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The Journal

Gombe Savannah Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies (GOSAJOLLCOS) is a peer-reviewed journal of the Department of English, Gombe State University. The journal is committed to the development of communication arts through researches in Language, Linguistics, Literature, Theatre Arts, Cultural Studies, Creative Arts, Media and Communication Studies. It has both print and online versions. The Editorial board hereby calls for thoroughly researched papers and articles on the subject areas already mentioned. Submissions of papers are accepted all year round but publication is expected to be done in May/June annually. All manuscripts should be accompanied with the sum of ten thousand (10,000) naira only. On acceptance of any manuscript, contributors will pay the sum of twenty five thousand (25,000) naira only as publication fee.

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EXPLORING THE THEME OF AMBITION IN SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH

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Abstract

Macbeth is a highly complex and magnificent tragic play in which nemesis descends upon the hero turned villain in a true tragic manner. Macbeth's tragic qualities together with his crimes and the ultimate punishments combined are exclusively integrated in an adroit dramatic and psychological ways that in spite of degenerating into a criminal due to his evil actions, he commands pity as a tragic hero. This is because Shakespeare skilfully shifts the blame to Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's over ambitious wife, who manipulates her husband and initiates him into a life of crime. This paper analyses Shakespeare's Macbeth specifically focusing on ambition as the major theme extracted from the actions and inactions of Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth. The paper adopts psychoanalysis as the lenses through which their ambitiousness is explained as a character flaw that exists in the characters' preconscious psyche, awakened by some external forces and thereafter controlling their evil actions. Shakespeare exposes the significant roles of the preconscious, unconscious and conscious parts of the human psyche in modulating affective processing in daily activities. The paper reveals that the ability to manage preconscious negative emotions can be improved by having total control of affective reactions to external forces.

Keywords: Ambition, Psychoanalysis, Preconscious, Unconscious, Conscious

Introduction

Shakespeare's characters have acquired the status of mythic figures; we speak of a Hamlet or Romeo without even reference to the works in which they occur. The continual survival of Shakespeare's works can be justified looking at the number of publications about Shakespeare and for the constant reinterpretation of his plays in theatres due to the fruitful interaction between the texts written centuries ago and the minds and imaginations of those who have gone on reading and performing them. This chain of interaction can both draw meanings from the texts and impose meanings upon them. Edward Berry reveals that, through his character Shakespeare "depicts not the particularities but the essentials of human condition" (43). Stanley Wells confesses that in Macbeth, Shakespeare tries to "draw attention to the play's moral and ethical structure, even major roles are drained of individuality" (285).

Since most critics agree that *Macbeth* is a morality play (Gerber, Lemon, Wells, etc.),

others like Tennenhouse see the play as panegyric, a play that celebrates sovereign power, revealing that Shakespeare "mystifies the notion of kingship, reinvigorates the signs and symbols associated with the exercise of legitimate power, and makes the theatre speak a more conservative ideology"(130). Lemon sees Macbeth's actions as treacherous. infecting monarchy to the point where, hidden villainy becomes part of the public life of the state. By exhibiting hidden wounds to the public view, by penetrating the boundaries between internal and external, tragic theatre stages an epistemologically and politically unsettling spectacle of infectious boundarylessness that, in the case of Macbeth, leaves the audience convinced less of the crown's authority than of the dramatic power of the hero's own original script, a script which defies the scaffold that represents him (29).

This paper examines how the theme of ambition runs through one of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* and further reveals how ambition is a character flaw not only peculiar to Macbeth, but also his wife, Lady Macbeth. Her cunning and feminine charms drive her husband to commit regicide and other series of homicide to ascend to the throne and make her wear the crown as Queen.

Ambition as defined by The American Heritage Collage Dictionary is 'an eager or strong desire for exertion or activity, excessive desire for honor, power or wealth' (42). In Macbeth's case, his ambition to be king comes into light after the three witches' prophesy, and it actualizes after the 'fourth' witch's intervention (Lady Macbeth). Kalicamin and Miladinovic are of the opinion that Macbeth's wife only contributes in the murder of Duncan, afterwards, she becomes irrelevant and he no longer needs her counsel. In their words, 'however, after convincing him to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth ceases to be his accomplice as he no longer seeks her council or informs her of his plans so as to spare her the knowledge of his bloody intentions' (204). They are convinced that Macbeth's moral crimes are entirely his evil doing. This paper is arguing against their submission and proving the fact that Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband and initiates him into the act of murder and whatever Macbeth does afterwards is to maintain and sustain his crown. The paper therefore is set to dissect the actions, inactions as well as inter actions of one of Shakespeare's hero turned villain character alongside his wife, in one of his most celebrated morality plays, *Macbeth*.

