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## William Shakespeare's Tragedy Macbeth: An Interdisciplinary Cooperation between Literature and Philosophy

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### Abstract

The interdisciplinary cooperation between Literature and Philosophy displays the rational and illogical rudiments of mortal life in a dialectical relevance. This paper looks at one of Shakespeare's works from a philosophical point of view in order to find new interpretations of the characters of his drama, and thus, to get to know man by means of an interdisciplinary approach. Historically, it is Shakespeare who gave humans the occasion to grasp the philosophical questions that dominated the early ultramodern world. **Colin McGinn**, the author of "**Shakespeare and Philosophy**" declares that there are three primary philosophical themes in Shakespeare's plays: (i) Knowledge and Skepticism (ii) The Individual Identity and (iii) Causality. The hunt for knowledge is central to mortal livelihood. We can find a similar philosophical perspective in some of his plays, like "**King Lear**" shows that we cannot have a life or future without friends and family. We cannot have a family without love and honesty. There are some abecedarian rules in life that one must follow. **McGinn** also states that "**Skepticism is Shakespeare's main theme**" for "**The possibility of error about people and the world..... in its numerous forms**" is one of the harmonious subjects of his plays. We can find the theme of skepticism in the speech of Macbeth in "**Macbeth**" where he memorably utters "**Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more**". In "**As You Like It**", Jacques declares "**All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players**" indicating the sentiment – that our lives are ever illusory, and that fabrication and reality are nearly integrated – could be said to constitute William Shakespeare's central philosophy.



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**Keynotes:** Literature, Philosophy, Life, Skepticism, Causality.

### Introduction

Comparative literature to give the literature students learn to interpret and evaluate literary and cultural products from multiple origins and in languages other than their own. We are trained to present persuasive arguments, to master and use different theoretical and methodological tools, and to engage in dialogue with scholarly voices both within the field of Comparative Literature and in other modern and classical language fields. This paper presents a re-reading of Shakespeare's tragedies, especially the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from his tragedy **Macbeth** to show a kind of interdisciplinary cooperation between Literature and Philosophy.

### Methodology

The paper is both descriptive and analytical. In writing this methodology, primary and secondary data have been used. Primary data is from some selected writings of different critics and secondary data includes reference books.

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### Objective of the Study

The objective of the paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the general observation that Shakespeare revels in weird twinning and doubling effects; his characters are at once irreducibly individual and prisms through which the others' traits are variously refracted. Ultimately, however, Shakespeare will never lose his status as a pivotal and important figure in the history of fiction, and **Macbeth** will probably always be read in high schools and colleges all over the world. But we need to make sure that when we read Shakespeare, we are recognizing the problems and injustices that we have not totally left behind, and considering how they continue to affect our lives.

### Re-Interpretation of the psychological counterations in Macbeth's character

The career and character of Macbeth shows how a noble and valiant man is brought to his damnation. It is presented in such a way as to arouse our pity and terror. At the very outset of the play, he is the very embodiment of courage and valiant enterprise. He can single-handedly save the nation from a foreign invasion aided by internal treachery. He is **'Bellona's bridegroom, a very eagle among sparrows', 'a pillar of the state'**. The tragedy of Macbeth lies in the fact that such an embodiment of heroism degenerates into a **'tyrant', a 'hell kite'**.

Macbeth's **'hamartia'** is unquestionably his **"vaulting ambition"**. His first crime is inspired by ambition but at the same time Macbeth is in a way a victim of circumstances. Though he is damned by his own sins, no doubt he is tempted. The witches inflame his latent ambition, harden his heart and lead him on to his cruel murder. But the rest of his crimes are all his own without the aid of the witches.

