

Fate, Free Will and Agency in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*

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Abstract

Macbeth and Julius Caesar have many common elements and themes. But one important theme shared by them is the theme of fate. In fact, the signs that foretell such a fate are so strong that the characters with no belief in fate change their mind. But there is also a degree of free-will, so human beings, being wise, can change their fate. But Caesar's pride consumes his wisdom and he submits to his written fate, which is getting murdered, while he could easily change it. In the world of Macbeth, unlike that of Julius Caesar, promises of the three witches are of the kind of self-fulfilling prophecies. According to Robert K. Merton, "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come 'true'." So this means that human beings make the prophecy come true by their own will. Macbeth, then, is not destined or forced to do anything. He chooses his own path, makes his way to the throne and fulfills the prophecies. Two major prophecies in this play, which are motivations of Macbeth for the two murders at two critical points of the play, like murdering Duncan, and murdering Macduff's family, are in fact self-fulfilling prophecies. But Macbeth, servant of his ambition, chooses to take the lead and make them come true, which in turn leads him to his downfall. This paper intends to show how fate functions (if ever) in these two plays. A study of the texts shows that in the world of Julius Caesar, every human being has a fate written for him.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, fate, free-will, prophecy

1. Introduction

Macbeth and *Julius Caesar* have a lot in common. Both are among the shortest plays of Shakespeare, *Macbeth* is his shortest tragedy and *Julius Caesar* his forth, both deal with the story of a ruler who is killed and the civil war that follows his murder, as well as some other similarities. There are even two allusions to the story of Julius Caesar in *Macbeth*, which was written seven years after the former. But maybe one of the most important theme common in these two tragedies is the matter of Fate, the theme that is also present in some other Shakespeare's works.

Shakespeare uses different supernatural elements in his plays to explore the question of Fate and Free Will in human life. In *Julius Caesar*, we are faced with Soothsayers, dreams, strange happenings, ghosts, etc. But it is less varied in *Macbeth*. The major supernatural elements present in *Macbeth* are the "weird sisters" and also the apparitions that come out of their cauldron. There are also ghosts and other apparitions present in the play. The question is that

how much control such supernatural agents have on human affairs? Can they really control what human beings do and their consequence? Or is it humans that are free to do whatever they wish? The present paper tries to answer these questions regarding these two plays, basing its argument on the evidence from the text.

Hypothesis

A close reading of the texts of these plays shows that in *Julius Caesar* there is a strong sense of Fatalism coexisting along with free will in a delicate relationship which is not so easy to discern. That is, there is a fate intended for everybody, but one can, being aware and wise, change that fate in the better way. Julius Caesar, whose fate is written to be murdered at the senate, could easily change his fate in various situations throughout the play (which will be examined in the present study). But as mentioned, one has to be wise and aware to be able to do this. Caesar's pride, however, has made him blind to the

signs that are warning him of his fate. Pride seems to be Caesar's Hamartia, or tragic flaw, which lets him to submit to his fate and be murdered in the senate, as destined.

Examination of *Macbeth's* text, however, shows that the witches' prophecies are a kind of so-called self-fulfilling prophecy. Such prophecies are clear indication of human free-will. Robert K. Merton, the 20th century American sociologist, in his *Social Theory and Social Structure*(1968), defines the self-fulfilling prophecy as such:

The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come 'true'. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.(478)

This kind of prophecy is also present in other great works of literature, like Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*. Had Oedipus' parents not heard the oracle's prophecy that their son will kill his father and marry his mother, they would not cast him out, something which in turn caused other events that resulted in the prophecies come true. But determinism is when something, prophesied or not, is going to happen, no matter what. Two examples of self-fulfilling prophecies are found in *Macbeth*. The first is the famous prophecy that Macbeth will "be king hereafter". This prophecy is what makes Macbeth do the things that he never would have done before, like killing Duncan, who is his close friend and cousin, as well as other things he does to get to the throne. It is these very deeds that finally bring about his downfall.

