

**ROOTING FOR THE 'BAD GUY' : NARRATIVE EMPATHY IN SHAKESPEARE'S
*MACBETH***

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Title: Rooting for the 'Bad Guy': Narrative Empathy in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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Abstract: One of the reasons for feeling an emotional connection with fiction is narrative empathy. Research shows that for narrative empathy to be fully realized, it must compose both reader response and authorial strategies. This paper proposes that William Shakespeare utilizes deliberate writing strategies in creating narrative empathy in *Macbeth*, and a study of it will validate the connection between reader response and literary empathetic strategies. This paper performs a technical survey of reader response, followed by an examination of William Shakespeare's writing strategies in *Macbeth*, regarding narrative empathy. Specifically, it examines Shakespeare's character, Macbeth; focusing on his psychological development and plot-line motivations which create narrative empathy in the reader; despite the paradox of his being a murderer. It will be shown that Shakespeare maximizes narrative empathy for his character Macbeth through his expert writing techniques, creating an empathetic character who otherwise would be seen as a murderer, making the play tragic.

Keywords: Narrative empathy, Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Reader response, Transportation, authorial input.

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Introduction

After reading William Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Macbeth*, I was struck by how it affected me emotionally. How did this 400 year old play manage to make me psychologically connect with a murderous character? It seems that empathy, the emotion that allows one to understand, even relate, to the motivations of another, was a major component in this. Empathy coming from an interaction with literature is called 'narrative empathy.'

Suzanne Keen has written extensively on narrative theory including narrative empathy and argues that is not just the reader that is involved but that: "narrative empathy overarches [other] narratological categories" (1). These categories include how plot-line and character development affect reader empathy. Keen's 'overarching' theory is intended to extend the concept past a readers' identifying with a character and include formal strategies of the writer.

This papers aim is to prove Shakespeare does, in fact, use psychology and plot-line writing strategies in *Macbeth* to invoke narrative empathy in the reader. Outside a survey of several important theories affecting empathy, including reader response to fiction, perceptions of evil, and religious morality, the paper will focus primarily on Shakespeare's development of his character Macbeth and how he creates this narrative empathy in the reader.

I believe that examining the character 'Macbeth' in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Macbeth*, will demonstrate how Keen's overarching theory works in narrative empathy creation. Shakespeare is nothing if not consistent in writing stories that induce reader empathies. His character, Macbeth, brings this to the fore. After a technical explanation of reader response and empathy, I will forward Keen's theory by examining Shakespeare's writing strategies regarding psychological character and plot-line development in his character, Macbeth. It will be shown that Shakespeare blends both these techniques¹ to fully develop a readers empathetic response. This will explain how Shakespeare can make Macbeth, an 'evil' tyrannical murderer, a fully empathetic character, making the play itself, a tragedy.

1 As well as others, however, I will focus on psychology and story-line specifically here.

Theoretical Background

My assertion, and Keen's theory is that this phenomenon is not reserved for the reader only, and that “narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it” (1). Thus the writer, in feeling empathy, must convey those feelings into the characters they write. They need to utilize “high levels of imagery inviting mental stimulation and immersion” (2), which engages readers 'transportation'² into the text. As this paper will show, “readers naturally experience narrative information as continuous with information gleaned from real experience and thus must exert themselves consciously to regard fictive narratives as fictional” (3). This 'empathy' should be considered as legitimate emotion that has an effect on a reader in a real world sense.

This real world reader response is only partly the readers 'doing'; The other part being authorial.

Keen sites the idea that the author's empathy and the readers may not match (3). I would argue that certain authors, Like Shakespeare, are more consistent in their 'reactive accuracy'.³ Whether this is controlled more by his mastery of characters' psychological development or the story-line will be investigated. I will look at certain story-line conventions, such as “narrative dynamics,” which involve following a story from its beginning to its conclusion (4). The psychological study will include how readers identify with a character on an emotional level, and understand their motivations.

In this paper, I will simplify any variables by assuming typical, or commonly assumed responses to these conventions. Outside a theoretical look at reader response to fiction, and a study of perceptions of evil, this paper will mainly focus on Shakespeare's narrative techniques in empathy creation as cited by Keen, such as “representation of fictional characters' consciousness,” and especially those narrative techniques “encouraging immersion or transportation of readers” (4).

2 “Transportation” will be discussed in detail in chapter 1 of this paper.

3 'Reactive accuracy' is my own phrase to mean how certain authors, like Shakespeare, elicit more consistent emotional responses from a majority of readers.

Previous Research

Regarding authorial induced empathies in *Macbeth*, my research has revealed a strong divide between those claiming narrative empathy as psychologically derived and those that claim it is story-line induced. Looking at plot driven empathies, my theory will reflect on work such as “Source and Motive in *Macbeth* and *Othello*” (1943), where author Elmer Edgar Stoll argues that plot is what drives Macbeth to evil, and his ultimate undoing. His notion that “the hero's conduct, at the heart of the action, is often not in keeping with his essential nature but in contrast with it” (27), is the root of his rejection of the psychological. Further strengthening his allegiance to plot, Stoll quotes George Santayana,⁴ who wrote: “it is by the plot, then, that the characters will be vivified, because it is by the plot that our own character will be expanded into its latent possibilities” (32). Stoll argues convincingly, giving valid reasons to why the plot is what motivates our empathies towards Macbeth.

