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## Deconstructing Macbeth and its complexes

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### **Abstract:**

*The article seeks to explore unconventional lines of argument based on the dynamics of a Tragic Hero who remains exalted even in the hours of disgrace. In fact this research paper builds some novel assumptions to find grounds to reinterpret the Tragedy of Macbeth and its Hero who has a dimension to his personality possibly undermined by literary criticism.*

**Key words:** Fate, Character, Destiny, Evil, Action, murder, devastations, crime, punishment, darkness, blood, remorse, guilt and conscience.

Much has been said and much more will be said as far as a work of literature is concerned for interpretations are uncertain and nothing can be construed as the last word particularly in the context of the Deconstruction phenomenon. *The Tragedy of Macbeth is as much a victim of epistemic skepticism and complex Aporetics as any other work of literature has been given the diversity of experiments in terms of meanings and contexts.* The terms like Character, destiny, fate, ambition, vice etc have been in circulation since the tragedy was written by one of the finest dramatic talents, William Shakespeare. The tragedy of Macbeth has always

enchanted me, enthralled me and even bemused me since my student days and more often than not I tend to go into its constitutive elements considering hierarchy and ideology, the two terms responsible for any determination of context. I may be stretched and be assailed for expressing an audacity to shift the context of a drama which is on the tip of all tongues engaged with intellectual explorations and therefore to find metaphysical dimensions in a character conducted to doom by a complete surrender of initiative to a woman as dark, macabre and merciless as Lady Macbeth is like fishing in troubled waters.

Wilson Knight, A.C. Bradley, Harold Bloom, Steven Newit, Charwie F. and K.C. Knight have developed perspectives on Macbeth that are a bundle of farfetched analogies, terms laden, empirical exercises and mind boggling phraseology which render my task even more puzzling to find bases to build a controversial and debatable thesis and transform it into a logical sequence of arguments to sustain the audacious stance that Macbeth deserves a reconstruction given the hammering he has received over a period of time for the acts the world bays his blood for.

Yes the Tragedy of Macbeth is doom recast on earth, it is the play where darkness drops, where gloom descends and where the two individuals Macbeth and Lady Macbeth shake the foundations of earth to rescript the history of Scotland. The ferocious and frightening temptations of power and the lengthening shadows of punishment stretch the human imagination beyond the limits of endurance. My objective here is neither to indulge in a terrain of intimidating thoughts nor to flummox your *senses into paralysis but* just to be just towards a character who is generally considered to be the epitome of violence, aggression and blood. Whether Macbeth spills innocent blood in pursuit of his dream to be the King of Scotland aided and abetted by the monarch of evil, Lady Macbeth who Wilson Knight refers to ‘as one complete moment of evil’ in the play can still be contested to soften the tissues of

heart towards Macbeth. But the same Wilson Knight in his essay on the Metaphysics of Evil, calls Tragedy of Macbeth' as the most Profound and mature vision of evil" which of course does not exonerate Macbeth from his timidity, villainy or criminal offences.

A respected General, a revered figure for the valour and commitment that Macbeth is in the opening pages of the play enjoys the confidence of the King Duncan who finds him loyal and steadfast towards his Kingdom but little did the King know that someday the General would taste his blood in propelling himself to the throne of thorns. Little did he know too that the visitations to the weird Sisters would turn a loyal General into a coy criminal to the extent that he himself will be dislodged through a dagger to be pierced at the dead hours of night to usurp the powers? But was it Macbeth's own doing or again to quote a cliché the pugnacious influence of an unrelenting woman who wishes to ride on the crest of power by shedding human blood?

A.C. Bradley writes to reveal the degree of desperation on the part of Lady Macbeth to convert Macbeth into a criminal who thinks before what he does but she goads him to kill Duncan.

