

Macbeth, “Wayward son” of Dunsinane: Self-imposed Trauma

Abolfazl Ramazani & Naghmeh Fazlzadeh

Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University, Tabriz, Iran. Email: ramazani57@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract

It was in 1995 that Cathy Caruth a path-breaking figure in trauma studies published her influential book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* and depicted trauma in literature. She defined trauma as the belated and oppressing representation of an overwhelming event long after experiencing it. This article will provide a detailed study of Shakespeare’s ambitious hero, Macbeth and his self-traumatization. There are psychological complexes in both Macbeth and his already traumatized wife Lady Macbeth which turned them into bloodthirsty tyrants. Lady Macbeth was not a tyrant by birth, but she reacted only the way her unconscious complexes and unresolved traumas such as childlessness and thirst for power, made her react. The couple was wrecked by false illusions of success and could not enjoy the prospects of a really prosperous life due to their unresolved traumas. The article also provides textual evidence of the symptoms of PTSD, evident both in Macbeth and his wife and shows how these unresolved traumas triggered a self-imposed trauma and how this led them to their final downfall.

Keywords: trauma, testimony, PTSD, *Macbeth*, and ambition.

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?
Macbeth, *Macbeth* (5.3.40-45)

I. Introduction

Written between 1603 and 1607, *Macbeth* is William Shakespeare’s shortest tragedy and one of his most important contributions to psychology. By portraying ambitious yet traumatized hero and heroine, Shakespeare demonstrates how trauma can also affect the individuals because of inner devilish characteristics like ambition and avarice rather than exterior factors. *Macbeth* is the story of a formerly brave army commander who, tempted by ambition and importantly his influential wife’s cupidity and cruelty, is led to trauma and tragic flaw. Macbeth was extremely ambitious; he had “vaulting ambition, which o’er-leaps itself / And falls on the other” (1.7.27-28). Macbeth is a trauma victim who is led to agony mostly by a self-imposed trauma. His and his wife’s thirst for power together with the prophecy of the witches ruined their hearts and harmed them more than the others. Killing Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff’s household, together with other bloody tyrannies, left indelible stains of blood on their hands and permanent scars on their psyches. It is in *Beyond the Pleasure Principles* (1920) that Freud refers to trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon

body but upon the mind” (qtd. in Kari Haller, p.14); though traumatized Macbeth washed the blood out of his hands, its stain was left forever on his mind. In his book *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (1964), Norman N. Holland asserts that unlike *Hamlet* which was usually treated as realistic, “*Macbeth* [is treated] only as fantasy except for the character of Lady Macbeth” (p. 219). But in this article, it is intended to analyze Macbeth as a real trauma victim who is haunted by ambition and traumatic fantasies. The authors of the present article have already published articles scrutinizing the evident traumas in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello*; in the article entitled “Hamlet, ‘Poor Wretch’ of Elsinore: Trauma and Witness,” the major characters of the play *Hamlet* are studied through the lens of literary trauma and in another article entitled, “Othello, ‘Dull Moor’ of Cyprus: Reading Racial Trauma and War Trauma” the evident war trauma and racial trauma are studied. The basis of discussion in this article, then, is to analyze the psychology of the Macbeth couple in the light of trauma theories and principles, and to study characters’ mental status before and after the traumatic event to see how trauma affects individuals, their surroundings, and their lives.