The paper adopts the Freudian concepts of preconscious, unconscious and conscious showing how innate goodness and aversion to evil sanctify Macbeth's unconscious, but his preconscious once vitiated with the agitation of becoming King impels him to criminal actualisation of that ambition. Within Macbeth's mind, a battle is drawn between his preconscious, unconscious and conscious. His conscious feebly attempts to disinfect his unconscious and so preconscious hallucinations engender his mind and try to control his actions.

Synopsis of the Play

Three witches assemble on a heath for an encounter with Macbeth. Returning from victory on the battle field, Macbeth and Banquo meet these 'weird sisters', who prophesy among other revelations that Macbeth will become king and that Banquo's heirs will reign thereafter. Immediately after their encounter, Macbeth receives word that he has been made the Thane of Cawdor, the first part of the witches' prophesy. He shares his news with his wife who begins to plot the murder of King Duncan so that Macbeth can become king. News arrive that Duncan will visit the Macbeth's castle and Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to kill him that night. When the deed is done, he panics and is convinced by his wife to calm down and act normal. News of the King's death soon after spreads and his two sons Malcom and Donalbain leave for England in fear of their lives.

Macbeth becomes King, although Banquo harbours secret fears that he murdered Duncan. Fearing Banquo's suspicions. Macbeth arranges his murder alongside his family, but Banquo's son Fleance escapes the killers. Macbeth is terrified when Banquo's ghost appears at a banquet he holds that evening and his reaction raises suspicions among the guests but for Lady Macbeth's timely intervention. Macbeth returns to consult the witches one more time and is told that his throne is secure until Birnamwood marches toward Duns inane. He feels further reassured when told that he cannot be killed by anyone born of woman and to 'beware of Macduff'. On hearing that Macduff has travelled to England to persuade Malcom to lead a rebel army, Macbeth orders the murder of Macduff's wife and children. This terrible news reaches Macduff in England and strengthens his resolve to revenge.

Lady Macbeth's guilt for Duncan's death leaks out when she is heard confessing while sleepwalking. While Macbeth believes that he can see a forest walking towards his castle, he hears that his wife has died. The moving wood is, in fact, an army carrying the branches of trees. In the battle that ensues, Macduff reveals that he was ripped from his mother's womb, the prophesy is completed, and Macbeth is killed.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Freud's psychoanalysis in dissecting the actions. inactions and interactions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth with regards to their ambition, addiction and aspirations to the throne. Psychoanalysis refers to a myriad of ideas first developed by Sigmund Freud and continued by Carl Jung among others. It is significantly devoted to the study of human psychological function and behaviour which can also be applied to societies. There are different theoretical orientations regarding the underlying theory of understanding the human mental setup, human development and human disorders under the broad umbrella of psychoanalysis. fundamental The most concept of the notion psychoanalysis is of the unconscious mind as a reservoir for repressed memories of traumatic events which continually influence conscious thoughts and behaviour.

In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, a documentation of Freud's series of lectures, he explains psychoanalysis as a unique terrain that a lot of people fear to relate with. Unlike the fields of chemistry, physics or biology all related to the medical profession where one can reduce the functions of an organism and its disorder anatomically, thereby prescribing the solution, he adds,

Psychoanalysis is learned, first of all, from a study of one's self, through the study of one's own personality. This is not quite what is ordinarily called selfobservation There is a whole series of very common and universally known psychic phenomena, which, after some instruction in the technique of psychoanalysis, one can make the subject matter of analysis in one's own personality (13).

He further laments how lack of physical evidence, the fact that one cannot "listen in" on a psychoanalytic treatment has placed those who want to learn it in an unusual position. They can only know psychoanalysis by hearsay as they have no choice but to put their faith in the instructor. Such unusual method of learning a medical profession that has no objective verification and no possibility of demonstration leaves people in doubt on the truths of its claims. He affirms that psychoanalysis is an investigating enterprise which requires thorough inquiry and stresses that common errors like forgetfulness and slips of tongue are not mere coincidences/ accidents but rather 'valid psychic acts' which can be adequately addressed. In his earlier topographical division of the psyche, Freud gives a distinction between different levels of consciousness as follows:

- 1. The Conscious: deals with awareness of present perceptions, feelings, thoughts, memories and fantasies at any particular moment.
- 2. The Preconscious: which is related to data that can readily be brought to the conscious
- 3. The Unconscious: which refers to data retained but not easily available to the individual's conscious awareness or scrutiny.