Contrarily, Sandra Clark's “Macbeth and the Language of the Passions” (2012), convincingly argues that Macbeth is *psychologically* driven to his crimes and fate. She supports her claim through psychological analyses of the text. For example, after quoting a particular soliloquy, she considers: “here, Macbeth implies that passion overcame his reason” (301). Clark's methodology is very convincing in its “proof” that Macbeth's psychological state is responsible for his actions. Her paper illustrates how early 17th century conceptions of psychology connect with our current conceptions of psychology allowing us to understand, thus empathize, with Shakespeare's character. She states that “[...] because Macbeth's own emotional trajectory can be read as both extreme humoral imbalance⁵ and cognitive breakdown⁶ the play is capable of producing such strong emotional responses in its audiences” (310).

To reconcile this discrepancy in critical alternatives, I will prove both are true independently, but that Shakespeare homogenizes them in such a way that either method can be correct in itself. This will justify both Stoll and Clark's seemingly contrasting theories and promote my own view that both are present in *Macbeth*.

Since narrative-empathy involve the interplay between the fiction and the reader, the question of the readers role in empathy creation will be our starting point. It will both answer

4 From George Santayana's “Poetry and Religion” 1900.

5 17th century psychology.

6 Contemporary psychology.

the question as to how a contemporary reader can still be emotionally effected by a 400 year old play, and how fictional literature has a real effect on a reader's life.

This approach to analyzing narrative-empathy from both the reader and writer standpoint will promote Suzanne Keen's 'overarching' theory, and validate my own by showing that both story-line and character psychology are necessary ingredients in creating empathy, not only in *Macbeth*, but in all well written fictional literature.

Organization of Essay

Chapter one will start out with how readers' conceptualize fictional literature. It will look at theories surrounding how readers perceive fiction. This will be followed by theories on how readers are 'transported' into fiction, utilizing examples from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

In chapter two, I will look at Shakespeare's empathy creation involving psychological character development. It will start with an important concept of evil and how it affects our empathies. I will then delve deeper into Shakespeare as a writer by looking at what *kind* of psychology he may have built into *Macbeth* and how contemporary readers still have access to his intended psychological meanings. The last part of the chapter will discuss an alternative view in Shakespeare's psychological character development; that of Calvinist reprobate theory, which puts the psychology of evil into a different light.

Chapter three will start by illustrating a seeming paradox between *Macbeth* being seen as a tragic drama while its main character is 'bad.' Then it will tempt to solve it by looking specifically at Shakespeare's empathy creating story-line, showing how the plot drives our empathies towards, not away, from *Macbeth*. The chapter will finish with an examination of the specific mechanisms Shakespeare uses, such as awareness, ambiguity, and language, all which push reader empathies forward.

The paper will conclude by answering the question of why we have empathy for *Macbeth*, and why it is a tragedy, as opposed to some form of revenge story. Then it will summarize the answer as to how contemporary readers can still relate to Shakespeare's 400 year old play. Finally, it will settle the seeming paradox between Clark's psychological empathy and Stoll's plot derived empathy regarding Shakespeare's authorial design of the character *Macbeth*, verifying my own theory and furthering Keen's overarching theory while simultaneously validating both critical views.

Chapter 1: How readers receive fiction

In order to study narrative empathy, it is imperative to examine how readers perceive fictional worlds; how it affects our emotions, especially in a compelling, 'real world' way. This information, while not exhaustive by any stretch, will answer two questions: How does a 400 year old play still affect a contemporary audience? And how fiction sometimes alters our real world views?⁷

Kendall L. Walton's paper, "How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World" (1978), explores the relationship between our 'real' world⁸ and the world of fiction. For this study, the most important aspect is understanding that readers generate 'real' world empathies for fictional world characters. As Walton puts it: "fictional characters cause real people to shed tears, lose sleep, laugh, and scream" (12). An example from *Macbeth*: "[...] my way of life is fallen into the sear [...] and that which should accompany old age, as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; But in their stead, curses [...]" (V, III, 25-27). We are sad for Macbeth, *feeling* that he has lost everything. This psychological bond with fictional characters is the driving force behind narrative empathy. Without it, we simply would become casual observers of these fictional happenings. But, "we feel a psychological bond to fictions, an intimacy with them, of a kind which otherwise we feel only towards what we take to be actual" (19). This made even more potent because "we have a strong tendency to regard them as part of our reality, despite our knowledge that they are not" (19). None the less, Walton makes the comment "readers *pretend*⁹ to believe" (21) and goes on to assert "rather than somehow promoting fictions to the level of reality, we, as appreciators, descend to the level of fiction" (21). The 'appreciators' having full knowledge of the fictional status of the story, thus consciously suspending their disbelief.¹⁰

7 Even though we fundamentally understand it to be 'pretend.'

8 I concede that metaphysics sees this as a problematic notion. However, I will proceed with 'real' being a common perception of the world we take in with our senses and thoughts.

9 My emphasis.

10 In order to 'get into' the story.

The problem in this theory is that it also implies that narrative empathy is consciously created, thus is *pretend*. My own assertion is that narrative empathy is felt as *real*. It is not clear that Walton, as a philosopher, would have considered this; however, Richard J. Gerrig and David N. Rapp's psycholinguistic empirical study "Psychological Processes Underlying Literary Impact" (2004), elaborates my assertion.