II. Discussion

As the play unfolds, Macbeth, the valiant commander of Scottish army, meets a group of witches that foretell the future; the weird sisters, who were “So wither’d and so wild in their attire” and “look not like th’ inhabitants o’ the earth” (1.3.40-41), appear and make prophecy about the future king of Scotland. The horrible vision of the witches makes Macbeth’s “seated heart knock at my ribs” (1.3.136), who starts to nourish the ambitious feelings in his heart. Weird sisters might symbolize Macbeth’s ambition. In his book, *The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth* (1912), Isador H. Coriat writes,

In the creation of wit, dreams, poetry, painting, two mental mechanisms are uniformly at work, namely, either an imaginary wish fulfillment or a tendency in that direction and a repression of painful experiences and memories into the unconscious. (p. 4)

Macbeth was influenced by the prophecy made by the witches, because the promised success was acting as a compensation for his childlessness, a frequently repressed desire; and it was in accordance with his unconscious wish to be king. On the other side, Banquo was not affected by the prophecy since he was neither childless nor unconsciously ambitious. This discussion can be directly related to trauma, a violent or sad event in the life of victim, which has to be kept hidden from others. In addition, the suppressed wish and ambition in Macbeth were triggered by the prophecy of the weird sisters and the unconscious desire is transposed into consciousness, an act which created trauma and fear in him.

Though Macbeth has gains a big success when he becomes the Thane of Cawdor, he is wrecked by this success. In the opinion of Freud, those wrecked by success “are individuals who, on achieving some material success, instead of enjoying satisfaction in the success, experience some kind of psychological, professional, emotional, and personal wreckage” (T. Levy et al p. 640). Macbeth primarily deserved the new title but was insinuated by his wife. In a very recent study of Shakespeare, entitled, “Freud on Shakespeare: An Approach to Psychopathic Characters” (2012), the author Chin-jung Chiu returns to the same psychoanalytical view on Shakespeare’s work. Chiu attempts to survey Freud’s analytical approaches towards Shakespeare and his psychopathic characters in five plays including *Macbeth*, in his discussion of which he refers to Freud’s remarks in his “Those Wrecked by Success” (1916), by saying that people become ill after a wish-fulfillment:

It is not at all unusual for the ego to tolerate a wish as harmless so long as it exists in phantasy alone and seems remote from fulfillment, whereas the ego will defend itself hotly against such a wish as soon as it approaches fulfillment and threatens to become a reality. (qtd. in Chiu, p. 42)

Trauma is “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth, 1996, p. 75). Macbeth murders Duncan, and the ensuing nightmares and disintegrated visions of this violent event haunt him repeatedly and make him vulnerable to clashes of trauma. He cannot think back about what he has done and he even cannot return to the chamber where he has committed the murder.

Ludwig Jekels (1917) noticed a technique in Shakespeare which is applicable to some of his tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. He states that Shakespeare often splits one character into two separate characters that are complementary; that is to say they are only comprehensible when brought together into a unity. Jekels adds that “Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are ‘the divided images of a single prototype’ and neither character makes psychological sense until recombined with the other” (qtd. in Holland, p. 68). Concentrating on the two Macbeths, Nataša Šofranac ends her article by stating that,

Dr. Kellogg believed that neither of them was mad, although Macbeth had hallucinations and Lady Macbeth walked in her sleep, trying to wash the blood off her hands. Still, in wake life (*sic*), she was very rational. But they both feared each other’s insanity. (p. 52)

So, before discussing the character of Macbeth it is important to scrutinize the character of Lady Macbeth who was the main cause of the trauma in Macbeth and all other tyrannies and tragedies in the play. Amongst the modern critics of Shakespeare, A.C. Bradley speaks of similarities between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth by allocating several pages of his monumental *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1905) to these two parallel, great, and terrible figures. He remarks, “These two characters are fired by one and the same passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike ...They support and love one another. They suffer together” (p. 350). In his article, “Some Character-types Met with in Psycho-analytical Work” (1916), Freud furthers Jekel’s idea and shows how these two characters are intermittently switching their stories:

It is he who has the hallucination of the dagger before the crime; but it is she who afterwards falls ill of a mental disorder. It is he who after the murder hears the cry in the house... but we never hear that *he* slept no more, while the Queen, as we see, rises from her bed and, talking in her sleep, betrays her guilt. (p. 323)

Norman Holland, quoting the French author, M. Jankelevich, suggests that Macbeth has two selves: one normal and the other satanic. Lady Macbeth is that second self which is the “projection of Macbeth’s wish for the kingship” (p. 223).