Remarks A.C. Bradley:

She animates him by picturing the deed as heroic, 'this night's great business,' or 'our great quell,' while she ignores its cruelty and faithlessness. She bears down his faint resistance by presenting him with a prepared scheme which may remove from him the terror and danger of deliberation. She rouses him with a taunt no man can bear, and least of all a soldier -- the word 'coward.' She appeals even to his love for her.

from this time

Such I account thy love;

Bradley's statement is key to the understanding in Macbeth's eventual submission to the tormenting persuasions of his wife

who even challenges his manhood or manliness by going to the extent of billing him a 'Coward' which does the trick for her. This is the first stance of lady Macbeth's cajoling of him and it is to be viewed in the context of human psychology that whether it is Macbeth or anybody else would have yielded to the temptations raised and the courage challenged. Given the fact that Macbeth was a General whose bravery was an acknowledged fact and Lady Macbeth knew that a General's valour can only be aroused by challenging it and she succeeds in her design to find a design to murder the King. Lady Macbeth's last minute withdrawal from killing Duncan also in a certain way speaks about her humane face because Duncan's face resembled her father's. But this apart the pace of the crimes one after another based on the prophecies of the weird sisters suggests the grit and determination of a woman who does not veer away from the committed paths even it meant destructions. She tampered with the order of things by indulging in a mindless guzzling of values in a hopeless effort to crown her husband as the king of Scotland. Also there is a prediction by the hags that Macbeth shall never be the king and Banquo's descendants would have the eventual coronation. This infuriates Lady Macbeth and perhaps a reason good enough to kill Banquo. Murder one leads to murder two and murder two culminates into the swishing drags of blood stained daggers. Now the important question is whether it was the weird sisters' predictions that did Macbeth in or the jealousy of Banquo's siblings taking over the reins of the Kingdom or the germination of ambitions induced into a perfectly normal individual until he met the hags? Lady Macbeth on the other hand exhibits exemplary courage both in the handling of her husband's dalliance into crimes and her own faith in scuttling the designs of an established political order and therefore the diabolic designs of a woman find expressions in the crimes of her husband. The husband's conscience is apparently smothered but it pricks him, the hallucinations that he suffers cage him within the psychological confines of confessions and

he remains a restless soul until he is annihilated by Banquo's son. There too he refuses to kiss the feet of Malcom and prefers a conflict to die with the boots on.

Macbeth's response to the attempted instigation of Lady Macbeth stresses the points of fidelity, the King as soul virtuoso and he is just and fair but the very thought of ambition to spur him in action perhaps is the point to ponder. Caught between the ambition and the emotions to serve, he crumbles and disintegrates into a prisoner of his wife's lust for power. There Macbeth looks an ordinary General who acknowledges the humility of the King yet swings into action driven by the motifs and the divided will.

If this business would really be finished when I did the deed, then it would be best to get it over with quickly. If the assassination of the king could work like a net, sweeping up everything and preventing any consequences, then the murder would be the be-all and end-all of the whole affair, and I would gladly put my soul and the afterlife at risk to do it. But for crimes like these there are still punishments in this world. By committing violent crimes we only teach other people to commit violence, and the violence of our students will come back to plague us teachers. Justice, being equal to everyone, forces us to drink from the poisoned cup that we serve to others. The king trusts me in two ways. First of all, I am his kinsman and his subject, so I should always try to protect him. Second, I am his host, so I should be closing the door in his murderer's face, not trying to murder him myself. Besides, Duncan has been such a humble leader, so free of corruption that his virtuous legacy will speak for him when he dies, as if angels were playing trumpets against the injustice of his murder. Pity, like an innocent newborn baby, will ride the wind with winged angels on invisible horses through the air to spread news of the horrible deed to everyone everywhere. People will shed a flood of tears that will drown the wind like a horrible downpour of rain. I can't spur myself to action. The only thing motivating me is ambition, which makes people rush ahead of themselves toward disaster.

Scene vii, Act 1 (Tragedy of Macbeth)

In Macbeth Shakespeare creates a tragic protagonist whose desolation is through an inherent tragic flaw and that takes him through the destructions. With each murder Macbeth falls deep into a crisis whose heart is stained, whose hands tremble and eyes flicker to remind him all his guilt. There it seems, is no evidence of Macbeth being proud of the sins committed in collusion with lady Macbeth, rather each step forward in the direction of crimes makes him lose his grace and he knows it well. The dignity of a General is compromised at the behest of a woman who loses her sanity to cry out

Theses deeds must not be thought  
After these ways: so, it will make us mad,  
O Banquo, Banquo,  
Our royal master's murdered

Writes Charwie F.

