Candidate 2 evidence

A comparative literary analysis of how Shakespeare exposes the dangers of human flaws and their destructive consequences in *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

Although Shakespeare's life is largely considered a mystery, with significant gaps in the timeline, we know that he was born in 1564 into a world shaped by ambition, political instability, and an obsession with climbing the social ladder. While Shakespeare worked in London's highly competitive theatre scene, he saw how power, ambition, and manipulation shaped human behaviour, which is reflected in his tragedies.

William Shakespeare's tragedies *Macbeth* and *Othello* explore the human weaknesses and flaws and the destructive consequences that come along with them. This is done through characters who are fuelled on overreaching ambition, jealousy, and manipulation. Shakespeare shows how, in the pursuit of power and status, even the nobility of men's morals can become dangerous and decay under the obsession of obtaining this power and control, leading to chaos, lies and even murder, anything to achieve and fulfil their goals while destroying the lives of many in the process. In *Macbeth*, ambition and manipulation fuels and destroys a noble soldier to become the king of Scotland, turning him from a noble soldier to king murdering psychopath, while in *Othello*, manipulation and jealousy planted in a scheme for revenge from his apparent close, "honest" friend Iago causes psychological chaos within Othello which leads him to murder his own wife and tragically take his own life. This essay will argue that Shakespeare shows human flaws not as accidents or just part of the play but as a message on how the potential dangers of human flaws can decay one's morality, sympathy and make people make unreasonable decisions to make sure they succeed and achieve their own goals and inevitably lead to their destructive downfall. Exemplifying the sad truth that the greatest threat to society often lies within humans and their hearts.

Ambition is the promptest human flaw in *Macbeth*, as it is the main fault for the tragic downfall of the main character Macbeth. At the start, Macbeth's incarcerated ambition lies there, only held down by his loyalty and moral conscience. This is until the witch's prophecy awakens this monster-like ambition, as it gives him this vision of him becoming king and having power; which ignites this internal conflict. Shakespeare uses soliloquies

effectively to give the audience a direct, intimate way to access Macbeth's thoughts. For example, a soliloquy is used to demonstrate Macbeth's conflict early on, specifically in Act 1, Scene 3, when Macbeth is heard speaking to himself as he says, "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me"[1]. This shows Macbeth's early temptation to become king as he contemplates the witches' prophecies. Another soliloquy is used to show that unchecked ambition can tempt even the noblest of people into considering and in Macbeth's case committing murder, corrupting morality. The soliloquy in question was said by Macbeth in Act 1, Scene 7, when Macbeth says, "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well"[2]. This means that he would do the assassination, if it were done quickly and without consequences, which shows his selfish ambition in conflict with his morality. Not only does Shakespeare use soliloquies effectively, but he also uses metaphors to help enhance our understanding of how ambition can lead to devastating consequences and corrupt our morality. In a moment of reflection, Macbeth realises he cannot undo all the heinous acts of murdering the king and that there is no turning back, this is confirmed with his line stating, "I am in blood/ Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er"[3]. When Macbeth mentions that he is "in blood" Shakespeare means this both literally and metaphorically, this is because Shakespeare uses the blood to vividly represent his guilt, suggesting that his morality has been infected with the destructive consequences of unrestrained ambition. The blood can also be depicted as a symbol of irreversible moral decay, as he is aware of his wrongdoing, yet he continues to commit such acts for power instead of putting an end to it and repenting for his wrongs. One quote near the end of the play delivered in a cold, emotionally numb tone really shows us how ambition can be a main factor in one's downfall, as Macbeths line reads "I have supp'd full with horrors; Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, cannot once start me." [4]This is said when Macbeth is now king and has the power he so once craved,

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Oxford School Shakespeare 2008, p. 107, lines 145-146.

[2] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p. 117, lines 1-2.

[3] Shakespeare, Macbeth, 3.4, p. 160, lines 137-139.

[4] Shakespeare, Macbeth, 5.5, p. 203, lines 7-8.

but at the cost of his morals and ethics. This is because, at this point, Macbeth has already committed numerous murders to gain his position and to maintain his power, and his ambition has driven him so far into violence that it no longer shocks or scares him. This is seen in the emotionally numb, cold tone in which the line was delivered. Macbeth has described his thoughts as "slaughterous", what this does is suggest that violence not only reflects on his external actions, but has embedded itself internally into Macbeth due to his ambition to become king and gain power. Overall, ambition was used strongly in *Macbeth* as one of the leading forces in his downfall. This was brought to life through Shakespeare's use of soliloquies, symbolism, imagery and more, and through these we witness a gradual increase of ambition becoming increasingly unhinged. Shakespeare uses Macbeth as an example that when ambition overcomes morals and human decency, it can lead to catastrophic consequences and the inevitable downfall.