Apparently, in the opening scenes of the play, there was no sign of any mental disorder in Lady Macbeth; she was a lovely wife for Macbeth and a “gentle lady” (2.3.84) for hosting guests. But, in fact, she was feigning the mental health whereas she was deeply ill. In the above-mentioned article, Freud writes about how illusions of success and childlessness, which shall be discussed later in this article, led Lady Macbeth to commit atrocity. Macbeth and his wife misused true success and became wrecked by it. Freud points out that the forces of conscience may also forbid a person to gain “a deeply-rooted and long-cherished-for” advantage from his wish-fulfillment (Freud, 1916, p. 315).

Tracing the history of *Macbeth*, Freud recognized the play as a pièce d'occasion, which was written after the accession of James I (1603-1625). Eventually, Queen Elizabeth I had to name James VI of Scotland as the next in line to become king James I of England because she, like Lady Macbeth, had no children. Thus "the accession of James I was like a demonstration of the curse of unfruitfulness and the blessings of continuous generation. And the action of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is based on this same contrast" (Freud, 1916, p. 320). In an extended analysis of *Macbeth*, Ludwig Jekels (1917), points out that the play tells us about Shakespeare's psyche. He "tries to use *Macbeth* to fix up a plot around the dramatis personae of [his] biography: Queen Elizabeth, Sir Thomas Lucy, the Earl of Essex, Hamnet Shakespeare, and the rest" (qtd. in Holland, p. 221). Shakespeare revealed his own psychic condition by representing real characters in *Macbeth*.

The issue of childlessness in *Macbeth* and other literary works is as significant as the issue of absent mother in literature. Mothers are lovely characters onstage, who play the role of sympathetic and nourishing figures for their children, and their loss and absence were considered as the main threat to children's mental health. Besides Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare has created several other characters affected and traumatized by the issue of motherlessness, such as the three sisters in *King Lear*, Beatrice and Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Portia and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Desdemona in *Othello*. The female characters who lack mother, demonstrate loveless, cruel, and masculine characteristics. This is the same for those mothers who lack children. The mother-child relation is a mutual one characterized by affection and care and whenever one side of this relation is absent, the sense of harmony is shattered, causing the other side lack the mentioned care and love, thus becoming a creature suffering from psychological problems. Concerning the issue of childlessness and parental loss, Freud states that,

Shakespeare early lost a son by the name of Hamnet. As in *Hamlet* (*sic*) there was treated the relation of the son to the father, so in *Macbeth* (*sic*) there is treated the theme of childlessness. Thus we can search out the meaning of the deep emotions in the mind of the creative poets. (qtd. in Coriat, p. 57)

The images such as "this bird / Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle: / Where they most breed and haunt" (1.6.7-9), "babe that milks me: / ... while it was smiling in my face, / ... pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash'd the brains out ..." (1.7.55-58), "take my milk for gall" (1.5.47), "from ... mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (5.7.44-45), and "Pour[ing] the sweet milk of concord into hell" (4.3.98), all show hint of maternity and maternal affection which are absent in Lady Macbeth. In this article, it is intended to link Freud's ideas about childlessness to trauma and to explain that Lady Macbeth was traumatized by the fact that she could not bear children, and, as her trauma could not be recognized and cured, it was transferred to those around her, significantly her husband. In his studies on Lady Macbeth, Freud attributes her callousness to her childlessness; and Macduff after hearing the news of the murder of his household, testifies to it by stating "He [Macbeth] has no children" (4.3.216). The lack of motherly affection is evident when Lady Macbeth cries, "Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers" (1.5.46-47). From the very first moments of carrying their plot, Lady Macbeth was showing heartless characteristics; she had a "fell purpose" (1.5.45) and wanted to gain the "golden round" (1.5.27) at any price, so she did not care for anything. When traumatic memories return and torture Macbeth, his wife states indifferently that "Things without all remedy / Should be without regard: what's done is done" (3.2.11-12). It is evident that Macbeth is also affected by his repressed desire for having children when he heartlessly commands the death of Fleance and the household of Macduff.