Another self-fulfilling prophecy in *Macbeth* is that of the witches' first apparitions, which bids Macbeth to "Beware Macduff"(Act IV, scene i 71). That makes Macbeth to consider Macduff as a threat, so he sends murderers to kill Macduff's family, which in turn makes Macduff, who seems to be the only one who can defeat and kill Macbeth, firmly seek revenge.

Transformèd with their fear, who swore they saw
Men all in fire walk up and down the streets.

And yesterday the bird of night did sit

So in *Macbeth*, the witches, despite having some powers to predict, never control the future and the main prophecies that urge Macbeth to do things that lead him to his downfall are indeed self-fulfilling prophecies, which as mentioned, are indication of human free-will.

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar is the scene of human attempt to change their fate or make their destiny. Cassius, the character considered by some as the play's villain, tells Brutus that "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (Act I, scene ii 140-1). But does Shakespeare sympathize with this belief? The aim of this section is to show what Shakespeare's text supports regarding this matter.

While reading *Julius Caesar*, we are faced with portents since the very beginning of the play. Since there we begin to doubt that human beings can make the future as they want. Such portents include soothsayers, dreams, strange weather conditions, etc. In the very first act, when Caesar is going to watch Antony's race, a soothsayer warns him to "Beware the ides of March" (Act I, scene ii 17). Julius Caesar does not have a constant reaction to signs and prophecies, sometimes paying extra attention to them, and sometimes ignoring them. He completely ignores this soothsayer's warning, calling him just a "dreamer" (Act I, scene ii 24). This prophecy in the first act might be read as a kind of exposition for the supernatural elements that are to come in the next scenes.

In the third scene of the first act, Casca reports the strange things he has seen. He is afraid that the gods are so angry with what they are going to do that they want to destroy humankind:

A common slave—you know him well by sight—
Held up his left hand, which did flame and burn
Like twenty torches joined, and yet his hand,
Not sensible of fire, remained unscorched.
Besides—I ha' not since put up my sword—
Against the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glared upon me and went surly by,
Without annoying me. And there were drawn
Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,

Even at noonday upon the marketplace,
Hooting and shrieking. (Act I, scene iii 15-28)

But Cicero assures him that such signs can be interpreted by anybody as they suit them, that is, they signify nothing certain. Cicero has always been known for his rhetorical skills, so Shakespeare seems to be showing Cicero here trying to manipulate Casca in order to join him to the group of the conspirators.

A few lines later, again Cassius tells Casca something different from Cicero's belief:

But if you would consider the true
cause
Why all these fires, why all these
gliding ghosts,
Why birds and beasts from quality
and kind,
Why old men fool and children
calculate,
Why all these things change from
their ordinance
Their natures and preformèd
faculties
To monstrous quality—why, you
shall find
That heaven hath infused them with
these spirits
To make them instruments of fear
and warning
Unto some monstrous state.
(Act I, scene ii 62-71)

Though the beliefs of these characters are not so important to the advancement of the plot, Shakespeare wants to explore the depth of his characters' personality and the different beliefs regarding the matter of fate by expressing their opinions.

Even Marcus Brutus, one of the main characters who is considered by some as a tragic hero, believes that everyone has a destiny, and he cannot be what he wants. In his soliloquy in the first scene of Act II, he says that Caesar's nature will change when he is crowned, because any king is destined to be tyrant. So, Caesar should be thought "as a serpent's egg" (Act II, scene i 32), and be killed in the shell before he "would as his kind grow mischievous" (Act II, scene i 33) when he hatches.

In Brutus' orchard, in the same scene, Cassius, whose belief regarding the supernatural elements was mentioned, calls Caesar superstitious, because he has changed his mind regarding "fantasy",

"dreams and ceremonies" and he may not come to the Capitol because of what his auguries may tell him:

But it is doubtful yet
Whether Caesar will come forth
today or no.
For he is superstitious grown of
late,
Quite from the main opinion he
held once
Of fantasy, of dreams and
ceremonies.
It may be, these apparent prodigies,
The unaccustomed terror of this
night,
And the persuasion of his augurers
May hold him from the Capitol
today. (Act II, scene i 193-201)

Cassius seems to have no belief in the power of the supernatural elements to intervene in human affairs, and what he told Casca seems to be an improvement on Cicero's advice to him. But as we will see, he will change his mind by the end of the play.

