

Example of macbeth and lady macbeth: how they contributed to each others downfall...

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



William Shakespeare's Macbeth is an engaging play which documents the journey of Macbeth up to the paramount helm and his subsequent downfall. The play portrays the dichotomy of mind, the hunger for power and the brutal clutches of fate that looms over the lives of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who finally succumb under the onus of their deeds. How life meanders its way through the series of events finally leading to the downfall of the duo is aptly portrayed by the stalwart playwright. Shakespeare uses the protagonist of his play to exude the horrendous effects of ambition and remorse which have the ability to make a soul cringe and get devoured in the cruel clutches of fate and retribution. Macbeth's character is irrevocably evil, though his weakness makes him stand apart from Iago in Othello or Edmund in King Lear.

The protagonist and his spouse are shattered with pangs of guilt as they both are not equipped with the strength of heart that would have made them withstand the impediments set forth by conscience and their psyche. Lady Macbeth too faces horrific consequences which leave the avid audience shocked at the retribution of life. She is eventually lost in the great abyss of guilt from where there is no respite. They duo have very close influences on each other's downfall as they both hatch the conspiracy of the assassination of the king and nurture the common goal of reaching the paramount position of immense power.

When the audience first sees Lady Macbeth, she is already plotting the murder of King Duncan. She is a lady who is driven by ambition. Her ruthlessness and strength of character overshadows Macbeth. She says, " O, never/ Shall sun that morrow see! /Your face, my thane, is as a book where

men / May read strange matters. To beguile the time, / Look like the time;
bear welcome in your eye, / Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent
flower, / But be the serpent under't." (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 61-66)

She knows of her key role in inspiring her husband and manipulating him into committing the murder of the king while he is staying at their castle as a guest. She readily inspires Macbeth as the news of the king's arrival reaches them. She even goes on to express that she wished she could assassinate the king herself. Shakespeare has penned one of the fiery and frightening female characters of all his works in this play. Lady Macbeth exudes the enigma and subverts the normative. She is symbolic of the repressed masculinity in the female. Her ambitions, desire for power are at par with the dominating self of a male. Even Macbeth implies the same in the play.

Macbeth hesitates to kill the king, but he faces the persuasion and manipulation of his spouse. Macbeth goes on to say, " If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly: if th' assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease success; that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all — here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We'ld jump the life to come." (Act 1, Scene 7, lines 1-7)

Macbeth endeavors to comprehend the consequences of his crime and is torn in the dichotomy of his " vaulted ambition" and sense of morality. He seems to be greatly worried about murdering Duncan, who is a good friend and an extremely benevolent king. He can be quoted saying, " We will proceed no further in this business: / He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people, / Which would be worn now

in their newest gloss, / Not cast aside so soon.” (Act 1, Scene 7, lines 31-35) At this juncture, Macbeth is extremely unsure of the plan of killing the king and desires to scrap it. The superfluous emotion of being honored by the old and honest king crowds his mind. He is inclined toward his moral side, in contradiction to Lady Macbeth’s undeterred aim of achieving the supremacy murdering Duncan.

She overrides all of Macbeth’s objections and goes on to put his manhood to repeated questions, thus igniting the zeal and focus in him to murder the old man, King Duncan. She aptly manipulates him to believe that he should murder the king to prove his masculinity to his wife. “ However, the mere fact that Lady Macbeth can sway her husband’s will in the persuasion scene inherently troubled generations of male interpreters. Early modern men were enjoyed to ‘ rule’ the women in their households. Macbeth lets himself be overruled instead.”

Macbeth is deeply affected after the murders of the king and shows his vulnerability. But, in stark contrast to her husband, Lady Macbeth keeps her calm and plays the pivotal role in steadying Macbeth’s nerves after the act has been successfully perpetrated by him. Macbeth goes on to say, “ One cried “ God bless us!” and “ Amen” the other; / As they had seen me with these hangman's hands. / List'ning their fear, I could not say “ Amen,” / When they did say “ God bless us!”” (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 24-27) Macbeth is clearly shaken and seems to be traumatized after spilling blood. He becomes hysteric and shares with Lady Macbeth of his inability to pronounce “ Amen” while she tries to pacify him with all her efforts. She consoles him by saying that such deeds should not be thought of so deeply and he should try to

calm down.

Lady Macbeth gets transcended and acquires the position of being the epitome of aggression and strength so unfamiliar to the societal attributes to the female folk. It seems as if Macbeth is merely a pawn at her hands and she firmly holds the omnipotent position in synchronizing the events that make the duo accentuate in the structure of power hierarchy of Scotland. Ironically, it is she who shows the tell-tale signs of vulnerability when her conscience comes back to haunt her of the heinous crime she had committed by manipulating her spouse to murder the king.

Macbeth, however, is left alone after Lady Macbeth's disintegration of strength surfaces. He is left all alone to face the music while she suffers from chronic pangs of guilt and is left to endeavor to put herself together in stark juxtaposition to the paramount strength of character she had shown in the beginning of the play. Macbeth plans a series of murder to consolidate his rule over the land and secure his position of the king neutralizing all possible threats to his sovereignty. He goes on to declare, " We have scorch'd the snake, not kill'd it: / She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice / Remains in danger of her former tooth. / But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer, / Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep / In the affliction of these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead, / Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace, / Than on the torture of the mind to lie / In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave; / After life's fitful fever he sleeps well; / Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison, / Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing, / Can touch him further."