Macbeth's own nature and 'metaphysical' influences is a lethal cocktail which propels him to his fate. The witches' ambiguous prophecies affected Macbeth by making him curious to why they greeted him as Thane of Cawdor and why he would soon become king. Ambition seemed to be Macbeth's forte but after the murder of King Duncan, which led to the murder of others, including Macduff's family, it became his frailty.

And again he writes

Metaphysical studies generally seek to explain inherent or universal elements of reality which are not easily discovered or experienced in our everyday life. As such, it is concerned with explaining the features of reality that exist beyond the physical world and our immediate senses. Metaphysics, therefore, uses logic based on the meaning of human terms, rather than on a logic tied to human sense perception of the objective world. Metaphysics might include the study of the nature of the human mind, the definition and meaning of existence, or the nature of space, time, and/or causality.

Remarks Derrida:

Because there is no fixed centre, there should no longer be any limits on what it is possible to think or believe. We should literally be able to think anything. We can be playful and flexible about the way we think, when we realise that “truth” and “falsehood” are simply wrong distinctions to make. Indeed they are just a destructive and harmful manifestation of that power structure.

Since Derrida believes that there is no fixed centre which obviously entertains the possibility of thoughts not thoughts before in the context of a text and the meaning of it cannot be deterministic. This in a certain way dismisses the hegemony of critical judgments. Further that” we should be able to think anything” again points to the impossibility of an agreeable judgment in terms of its final meaning and therefore my assumptions are not embedded in any sort of contradiction that Macbeth can be seen in a radically different light. So here it is only logical to presume that in this context we find Macbeth on a higher level of existence even he falters to please the majesty of his wife or to go against what was predicted by the Weird Sisters. It is not that Macbeth knew he would take over the reins of Scotland by killing Duncan and Banquo because these are ghastly murders in pursuit of ambition that was not his. Wilson Knight passes the pressure of guilt on Lady Macbeth by billing her as the “fourth witch” of the play and indeed the failure of Macbeth to transfer the burden of guilt to his wife is a major psychological barrier he could not break and second that once he succumbed to the pressure exerted by his wickedly ambitious wife who wanted her husband to be rewarded for the feats he accomplished for the King and the prognostications suggesting otherwise possibly ignited the dormant fire within her to prove the predictions wrong and place her husband on the highest pedestal. Lady Macbeth might be a vicious, pugnacious and belligerent woman but her commitment to husband cannot be challenged and third that she was a woman

who would have ended up as a normal woman even after the commission of crimes but she loses her sanity, her sense of proportions and there are umpteen occasions in the play where she does the introspection to find herself guilty and her husband a victim of her vaulting ambition. Macbeth from the moment of Duncan's murder down to the last word is a restless soul and the inherent element of flaw as a matter of conceptual character had to do something to lead to his doom. The doom obviously is self-cast though Lady Macbeth was like a shadow that chased him even while he had thoughts otherwise. Two elements are important here, one that Macbeth was not a criminal and if he were he would have enjoyed his criminal status by usurping power but he does not do so. There is no evidence in the play which suggests that even for a moment he cherished his elevation to criminal status. He keeps ruing and searching his souls for the maladies of the external influences. What makes Macbeth a tragic character and saves him from becoming a one-dimensional monster is that he is perpetually conscious of his evil choices. He is poignantly aware of the rapid deterioration of his humanity, his kindness and his gentility, grace and respect and the realization itself makes him transcend his status as a Hero who even in the hours of disgrace remains exalted.

The following points illustrate the dilemma and disgust and the ire and fire of a tragic protagonist who by virtue of being a tragic Hero carries a fatal flaw in his character as a matter of dramatic principle and therefore his very acts are extensions of the flaw and the errors in judgment.

1. Macbeth's tragic grandeur, his continuous realization of the fact that he is 'an instrument of darkness'
2. His live conscience.
3. His inability to succumb entirely to the evil that is within him.
4. The temptation and crime of Macbeth.