But once we examine Caesar's behavior; we notice that he is a little different from what Cassius describes. In the second scene of the same Act, Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, awakes from a terrible dream in the morning of Caesar's assassination. He tells Caesar that though she doesn't believe in the signs, yet this time they have frightened her. So it seems that the omens are so vivid that someone with no belief in them could be moved by them. She describes the strange sights he has heard of, such as "A lioness [which] hath whelpèd in the streets, / and graves [that] have yawned and yielded up their dead." (Act II, scene ii 17-8) Caesar may in fact believe such omens, and he has even sent a servant to ask for a sacrifice from the priests and ask their opinion. But he is far too proud and self-confident to show his acceptance of the omens. When the servant comes back from the priests, we read another one of the signs, that the animal the priests sacrificed has no heart:

They would not have you to stir
forth today.
Plucking the entrails of an offering
forth,
They could not find a heart within
the beast. (Act II, scene ii 38-40)

But as mentioned, Caesar is too proud to accept this:

The gods do this in shame of cowardice.
Caesar should be a beast without a heart
If he should stay at home today for fear.
No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well
That Caesar is more dangerous than he. (Act II, scene ii 41-45)

Caesar's state is exactly described by Calpurnia, that his "wisdom is consumed in confidence." (Act II, scene ii 49) But when his wife begs him to stay at home, he seems to make his wife's pleading an excuse to accept the signs, which he seems to believe. When Decius comes there, we read about what Calpurnia has dreamed. She has seen in her dream that Caesar's statue bleeds and the people come and bathe their hand in the blood, believing this to be a foretelling of Caesar's death. Decius, however, easily changes Caesar's mind by reinterpreting the dream as "a vision fair and fortunate" (Act II, scene ii 84) He also tells Caesar that the Senate, who want to crown Caesar as the king, may change their mind. So Caesar is convinced and calls his wife's fears "foolish", saying that he is ashamed that he yielded to them. Again, we see here another time Caesar could easily prevent his murder, but his pride blinded him to so many signs and omens, and he goes on.

At the beginning of the first scene of the act III, Caesar sarcastically tells the soothsayer that "The Ides of March are come" (Act III, scene i 1), implying that the soothsayer's warning regarding the Ides of March was false. But it is quite clear from his statement that all the time he has been thinking about it and might have in fact believed it. But he was too proud to pay attention to a soothsayer who may look like a beggar based on what we see in performances.

We see a very different aspect of the proud Caesar in the same scene. When Artemidorus, another soothsayer, who has written a letter to Julius Caesar (we read the entire letter in the third scene of Act II, which is in fact only a soliloquy by Artemidorus reading his letter, a warning to Caesar about the conspirators, and stating that he is going to give the letter as a petition to Caesar) demands from Caesar to first read his "suit / That touches Caesar nearer." (Act III, scene i 6-7) Here the proud Caesar we knew by now shows a level of humility and answers "What touches us ourself shall be last

served." (Act III, scene i 8) In this situation, it was exceptionally Caesar's desire to pretend to be humble that makes him ignore the sign, but that might be because of the fact he does not even know what is inside the paper. If he knew, he might have shown the same kind of pride we have observed of him.

Though maybe not an important one regarding the plot, a very explicit example of the relatively unavoidableness of human fate, especially by the simple folk, is the episode of Cinna the poet. In the third scene of Act III, after Antony's speech in Caesar's funeral, which makes the plebeians rebel, Cinna the poet says

I dreamt tonight that I did feast
with Caesar,
And things unlucky charge my
fantasy.
I have no will to wander forth of
doors,
Yet something leads me forth. (1-4)

It seems that he is destined to come out and feast with Caesar, in other words, die. There, some plebeians ask him a few questions, confusing him with another Cinna, who is one of the conspirators, and then kill him, fulfilling his dream. Shakespeare seems to have two purposes in adding this short episode to the play. One is of course the barbarism of the mass, what is shown several times in other Shakespeare's plays. But as mentioned, another point which follows this episode is to show that everyone has a fate written for him.