Gerrig and Rapp's theory may be the 'base' by which empathy enters our consciousness through literature. If Gerrig and Rapp are correct, and they present a solid argument, then it changes the way Walton's *'pretend'* works. The typical thought¹¹ is that 'suspension of disbelief' is something readers 'do' prior to reading fictional literature. This allows it to become a more pleasurable, if not emotional, experience. However, in accordance with Gerrig and Rapp, "readers can only achieve disbelief through effort, after they initially accept all information as true" (268). This makes us re-examine Macbeth's three witches. They may be seen as (or mentally converted to) 'fates,' but they are as 'real' to us as to audiences in 1600.¹² Readers do not *allow* the witches to be real for the sake of the story, but accept them as real. As Noel Carroll¹³ put it: "We cannot will our beliefs. Instead, belief is something that happens to us" (qtd. in Gerrig and Rapp 268). Only through a conscious reflective effort can we disengage our emotions from the story (269).

Aside from suspension of disbelief, the most relevant thing affecting empathy that Gerrig and Rapp speak about is "consistency of character" (271), through both "disposition:" character reactions stemming from their psychology, and "situations," coming from story-line actions any character might typically take (272). These both affect our long term suspension of disbelief; the truer a character acts to their nature,¹⁴ or the closer a character adheres to acceptable actions due to story-line, the less likely we are to undergo the disbelief process. Lest one jump to the conclusion that this means people simply believe what they read, this process requires a modicum of reliability.

Gerrig and Rapp talk about how "the process of comprehension automatically leads to acceptance" (268). This 'comprehension' is more than the ability to read, etc. but to understand why a character acted (or might act) in a certain way. This must happen in order to 'let us in' to a story. It is clear that Shakespeare grounds us, through world-building and things

11 That I, for one, and clearly Walton, in his essay asserts. Also Taylor Coleridge from Gerrig and Rapp (268).

12 When much of the audience would have been 'on the fence' as to whether witches were real or not.

13 Noel Carroll *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990).

14 Or follows a trajectory the reader finds 'sensible.'

the reader can take as reliably true. This grounding starts our belief process off, 'transporting' us in the play, a critical element in the creation of empathy.

A reader does not simply *get into* anything they read, and 'letting us in' requires something that Gerrig, in his book *Two Metaphors for the Experience of Narrative Worlds* (1993), investigates. What is important for this paper, is that his study explains the mechanisms “underneath” suspension of disbelief and what 'transports' us to the narrative world.¹⁵

In elaborating Gerrig's study this paper will utilize Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to illustrate the conscious steps a reader uses to begin the empathetic connection with Macbeth.

Transportation into Fiction

Gerrig contributes to Jerome Bruner¹⁶ the idea “that texts which require readers to fill in gaps – by forcing 'meaning performance' upon the reader – will, on the whole, be better stories” (qtd. in Gerrig 5). These 'meaning performances' are things the reader must do to *unlock* the meaning of the text, as through metaphor, or finding deeper meaning under otherwise banal dialog. This is common in Shakespeare. When Macbeth says: “so fair and foul a day I have not seen” (I, III, 37), we already know it has to do with his fate considering it echoes the earlier witches passage “fair is foul, and foul is fair” (I, I, 12). Even those who missed the witches passage sense something about the comment, something more than it being about the weather.

It seems that there are two ways of getting into a text, and Gerrig contributes an explanation of this to van Dijk and Kintsch,¹⁷ who make a distinction between “propositional representations of texts versus situational models” (qtd. in Gerrig 5). 'Propositional representations' mean that some readers initially take Macbeth's quote above to mean the weather, seeing it as a 'proposition' of basic meaning (5), but as they read deeper, they gather Macbeth is speaking, unknowingly, about his own undoing. These are called “macro-propositions” (6), which fill in the 'gaps' as the reader completes more 'meaning performances.' However, this is not enough for our conception of empathy. Propositional representation does not engage us emotionally, but remains rather static. I see this as neutral,

15 This is precisely the type of “transportation” I noted Keen was eluding to in this paper's introduction.

16 Jerome Bruner *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986).

17 Teun A. van Dijk and Walter Kintsch's *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension* (1983).

like watching a documentary without a particular emotional investment.¹⁸ In order to invoke our empathies, a text must have Gerrig's "situational model" (6).

Gerrig claims that: "if readers need to perform certain types of judgments with respect to the text, situational models are essential" (6). Indeed readers must perform judgements reading *Macbeth*. For example, while he is saying he will not kill Duncan, he adds: "[...] I have bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people / Which would be worn now in their newest gloss / Not cast aside so soon" (I, VII, 33-36). We don't just take this comment at face value, he truly wishes to be held in high esteem, honorably, so, taking in the whole situation, we *judge* this as good reasoning, he wants to be seen as a *good* person. These judgements are not simply looking at guilt or innocence, but whether or not we judge a character as sensibly acting in a given situation. This process is not fixed, but fluctuates in its draw on our emotional energies. This is in part because the 'transportation' into Gerrig's "narrative worlds" (6) can be multi-leveled (9).

Shakespeare was a true master at this 'layering' method and he uses it throughout *Macbeth*. He uses the conception of the 'scene' as one level, Macbeth's internally projected consciousness as another, and finally, the 'situational model' which is a reader's own judgement of actions takes place. An example of this is in the banquet scene where Macbeth's wife and guests set the overall scene; the first level of transportation, but Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost and shares this with the readers, this creates not only the second level of transportation, but the third level as well, where the reader worries over his saying or doing something to get caught as the killer he is, but not wanting him to, the reader transported far enough in to judge his actions as understandable. This engagement with the narrative world, of course, comes prior to any housekeeping one may later do regarding suspension of disbelief. However, since we do not commonly believe in ghosts in our own world, why would we accept them in a fictional one, even though we have become immersed in the fictional world?

It seems the further away we get from our own world, which Gerrig calls "the world of origin," the more we are "somewhat changed by the journey" (11). This has to do with how we adopt to the customs set by the story-line. In Walker Gibson's¹⁹ words, "we assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume

18 You can still gain knowledge and understanding from macro-positions but not *necessarily* any emotional interest.

19 Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers" (1980).

