

Critical thinking on common themes and character traits in macbeth and candide

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Gender roles and gender-related stereotypes are often depicted in literary works. For example, Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" could be considered misogynistic because it promotes the stereotype that women are the root of all evil, manipulate men for their selfish needs, and create chaos because all female characters in the play show that form of behavior. On the other hand, it is also possible to notice the lack of stability and logic in the main character Macbeth who is depicted as a naïve, indecisive, and dependent character. In "Candide," it is possible to notice that Voltaire depicts the vulnerability and abuse of women in his time, but he also criticizes man's devotion to useless contemplations on good and evil by creating a parody based mainly on Leibniz's teachings. Although the gender roles are similar in both works, the gender roles in "Macbeth" promote negative outcomes and destructive behavior while "Candide" depicts a story in which the characters strive to maintain optimistic despite the destructive social circumstances of their time. However, the female characters in both works lack positive female virtues, and the male characters are deluded and naïve.

Both works also depict various similar themes that are relevant to the social circumstances and gender roles in society during the authors' lives, and it is possible to notice that the main themes of both works are similar. For example, the power of ambition and its negative effect on people is depicted in "Macbeth" because Macbeth uses violence to achieve his goals.

Furthermore, he must continue with violent acts to preserve his position because he perceives others as threats that must be removed. Finally, Macbeth becomes a tyrant who rules by removing opposition forcefully and lives in fear constantly rather than a king who rules by wisdom and

leadership. When comparing the gender roles, it is possible to notice that masculinity is a constant topic while women are apparently depicted as the root of all evil.

In "Candide," several themes are constant throughout the work, and Voltaire mainly depicted how the innocent and naïve character Candide learned about the negative aspects of the world. The negative aspects are a critique of the corruption with power, corruption with money, and treating women as objects. Some parts of the work address the hypocrisy of religion. For example, Voltaire depicts some religious characters as thieves or homosexuals. Voltaire uses the negative circumstances to create a parody of optimism, which is a constant theme in the work. While Candide is looking for a suitable philosophy that explains good and evil properly, Voltaire discards all possibilities that philosophy can be useful in life.

It is possible to notice that corruptions with power or material wealth are a constant theme in both works. Furthermore, the flaws of various schools of thought and decision-making models are depicted in both works. Although Shakespeare does not address philosophy directly, he addresses Macbeth's decision-making model and the negative perception of masculine values while Voltaire indicates that all philosophy is useless in contrast to practical work. The concepts for depicting the male characters with wrong ideas of masculinity and female characters without positive virtues are the same in both works.

The female roles in both “ Macbeth” and “ Candide” are mainly passive in contrast to the male characters, and they lack positive virtues in both works. For example, Lady Macbeth does not achieve her ambitions directly, but she manipulates her husband by questioning his manhood when he did not wish to murder the king by asking him whether he would rather live like a coward who missed the opportunity to become the king of Scotland (Shakespeare 22). Apparently, courage is associated with manhood, but it is evident that courage is useless when the moral agent fails to discern between right and wrong actions based on their consequences. Furthermore, Lady Macbeth is able to manipulate her husband and Macbeth’s low self-esteem and inability to put his thoughts and actions in order is not a true virtue of masculinity.

Macbeth fails to make decisions independently and does not have any positive male virtues, but it is also evident that his wife supports the development of his negative virtues. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Shakespeare’s play is misogynistic to a certain extent, but it is also possible to observe it from a different angle and conclude that the woman’s role in the play merely emphasizes the lack of positive masculine virtues in Macbeth. Without independence, self-reliance, and self-control, he is not able to resist his wife’s manipulation that causes him to embrace the negative manifestations of masculine traits. However, it is not possible to ignore Lady Macbeth’s role in promoting negative virtues of greed, unrealistic ambitions, and fear, so it is possible to conclude that Lady Macbeth lacks positive virtues in Shakespeare’s play.

In “Candide,” the female characters are used only to depict the viewpoints on women in Voltaire’s time. Because the main character Candide is somewhat naïve and simplistic, he observes Cunégonde as an embodiment of female virtue, but Voltaire depicts a world in which women are treated as property rather than living beings. Forced marriages, rape, and prostitution are some of the main themes depicted in many literary works, and “Candide” covers all of those topics as well (Dusinberre 110). For example, the old woman recalls how she had lost her virginity to the corsair captain who considered his act honorable. Furthermore, after the stories regarding rape, the old woman states that considers those scenes not worth mentioning because they are common (Voltaire 46). It is evident that the real situation in Voltaire’s time was the vulnerability of women and it was impossible for them to develop any positive female virtues under those conditions.