We read a different type of foretelling in the second scene of Act IV. Late at night, Brutus, in his tent, very sad because of his wife's death and the quarrel he has just had with Cassius, his best friend, sees a "monstrous apparition." (Act IV, scene iii 277) The Ghost of Caesar appears and tells Brutus "thou shalt see me at Philippi" (Act IV, scene iii 284). This prophecy is an important one because it seems to be the most direct foretelling, as if Caesar has been informed by some high power that Brutus is doomed to die at the battle of Philippi and has now come to tell Brutus about this. Brutus wants to talk to the ghost, maybe he wants to ask him some questions regarding this prophecy, but the ghost vanishes and does not appear again. We know that this prophecy turns about to be right and Brutus suicides after losing the battle of Philippi.

In the first scene of the last act, we find Cassius' character transformed. He says he once "help

Epicurus strong / And his opinions." (Act V, scene i 77-8) In James Warren's *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, the Epicurean philosophy defends free will against determinism and rejects any divine intervention. Then Cassius continues that with the things he has seen, he has changed his mind now:

You know that I held Epicurus strong
And his opinion. Now I change my mind,
And partly credit things that do presage. (Act V, scene i 77-9)

Then he talks about the sign he has seen. Two eagles, on their way from Sardis, have fallen on their flag and ate from the soldiers' hand. But the following morning, they left the camp and "ravens, crows and kites" (Act V, scene i 85) came in their place. Cassius believes that this omen indicates that his army is "ready to give up the ghost." (Act V, scene i 89)

Reading the different characters' opinions regarding fate, it is clearly shown that sense of determinism is so strong throughout the play that even the character with no belief in omens, signs and fate, in other words, Cassius changes his mind at the end, and comes to know about the fate that is intended for everybody. But as shown in this section, human beings are in fact able to change their written fate by wisdom, something that most characters in this play do not have.

Macbeth

Macbeth has always been considered a classic example of what is called "self-fulfilling prophecy". According to Robert K. Merton's *Social Theory and Social Structure*, "*The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come 'true'.*" (478) The first scene of *Macbeth* is acted by the three "weird sisters". They predict that they will meet with Macbeth when the battle is over. When they meet Macbeth in the third scene, one hails him as the "thane of Glamis", what he currently is, the second as "Cawdor", and the third, which actually begins the events that advance the plot, predicts that Macbeth will "be king hereafter!" (Act I, scene iii 51) Since the very first, Macbeth takes their predictions seriously, and he might in fact have thought about it before. This is evident from Banquo's comment on him that he is startled and rapt from hearing the prophecies and also from Macbeth's curiosity to

know more about this matter: "Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more." (Act I, scene iii 71) This shows that the prophecies only urge and encourage Macbeth to follow what he already had in mind.

His belief in the predictions becomes stronger when he hears from thane of Ross that he has been called thane of Cawdor by the king. He quickly tells us what passes in his mind: "Glamis, and thane of Cawdor! / The greatest is behind" (Act I, scene iii 116-7) which is to be king. Then he wants to know what Banquo thinks about these prophecies. Banquo gives him a response that seems to be the true nature of these prophecies:

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
In deepest consequence. (Act I, scene iii 123-6)

He believes that sometimes darkness' agents, i.e. the three witches, inform us about some trifles to lead us to destruction, what exactly is the case with Macbeth. Then Macbeth in his soliloquy informs us that since then he has been actually thinking about killing Duncan "Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs." (Act I, scene iii 135-6) But he changes his mind a few lines later. He decides that he does not need to do anything, because if fate has chosen him to be king, fate itself would *make* him king too, without any move on his part.