[...]” (qtd. in Gerrig 11). It is important to understand 'for the sake of' as being rather automatic and we easily perform this action when the narrative world closely matches our own, and 'adapt' to fit ourselves into those where the narrative differs from our own 'world of origin' (14). We perform this adaptation when we accept Macbeth's witches and ghosts as real. It is not that we are unaware of the fictional world, but that we are too engrossed in it to engage our real world filters, thus our empathies are real. There is a “dissociation” between the truth in the real world (that one is reading a fiction) and real emotional reactions to it (15). Psychologist, F. C. Bartlett²⁰ claims that this leads one to a “rationalization” process which “rather rarely [...] was the effect of conscious effort,” in fact, “the subject transform[s] his original without suspecting what he was doing” (qtd. in Gerrig 19). 'Original' here meaning the readers' 'world of origin,' inclusive of their own belief sets and discriminations. This has the effect of transporting a reader into the narrative through an automatic rationalizing of its *truth* to the point that they engage real emotions.

Thus far, we have seen that readers engage in fiction by transporting themselves into that world and believe in it enough to rationalize their emotional engagement with it. Suspension of disbelief comes after it is taken in as true, and readers do not convert *everything* as fictional, fundamentally changing 'real' life ideologies. This answers the question as to how we can engage Macbeth in an emotionally impactful way, supernatural elements and all.

It is clear that there is an interplay between a reader and a text that creates narrative empathy. This supports Keen's belief in combining the readers' response and “authors' strategic narrative empathizing” (Keen, 3). In fact, it seems that Shakespeare, as an author, plays a strong role in creating this transportation into *Macbeth*. This paper will now study Shakespeare's methodology in the psychological creation of Macbeth that unlock reader empathies.

20 F. C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (1932).

Chapter 2: Psychological Empathy

In this chapter, I will examine Shakespeare's methodology regarding the formation of the psychology in his character 'Macbeth.' It will be beneficial to start with defining and discussing certain concepts of evil which are important to know in order to understand Shakespeare's literary methods in expressing character psychology.

In the paper: "The "Reason" of Radical Evil: Shakespeare, Milton, and the Ethical Philosophers" (2016), Catherine Gimelli Martin explores the basic idea that we "discriminat[e] between unwitting or passion-induced error and "mortal sin" or deliberate evil" (165). Martin distinguishes between "instrumental" evil (167), the type of which has a reasoned motivation behind it, allowing for continued empathies with the character committing them, and, "Radical" evil (Ibid), which is the type seen in the three witches (for example), who perform their acts of evil for no known conceptual gain, dis-allowing an empathetic connection with them. Shakespeare utilizes indirect methods to show this distinction in Macbeth.

Towards the beginning of the play Macbeth has been prophesied by the three witches to be Thane of Cawdor and also King. After the first prophesy comes true he makes the innocent comment "if chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me / Without my stir" (I, III, 144-46). Later, when he comes to realize his own role in this 'chance,' he is mad with guilt and dismay. His heartfelt guilt recognizable in: "[...] Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more / Macbeth shall sleep no more" (II, II, 42-43). If it were not for his 'innocent' stage, we would not have aligned ourselves with Macbeth as we transported ourselves into the story. This allows a reader to judge Macbeth's actions as

'instrumentally' evil.

Macbeth's initial reaction to the witches shows his own fear of 'radical' evil; "Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more [...] / Say for whence you owe this strange intelligence? or why / Upon this blasted heath you stop our way / With such prophetic greeting?" (I, III, 70-78), as he has no access to any morally good reason these witches would share with him 'good' news. His fear, in fact, is shared by the readers', in the inability to understand the motives of the 'radically evil.'

With these definitions of evil, it seems implausible that Macbeth would be 'radically evil' from Shakespeare's early showing of his innocent disposition. This is even more apparent in act IV, III, the banquet for King Macbeth, where he is completely unable to enjoy any moment of it due to his guilt and subsequent madness. It seem that in listening to Macbeth: "then comes my fit again / I had else been perfect [...] bound in / To saucy doubts and fears" (III, IV, 21-26), that he maintains a sort of guilt that would not exist in a radically evil character.²¹ If Macbeth saw evil as liberating, it might make sense that he be radically evil, and the play becomes a revenge thriller. It stands to reason then, that Macbeth is 'instrumentally evil,' keeping readers' empathies in place, keeping *Macbeth* a tragedy.

This readers' connection to Macbeth is not entirely through motivational understanding of his evil acts. In fact, Martin and I disagree in that she considers Macbeth as radically evil himself, even calling him a sadist (172). She claims that "Macbeth might well have fulfilled the witches' prophecy by legitimate means" (181). Legitimate, to me, implies a fully functioning 'logical' mindset, one that can reflect on situation, and outcome, then find the best solution. Macbeth does not fit this description, so we must look beyond evil to find what Shakespeare has done with Macbeth's psychology to keep the readers' empathies in place.

Shakespeare very likely applied "humoral theory"²²to deepen Macbeth's psychology. 'Humoral theory' is 17th century scientific psychology²³. Sandra Clark sees Shakespeare as using "the language of humoral theory [which] contributes significantly to his development of Macbeth as a character with an abnormal susceptibility to feelings" (Clark, 300). Shakespeare shows Macbeth's 'off balance' humors in his reaction to the three witches: "[...] My thought,

21 They would simply "not care" and go on as if nothing were wrong. This not even being an "act," but a part of their pathological psychology.