The main male characters in “Macbeth” and “Candide” follow different philosophies in life, and the outcomes for both characters show that Candide followed a better model than Macbeth. Macbeth followed Individualism because he acted in self-interest and without any consideration of possible negative outcomes for others. Candide did not develop his personal philosophy until he followed several teachings throughout the story and decided that philosophy cannot answer any important questions regarding the roles of good and evil in life.

Macbeth is clearly a victim from the beginning of the tragedy, and the witches are able to exploit him by manipulating undesirable human traits,

such as greed, ignorance, and insecurity, to achieve their cause. Their main operating principle is to support Macbeth and allow him to feel powerful and in control of the situation, but in reality, they are in control while he is deluded with power and unrealistic ambitions. Macbeth is an example of a naïve man who did not have the character suitable for a king.

The king was considered an archetype of masculinity in various traditions because the “ inner King” was a state of mind that signified purpose, passion, determination, and control (Bly 110). It is evident that Macbeth does not have any masculine properties because he lacks confidence, independence, and self-control. According to Bly, Macbeth would be categorized as a naïve man because “ the naïve man will have a curious link to betrayal, deceit, and lies” (Bly 67). Although his qualities were mainly influenced by Lady Macbeth, it is questionable whether she would have been able to support those negative traits if they did not already exist in Macbeth’s personality, so it is not possible to dismiss Macbeth’s responsibility for his actions.

It is also apparent that Macbeth shows more systematic philosophy than Candide, but it is obvious that systematic philosophy does not necessarily lead to positive developments. Macbeth shows strict adherence to Individualism, an ethical model that allows the moral agent to always act in self-interest and neglect the consequences. Although acting in self-interest is common to many Egoist models, Individualism is the only model that is not concerned with outcomes for others because the moral agent can act in self-interest while producing negative outcomes for others. From a theological

viewpoint, Macbeth progressively degenerated by practicing negative virtues, and that is why Macbeth eventually destroyed himself by trying to attain his unrealistic ambitions (Bryant 153).

Candide shows a lack of systematic thinking because the main character is a student who is still learning from others and did not yet develop his personal philosophy. However, it is evident throughout the book that Voltaire's main aim is to criticize Leibniz's theory on the origin of evil. Leibniz claimed that evil must exist for a reason because God chose to create it, so it must have a purpose in the world, but it is also evident that the difference in wisdom between humans and God is too great, so the human concept of evil and its role in the world is limited (95). In "Candide," Voltaire contrasts comedy and tragedy by strong depictions of the contrast good and evil in the world. It is apparent that more emphasis is placed on the evils in the world, and Candide is depicted as a naïve man who experiences trouble and looks for teachers who are knowledgeable on the origins and roles of evil in society.

However, Candide is incompetent in understanding the optimistic teachings of his teacher Pangloss. In the conclusion, Candide decides to throw away the teachings he received and indicates to his former teacher Pangloss that they must cultivate their garden (Voltaire 152). While that decision was inspired after the communication with a farmer who was dedicated to his farm and avoided all evils through work and avoiding external affairs, Voltaire's statement does not refer to tending an actual garden. Voltaire himself was interested in gardening as a quality pastime that keeps a man busy and

eliminates boredom (Davidson 55). However, tending a personal garden is a statement that can be observed through various spiritual traditions.

In spiritual traditions, a garden was considered a personal space that had to be nurtured to realize one's personal potential. Bly claims that the main character in the fairytale was destined to cultivate the garden in the palace where he resided, and the garden is a metaphor for his personal subconscious or soul (123). It is not clear whether the garden refers to the soul or the subconscious, but it is evident that cultivating the garden in metaphorical languages of various traditions referred to self-development, containing biological impulses, establishing emotional balance, personality refinement, and other forms of self-growth. Unlike Macbeth's tragic end, Candide realized the true meaning of existence and the purpose of self-development rather than being concerned with external factors that were defined as good or evil.

Although it is possible to argue that the female gender is ill-represented in both "Macbeth" and "Candide," it is also possible to notice that the authors depict the male characters as naïve and deluded in both works. They are both ignorant, but Candide is in a better position because he is seeking knowledge while Macbeth observes his position in power as absolute. Macbeth follows a destructive path while Candide is eager to learn, but he dismisses all teachings he had received to develop his personal viewpoint on life. Although the outcomes for both characters are different, it is evident that the main themes throughout the work were the negative roles and traits of both genders. Women were depicted as property and the causes of evil

while men were depicted as naïve, ignorant, and dependant beings in both works.

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