The relationship between the couples also underwent change due to trauma and its effects. Lady Macbeth is no longer a dear wife; she has gone from his trustful advisor to a hysteric wife who is not needed anymore. Before the integration of traumatic recollections, though being under dominance of his wife, Macbeth called Lady Macbeth with affectionate words such as “*my dearest partner of greatness*” (1.5.12, emphasis original), “My dearest love” (1.5.58), “dearest chuck” (3.2.45), and “Sweet remembrancer” (3.4.38), while, towards the end of the play and after the uncanny return of trauma, he is even indifferent about her death and says, “She should have died hereafter” (5.5.17). This line from *Macbeth* also reveals the fact that those affected with trauma are already dead. According to Freud, a survivor of a car crash comes out of the scene apparently unharmed but his psyche might have fatal wounds, and the victim carries a ghostlike life on. In this regard, Elissa Marder states, “This absence at the heart of the traumatic event lends it its constitutive ghostly quality. And because of this absence, people who have suffered traumatic experiences can become so possessed by them that they frequently describe themselves as living ghosts” (p. 2). Lady Macbeth’s doctor is concerned with her sleep-walking and asks Macbeth to care more about his wife and “Remove from her the means of all annoyance, / And still keep eyes upon her” (5.1.73-74), but it is in vain. Lady Macbeth has put an end to her life “by self and violent hands” (5.7.99) and Macbeth was indifferent to this news. Macbeth’s cold reaction to his wife’s suicide can also be attributed to the numbness that may happen during or after the traumatic event. This numbness “oscillates with liability and incomplete control of one’s emotions” and leads to an inability in expressing emotions (Šofranac, 2011, p. 47).

Indifferent and relaxed, Lady Macbeth seems to be very determined and firm at the commencement of the play, when she prudently plans the conspiracy. She feels no sympathy; the noises heard before and during the crime seem to her as facts, and the knocking at the gate to Macbeth’s castle is not mysterious for her. In her famous lines, “unsex me here” (1.5.40), she demands that the forces of evil free her from the feebleness of womanhood. As a reaction to Macbeth’s fear, she feels relaxed and even questions Macbeth’s manhood and tries to soothe him by lessening the agonies of Banquo’s death; she exclaims, “I tell you yet again, Banquo’s buried; / he cannot come out on ’s grave” (5.1.60-61). She thinks that “A little water clears us of this deed”, and reproaches Macbeth for thinking too much about murder (2.2.67). She longs for atrocity and asks heaven, “And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood” (1.5.41-42). However, by the end of the play, she demonstrates the symptoms of a PTSD victim and finally commits suicide; then “traumatic disorder is indeed the apparent struggle to die” (Caruth, 1996, p. 53). According to Coriat, “fixed ideas or complexes occurring during the waking state may bring on attacks of sleep and when they occur during sleep, they may produce somnambulism” (p. 12). Lady Macbeth was suffering from sleep disorder and “slumbry agitation” (5.1.11) since that traumatic night; those memories that had been forgotten might return and revive when sleeping;

Somnambulism may assume various types, either the ordinary form of sleep-walking or it may develop to such a high degree that the subjects may wander about in strange places for hours or days and lose the memory of their real personality. (Coriat, p. 17)

This can also be described in Freud’s words, “the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action: he *repeats* it without of course knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud, “Remembering, Repeating” 150). Freud argues the latency of a trauma and its repeated and uncontrollable return. The state of amnesia or partial forgetfulness leads the victim to temporarily send the memories to the unconscious; Lady Macbeth unconsciously acts out in sleep the complexes that she had already

repressed. It might be concluded that, “The entire scene [of sleep-walking] furnishes a splendid illustration of Shakespeare's remarkable insight into mental mechanisms, particularly into abnormal states of consciousness” (Coriat, 1912, p. 66).