22 Essentially the psychology of a human was made up of melancholic, sanguine, choleric, and phlegmatic (Harvard University Library Open Collections Program). Any of these "out of balance" would throw off the constitution of an individual. While we use words like depression, anxiety, or ADD, the 17th century physicians would site some imbalance of humors. The psychological manifestation is essentially identical.

23 It actually spanned several centuries, including the 17th.

[...] / Shakes so my single state of man that function / Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is / But what is not" (I, IV, 139-42). Even if Shakespeare is utilizing humoral theory, Macbeth's reaction manifests itself as *trepidation*. Thus, as Clark states it: "it would be wrong, and untrue to the experience of the play, to suggest that emotions are so culturally and historically specific as to be unrecognizable outside their original context" (309). So, while humoral theory is completely different than contemporary psychology in mechanism, it is essentially the same in its reflection of emotional values. In fact, Clark's notion that Macbeth has unusually strong emotions would be shared by the 17th century audience.

Of course the recognition of strong emotion cannot 'claim' humoral theory was what Shakespeare used. The proof comes when his strong emotions cause him to imagine things so vividly that he can't reason for truth; "is this a dagger which I see before me / The handle toward my hand? - come, let me clutch thee [...] art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?" (II, I, 32-39). This shows Shakespeare's use of humoral psychology as "the phrase "heat oppressed brain" conveys the idea of humoral disturbance" (Clark, 305). Of course, contemporary readers don't need this phrase, knowing Macbeth's confused motivations come from his confused psychology.

Macbeth's continuous soliloquy and asides show this mentally confused regression. Readers begin worrying about his declining condition, his turmoil and uncertainty. He exposes his uncertainty in passages such as "[...] if the assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With its surcease, success: that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all here / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time / We'd jump the life to come [...]" (I, VII, 3-8). He is right, of course, but sense his hesitation to be sure of himself. Even in physical descriptions, "Whence is that knocking? / How is't with me, when every noise appals me? [...]" (II, II, 56-7) we sense his mental turmoil. Both physical description and soliloquy strengthen readers' mental connection with Macbeth, ever forming deeper empathies.

This all helps to reconcile the reader to Macbeth's actions through understanding his inner state. Macbeth cannot find a way back to a 'mindfulness;' "to know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II, II, 73-4), the murder plots, deceptions, and 'bad' business, a desperate way to 'normalize' his situation. He murders Banquo thinking it will settle things. This is evident at the start of the banquet scene, when Macbeth finally starts to relax, he says "[...] here I'll sit i'the midst / Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure / The table round" (III, IV, 10-12), only to fall into despair when his murderers have failed. "Then comes my fit again

/ I had else been perfect” (III, IV, 21-22). This is critical. If the reader was not 'in Macbeth's head' they might hope someone in the room would 'uncover' his murderous scheme. But Shakespeare keeps our concerns focused on him.

When Macbeth is consulting the doctor about his wife's own mentally deteriorating condition he is not simply asking if there is a physical cure for *her*, but for himself as well. “Cure her of that / Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd / Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow / Raze out the written troubles of the brain / And with some sweet oblivious antidote / Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff / Which weighs upon the heart?” (V, III, 39-45). His physical actions have not normalized him, so he tries in vain to reach 'humoral' balance, and so does the empathetic reader.

When Lady Macbeth advises her husband: “You lack the season of all natures, sleep” (III, V, 141-42). This possible 'cure' could balance his 'humors,' or allow him to reason again, in a contemporary way. Shakespeare uses these dialogs to keep readers mentally hopeful. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth was full of passion for his wife, as indicated in his letter (I,V) even the killing of Duncan was really *for her*. Yet towards the end, when Lady Macbeth cries out and dies (V,V), and Macbeth cannot conjure up any feelings for her: this is the moment the reader senses the true tragic impact, the loss of hope, the depth of empathy revealed fully. When Macbeth says: “She should have died hereafter / [...] Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more : it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing” (V, V, 17, 23-28), his words are heartfelt and tragic, while the plot-line has made him a killer. Shakespeare uses Macbeth's very words to make the reader consider *Macbeth* a tragedy, despite the fact he is a tyrannical murderer.

Empathies for Macbeth grow, even while he victimizes characters all around him. It seems that Shakespeare creates an intimacy with Macbeth through a type of narrative honesty. Macbeth owns up to struggling horribly with his mental stability, which likely indicates Shakespeare's intent to show his 'humoral imbalance.' Alternatively, or simultaneously, Shakespeare may have based Macbeth's psychology on moral or religious grounds. The psychology of *Macbeth* is so intimately woven with evil and fate²⁴ that a study of Shakespeare's literary methodology in creating Macbeth's psychology would be incomplete without a look at religious morality.

24 Both notions of which are analogous with religious ideologies.

Shakespeare and Religious Psychology

In John Stachniewski's paper "Calvinist Psychology in *Macbeth*" (1988), he proposes that Shakespeare utilized Calvinist psychological conventions in *Macbeth*. Stachniewski sites the Calvinist idea "that all human action was dictated by a predestined plan" and that "the logic of this identity would unfold relentlessly along the axis of the individual's career" (171). The standard psychological view sees Macbeth being tricked by the 'radically evil' three witches. The Calvinist view sees the witches as a projection of Macbeth's born nature (172). It does seem however, that Shakespeare gives us reason to believe that Macbeth is fundamentally good. The Calvinist reprobate theory of man as fundamentally depraved (171) incongruent with his own wife's conception of him: "[...] / Yet do I fear thy nature / It is too full o' the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it [...]" (I, V, 17- 19). This shows his gentle nature, and his lack of 'illness' to commit evil. Furthermore, Ross's proclamation from the King: "And for an earnest of a grater honour / He bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor / In which addition, hail, most worthy thane / For it is thine" (I, III, 103-06), showing his honorable nature.

