



Sartre's Concepts of Consciousness and Self in Macbeth

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare has portrayed his tragic heroes in a way that can be fruitfully investigated through an existential critical approach. The tragedy of Macbeth may be viewed through the lens of Sartre's existential notions. Two significant concepts in Sartre's existential philosophy are the notions of consciousness and self. The present article intends to have a brief overview of these notions in relation to the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The significance of this study is due to the considerably little amount of existential critical examination of Shakespeare's works particularly from the viewpoint of Sartre's philosophy, since most of the present critical investigations are in the line of new historical, social or gender-oriented approaches. It reveals the degree of impact of outside factors on Macbeth's nihilating consciousness, his self-assertion, self-division, and alteration of self through his free decisive choices during the tragedy, and it also examines the same issues about Lady Macbeth. His consciousness is exhibited in its relation with outside elements, and his subjective self is displayed in his myriad asides and soliloquies during the tragedy. His ambition to assert his self in becoming the king of Scotland via foul means like murder culminates in his final downfall. He experiences self-division since he cannot compromise between his ambitious and moral self, and thus his conscience incessantly torments him. Sartre's notion of unstable self and the process of self-becoming are applicable to the Macbeths in the decisions which end in their downfall.

Keywords: Sartre, Shakespeare, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, consciousness, alteration of self, self-assertion

1) Introduction

Sartre and Shakespeare have a specific bond in that the Bard has portrayed tragic characters who can be the embodiment of Sartre's existential concepts in practical and decisive situations. They create their own essence and self through their free decisive choices exactly as Sartre regards as the mission of human beings who have been abandoned in this world and left to create their own essence by freedom, and to accept responsibility for what they make out of themselves and their life. Two significant existential concepts that have been defined in Sartre's philosophy are the notions of subjectivity (consciousness) and self. He discriminates between consciousness and self, and puts self as transcendent to consciousness and in the world influenced by others' attitudes and judgments as well as by one's own free decisions and actions. This article has selected *Macbeth* as it is one of the important and thought-provoking tragedies of Shakespeare and it has put much impact on generations of readers and scholars. This tragedy depicts the existential danger of headstrong ambition on human submission to evil and its resulting downfall. Macbeth has a moral standard of chivalric loyalty to his king, Duncan, at the beginning of the play displayed in his several triumphant victories and valor in battles;

but, he does not remain faithful to this moral code, succumbs to his ambitious desires, and commits murder. His self gets altered through heinous deeds and he cannot return to his previous innocent self. His consciousness is heavily influenced by the tempting prophecies of the witches and particularly by the heavy incitements of his ambitious wife who views royal status as a sweet achievement and heroic endeavor! She has a Machiavellian mindset, and the means for reaching this goal are not important for her as far as the purpose is triumphantly achieved! Thus, she spurs Macbeth into committing regicide and its consequences soon fall upon them.

This study aims to investigate the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the light of Sartre's theories of consciousness and self to illuminate the existential merit of this tragedy and the degree of usage of existentialism by Shakespeare even before its introduction by existentialists themselves. This research is significant since contemporary critical reviews of Shakespeare's tragedies are mainly in the line of new historical, cultural materialistic, social or gender-oriented studies and little attention has been paid to their critical examination in existential approach. The two concepts of self and consciousness are the major concepts introduced in Sartre's existential philosophy, and their analysis in the characters of the Macbeths can elucidate a new dimension of Shakespeare's merit and genius.

The present study intends to discover possible answers for some questions about the consciousness and self of Macbeth and his wife through the lens of Sartre's existential philosophy; it tends to illuminate the relation of the consciousness of Macbeth and his wife with outside factors, and their impact on the Macbeths' nihilating consciousness in choosing a specific course of action; also it will discuss the way Macbeth and his wife alter their self and attempt to assert it during the tragedy and the process of their free decisive choices; and finally it will shed light on their process of self-division and its aftermath.

2) Literature Review

Self and consciousness in Macbeth and his wife have been investigated in many sources including various books and articles but not from the viewpoint of Sartre's existentialism. Therefore, this paper intends to fill in this gap. Some sources which have discussed the general meaning of self and consciousness or the application of existentialism by Shakespeare have been used for citation in this article; for example, A. C. Bradley in *Shakespearean Tragedy* discusses various aspects of Macbeth's tragedy including his freedom, the role of the witches and Lady Macbeth in the action, and Macbeth's change of self during the tragedy. Asloob Ahmad Ansari in *The Existential Dramaturgy of William Shakespeare* speaks about the fragmented consciousness of Macbeth, the changing concept of time for him, and the web of ambiguity woven for him by the witches. Vivian Boleyn in *The Existential Macbeth* investigates the heavy use of existentialism by Shakespeare in the depiction of Macbeth so that he can be an embodiment of the existential man like Hamlet.