Shakespeare represents ambition in *Othello*, not through Othello himself but through Iago, whose ambition for control, status, and supremacy is one of the main forces that drive this play to tragedy. Early on, we see that Iago is jealous of being overlooked for the promotion handed to Cassio, by Othello, which causes Iago to feel underappreciated. We see this when Iago exclaims "I know my price, I am worth no worse a place"[5], in Act 1 Scene 1. This sentence creates an assertive tone, as it reinforces Iago's confidence and his feeling of entitlement to the promotion. This exact same arrogance and belief that the rank is owed to him, show that his ambition comes from envy and ego. This flawed mindset, later motivates his reckless actions. Shakespeare also uses dramatic irony to really show us the character of Iago from the start. This was seen when Iago said "I am not what I am"[6] to the audience in Act 1 scene 1, confessing his deceitfulness. This shows Iago's awareness of his dropping morals in pursuit of his ambition, but to him ambition justifies this, again reinforcing Shakespeare's message about the dangers of unchecked ambitions and what they can do to people. Through a soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 1, Iago shows how his ambition

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[5] William Shakespeare, Othello, Oxford School Shakespeare, 2008, p. 227, line 8.

[6] Shakespeare, Othello, p. 229, line 65.

turned into calculated steps as he says, "with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio"[7]. This shows how ambition has taken a toll on Iago and he is now plotting a careful plan to derail Cassio's nobility. By dehumanising Cassio to just a "fly" Shakespeare has used animal imagery to reveal how ambition has corrupted his morals as he sees people as nothing but tools that are at his disposal to get what he wants. At the end of the play in Act 5, scene 2 we see how ambition destroys others and themselves. We see this when Iago says, "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know"[8] This was said after the truth was exposed and the tragedies had occurred, and he is refusing to explain himself. This shows a lack of remorse even when lives have been lost due to him and how his ambition has completely stripped him of all humanity. This again reinforces Shakespeare's message that unrestrained desire destroys oneself and others. Overall, Shakespeare demonstrates ambition through calculated steps rather than direct action. Through Iago's actions and behaviour, we can see how ambition can blur the line of moral boundaries and make meaningful relationships nothing more than a tool for personal achievement. *Macbeth* and *Othello* both display ambition as a dangerous human flaw, but they are displayed in contrasting forms. In *Macbeth*, ambition is shown openly through physical actions, with his drive to become king and stop any threat to his power, even if it means murder. On the other hand, Iago displayed ambition in a more discreet way, using tactics like trust and manipulation, to achieve his cravings for status and control. Even though it was shown in different ways, some things are the same, as both protagonists knew the consequences of their actions, but their moral conscience where to far eroded, due to their unhealthy obsessions with their goals.

Manipulation is also used effectively in both plays as a main catalyst for losing one's sense of principles and the overall tragedy. In *Macbeth*, manipulation is mainly practised by Lady Macbeth, his wife, who exploits her husband's weaknesses such as his ambition and masculinity to try to guide his actions so she can achieve her own desire for power. This

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[7] Shakespeare, Othello, p. 268, lines 165-166.

[8] Shakespeare, Othello, p.387, line 301.

was seen at the start of the play in Act 1, Scene 7 when she was trying to pressure Macbeth to murder King Duncan by saying "When you durst do it, then you were a man"[9]. In this line we see her playing with his emotions, to get him to put his morals behind him to prove that he is a man. Shakespeare sends a message that manipulation can work when exposing and pulling on people's insecurities and vulnerabilities, allowing heinous acts to be justified with a sense of strength and pride. As the play progresses, we see that manipulation is almost infectious, as it infects the people who were once victims, so it is just this ever-going cycle harming our society. We see this in Act 3, Scene 2, when Macbeth turns the tables and says "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed"[10] to Lady Macbeth. This moment is a great use of dramatic irony, as the audience is aware that Macbeth has planned Banquo's death, but Lady Macbeth is not. This shows that Macbeth comes off as loving and protective with the words he is using, but he uses these exact words to hide the truth from her limiting what she knows to maintain control over the situation. Shakespeare shows us with dramatic irony that manipulation often disguises itself as affection and care. The shift of manipulation demonstrates, how being manipulated can turn one's behaviour and identity rotten, seeing a turning point in Macbeth as he is the one now wanting to control others. BY the end of the play in Act 5, Scene 5, we see the detachment that Macbeth feels through his wife's death when he says, "She should have died hereafter"[11]. This shows how his own self-manipulation has numbed his feelings and suppressed his guilt. Shakespeare implies that manipulation can leave somebody emotionally vacant, as he is now disconnected from his original feelings and morals. Shakespeare uses *Macbeth* to show us that manipulation is a human flaw that can spread from person to person, like a virus, slowly corrupting them. For example, how Macbeth shifted from a man whose vulnerabilities were exposed and was influenced by others to a man who purposefully lies to them to have authority over situations. This highlights how manipulation can cause moral decay