Shakespeare shows how the three witches get under Macbeth's skin, he cannot forget or push them from his conscience. This is evident when Banquo states: "O dreamt last night of the three weird sisters [...]" and Macbeth lies "I think not of them [...]" (II, I, 20,22) This shows the influence of the supernatural on Macbeth (and Banquo, actually).

Stachniewski sees this supernatural influence as Macbeth's natural (reprobate) instinct to 'turn' evil (174), which echoes Martin's theory about Macbeth 'turning' radically evil; radical evil being similar to reprobate. None the less, the idea that Macbeth was fundamentally evil, or became radically evil is not in line with an audiences perception of tragedy. We do not typically empathize with radical evil. For example, when Macbeth says "[...] listening to their fear I could not say 'Amen' / When they did say 'God bless us!'" (II, II, 27-28), if he were radically evil, he would easily 'find the words' to keep up the deception. It may be fruitful to consider Othello's Iago here: He would never be at a loss for words to deceive or to further his evil goals. Macbeth, on the contrary, is unable to push the lie onto his

own morally virtuous sense of self. This is what readers recognize and empathize with in Macbeth's psychology.

If Stachniewski's Calvinist reprobate theory were true, one would have to overlook the supernatural influence. The witches are not metaphoric to a Calvinist fate, but deceive his honest, naïve nature. Shakespeare would not have needed the three witches to show a Calvinist reprobate. He could have elaborated on Duncan's telling Macbeth “[...]Our eldest / Malcolm, whom we name hereafter / The Prince of Cumberland [...]”²⁵ and Macbeth's dark response “[...] that is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap / For in my way it lies [...]” (I, IV, 10-11, 48-49). Yet Shakespeare pushes us further away from reprobate in Macbeth's note to his wife, where he said “[...] This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee.” (I, V, 11-14), which seems sincerely innocent.

Shakespeare uses the witches to encourage Macbeth's recklessness. The proof of Macbeth's *lack* of reprobate destiny is in his second encounter with the witches, when an apparition tells him “[...] Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him” (IV,I, 92-94) It would seem he still needs 'coaching' to continue down the corrupt path.

If we did take *Macbeth* as a Calvinist reprobate journey, the story would not matter. Macbeth is doomed through any possible scenario, his very soul corrupted from birth. If a contemporary reader can access this Calvinist reprobate concept at all, they would not feel empathy. One cannot empathize with pure evil. And empathy *is* a driving factor in *Macbeth*. Leaving alone whether Shakespeare considered reprobate theory in his psychological design of Macbeth or not, a bigger argument exists between critics who think Shakespeare only used psychology in creating reader empathies, and those who only considered plot-line in *Macbeth*.

25 Where in actuality never says “who will be king” or mentions the throne per se.

Chapter 3: Plot-driven Empathies

There is an unconventional nature to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. If it is to be a tragedy, among other things, the ending should be the culmination of all the plot-twists, problems, and turns of events the hero faced, resulting in a devastating or catastrophic finale. But Macbeth's acts are evil, so getting his 'comeuppance' should not seem particularly devastating or catastrophic²⁶, yet still, *Macbeth* remains a tragedy. In this chapter I will explore how Shakespeare makes it a tragedy through plot-driven mechanisms, aligning reader empathies with Macbeth, making the ending tragic, despite the fact that he is a tyrannical murderer.

Initially, the plot-line seems to show Macbeth's murder of Duncan was forced on him, with no other way to the throne; yet it never indicates Macbeth was particularly desperate to become king. Elmer Edgar Stoll, not only agrees with this assessment, but claims “instead of using a paltry chance to condone Macbeth's guilt, he [Shakespeare] seized on it and plunged threefold deeper” having a “sworn soldier” kill his master, killing a guest in his own house, and having the same strong soldier kill an old man in his sleep (Stoll, 25). Shakespeare's plot, seemingly, not aligning us with Macbeth at all.

This paper has shown compelling evidence that Shakespeare uses Macbeth's psychology to align reader empathy towards him; but it seems the plot-line hinders this reader empathy. Stoll argued that a reader must have a plot-driven connection with Macbeth in order

²⁶ It seems hard to imagine that if somehow Macbeth prevailed, ended up happy, that it would remain a tragedy because the three witches suffered a cumulative disastrous loss.

for the story to be tragic. He then sites three ways in which Shakespeare can make this happen: Show that he was virtuous and brave at the beginning, focus the supernatural elements, and amplify the influence of his wife (25, 6). While I agree with these, I also believe that giving Macbeth 'no choice,' magnifying Macbeth's unawareness, and creating ambiguity are also key elements in the unfolding plot-line.

After Macbeth's killing of Duncan, with his path to kingship secure, he thinks: “[...] / Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? / No; this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine / Making the green one red” (II, II, 60-63). This is his own accusation, a guilt he knows he can never live down; the story-line's way of showing Macbeth's fundamental nature as good, not evil. What Shakespeare has created is a good person reflecting accurately his own evil act, with *no self deception*. We can gather from the Calvinist view and 'radical evil,' that evil is deceptive and the evil doer tricks themselves (or excuses themselves) from taking guilt or blame for the evil act. Macbeth's goodness does not allow for this self deception, and thus the characters fall is motivated by situation, his psychology simply 'good,' and honorable throughout²⁷.