Lamia Kabal in "Macbeth's Conscience and Moralizing Imagination" and Francesca Cauchi in "'Compunctious Visiting': Conscience as Unequivocal Witness in *Macbeth*" describe the role of conscience in resisting against the relentless ambition in Macbeth's self, and the torture and sense of shame or self-disgust he feels due to his conscience. Min Huang in "A Battle against One's Soul: An Analysis of Lady Macbeth's Functions as the Other Self to Macbeth" introduces Lady Macbeth as having a very crucial role in the temptation of Macbeth into a strong self-assertion, and also as a silent bearer of his burden of conscience and self-alienation! Ali Salami in "The Aesthetic Response: The Reader in Macbeth" surveys this tragedy from the viewpoint of reader-oriented critical approach of Iser and the function of evil on the change of soul and self in Macbeth.

Harold Bloom in *A Dagger of the Mind* investigates various perspectives in relation to this tragedy, and in another book which is an edited collection of valuable articles on *Macbeth* called *William Shakespeare's Macbeth* provides myriad orientations of several authors to *Macbeth*. "Macbeth: Counter-Hamlet" written by James L. Calderwood and quoted in Bloom's second book cited above, discusses the issue of relation between Macbeth and Hamlet and how the two protagonists are exact counters to each other! Jan Kott in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* examines the necessity of assassination when Macbeth commits the first wicked murder and attempts to keep himself secure in the throne and to conceal his crime: he gets death-infected and cannot shun from killing and more killing! And finally, E. A. J. Honigmann in *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* explains about the ambiguity of Macbeth's role when he commits Duncan's murder: he is as much a victim as a murderer! All the above sources contribute a lot in illuminating various aspects of this tragedy but none of them discusses Sartre's existential notions or his concepts of self and consciousness regarding this tragedy and its main characters.

3) Theoretical Framework: Sartre's Concepts of Consciousness and Self

Two crucial notions in Sartre's existential philosophy are the concepts of consciousness and self which hold his views tightly together based on individual freedom of choice and the role of others on one's self-formation. In Sartre's philosophy, consciousness and self are distinct from one another: consciousness refers to our ability to be aware of and perceive the world around us; it is the state of being conscious, experiencing sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Human consciousness or pure impersonal subjectivity is a kind of relational activity which attributes meanings to things in the world. "It is a kind of nothingness, characterized by its nihilating activities, which assumes goals for itself as lacks or possibilities that can be realized in the future" (*Being and Nothingness* 88). In fact, it puts aims for future, and thus it moves toward self-becoming through its freedom and agency or power of choice. On the other hand, self, in Sartre's philosophy, refers to our sense of individuality and identity. It is the subjective experience of being oneself, distinct from others. Therefore, unlike consciousness or subjectivity, our self is quite personal. It is also very complicated and many-sided, and so it cannot be grasped easily. The self is not a fixed or pre-determined entity but is continuously shaped and defined through our choices and actions.

The key difference between consciousness and self in Sartre's philosophy lies in their respective orientations. Consciousness is directed outward, towards the external world, while self is inwardly focused, concerned with our own existence and personal freedom. Consciousness allows us to engage with the world, while self enables us to make choices and take responsibility for our actions. Sartre emphasizes that consciousness is always consciousness of something, meaning it is directed towards objects or phenomena outside of itself. In contrast, self is characterized by its reflexivity, as it reflects upon itself and its own existence. Self-awareness is a central aspect of the self, as it enables us to reflect on our own thoughts, desires, and values.

Self, according to Sartre, "is transcendent to consciousness or in front of it, and is created in the act of reflection" (*Transcendence of the Ego* 19); it is also beyond consciousness in the world, quite objective and under others' judgments and opinions. "Self is an abstract center created through one's unity of actions, states and qualities" (ibid 20), and since these may change through time, one's self is also very unstable and unpredictable, and may alter due to free choices and actions. Sartre regards two forms of self for humans: past self that is created by looking at the past and appears in hindsight, and future self which is characterized by putting goals or possibilities for the future. The separation of consciousness and self enables us to stand apart from ourselves, be free, and change our choices and actions.

4) Discussion: Sartrean Consciousness and Self in *Macbeth*

4.1. Sartre's Concept of Consciousness in *Macbeth*

The application of the above terms to the tragedy of *Macbeth* can be quite illuminating for the heavy usage of existentialism by the Bard long before its introduction by the existentialists including Sartre. Sartre believes that we human beings through our consciousness become aware of the outside world and then through the freedom of choice and resulting action(s) we surge up in the world and create a unique self and identity for ourselves, and we must accept responsibility for this self. This is the process that can be examined in relation to Macbeth and his consciousness and upsurge of self during the play.

Just at the beginning of the play in the mixture of fair and foul atmosphere portrayed by the witches and as the result of the war between Scotland and Norway, the portrayal that Shakespeare presents us of Macbeth is that of a brave hero who has extraordinary power to the extent that he has been titled as "Bellona's Bridegroom" or "Valor's minion". These triumphant victories put the first seeds of wild ambition into Macbeth's consciousness. While the consciousness of Macbeth is busy engaging with his world and is heavily influenced by the witches' prophecies and the ambitious temptations of his wife, his self has been nicely portrayed in his soliloquies and asides (myriad acts of reflection) which exhibit his self-assertion, self-division as the result of severe struggles within his self between powers of ambition and morality, and the alteration of his self through final decisive choice of murder of Duncan and the subsequent assassinations.