In order to further clarify and justify his claims, he provides architecture of the structure of the mind as comprising of the Id, the Ego and the Superego functioning at different levels of consciousness. There is a constant movement of memories and impulses from one level to another. The Id is the unconscious reservoir pf drives, which are constantly active. Ruled by the pleasure principle, it demands immediate satisfaction of its urges regardless of undesirable effects. The Ego operates mainly in conscious and preconscious levels, although it also contains unconscious elements because both the Ego and the Superego evolved from the Id. Ruled by the reality principle, the Ego takes care of the Id urges as soon as the adequate circumstance is found. Inappropriate desires are not satisfied but repressed. The Superego serves as a censor on the Ego functions. It is partially conscious and comprises the individuals ideals derived from the values of his family and society, being the source of guilty feelings and fear of punishment. Balconi et. Al, (3) postulate that, 'conscious, preconscious and unconscious mechanisms continuously and concurrently interact to define our experience of, in and with the world. The integration of conscious and implicit information processing is peculiarly critical in shaping self-awareness and emotion regulation.'

Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's contributions may differ in many ways; however, they ultimately shaped our understanding of the human mind and its intricacies. Freud's seminal work gives emphasis on the significance of the unconscious mind and its influence on our thoughts and behaviors. His belief is that the unconscious, driven by primal instincts. contains repressed emotions, desires and memories that shape our psychological well-being. The foundation of psychoanalysis, to Freud, is formed by accessing and analyzing the hidden aspects of the unconscious. Jung on the other hand emphasized the significance of the collective unconscious comprising inherited archetypes and universally shared symbolic patterns. His belief is that tapping into the collective unconscious will help individuals achieve self-actualization and a deeper understanding of the human psyche.

Freud popularised the use of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic method to uncover repressed thoughts and unresolved conflicts from the unconscious. He introduced various techniques such as dream analysis, interpretation of slips of tongue and free associations. He believed that individuals could achieve psychological healing by bringing these hidden aspects of the unconscious to conscious awareness. Jung however expanded on Freud's methods by introducing additional tools such as art therapy, active imagination and explaining spiritual experiences to achieve selfrealisation and wholeness.

This research finds Freud's contributions most relevant in interpreting the actions and inactions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The research will prove that their activities has nothing to do with inherited traits, rather their primal instincts driven by their preconscious ambition to wear the crown, a repressed emotion set loose by the three witches' prophesy.

Textual Analysis

It is quite hypothetical to say that Macbeth was ambitious to be king but not conscious of it before his encounter with the three witches. This is because upon his encounter with the witches and after their revelations, Macbeth becomes more interested in their affairs whereas he detested their appearance before. He agrees with Banquo's description of them as he interrogates them, thus:

What are these, so wither'd and so wild in their attire, that looks not like the inhabitants o' the earth, and yet are on't? live you? Or are you augth that man may question? You seem to understand me, by each at once her choppy finger laying upon her skinny lips.- you should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so. (Act1:3:39-47).

After asking them 'what' they are, Macbeth suddenly becomes interested in their speech as they greeted him and declare the prophecy without wasting time. His excitement can be detected from the change in his tone when he orders them to:

'stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more (Act1: 3: 70)

He takes his time to weigh the accuracy of the witches' prophesy which brings to the surface of his mind his preconscious ambition as he enquires, 'say from where you owe this strange intelligence?' Macbeth experiences the awakening of a repressed desire in his preconscious and so he wants to learn more about the possibility of him becoming king. He is actually interested in knowing the plan and when they vanished without saying more, he confesses his disappointment, 'would they had stay'd' (1: 3: 82).

Although criminal thoughts pave way for crimes and detracts from the eminence of a tragic hero, it is not counted as crime. However when other agents flare up that thought in the preconscious state of the mind to the conscious, the culpability increases as seen in the case of Macbeth. The three witches' prophesy ignites the unconscious desire of the hero and burst the bubble of excitement building inside him. However Macbeth has a flicker of doubt in his mind as to the certainty of their utterance and when he receives the good news of the king proclaiming him the Thane of Cowdor, which happens to be the second prophesy, he declares, two truths are told as happy prologues to the swelling of the imperial theme.- I thank you, gentlemen ...

Criminal thoughts have already been building up in Macbeth's mind and as a General in the Army, taking lives is a duty to country but this time he is thinking of taking a life as a duty to himself to achieve his desire. He confesses, my thoughts, whose murder yet is but fantastical shakes so my single state of man, that function is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is but what is not (1: 3: 128).