In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth alludes to Tasso's story of Tancred and Clorinda, in which, Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved, Clorinda, and remorsefully goes into a forest where he strikes a tree inside which the soul of Clorinda is imprisoned; the voice of Clorinda comes out, bears witness to a past traumatic event and tortures Tancred. Lady Macbeth was agonized by the sense of guilt and as her doctor stated, “she is troubled with thick-coming fancies, / That keep her from her rest” (5.3.38-39). The memory of that traumatic event, tortures her in a way that leads her to psychological and mental crises; she hysterically rubs her hand with the hope of getting rid of blood stain but it seems that “all the perfumes / of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (5.1.48-49). Disappointed with Lady Macbeth's status, her doctor emphasized the fact that her disease was beyond his practice and that she needs “the divine than the physician” (5.1.71). The sign of blood on her hands and even Banquo's ghost are the others within her traumatized self: “it is this plea by another who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken” (Caruth, 1996, p. 14). It seems that all her victims are calling upon her; there is a voice within her which returns “To plague the inventor” (1.7.10).

Harold Bloom believes that trauma victims not being successful in mastering trauma choose death as a defense against life's imposition as for them “life began as a struggle to return to death” (Caruth, 1995, p. 9). Lady Macbeth, wrecked by illusions of unattainable success, prefers death to a torturing life; she has not gained the desired tranquility and cries “Nought's had, all's spent, / Where our desire is got without content: / 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy / Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy” (3.2.5-7). Demonstrating the symptoms of parasomnia, Lady Macbeth is already a walking dead. She thinks that death can bring peace to her infected mind and finally, being fed up by the uncanny return of the traumatic event, attempts suicide, the cliché action performed by the traumatized victims. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth seek oblivion; they want to wash the blood stain and “Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, / Raze out the written troubles of the brain” (5.3.41-42), because “Oblivion throws our memories into relief and gives them shape and definition” (Whitehead, 2008, p. 121).

Macbeth has “strange infirmity” (3.4.86), he cannot sleep, he hears voices, he sees “horrible Shadow” (3.4.106), he is violent and fierce, and “all that is within him does condemn / Itself for being there” (5.2.24-25). These forces make Macbeth find a way to forget the past, but it is too late and “What's / done cannot be undone” (5.1.64-65) and even so-called brave Lady Macbeth paralyzed by fear and horror, is led to hysteria.

Every mental experience might leave its marks upon one's nervous system. They will be stored in the form of memory and later on get revived either voluntarily or involuntarily, “For those mental states which exist in an active but latent form in consciousness, but of which we are not aware, the term subconscious or unconscious is applied” (Coriat, 1912, P. 7). Once again, it is useful to remind the readers of the definition of the concept of trauma as,

A response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (or avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth, 1995, p. 4)

The ambitious Macbeth, being already under the influence of his unconscious, was traumatized primarily by the plot of murder, and was partially numbed by intrusive hallucinations. He was seeing blood everywhere and on the sword with which he intended to kill Duncan: "And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, / Which was not so before" (2.1.46-47). Traumatic thoughts rotate in his "heat-oppressed brain" (2.1.39), everything around him is black and traumatic, "Nature seems dead" (2.1.50), and he has "fatal vision" (2.1.36) and "false creation" (2.1.38); his mind is "full of scorpions" (3.2.36) which are all products of his intended crime and self-imposed trauma. In her book, *Memory* (2008), Anne whitehead writes,

Trauma arises when a stimulus is so powerful that it breaks through the protective shield and floods the underlying mental apparatus. The primary concerns of the individual are then to retrospectively master the amounts of stimulus which have broken in, and to repair the breach that has been made in the outer system. (p. 95)

For Macbeth, this stimulus is the memory of the assassinated king. He wants to master his trauma by furthering his bloody misdeeds but, reversely, it adds to his agonies. Macbeth tries desperately to untraumatize and repair his psyche but the vision of blood remains forever in his mind.