His first reaction to his encounter with the witches' prophecies about his becoming "Thane of Cawdor and king hereafter" has been placed in stark contrast and nice comparison with a quite different reaction from Banquo who has been put under similar situation and prophecies. Their consciousness reacts entirely different from each other to the same predictions. While Banquo reacts quite calmly and in an indifferent manner to the seemingly good news about their future, Macbeth surprisingly reacts with *fear!* Banquo recognizes this strange fear and asks Macbeth: "Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (1. 3. 51-52) Ali Salami in "The Aesthetic Response: The Reader in *Macbeth*" asserts: "There is no logical reason for Macbeth's fear unless we assume with Bradley that his psychological disturbance at the news stems largely from an aforesight which he had long entertained for murdering the king and taking his place" (176). Even Lady Macbeth presents a hint to this matter when she remarks in her dialogue with Macbeth:

What beast was 't, then,

That made you break this enterprise to me?

When you durst do it, then you were a man.... (1. 7. 54-56)

Thus, the consciousness of Macbeth has been already preoccupied with the thoughts of murder even before being influenced by the witches' predictions or his wife's incitements.

The Weird Sisters choose him since he is accustomed to killing in the wars and he lives in "the world in which murder potentially and actually exists" (Kott 61). In his world, manhood and valor are synonymous with bloody actions! His successive victories in battles motivate his ambitious consciousness into desiring higher political positions even the status of the king. Sartre contends that we choose our life path and essence through freely choosing different courses of action, and this is quite apt about Macbeth: Shakespeare contrasts Banquo and Macbeth in that they freely choose two quite divergent paths of life and self-becoming. Banquo keeps "his bosom franchised and allegiance clear" and refuses to do any foul action to fulfill his desires, but Macbeth's consciousness is so filled with the prospect of becoming king that he is ready to do any foul action to fulfill it! Therefore, Macbeth's potent desire for self-assertion and displaying himself as quite worthy and capable for the position of the king motivates him into killing Duncan.

Macbeth's nihilating consciousness even before the influence of the outside temptations puts the ambitious aim of becoming king through every conceivable means for itself and the witches' prophecies just arouse this end again within him. If it were not so, nobody could force him into doing murder. A. C. Bradley declares in *Shakespearean Tragedy*: "he was tempted only by himself" (301). His consciousness gets obsessed with the thought of fulfilling the prophecies especially when he observes that one of them (his becoming Thane of Cawdor) was realized without any effort by him. However, his choice of murder of Duncan to fulfill the prophecy sooner was freely made by himself to speed his descending move toward negative self-becoming.

4.2. Sartre's Concept of Self in Macbeth

Macbeth's powerful self-assertion causes him to choose the wrong path of treachery and murder to obtain authority, but the choice is not so facile and straightforward for him to make. He vacillates a lot before making the decisive choice, and engages in a severe conflict within his self between ambition (self-assertion) and ethical codes (human feelings) to determine his essence and later self. Sartre argues that human self is a unity of actions, states and qualities which is revealed in acts of reflection: Macbeth's self is exhibited in his myriad reflections (soliloquies and asides) during the play which illustrate his spirit of self-assertion, self-disintegration, and sense of guilt and alteration of self through decisive choices.

Macbeth's first serious encounter with the prophecies is his first aside in which he evaluates the goodness or evilness of the prophecies, and he is in a state of total bewilderment:

This supernatural soliciting
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good: _ if ill
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature? (1. 3. 143-150)

These statements that are full of ambivalence are in fact exhibiting the first traces of his existential dilemma of choice: he both likes and fears to choose the easiest but the foulest method to obtain the throne! He does not want to risk his past self (that of a brave faithful warrior honored by everybody) but simultaneously does not desire to be content with this self and wants higher positions which necessitate him to transgress his moral standards and his humanity. He is so enchanted by the prophecies that he seems to be negligent of his surrounding and even Banquo notices this fact and refers to it several times using the word "rapt" for Macbeth:

My noble partner
 You greet with present grace and great prediction
 Of noble having and of royal hope,
 That he seems rapt withal. (1. 3. 57-60)

Even Lady Macbeth is aware of this ambivalence and infirmity of purpose within Macbeth and "the milk of human kindness" which does not allow him to "catch the nearest way" or the foulest way to reach the throne!