However, despite his confession, Macbeth intends to leave his fate to chance and not take action for goodness still exist in his mind as he is still loyal to the throne. He declares:

'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me'. 'when without my stir.' Left to Macbeth, the dream of becoming king will never see the light of day despite his evil contemplations were it not for the unfortunate intervention of his wife, Lady Macbeth. Hers is an ambition without fear of actions or consequences. Lady Macbeth knows what she wants and how to get it. Immediately she reads the letter her husband sends narrating his encounter with the witches, she declares murder as the solution and confesses her husband's inability to do evil acts,

> thus Glamis thou art, and Cowdor, and shalt be what thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature. It is too full o' the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great; Art not without ambition, but without. The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly, that wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, and yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have, great Glamis, that which cries, 'thus thou must do, if thou have it;' and that which rather thou dost fear to do than wishest should be undone. (1: 5: 15-25).

Her husband's incapability makes her to take charge and implore her plans to convince him to do the necessary for the prophecy to be fulfilled. Her feminine charms and the power of her tongue are all she needs to subdue the General to dance to her tunes. She announces:

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,

and chastise with the valour of my tongue all that impedes thee from the golden round, which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem to have thee crown'd withal.

The news of the King's visit to the Macbeths is the timely intervention she needs for her plan to work. Her thirst for the crown has unravelled the monster inside her and so she invokes spiritual forces of evil to come to her aid and fulfil her ambition, thus:

Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood, stop up the access and passage to remorse; that no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between the effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts, and take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers, wherever in your sightless substances you wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell that my keen knife see not the wound it makes nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark to cry, 'hold, hold!'- (Act1:5:40-54).

She plots the perfect murder for her husband and cautions him against giving himself away right before the act so that the King may not suspect foul play upon arrival to their castle. In her words,

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 serpent under it. He that's coming must be provided for; and you shall put this night's great business into my dispatch (1: 5: 62-68)

All their actions afterwards are controlled by the ambition that took over and intoxicated their minds. Killing Duncan is the first crime committed that opens the door for other major crimes he committed with the help of others. The act exposes him to unlimited abilities and like a rebirth, he confesses, 'to know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.' And from then he orders for the murder of Banquo and his entire family and afterwards he orders for the wiping out of Macduff's family as well. These last two murders are for him to retain the throne and ensure his lineage succeeds him.

The hallucination he experiences afterwards is his unconscious taking over the conscious as a result of his actions that were dictated by his preconscious. The appearance and reappearance of Banquo's ghost almost gave him away as he almost if not confess with the following lines: Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time, Ere humane statute purg'd the gentle weal; Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd too terrible for the ear. The time has been, That, when the brains were out, the man would die, And there an end; but now they rise again, with twenty mortal murders on their crowns, And push us from our stools. This is more strange than such a murder is. (3:2:76-84)

Lady Macbeth covers up her husband's mess but unknown to her; she will be the first to publicly announce their criminality. Her ultimate confession while sleepwalking and constantly washing her hands with imaginary water intended to cleanse her of the blood on her hands gave them away of all their atrocities. Her declaration 'here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand', affirms her regrets and signifies her redemption. Unfortunately there are witnesses and the doctor employed to cure her declares, 'this disease is beyond my practice: yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.' She did not live long to enjoy her crown leaving behind her husband, the king who follows her thereafter. Macbeth's final speech signals his resolve to fight till the end protecting his crown. Although he earlier announces how he didn't enjoy the throne has he should knowing fully the way he chose to get the throne is the ultimate reason. He bravely fought till the end after declaring:

I will not yield, to kiss the ground before Malcom's feet, and to be baited with the rabble's curse though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane, and thou oppos'd, being of no woman born, yet I will try the last. Before my body I throw my warlike shield: lay on, Macduff, and damn'd be him that first cries, hold enough, (5:7:56-63) In conclusion, ambition was embedded in Macbeth's preconscious mind and so it intensely and devouringly flares up the moment his conscious becomes aware of the possibility of him becoming king. However, he has no idea how to achieve his aim and almost gave up until his wife who is equally as ambitious as he is came into the picture. Her perfect plan for murder makes Macbeth more blood thirsty to get the crown and sustain it. But their unconscious psyche couldn't handle their evil and it took over to reveal the secret that only the two of them know. Macbeth's tragedy is that he fools his conscience but cannot kill it for it is deeply, inextricably and poetically rooted in his unconscious.

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