**G. Wilson Knight** points out that in spite of the gross villainies of Macbeth and his gradual degeneration, Macbeth does not lose our admiration or sympathy. He is always aware of the enormity of his crime. He is totally unnerved thinking of the **'deep damnation of his taking off'**. His mountainous guilt always haunts him and his consequent sufferings palliate our condemnation of his villainous career. From the moment he murders Duncan begins the moment of his colossal anguish. In his vivid imagination, he looks at the mark of blood in his hand. His conscience so magnifies his guilt that he feels: **".....this my hand will rather/The multitudinous seas incarnadine"**. His overwhelming fear and remorse result in his auditory hallucination: **"Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep"**.

Yet the greatest puzzle remains why then Macbeth commits his future crimes. The answer is that one who rides a tiger, does not know to dismount. His murder of Banquo is not only motivated by the selfish desire to secure the crown for his own children, but also by fear - a fear of the royal nature of Banquo. In the final murder of Macduff's family, he is also motivated by that same sense of fear, though it is highly irrational and inhuman. In fact, this is the only act of irredeemable villainy in his entire career. Yet it should be remembered that right before it Macbeth has been heavily cheated by the witches who bid him- **"Be bloody, bold and resolute!"** Macbeth is so much steeped into crime that his normal senses are blinded. He can not discern reality and appearance, good and evil. His tragedy lies in the fact that the more he proceeds in his villainies, the more he relies upon the witches which brings about his fall.

**John Hamington** rightly points out that if at all Macbeth has any redemption, it is in the fact that never for a moment Macbeth shifts the burden of his guilt upon the witches. He acknowledges that his trust in their equivocation results in his betrayal. What is significant is that even at the last moment of his life Macbeth can consciously assess his position. He knows that he is only worthy of **'mouth honours'** and silent curses and that he must not have obedience, friendship and reverence which one looks for in old days.





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Macbeth in his most stunning soliloquy "**out-out brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow... It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing**" (Act V, Scene V) meditates on life and thinks that life is a vanity of vanities, a pompous and insubstantial pageant. He uses a series of metaphors. He has compared life to a book which is dull and monotonous till the last syllable is reached - then he switches to another metaphor. Life is compared to a brief candle, a flickering spark. It soon goes out. If that be so, let the candle of life be put out at once. Life is then compared to a shadow. It is unsubstantial and of no importance for eternity. Man when alive is no better than an insignificant actor, who for a moment moves on the stage with pomp, pride and passion for the brief period of his part and then is forgotten by all. Life may be compared to a senseless tale told by a fool - a noisy speech full of strong words and violent gestures but wanting in sense.

Macbeth suffers the poignant sense of loneliness. He has come to the realization that he has made a huge waste of life. He has the illusion of hope and happiness by killing others; he wants to gain the throne and make himself safe by destroying and defying others. But all his efforts have ended in utter frustration. But he does not give way to despair. He has realized the truth of life, and this realization restores him to his normal self which was disintegrated by his false hopes and futile endeavours. Macbeth is pessimistic but Shakespeare is not. We are moved by Macbeth's isolation and loneliness despite his wickedness.

In conclusion, if Macbeth is a villain, the bare epithet would do him nothing but injustice for he is more than a villain. He is a perplexing villain-hero.

## The Different Representation of Lady Macbeth's Character in Macbeth

In the domain of Shakespeare's women, who are beautiful and charming like **Juliet** and **Miranda**, intelligent like **Porotia**, faithful like **Desdemona**, Lady Macbeth stands as distinguished and unparalleled. Unlike other females in Shakespeare's plays, she is more dominant, passionate and violent, even than **Goneril** and **Regan** in **King Lear**. She has a powerful imagination, boundless ambition, cruelty of a murderer, loyalty of a king, yet timid like a housewife, tender like a daughter to her father and repentance as a sinner at confession. It is such a mixture of fair and foul that makes her character a study of human psychology.