Slightly after the first aside quoted above, Macbeth decides to let chance make him king without any wicked effort whatsoever by him to speed this destiny! But, immediately after Duncan declares his son, Malcolm, as his heir to the kingdom, the ambitious and wicked thoughts of Macbeth come to the surface again to plague him:

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
 On which I must fall down or else o'erleap,
 For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
 Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1. 4. 54-60)

His past self of a loyal honest warrior is seemingly harboring thoughts of murder of the king to obtain power and to make a new future self; he is entirely aware of his wicked intentions so that he desires to conceal them from the public. Min Huang in "A Battle against One's Soul" remarks: "Macbeth is disembodied; the eye and the hand become two independent parts, with the former, or the heart, representing his conscience and his recognition of evil, while the latter his bloody actions of self-assertion" (90). He moves slightly toward making the decisive choice but this time by the help of his wife who wants to "pour [her] spirits in [his] ear" to do the act of murder of Duncan. She takes the bloody business in her charge and attempts to urge Macbeth into committing murder by questioning his valor and manhood!

Macbeth's struggle with his self continues, and his reluctance to commit murder is quite obvious throughout his speech with Lady Macbeth. In his final soliloquy before the murder of Duncan in Act 1 Scene 7, he ruminates on the possible consequences of murder on the murderer, and this soliloquy best reveals his extreme self-conflict between ambition and morality, and here the weight of argument is on the side of moral considerations: he is afraid of the life to come, afraid of the possible retaliation of people against him, and knows that the demands of kinship, hospitality and humanity all deter him from committing this foul murder. Also he is aware of the innocence of Duncan that makes heaven and earth damn his murderer, and pity like a newborn baby will make his wickedness known for the public so that their tears shall drown the wind, and Macbeth is so defenseless against this outcome that no reasonable cause can spur him into doing this foul act except relentless ambition:

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other_ (1. 7. 25-28)

The words "overleap" and "vault" have been used ingeniously by Shakespeare here and significantly reveal both the uncontrollability of Macbeth's ambition and his haste and negligence of vital considerations because of it.

The process of his decisive choice is still keeping on in his crucial conversation with his wife just before committing the first murder: he briefly decides to forget their enterprise altogether by declaring "we will proceed no further in this business" **since he doesn't desire to lose so soon the golden opinion of others about him obtained** through courageous victories in battles and faithful servitude to his king. However, his wife blinded by the splendor of royal position urges him to do the act and affects his consciousness; she disdains him by accusing him of timidity **and lack of sufficient courage for obtaining his goal. She likens him to a cat that desires the fish but doesn't want to get wet!** Macbeth answers "I dare do all that may become a man. / Who dares do more is none" (1. 7. 51-52). These statements have a nice double meaning or ambiguity; he may mean that he is so courageous that no man is braver than him or else may mean if a man dares to do more, he will deviate from the verge of humanity! Lamia Kabal in "Macbeth's Conscience and Moralizing Imagination" asserts:

To Macbeth, following the path of desire and ambition _the very traits which Lady Macbeth equates with courage and manhood_ means that he will be discarding what makes him not only a moral person but a human being since 'to be daring' is to excel in manliness, yet 'daring too much' may carry one outside the **limits proper to human activity. ... Unlike Lady Macbeth who cunningly chooses to ignore the question of 'humanity',** Macbeth points to the immorality of the act. Yet, Lady Macbeth wins him over by taking the literal definition of 'man' and aligning masculinity with daring violence". (855)

She provides him with a careful plan to put the responsibility of murder on Duncan's two chamberlains by making them drunk (so that they fall on heavy sleep) and placing their bloody daggers on the crime scene.

Because of the heavy impact of Lady Macbeth on his consciousness and of course due to his own inclination to accept this influence as the result of his vaulting ambition and desire of self-assertion, Macbeth yields at last to her will and decides to kill Duncan to reach the throne: "I am settled and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (1. 7. 92-93). Here, his decisive choice is made culminating in his downfall and the alteration of his self. He transforms from an honest loyal warrior to a murderer and treacherous man, and he makes this self freely for himself through his choice and violation of his moral standards of chivalric honor and loyalty to his king. He tries to actualize his future self of being a king through foul murder. However, his self-conflict (self-division) **doesn't end here but just** begins and takes a novel shape! The struggle between the ambition and morality inside his self takes the shape of a sense of guilt and torment of conscience after the murder and even to some extent before it.

According to Bradley, the better part of his self or his imagination attempts to deter him from committing murder, and so his consciousness before the murder of Duncan receives some hallucinations from outside like a bloody dagger. Of course, his imagination acts somewhat paradoxically since it can be regarded as *both* an impediment and a precursor to his foul actions. James L. Calderwood in "Macbeth: *Counter-* Hamlet" writes about the paradoxical role of Macbeth's imagination as both a get-between and a go-between for his action:

As a get-between it occupies the space between the desire to act and the act itself, and hence can even deter action, as in the Hamlet-like "If it were done" soliloquy. ... On the other hand, as a go-between Macbeth's imagination envisages and conduces to action, most obviously in the "Is this a dagger that I see" soliloquy. (Bloom 10)

Anyway, his consciousness or his imagination plays a significant role in his awareness of what he is going to commit. Even his consciousness presents him a distorted view of the world around him that projects the unnaturalness of the deed he is about to commit; he soliloquizes just before the murder of Duncan:

Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings, and withered murder,
Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. (2. 1. 61-69)