Early in the plot-line Shakespeare made Macbeth honorable and valuable, both as an individual and to Scotland. Both in how Duncan respected him “Give me your hand / Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly / And shall continue our graces towards him [...]” (I, VI, 28-30), and the sergeant: “[...] but all's too weak / For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name / Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel / Which smoked with bloody execution / Like valour's minion [...]” (I, II, 15-19). This honorable Macbeth is then given a 'no choice' situation when his wife prods him on “[...] Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valour / As thou art in desire? / [...] And live a coward in thine own esteem [...]” (I, VII, 39-43) This both answers Stoll's consideration that Shakespeare had to emphasize Lady Macbeth's role, and my theory that his 'honor' gave him *no choice* in the circumstances. The tragedy deepens when the readers see options that Shakespeare made Macbeth himself unaware of.

There is an important concept that relates to unawareness, elaborated in Werner Brönnimann's paper “Shakespeare's Tragic Practice” (1986), that may be helpful to understand. Brönnimann argued that Bernard Evan's “discrepanc[ies] of awareness”²⁸ (211)

27 Contrast this with both Stachniewski and Martin's view that he “turns” evil, his fundamental psychology *changing*.

28 Bernard Evans *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1960)

are what drives reader empathy for Macbeth; Among these are “gaps of awareness” caused by “wilful practice of the participants [who are] conscious deceivers who devise plots unknown to the victims” (211). This gives a reader the fundamental feeling of the character being wronged, 'automatically' siding them with the victim. We get this feeling in Macbeth when we sense he is being 'played' by the witches, being told: “Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (IV, I, 78-81). In simply knowing that Macbeth is 'blissfully' unaware of a bad situation, it brings the reader into the story by enacting the empathetic response to 'do something' about it. This continued 'duping' by the witches keeps Macbeth *innocent* to a certain degree. This also reverberates with Stoll, as Shakespeare emphasizes the supernatural multiple times in the play.

Reader empathy, through unawareness, can be effected by perceptions of ego and innocence. Innocent unawareness is empathy creating, in line with honest character flaws, as opposed to a character having an ego that 'overlooks' reality. Because Macbeth is seen as innocently unaware, the reader retains empathy. Specifically, we empathize with him as being unaware of the three witches radical evil.²⁹

Shakespeare adds another level of unawareness by having Macbeth invest so much in his own causal creation of unawareness in the other characters, such as keeping up appearances to deflect his own guilt, that it drains his spirit; “[...] Give me some wine, fill full / I drink to the general joy o' the whole table / And our good friend Banquo, whom we miss / Would he were here / To all and him we thirst / And all to all” (III, IV, 88-92). He is not good at being a liar³⁰. This is a huge part of the undoing of Macbeth. This 'double' unawareness keeps us 'on his side.' We fear for him getting caught lying while his original unawareness justifies his motivation for doing it.

Even when the plot leaves little in the way of options, Shakespeare knew that the audience would be privy to things that Macbeth would be unaware of. If it is true that we empathize through a sort of imagining of ourselves in a similar situation, he had to keep his audience 'in the dark' a little. He did that through his use of ambiguity, in this case, lines that leave multiple interpretations, or uncertainty. Shakespeare uses ambiguity from Macbeth's very first line “So foul and fair a day / I have not seen” (I, III, 38), setting up readers' curiosities immediately. As the reader becomes emotionally invested (empathetic) they want

29 In fact, it seems we share this difficulty in comprehending radical evil in any context. Thus our own naivety reveals itself in our lack of understanding of the three witches.

30 Even this is a nearly subliminal way Shakespeare shows Macbeth's fundamentally 'good' nature.

to understand how the words fit the plot. Shakespeare deepens a readers curiosities with ambiguous lines like “You are, and do not know't / The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd” (II, III, 82-84) as Macbeth is not only telling Macduff that his father is dead, but giving the reader a sense that Macbeth is unknowingly talking about himself. When Martin claimed that Macbeth had a choice, she sited the passage “All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!” (I, III, 49), and focused on the word “hereafter” (Martin, 187). She did this to show Macbeth's mis-interpretation, blinding him to his choice in the matter. However, if we take 'hereafter' as a fate driven 'fact' then choice is eliminated. This shows how ambiguity keeps the reader guessing prior to their elimination as the plot unfolds, Shakespeare never allows us to become disillusioned by Macbeth's actions. Had Shakespeare not been careful to clear up the ambiguities, the readers' could become more skeptical of Macbeth, less empathetic.

Shakespeare also uses ambiguities to keep the reader from judging Macbeth's actions too harshly. He uses it to deflect Macbeth's guilt. This explains why we don't so readily side with Mcduff, (for instance), even when we realize that Macbeth had his family murdered. When MacDuff says “[...] Sinful Macduff / They were all struck for thee! / Naught that I am / Not for their own demerits, but for mine [...]” (IV, III, 223- 26), he is blaming himself; earlier Shakespeare shows us that MacDuff's wife also felt betrayed by him for leaving her “Wisdom! / To leave his wife, to leave his babes, [...] / From whence himself does fly?/ He loves us not [...] all is the fear and nothing is the love” (IV, II, 6-12). The way Shakespeare puts these elements in the plot-line make things that seem very clear, more ambiguous, specifically manipulating reader empathies.

Even with Shakespeare's masterly use of awareness and ambiguity, his most powerful plot moving tool is language. Above and beyond awareness and ambiguity, while containing both, Shakespeare uses metaphor and eponym to draw the reader in. He uses subtle but complex language to enhance empathies, even using character names, to nearly subliminal effect.