(Act 3, Scene 2, lines 13-26)

He is not free from moments of terrible guilt and the adversity of pessimism. He never seems secure of his position at the helm and continually plots to supplement the sense of lack. The juxtaposition of the strength of the position he holds and his vulnerable character attribute literary quintessence to the play.

The mutual destruction is brought in as the duo complement each other in their ambitions which are unchecked by their conscience and sense of morality. The id gets surfaced in their actions and their superego fails miserably in checking their dark desires for supremacy at the cost of bloodshed and criminality. Macbeth's conscience is shaken by the manipulations of his wife and he treads on the path to his doom with the chronology of events.

Lady Macbeth feels alienated as Macbeth does not share his comprehensive plans of murdering the other individuals in the due course of the play. She does not find solace in the care and amorous emotion from her husband which could have been a healing force enabling her to get over her vulnerable self. Macbeth is still blinded by the thirst of power, though he does not find the strength of her wife acting as the evil inspiration for his deeds. In the gradual course of events in the play, Lady Macbeth moves into oblivion.

She is left ill with the physician endeavoring to treat her. He suffers from somnambulism and is seen by the servant and the physician speaking to herself in sleep and trying to wash her hands off the blood that has drenched her soul with the insurmountable feeling of guilt.

Lady Macbeth had once uttered after Macbeth had killed Duncan, " A little

water clears us of this deed. / How easy it is, then! Your constancy / Hath left you unattended. / Hark! More knocking. Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us / And show us to be watchers. Be not lost / So poorly in your thoughts.” (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 67-73)

She had so casually talked of washing away the blood from Macbeth’s hands after the murder. It is really baffling to see the same lady succumbing to ill-health, psychological trauma and stress pondering about the murder day in and day out.

She is weary of the consequences of her crime and is left too guilt-ridden to bask in the fruits of her accomplishment. It is painful and baffling at the same time to see a character as manipulative and gritty as Lady Macbeth to be left in such a helpless state of mind. At the end, she is known to have met with her demise. Her fall from the paramount position of the queen of Scotland to the obscurity of mind that makes her heart cringe with the chronic emotions that rise from the acts of her crime leaves the audience shaken. She signifies the futility of power and manipulation as serves as the perfect example of destiny’s just retribution to the human beings.

Macbeth is left to fight his own battle as she meets her demise. By this time, he had already been greatly alienated from her mentally, but this does serve as the penultimate blow to his sense of false power and position. He goes on to fight for the last time as the enemy advances to see his end. He succumbs at the brutal blows of the destiny and is beheaded only to be set as the perfect precedent of any man who would be driven by the evil of his soul in a bid to surmount the peak of the enormous pile of ambition.

It would be correct to assert that the two main characters of this play,

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth contributed to each other's fall. As spouses, they both had the responsibility and power to influence the other to deter from committing the criminal activities. One could have instilled strong sense of morality in the other, thus averting the horrific consequences that followed. However, both were blinded by the enigma of their supreme ambition. Both nurtured the desire to climb up the ladder of power hierarchy of the state, irrespective of the means to achieve their dream. Their dreams of having enormous power and prestige as the potential rulers of Scotland got transformed into their worst nightmare the tables were turned by the chronology of events.

Neither did the two succeed in gaining the respect of their subordinates and the subjects, nor did they find the opportunity to reap the harvest and ease off as the paramount heads of the state. Rather, they both were haunted by guilt or insecurity which finally zeroed in on them to leave them helpless in the duel with the brutal clutches of destiny. " Macbeth highlights the tension between internal affective mandates and the demands of the power structure." Macbeth is dead inside even before he prepares for the fight with the enemy. It seems as if he is ready to embrace his defeat and death as by now he has come to realize of the dagger of retribution that looms over his head. The impending doom makes one recall how this man and his wife had crept their way up the order with twisted dreams of having power.

William Shakespeare portrays situations where he swaps the gender roles as set by the society. He delves deep into the psyche of the characters which are driven by their darkest desires. The characters exhibit superhuman, yet vulnerable facets which enable the play to get registered in the pages of

history of English literature. It is a study into the human nature and the cognition of the individual.

The play portrays the institution of love and marriage as the destructive unit of social contract where the individual ambitions soar to take a cumulative form only to bring in the ultimate downfall of the couple. Denied the mercy of fate, both find their deeds paid by their eventual haplessness. The pomp and grandeur of kingship which the couple had so greatly desired for remain futile throughout the play as they fail to find the mental peace to continue their lives of normalcy. Truly, the playwright had penned in one of his plays, *As You Like It*: “ All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women mere players: / They have their exits and their entrances.” In this play too, the duo had left no stone unturned to reach their destination of happiness and prosperity, opting for immoral ways to fulfill their dream. But, to their sheer misfortune, their deeds never left them in peace. Macbeth follows his wife to the ultimate destiny of meeting their doomsday. Left to burn in hell in the simmering fire of retribution of their worldly deeds, the two live on in the ardent minds of the audience and readers who remain flabbergasted at the climactic resolution which the playwright offers in the play, *Macbeth*.

The play establishes that no one escapes the wrath of his own deeds. The melancholy of Macbeth’s heart, the lamentations of pained Lady Macbeth, the horrendous outcome of their lives leave an ever-lasting mark on the hearts of the audience who can only but wonder about the tumultuous emotions of the duo’s psyche as they knowingly approach toward the inevitable—their tragic downfall into the dungeons of hell where they would be left forever as the timeless examples of justice meted out by the

overlords who reign over the lives of the innumerable human beings who are also driven by their ambitions and desires to accomplish.

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