I will not yield,  
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,  
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.  
Though Birnamwood be come to Dunsinane,  
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,  
Yet I will try the last. Before my body  
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,  
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough.'

When all is lost and Lady Macbeth having suffered insanity, Macbeth is on the threshold of a possible end though he refuses to recognize the forces ganging up to eliminate him and does not goad himself into any kind of surrender given the fact that he knows he was a General and the same valour restricts him from going down to kiss the feet of Malcom. His pride is intact, his courage is not dissolved, and his arrogance of being a General stays with him though in anguish he screams out

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
signifying nothing."

Yes, he dissipates not in order to create but the images of blood, daggers, deaths, disasters all appear as futile engagements and he dwindles to an existentialist who fights with the created circumstances, loses out his buoyancy and falls into the quagmire of existential pain which makes him a realist to the core in terms of accepting the negatives of life. Why I call him metaphysical because he has the remorse within him, being redemptive and the purgation elicits sympathy for his deadly acts. He is on a higher plane in final flickering moments of his life where he finds life a walking shadow and a tale told by an idiot. One of the things that stay with Macbeth till the final moments is his self-evaluation which finds him guilty and the blood he shed strikes his soul. He allowed himself to disappear with valour intact, pride humbled and prejudice tamed. He still

has words of praise for his wife after her death but the substance of the thoughts express a sense of remorse, battle weary character who had his heydays but for the error in judgment he falls and falls not to rise ever again. The anguish, the pain, the images of the blood stained dagger, the ghost of Banquo all remind him of the sins he committed but the very realization that ambition is a futile word, life is without substance and the bloodshed left him sleepless for the rest of his life leave him perched on a high pedestal of values, he violated with utter disdain early on. Macbeth is not so much the story of an evil deed and its consequences, but rather an exploration of the meaning of evil and its ramifications--- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth can be seen as embodiments of a quest that seeks to know the meanings of actions which cannot be successfully and convincingly explained with the philosophical postulates of 'free will' and the pessimistic and deterministic impact of the environment one is placed in. Other examples from Shakespeare and Marlowe can be deduced to suggest further how evil overrides the will of a man and to the extent that he hardly recovers to find its repercussions. Christopher Marlowe in creating Dr. Faustus produced a model of a man's desire without being sure of its utility. Dr. Faustus realizes the futility of his newly acquired knowledge only when he achieves it and that too at the expense of his scholarship and therefore he is confused about the application of such knowledge and ends up using it for all the wrong purposes. Othello is the most timid and hot headed of the Shakespearean Tragic heroes who is maneuvered by Iago which Coleridge failed to see and called his villainy "Motifless malignity". That was not motifless because Iago was a racist who declined psychologically to recognize the authority of Othello, a Negro that too in possession of a white wife. Second that Casio superseded him in the administrative hierarchy despite being junior to him. Othello was reduced to a tool in the hands of Iago who did not even use his common sense to realize the plot of Iago. My disagreement with Coleridge's rather eulogized

interpretation of Iago's intent stems from the assumption that what has been said by a critic can never be the last word on any issue that Derrida advocates through his deconstruction to locate the point of contradiction in the text as "there is nothing outside the text." Shakespeare had composed modern texts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century itself and whatever has been said or spoken by the critics including Wilson Knight, Harold Bloom and A.C. Bradley can be reviewed as **Derrida** observes:

(Différance) Any signifier (or chain of signification, ie. text) must infinitely defer its meaning because of the nature of the sign (the signified is composed of signifiers). At the same time, meaning must be kept under erasure because any text is always out of phase with itself, doubled, in an argument with itself that can be glimpsed through the aporias it generates.

The point that Derrida refers to is almost what I had referred to in the first part of this discussion that committing epistemic violence is like leaving the door ajar for further investigations through the generation of Aporia which is uncertain grounds of human knowledge and this uncertainty leads to the movement towards the flexibility of thoughts. What Derrida calls Différance in fact is the perception of a refusal to kowtow a certain line of argument and the meaning is deferred in terms of possibilities. My assiduously manufactured thesis to see Macbeth in metaphysical terms representing Derridian **Différance**, also entails a probable reinterpretation of a text which is as modern as any text written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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