After he finally succumbs to his ambitious self and commits the regicide, his moral self or conscience starts tormenting him immediately after his return from the crime scene; his consciousness receives illusory images or voices from outside, and no one else is able to see or hear them. He conceives hearing a voice which cries he has murdered innocent sleep:

"Glamis has murdered sleep, and therefore,
Cawdor
Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more." (2. 2. 55-57)

This visionary voice heralds the oncoming torture of conscience and lack of future peace and happiness for Macbeth due to his wicked deeds. It is an echo of Macbeth's own view of himself and speaks of him in three different identities which reveal his sense of self-alienation and being a stranger to himself! According to Honigmann in *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited*, "With a wonderful instinct Shakespeare makes his hero refer to himself by his three titles which suggests a sense of dispersed identity, as when a man in a state of shock cannot collect himself" (128). Macbeth knows he has been forsaken by God due to his heinous act, and the clear sign of this abandonment is his inability to say "Amen" to the prayer of the two chamberlains. His consciousness causes him to imagine that his hands are plucking out his eyes after the murder, and the color of blood will not be wiped off his hands even by the water of "Neptune's ocean", and their bloody color will redden all the water of this ocean! Macbeth knows what he has done to his soul and self by his conscious choice of evil, and thus he passionately seeks to escape from his self-knowledge though he knows it is entirely impossible. Vivian Boleyn in *The Existential Macbeth* declares: "Following the murder of Duncan and his servants, Macbeth cries out from within him, "to know my deed, 't were best not know myself." (2. 2. 72)" (6).

Since Macbeth has devised a new self through his decisive choice of evil and murder, in fact he has killed or transformed his past honest self. His immediate remorse about his evil deed (murder of Duncan) and its resulting murder of his self (his sleep, mental peace and happiness) is evident in this wish when he hears the sound of knocking: "Wake Duncan with thy knocking, I would thou / couldst" (2. 2. 94-95). This wish shows the deep grief he feels at his wrongdoing which is also conspicuous in his evasive confession after others become aware of the murder of Duncan. He laments the murder of Duncan but in fact he is lamenting his own self-slaughter!

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time; for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality.
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of. (2. 3. 107-112)

Apparently he is saying that 'renown' and 'grace' have ended by the death of Duncan but in fact he means that his own renown and grace have been eradicated through his foul act; the word "vault" here is significant since it reminds us of Macbeth's vaulting ambition, and Macbeth already knows the futility and vileness of his wicked deed. Francesca Cauchi in "Compunctious Visitings" points out:

The above-cited lines, uttered by Macbeth in the immediate aftermath of Duncan's murder and taken by the assembled generals and nobles as an *ad hoc* funeral oration over the death of the good and gracious King, articulate in the form of a public, if veiled, confession Macbeth's heavy judgment upon the death of his own soul and his formerly "blessed" state of grace. (4)

Macbeth clearly knows he has assassinated himself instead of Duncan and his return to his previous state of innocence is entirely impossible.

The ironic fact about Macbeth is that he doesn't feel happy after he attains his ambitious goal of becoming the king of Scotland! Instead, he gets disillusioned and paranoid toward the end of the play. He is plagued by the "affliction of terrible dreams" and his mind is "full of scorpions" since he is still being tormented by his moral self, and

also he is afraid of insecurity and retaliation of others against him as he had conceived in his soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 7. He has no way except keeping with this new self that he himself has created with his choice; Bradley asserts: "Although in Macbeth the consciousness of guilt is stronger than the consciousness of failure, his ambition, love of power, and the instinct of life and self-assertion are also so potent that they don't allow him to yield to this guilty restlessness!" (360) He decides to confront the world and not to acknowledge any defeat!

After the murder of Duncan and attainment of the throne, Macbeth still doesn't feel secure and satisfied "to be thus is nothing, / But to be safely thus" (3. 1. 52-53), and looks for the reason of his restlessness and lack of sleep; he finds the reason in the person of Banquo who has been exposed to the similar prophecies of having kings in his descendants by the Weird Sisters. Macbeth feels insecure and his target is apparently Banquo. Macbeth is envious of Banquo for three reasons: first, he is as brave as Macbeth but wiser and more prudent than him; second, he may be suspicious of Macbeth's role in the murder of King Duncan and seek a suitable opportunity to betray him and pave the way for the succession of his children but currently he shows himself as Macbeth's friend and chief council and doesn't flee like Macduff; and finally, he is fertile unlike Macbeth who has no children to succeed him in the line of kingship! Macbeth thinks he has sold his soul to the Devil by the regicide just for the sake of Banquo's sons, and this fact infuriates him to the extent that he firmly decides to prevent it and challenge the destiny predicted by the witches through killing Banquo and his son Fleance. And the difference of this second murder with the first is that he does it with no remorse or pre-hesitation and with no informing of Lady Macbeth! The moral power has got feebler in him, and he has yielded more to his new evil self!