Lady Macbeth first appeared contemplating Macbeth's letters which bears the suggestion of evil design. She is seen at the height of her inhuman nature when she invokes the "**ministers**" of remorseless cruelty. She wants to extinguish in her breast all those feelings which might have stood between her ambition and its fulfilment. She prays to the agents of evil: "**make thick my blood / Stop up the access, and passage to remorse**" / **come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall**". When, shortly after, Macbeth arrives, She simply instigates him: "**.....look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under it.**" There is no doubt that Macbeth first sowed the seeds of guilt in her mind. Yet, when Macbeth determines to proceed no further in the business, Lady Macbeth uses all the forces of her tongue to awaken his evil genius. She taunts her husband and brings the charge of cowardice against him. She drives away that loyalty and pity which might have prevented Macbeth from the murder. In order to emphasize the fact that promises must be kept, Lady Macbeth uses the most potently eloquent speech. She says that she could throw the baby of her breast down to death, had She promised to do so. It is indeed here that she appears to be the fourth witch. What the three witches have predicted, she will translate into action. She is terribly monstrous and far more iron-willed than her husband. Even Macbeth, in spite of all his heroic stature, appears but a puppet beside hers.

However, Lady Macbeth's essential human heart is brought out in the sleep-walking scene, She is now a ghost of her former self. She has lost all her mental rhythm. We behold her now with a pale countenance, her eyes glared with a fever of remorse. She is a victim of troubled dreams and Somnambulism. During her sleepwalking, the thoughts of innocent blood continuously haunt her imagination: "**Here's the smell of the**



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**blood still: all the Perfumes of Arabia will not Sweeten this little hand".** This image of the pale, broken woman appears apparently irreconcilable to the image of the previous ruthless woman.

But the two pictures are not really incongruous. A close look at the her utterances before the murder reveals that Lady Macbeth of the earlier scenes anticipates the broken lady of the final act. Before the murder of Duncan, she appeals to the murdering ministers to 'sunsex' her and it shows that she is not inherently cruel. Unlike Goneril in **King Lear**, she has filial feelings so much so that she can not murder Duncan simply because he resembles her fathers. Further, she has to take recourse to wine to give her boldness. Again **G. Wilson Knight** finely points out that though she is gruesome, there is nothing vulgar in her ambition, Her conjugal devotion to her husband is too deep, her ambition being only for him. The change in Lady Macbeth's self is also not abrupt. Once the murder is over, she gradually fades out of the play, sinking in desolation and despair. In the Banquet scene she sparkles a little, probably before being extinguished forever. The very next time she appears in the sleepwalking scene which is the culmination of her despair. Thus the two ladies are actually ones; the initial facade of cruelty and monstrosity only fading out at the end. In the ultimate conclusion. Lady Macbeth is essentially a woman who failed to realize her womanliness, did something against her nature and this ultimately boomerangs on her.

It is too glib to say that Lady Macbeth is simply 'fiend like'. It is not she who puts the ideas of murder into Macbeth's mind. That horrid suggestion was the fruit of Macbeth's own imagination. What she does is to give him support, the strength and courage to perform the deed, though the critics like **Dr. Johnson** regard her as an ogress who is 'merely detested'. **Schlegel** considers her to be a species of female Fury and **Goethe** calls her a 'super witch'. Indeed, at the very beginning, Lady Macbeth is a picture of monstrosity and evil ambition. However, at the fag-end of the play, she is transformed into a pathetic, sleepwalking creature under the pressure of evil. Shakespeare has also shown that her role as a fiend is temporary and artificial. The artificial role which she plays against her nature turns back on herself and she becomes a tragic figure.

## Conclusion

The story of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is wholly about human nature and the tendencies one faces when faced with the opportunity to gain power. While taking the same path, the two characters in **The Tragedy of Macbeth** face different endings altogether. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's similarities are striking and their differences even more so. The play depicts just some of the possible changes a person may go through in chase of a horrible ambition that is highly likely to change their lives for good.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth share an ambitious nature, however, they are polar opposites in terms of character, courage, and resolve as demonstrated by the character analysis above. The differences are rooted in their genders—Macbeth being male and Lady Macbeth being female. Due to these differences, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are also foil characters of each other, the contrast of which highlights the differences between the genders during the time, which is way before the rise of feminism and the **Time's Up Movement**.

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