In the fourth scene of Act one, when King Duncan appoints his eldest son, Malcolm, as the Prince of Cumberland, to be king after him, Macbeth's feeling of insecurity begins to hold strong in him. He finds that if he is to be king, he cannot let fate do this, and he must take fate into his hand, because "in [his] ... way it lies" (50). That's where he actually decides that he must kill Duncan:

Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires.
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (Act I, scene iv 50-3)

Despite all this, when reading the text, we still have a feeling that he is reluctant to kill the king. But when we meet Lady Macbeth in the next scene, we find that she is quite resolved to urge Macbeth to kill Duncan. But she is afraid that Macbeth's nature, which is "full o' th' milk of human kindness," (Act I, scene v 15) may prevent him from murdering his king. In fact, Lady Macbeth believes that it is their duty to follow what "fate and metaphysical aid" have promised to them.

She is right. Macbeth has a positive aspect within him, and this positive side and his ambition to become the king are struggling with each other. Unlike Macbeth, his wife, however, seems to be a quite ruthless woman and she even invites the "spirits" to fill him with "direst cruelty", lest her nature would prevent her from becoming Queen, i.e. killing Duncan.

As is the case with some other Shakespearean military leaders like Coriolanus and Othello, Macbeth is a not-so-determined character, and he is easily swayed by a few words and thoughts. The night before killing Duncan, Macbeth leaves the supper banquet in his house, weighing the two possibilities. He thinks that if killing Duncan would make him king, with no difficult consequences, it would be good. But on the other hand, Duncan is his king, his kinsman and his guest, "Besides, this Duncan / Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been / So clear in his great office, that his virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against / The deep damnation of his taking-off;" (Act I, scene vii 16-20). Considering this things, Macbeth tells his wife that they will not go on the play. But as usual, Lady Macbeth easily convinces him with the famous lines in which she pricks his sense of manliness:

What beast was 't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
They have made themselves, and that their fitness
now
Does unmake you. (Act I, scene vii 47-54)

Macbeth makes up his mind this time, and kills Duncan that very night.

In the fourth scene of act two, Lennox talks to an old man about the strange events that have occurred. Their conversation adds nothing to the plot, but we find the holiness of the king in the time's

beliefs and also some power the supernatural elements can have. These strange things, unlike those that happen in *Julius Caesar*, are because the king is murdered or as the old man puts it " 'Tis unnatural, / Even like the deed that's done." (Act II, scene iv 10-11) They inform each other about strange things they have seen. Ross tells the old man (thus the audience) that it is daytime, but dark as night. The old man talks about the proud falcon that was caught and killed by an owl. And the most important of them, Duncan's horses eat each other, clear signs of God's anger with the murder that has been done.

In Act three, we see for the first time that someone is suspicious of Macbeth. He is the one who was with Macbeth when they received the prophecies from the three witches. Now Banquo thinks that Macbeth might have killed the king in order to become king himself:

Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for 't. (Act III, scene i 1-3)

But Banquo assures himself that if the prophecies have been fulfilled for Macbeth, then his own children would be the next kings, and he does not need to do anything for it.

In the same scene, Macbeth now decides to change the prophecies which relate to Banquo. He has, by now, tried his best to fulfill the prophecies about himself to become king. But now he is afraid that, as prophesied, Banquo's children, not his own descendants, would become the future kings. He thinks if it be the case, then he has murdered Duncan for Banquo's children.

If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;
Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (Act III, scene i 65-71)

But he decides to change this, and that's when he challenges the fate he has been like a servant for by now: " come fate into the list, / And champion me to th' utterance." (Act III, scene i 72-3) He hires three murderers to kill Banquo and his son.

This deed of Macbeth's is exactly what Hecate, the queen of the witches describes:

all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you. (Act III, scene
v 10-3)

Not that exactly Macbeth should have
done anything for the witches, but it is true that he
just wants fate for his own ends, and tries to prevent
from being fulfilled the prophecies that are not to
his benefit.