It can be imagined that Banquo is banquet, representing friends, honor, and warmth, which Macbeth wanted, but lost, leaving him with Satyn, the devil's minion, pushing Macbeth those last few steps to his cruel fate. He uses symbolism such as bloody hands and stormy weather to mean guilt or foreboding. “[...] go get some water / And wash this filthy witness from your hand” (II, II, 46) can be read as 'hiding guilt.' However, in: “[...] a little water clears

us of the deed / How easy it is then / Your constancy has left you unattended” (II, II, 66-68). 'Water' here, an allegory for consciousness, but is it really that easy?³¹

Shakespeare also puts in passages that indicate what *almost* could have been, like Lady Macbeth's: “Nought's had, all's spent / Where our desire is got without content / 'T is safer to be that which we destroy / Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy” (III, II, 3-6). The story-line puts this before she knows he is having Banquo murdered. This passage shows her desire for the couple to blend in and get back to normal, while the relentless plot has already shut that door. It shows Macbeth's complete disillusionment from 'sensible' alternatives, having been spurned on by the witches. In this, Shakespeare has eliminated the psychological 'judgement' that we might have otherwise passed on Macbeth.

In her paper “Positive Effects of Ambiguity when Created by Rhetorical Devices: To Be or not to Be” (2010), Jeannie Smith Muzzillo claims that “fiction is most convincing when it mirrors reality” (453). Yet considering Shakespeare has included witches, ghosts, bizarre weather incidents, supernatural dreams, and more, all wrapped up in ambiguities and metaphor, it seems like Macbeth is as far from reality as fiction can get; yet Shakespeare's mastery of story telling makes Macbeth a timeless classic of tragic drama. At the end, despite this seeming lack of reality, it is clear that radical evil has won the day, and our real world empathies, fully peaked, can take no comfort in that.

31 It seemed that Lady Macbeth had underestimated her own inability to “wash her hands” of the murder.

Conclusion

To answer my initial question of why I was emotionally affected by reading *Macbeth*, this paper performed a technical examination of how readers' respond to fiction. Kendall Walton showed that readers form a psychological bond with fictional characters that, while inducing 'real' emotions, is consciously created; we *knowingly* suspend our disbelief to *allow* our empathies to pass on to fictional characters.

While Gerrig and Rapp endorse Walton's view that readers share a psychological bond with fictional characters, they explain how a reader's suspension of disbelief is actually only utilized in part, after the fiction has been accepted as real. This notion of how suspension of disbelief works helps explain how a reader can become so engrossed in a fictional character that it elicits 'real life' emotions.

Regarding empathy for *Macbeth*, Gerrig's (1993) theory explains how a reader 'transports' into the play allowing a strong empathetic bond to form with the main character, Macbeth. These concepts reveal how narrative empathy affects the reader, allowing for a more cognizant look at Shakespeare's narrative empathy writing strategies.

To better understand the role of evil, relevant to the study of narrative empathy in Shakespeare's play, I utilized Catherine Gimelli Martin's essay on evil. This shows convincing evidence that Shakespeare made Macbeth 'instrumentally' evil, permitting him to do evil things but remain in a readers empathies; allowing for an *understanding* of his motivations in committing his evil acts.

Shakespeare's writing methods likely included the scientific psychology of the time, 'humoral theory,' in creating Macbeth. While contemporary psychology and humoral theory are radically different, evidence showed that Macbeth's behaviors are manifested similarly,

despite the span of history. This explains why contemporary readers are still able to relate to a 400 year old character. This view was proposed by Sandra Clark, who felt that Shakespeare's writing strategies were psychologically based in creating reader empathy in *Macbeth*.

Shakespeare may have considered another psychological theory, Calvinist reprobate, in *Macbeth*'s creation; a religious morality of the time. Yet, on deeper study, while Shakespeare would have been privy to its philosophy, reprobate theory would have made *Macbeth* a fundamentally evil character, not conducive to its empathetic tragic ending.

The study of Shakespeare's plot-driven empathy creation showed an initial paradox between the plot showing *Macbeth* as a murderer yet somehow driving forward our empathies for him. Elmer Edgar Stoll's theory, in contrast to Clark's, discounts psychology as a motivator in *Macbeth* specifically because of this paradox; this stemming from *Macbeth*'s actions going against his nature. Adding to Stoll's theory, I discussed Shakespeare's plot design, showing *Macbeth*'s lack of choice, continued unawareness, and ambiguities, all keeping readers' empathies in place. Completing the study with Shakespeare's language, including metaphor and eponym, fully answers this contradiction by showing how Shakespeare's writing creates reader empathy with *Macbeth* and ultimately solidifies *Macbeth* as tragic.

By delineating between Shakespeare's psychological and plot-line authorial methodology in *Macbeth*, my paper shows how both help in creating reader empathies independently, and once combined, makes *Macbeth* all the more powerful.

The disparity between the psychological and the plot-driven empathy 'sides,' is dissolved by considering that Shakespeare being a writer of such high caliber is able to allow for someone to analyze his work from either point of view, as was done here, and be 'correct.' Since this is the case, it does not invalidate either Clark or Stoll, and satisfies Keen's overarching theory.

This study answers my initial questions, and forwards my assertion that Shakespeare utilizes multiple writing strategies in *Macbeth*. While it also sheds light on narrative empathy as a whole, it opens up a gap for further research: Is it possible to have an empathy inducing story with only purely psychological, or story-line motivations as Clark and Stoll think of *Macbeth*? This remains to be researched, although it seems unlikely to be found in Shakespeare's literature.

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