayed the truth. According to a website 'Dreaming and Sleeping' crow is not only ominous but also representative of wisdom. However, when Lady Macbeth, in Act I scene v. speaks of the raven, which 'croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan' it is a bird of ill omen. But ironically the bird of ill omen is transformed into the bird of truth and wisdom and it is ominous for the Macbeths with this new significance.

Amid all the serious imagery of fear, there is in Macbeth the happy image of the house-martin described with joy and admiration by Banquo:

This guest of summer
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here (Act I scene vi lines 3-6).

The martlet is the symbol of Pembroke House and its symbolical value is used by several international educational institutions; in their website, they argue that the bird 'is a mythical creature that represents the ceaseless pursuit of learning'. Indeed the bio-diverse world of Shakespeare is full of symbolic and psychological significance which reasserts the findings of modern psychoanalysis.

Notes

1. See 'Introduction' by John Freeman to *Man and his Symbols*. Freeman mentions of Wolfgang Foges, who was the managing director of Aldus Books and who reflected that it was a pity that while Freud was well-known to educated readers of the western world, Jung had never managed to break through to the general public and was always considered too difficult for popular reading' (p 1).
2. In Indian mythology, cat is the carrier of the Mother goddess Shasthi, an incarnation of Mother Parvati, who presides over childbirth.
3. All quotations from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is from the New Cambridge Edition edited by A.R. Braunmuller.

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