

Tragic Downfall: A Literary Significance of Macbeth and Julius Caesar

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This paper examined Julius Caesar and Macbeth as a tragic play written by William Shakespeare. In particular, this work of art deals briefly with the error of judgment which inevitably led to the tragic downfall of the characters particularly the protagonist in each play. This study utilized the qualitative research using objective approach and textual analysis. The researchers incorporated ideas from literary device called Hamartia by Aristotle, and the formalistic approach. This gives emphasis to the error of judgment of the characters found in two major plays of Shakespeare and show that this error has to do with their downfall and its implication to teaching literature. In the play Macbeth, the focus is on the ambition of the protagonist of becoming a king, and being too ambitious led him to danger while Julius Caesar's error of judgement was his pride, arrogance and individual quest for power, self-priority and use of popularist tactics to further own political gains which led to political and military leadership. With all the good and horrible deeds of the characters in the play, the cause of the tragic end of the protagonist must be emphasized in the classroom discussions, since it is indeed timely and

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relevant for the readers to analyze how the sequence of the events changes from the state of happiness to a state of misery.

INTRODUCTION

Tragedy is often used loosely to describe any sort of disaster or misfortune. Stories often have characters that are doomed or flawed in some way that means that they are going to lose out and not achieve their goals. Indeed, tragedy is deliberately part of life. This could be something like the change from being rich to being poor, or being powerful to being powerless, or from being a ruler to being a beggar. The change that takes place in a tragedy is also taken in the deeds of the characters; from a state of happiness to a state of misery.

Literature is a form of art. It holds creative significance on various levels, encompassing both the positive and negative traits of individuals, which can lead to flaws or mistakes. Therefore, it can also serve as a means to convey lessons applicable to real-life scenarios. Discussing tragedy can be a challenging endeavor. It addresses matters that are deeply serious and significant. This is why many tragedies revolve around the theme of death. A situation would not qualify as a tragedy if it did not involve painful suffering.

In the book of Mueller (2009) about *The Iliad*, it is said that the Homeric warriors have a weakly developed sense of group loyalty. Allegiance to a common cause runs a poor third to the quest for individual honor and the commitment to an immediate kinsman or companion in arms. Even in this hierarchy of values Achilles' request amounts to treason, and, as events will show, it is a hamartia in Aristotle's sense, a disastrous error of judgment the mortal consequences of which will rebound upon Achilles himself. Moreover, it is stated in the book that Achilles lives his life as a grand warrior, believing that he is invincible. Thus, Achilles tragic flaw was the pride which caused him to withdraw from the fighting. This led to the death of Patroclus, one of the few human beings that Achilles seemed to love.

Meanwhile, in the undertakings of Atherton et.al., (2013), also shows an error of judgment of the main character in the Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus. She stated that Faustus certainly enjoys great reputations and prosperity. His misfortune was not brought upon him by vice and depravity, but by hubris which could be called his tragic flaw especially since, when his pride left him in the second act, it has been replaced with despair and this is the flipside of pride. He judges his own sins instead of humbly asking for God's forgiveness. However, it could be argued that he gambles hell as a fable, and this gamble turns out to be an error of judgement.

Also, in the book of Bloom (2010) about the Great Gatsby, it was discussed how the protagonist committed tragic downfall. It included some qualities and the deeds of the main character, that Gatsby tries to believe in the image he has created - of himself first, then of others. He has become wealthy through dubious means, but manages to keep up a clean "preppy" look just the same. He maintains his status by throwing lavish parties but does not seem to really care too much about the friends he invites. He remains detached from the essential - developing true relationships with "real" people. He is a loner in the crowd. Only Gatsby, who was relatively unselfish in his life, and whose primary flaw was naive idealism (Bloom, 2010).

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Moreover, tragedy cannot be conceived without enumerating the characters who are the main subject of the issue. The one who experiences all kinds of occurrence and control conspicuous events in some way. The act which is applicable to their personalities, the credibility or otherwise to the situations and other stations of life. The tragic characters then will be defined according to good and horrible deeds. As a result, an error occurs where a character either does it consciously, or does it out of ignorance or mediates it.