Macbeth uses the image of snake for referring to Banquo and his son as his potential enemies, and speaks of his restlessness as long as they are still alive: thus, he hires two murderers to kill them in order to obtain the peace of mind, but ironically his moral self still plagues him after the murder in the form of Banquo's ghost! It occupies his chair in his celebratory banquet. This illusory image, which is observed just by his consciousness and nobody else is able to see it, reveals the degree of his ongoing affliction by his conscience. It takes him to the verge of total mental collapse or madness: "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (3. 4. 61-62). He is indirectly betraying himself when his wife saves him from being exposed by attributing the reason of this crazy fit to an old mental illness from his youth. Since his moral self becomes weaker toward the end of the play and his ambitious self gets more potent due to his evil deeds, soon he recovers his normal state and the ghost vanishes. However, he discovers that he has not retrieved his mental peace despite getting rid of Banquo! And the next victim will be Macduff who is absent from his feast, and Macbeth is suspicious of his treason and his flight to England to join Malcolm.

Macbeth is afraid of others and the appearance of the ghost revealed that he is not secure yet, and he must continue the line of assassination to remain safe! This time, *he* goes to the witches to seek consultation on the potential dangers to him, and they give him sham security with equivocal speech: he must be aware of Macduff, but no woman-born can harm Macbeth and he shall not be vanquished until Birnam Wood gets to Dunsinane Hill. Since Macbeth thinks these things are impossible to occur, he feels secure to keep on with his bloody deeds. Anyway, he decides to get rid of Macduff to "make his assurance double sure" and not to "sleep in spite of thunder".

Sartre contends that our self is displayed in our choices and actions, states and qualities; Macbeth's self has changed from a past honest man to a tyrant and murderer now, and the sense of guilt he would feel before decreases as he sinks deeper into the maelstrom of evil and bloodshed. We see a great transformation in his self that has been reflected in his talks and soliloquies after the subsequent murders: he is ready now to commit every conceivable nefarious act to maintain his power!

For mine own good
All causes shall give way; I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er;
Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere may be scann'd. (3. 4. 167-172)

The Macbeth, who had a lot of pre-thoughts and vacillations before committing the murder of Duncan, now has been altered into a man who acts immediately and without any pre-reflection; his purpose, choice and action have got single and simultaneous! He has been turned into the exact opposite of Hamlet. He himself confesses the impossibility of his return to his previous innocent self after so many demonic choices even if he would tend to do so. He gets increasingly paranoid, and cannot trust in anyone. Therefore, he slaughters the innocent family of Macduff for no reason! And he continues killing others so that his reign becomes the reign of terror, horror and bloodshed.

The negative transcendence of Macbeth's self through making evil choices is so swift that no one can now remember his past self except Malcolm who refers to this fact in his talks with Macduff: "This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues, / Was once thought *honest*." (4. 3. 14-15) With this new self, Macbeth gets more alienated from others even from his wife who was his chief accomplice and motivator in the first murder, and descends into his isolated world of disillusionment and absurdity. As Angus declares: "Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love." (5. 2. 22-23) The bogus safety given to him by the Weird Sisters causes him to lose the taste of fear

and to commit any heinous action and it seems that he has absolutely disposed of his conscience! He gets so weary of life and its futility and brevity that he displays little signs of grief in reaction to his wife's death: from his view, life is like a brief candle, a walking shadow, a poor player, or a foolish tale told by an idiot which is full of sound and fury but signifies nothing meaningful; all these images connote the brevity and absurdity of human endeavors in this short life which soon culminates in death with nothing afterward! From Macbeth's perspective, past, present and future are the same and all signify nothing worthwhile in human life. Asloob Ahmad Ansari in *The Existential Dramaturgy of William Shakespeare* asserts:

It is Macbeth's consciousness that serves as the mode for measuring the flow of time. And his is a fractured **consciousness. ... There is, therefore, a direct relationship and consonance between the essential lunacy of Macbeth's** alienated life and duration which, instead of being a symbol of order and control, has become cancerous. (132)

This terrible pessimistic outlook on life is the consequence of his free choices and his knowing movement in the path of evil.

The sense of false security that Hecate and the witches give him causes him not to think of morality, grace, wisdom, and even death, and hence his self-destruction gets complete; he turns into a total monster! His reaction to this new self that he has consciously created for himself through free evil choices is that of gloomy acceptance despite the fact that as Angus says: "his title hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (5. 2. 24-25), or as Menteith points out: "all that is within him does condemn / Itself for being there" (5. 2. 28-29). He confesses that he has obtained nothing valuable in return for the selling of his soul to the devil, and thus he gets weary of life and its futility and brevity. He has lost the taste of fear and nothing is significant for him in his life anymore; he is in total existential despair:

My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have ... (5. 3. 26-30)

In spite of all his existential despair, he clings firmly to life, and his instinct of self-assertion **doesn't permit him** to yield to his enemies and to accept failure. When he gets informed that the Birnam Wood is moving toward Dunsinane Hill, and therefore he has been tricked by the equivocal guarantee of the witches, he refuses to commit suicide, yield to enemy, or flee from the battle field; instead, he decides to face with Malcolm and Macduff and to die in dignity! He is ready to "undone the estate of the world" but not to succumb!