Here Hecate decides to take revenge from
Macbeth, because he thinks that he is stronger than
fate (in fact he is, but somewhat foolish too) and is
over-confident that he can change fate as it suits him.
The revenge sought is false security:

He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear.
And you all know, security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy. (Act III, scene v 30-3)

In the first scene of act four, Macbeth again
goes to the witches to know about the future. Witches
tell him three prophecies which have a meaning
beyond their appearance, exactly the false security
Hecate told the witches about, But Macbeth does not
seem to realize this. They show him three apparitions.

The first tells him that he should "beware
Macduff." (Act IV, scene i 71) This one is the second
important self-fulfilling prophecy. It is an armed head
which tells Macbeth to beware of Macduff. It is
because of this prophecy that Macbeth finds Macduff
a threat and savagely kills all the Macduff household
and this event makes Macduff (apparently the only
one not "of woman born") thirsty for revenge and
killing Macbeth. Maybe if he didn't hear this
prophecy, he wouldn't kill Macduffs and probably
wouldn't be killed at the hands of Macduff. This is
the first of the three apparitions which the witches
have planned to lead him to his destruction.

The second tells him to "laugh to scorn / The
power of man," (Act IV, scene i 79-89) because no
one born of a woman can harm Macbeth. The third
one tells him not to fear anything, because unless the
Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane, "Macbeth shall
never vanquished be." (Act IV, scene i 92) The reader
cannot help feeling that there is something wrong
with these two last prophecies, but remembering what
Hecate told his servants, we know that they are all
play on words in order to give Macbeth false security
about his position and power. But Macbeth does not

realize this, and becomes ultra-confident in his
immortality.

After these three apparitions, Macbeth asks
the witches if Banquo's descendants would be kings.
They show him "a show of eight kings" that are
followed by Banquo, and this makes Macbeth mad,
because he learns that Banquo's descendants not only
will be kings, but also some of them "twofold balls
and treble scepters carry," (Act IV, scene i 121) that
is, they will be the kings of more than one country.
Upon hearing this, after the witches vanish, Macbeth
seems to be consoling himself when he says "damned
all those that trust them!" (Act IV, scene i 139),
meaning that what they said is wrong, though he
surely believes them deep in his heart. This is
apparent from his feeling of security before the end
of the play.

As mentioned earlier, the "unnatural" act of
regicides brings about many consequences, some of
which are supernatural. In the third scene of act four,
Macduff, who has escaped to England to urge
Malcolm to attack Scotland and take back the throne,
describes:

Each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland and yelled out
Like syllable of dolor. (Act IV, scene iii 4-8)

In the last scene, when Macbeth understands
that the apparitions were made to trick him into his
destruction, he curses Macduff, who tells him that he
was not born, but "untimely ripped", and says that he
doesn't believe the witches anymore, because they
want only his destruction:

be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense,
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. (Act V, scene viii 19-22)

But it is too late to do anything, so he fights
and is killed by Macduff.

Macbeth's hamartia is surely his ambition.
But unlike Julius Caesar's pride which caused him
neglect the warnings; Macbeth's ambition makes him
follow his way to make the prophecies come true.
Julius Caesar's prophecies are warnings, which pride
entails neglecting, whereas Macbeth prophecies are
promises, which ambition entails following and
making them true.

Conclusion

Shakespeare explores many themes and beliefs in his plays, most of the times contradicting each other. But he never confirms any one of them. Sometimes these elements even contradict what is demonstrated in the same play. An example of such contradiction was presented in this study. In *Julius Caesar* there is a strong sense of determinism, whereas in *Macbeth*, it is the hero's free-will that advances the plot until his downfall. But one more

point should be added here, and it is the natural conclusion from these seemingly contradictory beliefs. Can we call Shakespeare a nihilist because of the nihilistic elements found in, say, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*? Of course not! Shakespeare never imposes any kind of ideology in his plays and when a kind of belief is present in a play, it never means that Shakespeare himself believed in that belief. An example was presented here, and many more examples of the contradicting ideologies can be found in other Shakespearean plays.

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