It is in this context that the researchers examined Julius Caesar and Macbeth as the major tragic plays written by William Shakespeare. In particular, this work of art deals briefly with the error of judgment which inevitably led to the tragic downfall of the characters particularly the protagonist in each play. The researchers examined first the tragic flaw found in the plays of Shakespeare in accordance to events, setting, theme, and characterization. Hence, this led to the main aim of the study of finding out errors of judgement among the characters in the plays involved.

In addition, since the tragic plays of Shakespeare are also part of literature, emphasis is on the implications of the study's findings to teaching literature. This will reflect on additional learning, where every tragic story as being encountered by the people. The traits of the characters that influence the actions either positive or negative may cause errors which may lead to tragic downfall. Even honour does not have the strength to overcome reason in order to guide men's action towards tragic ends. Even their expertise in not being wounded by experiences, often result in death. Every individual has to face barriers with very serious decision; and rationality makes the individual learn from mistakes.

METHOD

This study utilized the qualitative research using objective approach and textual analysis. Objective approach is used since it is an approach of a study through the facts and evidences in the work itself. However, the analysis of the drama Macbeth is based on writer analysis and interpretation in accordance with the facts and evidences 'round in the drama.

The data are collection from two sources. Primary source is the literary plays work itself. Besides primary source, the writer also used books and others related to the topic as secondary sources

The researchers read the tragic plays so as to have a general idea and understand the sequence of the events in the play. Since this is the interest of the researchers to conduct study in the tragic plays of Shakespeare, a systematic extraction of the needed data for the study to find answers to the stated objectives was undertaken. This study followed a definite procedure to come up with a reliable, precise, and accurate analysis of the medium used. The hereunder statements systematically developed the flow of the study.

The researchers incorporated ideas from literary device called Hamartia by Aristotle, and the formalistic approach. This gives emphasis to the error of judgment of the characters found in two (2) major plays of Shakespeare and show that this error has to do with their downfall. To identify how these characters suffered death because of the flaws or errors, Aristotle's hamartia was be utilized. The researchers included characters, only the protagonist who died in the play and have huge part in the tragic plays, and in turn, provided significance how the plays of Shakespeare become tragic. The source of hamartia is at a juncture between character and the character's actions or behaviours.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the analysis of Macbeth and Julius Caesar.

MACBETH

Downfall of Macbeth

In an objective approach used by Moonik, Moge, & Sabudu (2020), Lady Macbeth not only encourages her husband to fulfill the prophecy but also exerts control over his mindset. She persuades Macbeth to commit the murder so that the prophecy of him becoming king of Scotland can come to fruition.

Purnomo (2013) added that the theme of the play is a blind ambition. Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's more ambitious wife, encourages him to become king through

devious means. He employs the objective to justify the methods "to achieve it." However, it leads to the demise.

Event and Theme of Macbeth

Macbeth sees a vision of a bloody dagger floating before him, leading him to Duncan's room. When he hears Lady Macbeth ring the bell to signal the completion of her preparations, Macbeth sets out to complete his part in the murderous plan. Lady Macbeth waits for Macbeth to finish the act of regicide. Macbeth enters, still carrying the bloody daggers. Lady Macbeth again chastises him for his weak-mindedness and plants the daggers on the bodyguards herself. While she does so, Macbeth imagines that he hears a haunting voice saying that he shall sleep no more. Lady Macbeth returns and assures Macbeth that "a little water convey Lears us of this deed" (Act II, scene ii). As the thanes Macduff and Lennox arrive, the porter pretends that he is guarding the gate to hell. Immediately thereafter, Macduff discovers Duncan's dead body. Macbeth kills the two bodyguards, claiming that he was overcome with a fit of grief and rage when he saw them with the bloody daggers. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain, fearing their lives to be in danger, flee to England and Ireland. Their flight brings them under suspicion of conspiring against Duncan. Macbeth is thus crowned king of Scotland.