A question can be asked here: why is Macbeth regarded as a tragic hero despite his wicked actions?! Indeed, regardless of all his malicious deeds, Macbeth never loses his sublimity and grandeur as a tragic hero in the Shakespearean canon, and we can still sympathize with him! According to Bradley, "We never feel towards him as we do to those who appear the born children of darkness. There remains something sublime in the defiance with which, even when cheated of his last hope, he faces earth and hell and heaven." (364). In fact, he is very much different from the villains of other tragedies of Shakespeare such as Iago, Richard III, or Goneril and Regan since his soul is not originally congenial to darkness and wickedness, and any one of us may face the same fate as his if we yield to our own human desires.

4.3. Sartre's Concepts of Consciousness and Self in Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth's consciousness seems to be captivated with the splendor and grandeur of kingly authority immediately after she receives the news of the witches' celebrating prophecies for Macbeth. She merely concentrates on the heroic sweetness of this status and is afraid of Macbeth's moral scruples that may hamper him from any wickedness to reach the kingly position sooner! She *chooses* to spur him into committing any action to attain kingship. She envisions the prospect of the future self for herself as the Queen of Scotland and for Macbeth as its King as if it has been actualized in the present:

Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant. (1. 5. 64-66)

She advises Macbeth to deceive others with a false face and she also takes the great business into her dispatch.

Sartre argues that the conception of self in human beings is quite unstable and it shifts based on the free choices an individual makes and the free actions he performs in his life; such a process of instability is observed in Lady Macbeth's self during the play, and it is quite opposite of the same process in her husband's self. At the beginning of the play, she regards the attainment of kingship as a majestic success which her husband has been long deserved to get but afraid to obtain through foul means; she does not think of the immorality or vileness of murder, and her **eyes are just fixed on the grandeur of power! Thus, at this stage she apparently doesn't experience the self**-conflict or self-division that Macbeth feels between his ambitious self and moral self. She exhibits potent authority at the beginning to counter the seeming "milk of human kindness" in Macbeth and to push him into action. The harmony

between will and deed or thought and action which she perfectly has at the start of the play is solely achieved by Macbeth at the later stages of the play and after long struggle within himself between conscience and ambition!

As was mentioned above, since her consciousness regards kingship as a 'heroic' success, and she knows that Macbeth *desires* this position but like "the poor cat in the adage" lacks the courage and essential "illness" or immorality that must accompany ambition, she decides to urge him into selecting "the nearest but the foulest way" to reach the crown! She takes superior position and in a long dialogue with Macbeth in Act 1 Scene 7, she questions his manliness, valor, and his love for her by calling him a "coward", displays the enterprise as 'heroic' not 'evil', and provides him with a prepared scheme on how to commit the murder of the king safely. She suggests that they could put the responsibility of murder on Duncan's two guards who have not been able to perform their duty well while being drunk! Macbeth, who is first unwilling to lose his golden honor so soon, finally succumbs to her temptations, and decides to commit murder. Thus, Lady Macbeth consciously chooses to be an accomplice for Macbeth in the act of killing Duncan, and this choice creates her future self.

The self she displays during most parts of the play is that of a strong and cruel woman, and indeed her immense self-control in not betraying her husband even in the worst situations, and in leaning exclusively to herself especially after her alienation from Macbeth, is superior to his! However, despite the invincible and inhuman self she exhibits, she does not entirely lack human feelings or feminine weaknesses which rationalize the alteration of her self into a guilt-stricken mad woman and a tragic heroine; her self-division (self-conflict) between ambition and conscience is so covert that she cannot notice it until the last parts of the play and the sleepwalking scene. Since she feels weak, she invokes evil spirits to unsex her and to make her blood thick in order for her to be able to entice Macbeth into committing murder! Other signs of her weakness can be her use of wine to nerve herself with, her inability to commit the crime herself since Duncan resembled her father, or her fainting after the murder was disclosed.

Despite these obvious signs of human frailty in her which account for her later sinking into madness, she is overall known for her courage and force of will: she cannot perceive or tolerate the inward self-conflict of Macbeth displayed in his illusory visions, so she attributes them to his sense of fear and cowardice, and scorns him to retrieve his manliness and courage:

O, proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear.
This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
Imposters to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam. (3. 4. 73-79)

But in spite of this courage, Shakespeare portrays her as having less intellectuality and imagination than Macbeth: her plan to put the bloody daggers of the chamberlains on their pillows was not a very elaborate plan since it was as if they would tend to trumpet and betray their crime themselves! Her weaker imagination is evident in her lack of tolerance for the visions of Macbeth, and her facile realism exactly where Macbeth's guilty conscience made hallucinations for him: she hears the knocking or the sounds before and after the murder as simple facts and not as frightening visions. "She feels no sympathy in Nature with her guilty purpose, and would never bid the earth not hear her steps, which way they walk" (Bradley 372). Even her later imaginary illusions stated during the sleepwalking scene and fit of madness bear a strong trace of reality and memory: "Yet who would have thought the old man / To have had so much blood in him?" (5. 1. 41-42)

This lack of imagination on her part is proper for resolution in choice and action but fatal for their selves: she cannot imagine or foresee the inward or outward consequences of her wicked purpose on her own self or on that of Macbeth; her function in the act of murder is less open-eyed than Macbeth's because her gaze is just fixed on the sweetness of power and nothing else! She does not understand herself and never suspects that one day her simple words that "a little water clears us of this deed" will give way to "will these hands ne'er be clean?!"