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[9] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p.120, line 49.

[10] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p.150, line 48-49.

[11] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p.203, lines 18-19.

and be used as a dangerous weapon when in pursuit of one's ambitions but at the same time is something that can be self-inflicting with destructive consequences eventually leading to a downfall.

Manipulation in *Othello* is quite literally embodied by one character, that being the main antagonist Iago, who uses it for personal gain and a sense of power. We see these early signs of the manipulation when Iago says "I follow him to serve my turn upon him"[12] in Act 1, Scene 1. This shows Iago's calculated manipulation as he explains how his loyalty to Othello is part of a bigger plan as he is just using it for personal gain and to get what he wants. Shakespeare uses dramatic irony well here as the audience knows his true intentions which further increases the tension and emphasises how manipulation when used wrongly, can have serious consequences, not just for themselves but also for others. Another quote said by Iago in Act 3, Scene 3, further demonstrates his deceitfulness when he says, "men should be what they seem"[13]. This is ironic as out of all people Iago is the one promoting honesty, which further strengthens Othello's trust towards him, deepening the manipulation. Iago uses this to plant destructive seeds of doubt in Othello, for him to believe his made-up scenarios, so he can gain from it personally. This sends us a message that manipulation is most effective when personal interest is involved. Shakespeare also shows us that appearances can be deceitful, and you shouldn't trust a book by its cover as it can lead to having catastrophic consequences for everyone involved. In the same act and scene, Shakespeare further shows Iago's manipulation tactics, as he uses words to control Othello's perception instead of concrete facts. This is shown when he says, "I speak not yet of proof"[14]. The phrase "not yet" suggests that there is proof out there, but Iago is purposely concealing this information, by doing this, he manipulates the situation with rumours, rather than facts. By doing this he is letting Othello's imagination fill in the gaps where there are gaps missing, making this suspicion seem self-imposed, instead of

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[12] Shakespeare, Othello, p.228, line 42.

[13] Shakespeare, Othello, p.300, line 132.

[14] Shakespeare, Othello, p.303, line 199.

generated by an external force, that being Iago. This genius way of manipulation allows Iago to seem like an honest friend, while he is secretly orchestrating a destructive plan that will ruin lives, unbeknownst to everyone. Shakespeare shows us that manipulation can come from the people who are closest to you, as they use the trust you have in them against you. Shakespeare brings Iago's manipulation to its final form near the end of the play through Iago's deliberate choice to stay silent when his plans blow up and his illusions have been brought to light in Act 5, Scene 2. This is seen when Iago proclaims," From this time forth I never will speak a word"[15] he uses silence as one last move to maintain control. By refusing to explain himself and why he did what he did, he declines closure for both the audience and other characters in the play. This is a clear showing of manipulation as he can keep control and power even after his evil schemes have been exposed. Rather than pleading for remorse and showing empathy, Iago asserts dominance through his refusal to explain the events that unfolded, this is because he now dictates what everyone knows and is shifting the power dynamic in this interaction as he is supposed to be submissive after getting arrested. This shows that even when nothing is being said or done, manipulation can still prevail through silence. Overall, Othello is a great showcase of subtle, calculated manipulation and shows us how people can use one's trust as a deadly weapon, which, when fired can have destructive consequences. Shakespeare shows manipulation as a central human flaw in both Othello and Macbeth, although it's shown in contrasting methods and consequences. Despite the differences, Shakespeare makes clear that manipulation in both plays causes moral decay in characters, which leads them to make decisions that are irreversible and have destructive outcomes.