Ambition and temptation both play a key factor in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan. Macbeth possesses enough self-awareness to realize the dangers of overzealous ambition. And yet, the temptation to carry out the witches' prophecy is ultimately too strong for Macbeth to curb his ambition. In Lady Macbeth's lexicon, incidentally, "hope" is also another word for "ambition" and perhaps "temptation." As Macbeth expresses his doubts about killing Duncan.

Ironically, Lady Macbeth must herself rely on intoxicants to "make [her] bold" before executing her ambitious and murderous plans. Once the intoxication wears off, Lady Macbeth finds that she is unable to cope with the consequences of her own "hope." Ultimately, ambition and temptation prove fatal for both the Macbeths.

Setting

The play takes place in Scotland. Duncan, the king of Scotland, is at war with the king of Norway. As the play opens, he learns of Macbeth's bravery in a victorious battle against Macdonald—a Scot who sided with the Norwegians. At the same time, news arrives concerning the arrest of the treacherous Thane of Cawdor. Duncan decides to give the title of Thane of Cawdor to Macbeth. As Macbeth and Banquo return home from battle, they meet three witches. The witches predict that Macbeth will be thane of Cawdor and king of Scotland, and that Banquo will be the father of kings. After the witches disappear, Macbeth and Banquo meet two noblemen Ross and Angus, who announce Macbeth's new title as thane of Cawdor. Upon hearing this, Macbeth begins to contemplate the murder of Duncan in order to realize the witches' second prophecy.

Characterization

Macbeth who was once a hero, slumped down to become a murderous and tyrant king. However, Macbeth is not at fault for his unfortunate transformation. Macbeth's tragic flaw is his ambition, which is heavily influenced by his gullibility because it eventually exploits enough of his ambition that causes his isolation and downfall. Macbeth's gradual isolation is caused by his gullibility exploiting his ambition from his initial encounter with the three witches and their prophecy. The prophecy is the root of Macbeth's isolation and downfall as the witches predict that Macbeth is the Thane of Cawdor, and king of Scotland.

Here, Macbeth acknowledges that the murder of Duncan's chamberlains was a wrongdoing. He does not even wish to look at who he really is because of how wrong he knows his actions are.

Macbeth suffers from his ambition to become king, and it is his error of judgment. When blind ambition leads him to kill innocent people, he ultimately dies at the hands of MacDuff. Similarly, the error of judgment of Jay Gatsby is his harnessed ambition. His desire for wealth leads to corrupt business goings-on, and his desire for Daisy's love leads to excessive partying, showmanship, and an affair.

Drama from these actions leads to tragic deaths. Purnomo (2013) further emphasized the blind ambition of Macbeth as an external factor of the readers.

JULIUS CEASAR

Event and Theme of Julius Caesar

Even as a young man, Julius Caesar started to take part in many small leadership positions, which eventually led to Caesar's establishing the trust of society and the eventual reign of Julius Caesar. Caesar's rise as a political leader and politician was blemished with a fatal flaw which leads to his destruction.

Persuasion is a concept at the center of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowing (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself. This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience.

While gender itself is not a central issue to this play, questions of Masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness — his effeminacy — makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy for them.

Setting

The play takes place in ancient Rome, just after Julius Caesar has defeated Pompey and his sons and returned to Rome in triumph. Though it's not spelled out in the play, Caesar's power is growing. He's been elected Consul (the highest office of the Roman Republic) for life, giving him unprecedented power. Though a lot of the actual events are crunched together for Shakespeare's literary purposes, the

general feeling is that it's a time when Romans are happy to be recovering from civil war – so happy that they don't worry that the Republic is in danger of becoming an empire led by one king instead of elected representatives.

Caesar was actually assassinated on March 15, 44 B.C., and Antony's alliance with Octavius in the second triumvirate came to an end eleven years later, in 33 B.C., when a disagreement turned into a war. Power politics were beginning to become the norm in Rome, and Rome's honor and tradition as a republic hung in the balance.