It was mentioned above that Lady Macbeth willfully chooses a future self of being the Queen of Scotland for herself by enticing Macbeth into committing the murder of Duncan. She passionately seeks this self but as the play proceeds, we observe a change in her self and her view toward this self! The transformation of Lady Macbeth's self is exactly opposite of her husband: she is more resolute, domineering, and active than him at the early parts of the play, and little by little she sinks into despair, inactiveness, and madness while he becomes more resolute and active toward the end, and he commits his other wicked deeds without her knowledge! "As the play proceeds, "Lady Macbeth's activity diminishes, but her misery increases" (Bradley, 1905) because she takes all the misery inward." (Huang 91) The Macbeths get more alienated from each other as the play goes on.

The signs of alteration in the self of Lady Macbeth and her growing misery begin at the discovery of the murder of Duncan where she faints; then, we observe her as the Queen of Scotland but ironically nothing of the glory and prosperity she expected of this status is observed in her demeanor! She is absolutely disillusioned:

Naught's had, all's spent,

Where our desire is got without content.
 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
 Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (3. 2. 6-9)

As Harold Bloom declares in *Macbeth A Dagger of the Mind*: "She has it now and sees she has nothing. Desire has been squandered, and there is a dark envy of the slain Duncan, safe in his tomb, while she lives on in an uncertain pleasure of power" (21). Also, this soliloquy reminds us of and echoes similar words by Macbeth when he utters:

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. (3. 2. 22-25)

It is interesting that despite her severe reproaches against Macbeth's fears or guilt-stricken visions, she gets inflicted with the same guilty conscience and both of them experience problems in sleep as it had been predicted by the visionary voice that told "sleep no more" to all the residents of Macbeth's house!

From now on, her role in the action gets less. The last time she actively helps him is in the banquet scene where she saves him from instant exposure; however, he does not need her help very much, and even when he informs her vaguely of his intention to murder Banquo, she shows little interest unlike before! Her long domineering speech at the beginning of the play gives way here to curt dull answers to Macbeth's speech! She is silently enduring the extreme misery since its revealing to Macbeth would mean the acceptance of her weakness. Thus, increasingly she gets weary of the new self she would seek so enthusiastically! And now she feels the fear and misery of the results of her deeds.

Lady Macbeth's self-disintegration gets worse when she becomes informed of Macbeth's later murders especially that of Macduff's family. Eventually, she gets totally mad, betrays their crimes unconsciously in her sleepwalking speech, obsessed with clearing the color of blood off her hands, and carries light everywhere since she is afraid of darkness! At last, she commits suicide with her bare hands, though the doctor had predicted it: "unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles" (5. 1. 75-76). Anyway, both Lady Macbeth and her husband experience self-disintegration but in different ways: Macbeth's instinct of self-assertion in spite of some fits of madness keeps his sobriety to the last moment when he is killed by Macduff, whereas she cannot endure her self-split and mental agony, **and ends her life. It is ironic that such ruthless woman, who apparently didn't possess any human feelings and scolded her husband for owning such passionate sensations, herself falls victim to the force of conscience which she would deny!** A last sign of the inward conflict between her ambition and conscience may be this statement uttered in total madness and sleepwalking state: "What need we fear / who knows it, when none can call our power to / account?" (5. 1. 39-41). **She couldn't put up with the new self she had created for herself.**

5) Conclusion

The consciousness of the Macbeths influenced by the outside factors such as the witches' predictive speech or the magnificence of power glorifies the future goal of kingship for them so that they strive malevolently to reach this aim, and create a new future self for themselves during the process of free decisive choice of vice. In both of them, the instinct of self-assertion is so potent that they disregard their former innocent self and step on the path of corruption quite consciously! They also do not pay any attention to their mighty self-struggle between the forces of ambition and conscience. Their upsurge in the world through foul means finally culminates in their terrible downfall!

In fact, Macbeth is freely seeking a new stable and powerful self of being a king under the heavy impact of the equivocal prophecies of the witches; however, the only thing he does not acquire at all is this same stability and order in his self since during his process of self-becoming, his vicious choice of murder and bloodshed makes him sacrifice his mental peace and happiness so that he cannot experience a calm sleep anymore! Instead of achieving prosperity and pleasure, he solely attains mental agony and his wife is also afflicted with the same destiny. They get disillusioned and perceive the brevity and absurdity of human life: their wicked endeavors to assert their self merely concluded in their own self-destruction and death.

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