Jealousy is represented in both plays as a destructive human flaw in both *Macbeth* and *Othello*, as it gradually intensifies as the plays progress, driving the characters to violence and loss. In *Othello*, Iago is full of resentment and envy as Othello promoted Cassio over him. This is seen in Act 1, Scene 3, right at the start of the play when Iago exclaims "I hate the Moor"[16]. This blunt statement from Iago shows that jealousy over the role is a

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[15] Shakespeare, Othello, p.387, line 302.

[16] Shakespeare, Othello, p.257, line 375.

personal motivator for his manipulation. The simplicity and directness of this line show us how deeply Iago's jealousy is, showing it as not a reaction but a flaw that drives manipulation and revenge. This shows us that in the case of Iago, over-the-top jealousy can lead to destructive actions. As the play progresses Iago uses jealousy in a different way. He is seen manipulating Othello in Act 3, Scene 3, by planting jealousy into Othello's head, as he says "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; it is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on."[17] This is Iago warning Othello about jealousy, while simultaneously stirring Othello's jealousy, making him believe his wife Desdemonda is having an Affair. He also personifies jealousy as this "monster", which shows the destructive power of jealousy. This tells us that jealousy is a monstrous flaw, that feeds on one insecurity, and when manipulated it can swallow someone whole, which ultimately leads to destructive consequences, like how Othello smothered his wife due to jealousy, then killed himself after learning the truth leading to a tragedy fuelled by jealousy.

In *Macbeth*, jealousy is shown more through fear and power, rather than betrayal. The first real sighting of jealousy was seen in Act 1, scene 3 when he is seen reflecting on the witches' prophecies, after they vanish and the first prediction came true as he is now the Thane of Cawdor. As a result of this, he becomes unsettled with the fact that Banquo's sons are predicted to become king threatening the security of Macbeth, creating early signs of jealousy and fear. This becomes clear when in Act 3, Scene 1, Macbeth confesses that "To be thus is nothing; / But to be safely thus."[18] This emphasises his insecurity as he is basically saying the role of king is meaningless, if others threaten his spot. His obsession only intensifies over Banquo's heirs, transforming this fierce jealousy into violent paranoia. Near the end of the play, in Act 5, Scene 3, we see this paranoia escalate and intensify even more, when Macbeth says, "Then fly, false thanes, / And mingle with the English epicures"[19]. This suggests that Macbeth now assumes betrayal from those around him

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[17] Shakespeare, Othello, p.302, line 169.

[18] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p.143, line 48.

[19] Shakespeare, Macbeth, p.198, lines 7-8.

with no evidence to back it. By calling the Thanes "false", it reveals how jealousy has impaired his outlook on things, and now he feels the need to be disloyal to others to protect whatever authority he has left. This shows that jealousy has moved far past Banquo and his sons and is now a view he has on the world leaving him able to trust no one. Shakespeare demonstrates here how a little bit of unhealthy jealousy does not just affect relationships, but can destroy and swallow people whole, leaving them with nothing, being a main ingredient in one's downfall and bad consequences. By using jealousy across both plays in different stages, shows us how this human flaw can grow from simple envy to obsession and then finally a violent paranoia destroying one's sense of morality.

Both *Macbeth* and *Othello* deeply explore how human flaws such as manipulation, ambition and jealousy have destructive consequences if these flaws become unchecked. These are both powerful demonstrations of how human flaws can lead to destructive and self-inflicted downfalls. While *Macbeth* demonstrates the consequences of overreaching ambition and an excessive amount of paranoia, as he was once a noble soldier but turned to committing murders and crimes to seize and protect his throne. But these flaws got the best of him and Lady Macbeth, eventually causing both of their life's to be lost. On the other hand, Shakespeare uses emotions powerfully through *Othello*, as it exposes the danger of jealousy and manipulation on a deeper level. As Othello's "Honest" friend, Iago, used the trust Othello had in him to completely blind side him as he orchestrates the tragic downfall of Othello and many other people. *Macbeth* feels cinematically grand with epic moments of conflict due to growing human flaws whereas *Othello* feels more personal and intimate as it uses betrayal in an almost relatable relationship. If I had to choose one play that projects the message the best, I would 100% choose *Macbeth*. This is because Shakespeare has done an unbelievable job in illustrating the potential dangers of everyday human flaws when they manage to engulf somebody. It is also more effective in showing how bad these flaws can be as it shows that once a noble soldier character gets destroyed by allowing his ambition and jealousy to be manipulated and complete strip him of any moral conscience he once had. Through soliloquies and grotesque imagery, the audience is made clear of Macbeth's tragic decline, making *Macbeth* a better play that

conveys these human flaws as dangerous and has graver dramatic consequences that help us understand.

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