Characterization

Antony shook hands with each of the murderers in turn, thus smearing Caesar's blood among all of them; while appearing to make a gesture of reconciliation, he silently marked them all as guilty. In both the handshake and the speech, Antony damns the murderers while appearing to pay respect, showing his consummate skill as a politician and rhetorician.

Antony speaks these lines in his funeral oration for Caesar. He has asked Brutus's permission to make the speech, and Brutus foolishly allows him the privilege, believing that the boost in image that he and the conspirators will receive for this act of apparent magnanimity will outweigh any damage that Antony's words might do. Unfortunately for the conspirators, Antony's speech is a rhetorical tour de force, undermining the conspirators even while it appears deferential to them. This clever strategy recalls the previous scene (III.i).

The act of Julius Caesar accidentally led to his death. With the desire to be crowned as the next king of Rome makes him to be filled with pride, arrogance, and self-priority. It is also the same in *The Iliad* where Achilles tragic flaw is his pride which caused him to withdraw from the fighting. Achilles lives life as a grand warrior, believing that he is invincible. Unfortunately, this only led to the death of Patroclus, his beloved friend.

Literary Significance

In the play Macbeth, the focus is on the ambition of the protagonist of becoming a king, and being too ambitious led him to danger. And also in the play, it is shown that ambition is much more important than relationship with the family.

The play's error of judgement is all about Macbeth's being too ambitious. Indeed, everything that is too much can lead to something disastrous. The character attitude leads him to kill innocent people and also his own downfall.

The implications of the play to students, specifically those who have literature subject appear that it could help them reflect on themselves, that too much of something might cause negative effect not just on themselves but also to other people. In the findings of Basu (2024), pedagogical periphery might be use in the context of classroom. He further highlights the linguistic translation to a translation of context to explore teaching in language literature.

Meanwhile, Julius Caesar's error of judgement was his pride, arrogance and individual quest for power, self-priority and use of popularist tactics to further own political gains which led to political and military leadership as well as to democratic and popularist tactics to advance his career as politician and ruler of Rome.

Implication from the play is best shared in literature class. Hence, the error of judgment may also discuss implying that our desire to become on top as student, may also cause us to be filled with pride, arrogance and self- priority. As such, the learners in literature class may be acquainted of the things to be considered first, not just for his/her own self but for the others, and let this as a moral lesson that every individual can achieve goals with the help of others. In the ethnographic study of Richardson (2014) in a close reading of Julius Caesar, he describes how students' talk unfolded during literacy learning experiences in an English Language Development and students engaged in specific literacy practices during these small group interactions. In teaching Julius Caesar, teacher may use the cognitive strategy integrate new information with what they already know for example repetition and space learning.

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Indeed, the work of Shakespeare is not just about stories that need to be told, but it is also about getting knowledge or lessons reflected in real life situations. Studying the tragic plays of Shakespeare is not as easy as reading educational books where the information is already stated and so easy to acquire, but it is the very complete set of codes which are to be analysed critically and comprehensively to make it more understandable and present similarly a set of codes that guides decision making, falling in love, making friends, building a name, maintaining honor, and serving the people.

CONCLUSION

Introducing these plays into the classroom will give students values to take into account when making decisions and enjoying the work. To give readers the impression that even a protagonist makes a mistake in judgment that ultimately leads to his or her demise, the fatal defect in the characters in any tragic play—including those written by other authors—must be highlighted and analyzed. Because students are taught that literature reflects events and conditions in real life, this resembles real-life issues.

Literature teachers who handle subjects in any literature classes, should also give importance to some tragedies of Shakespeare, since the said plays are considered as the leading and contemporary plays on tragedy. They may consider a variety of genres like short stories, poems, novels, graphic novels, and even film adaptations in teaching literature. With all the good and horrible deeds of the characters in the play, the cause of the tragic end of the protagonist must be emphasized in the classroom discussions, since it is indeed timely and relevant for the readers to analyze how the sequence of the events changes from the state of happiness to a state of misery.

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