When a traumatic and painful experience occurs, the victim naturally wants to repress and banish it or wants to prevent it from entering the consciousness; however, "the experience although banished is not really dead or rendered completely quiescent, but remains active although latent, and may suddenly appear in consciousness or in the actions of the subject under certain conditions, such as in absentmindedness, sleep or dreams" (Coriat, 1912, p. 8). After committing the crime, Macbeth leaves the site of the crime but is possessed by the image of murder. Although he washes his hands and cleans the "filthy witness" (2.2.47), the vision of blood is engraved on his psyche. He cries, "I am in blood" (3.4.136) which nothing can wash: "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" (2.2.60-63). At the moment of committing murder, Macbeth was not conscious of trauma, because "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). The overwhelming power of the past returns at another time and place, in form of hallucinations; Macbeth hears strange voices in the castle which are imposed on him, "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth doth murder sleep'—the innocent sleep" (2.2.35-36). Bloodthirsty and traumatized, Macbeth furthers his misdeeds by conspiring in Banquo's murder and again he is "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in / To saucy doubts and fears" (3.4.24-25); He was a traumatized patient who had emotional reactions, without being able to understand the meaning of the integrations.

Like the other Shakespearean tragedies, *Macbeth* has a very forceful setting and time. In his immortal book, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1905), A. C. Bradley states, "A Shakespearean tragedy, as a rule, has a special tone or atmosphere of its own, quite perceptible, however difficult to describe" (p. 333). The action of the play happens mostly at night and darkness governs the atmosphere of the play. The traumatic event also happens at the darkness of night which adds to the horrors of the victim. Traumatized Lady Macbeth also shows her fear of darkness; "she has light by her con- / tinually" (5.1.22-23). Everything is black and colorless and the only vivid color in the play is the red of blood. The frequent repetition of darkness and light symbolizes the trauma victim's changing state of mind; "the [traumatized] subject acts as if the original traumatic situation were still in existence and engages in protective devices which failed on the original occasion" (Ringel and Brandell, 2011, p. 3). Lady Macbeth tries to protect herself from the darkness of traumatic recalling by taking light with her. Hopeless Macbeth contemplates on the triviality of

life and he asks stars to hide his misdeeds with the hope of mastering his trauma; “Stars, hide your fires! / Let not light see my black and deep desires” (1.4.50-51).

The repetition of the memory of traumatic events can happen in different ways; in his book, *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* (2002), quoting Avital Ronel, Julian Wolfreys writes that “trauma can be experienced at least two ways ... as a memory one cannot integrate into one’s own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others” (p. 136). In the same book, Wolfreys states that the memory of trauma can return in the shape of a ghost or phantasm. In *Macbeth*, the ghost of Banquo, for the murder of whom Macbeth is responsible, appears and by its apparition tortures him, psychologically. This happens in the fourth scene of act three of the play and adds to the hero’s agonies. Unlike others in the banquet scene, Macbeth was able to see the ghost as a traumatic recalling, but he was not able to communicate this uncanny event to others and everybody thought that he was crazy, whereas he was sane but traumatized. Earlier in the play, Macbeth believed that the illusionary visions like that of dagger were unreal: “A dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain” (2.1.38-39), but in the banquet scene, the apparition of the ghost of Banquo to Macbeth testifies to his intense trauma. Here the need to testimony and bearing witness is crucial; Macbeth has to bear witness to traumatic past, in order to overcome his trauma. But, he was misunderstood; those around him thought of him as mad and did not care that he was an individual “inwardly or unconsciously struggling with how to absorb and in some measure, confront what [he] has thrust upon” (Caruth, 1995, p. 137).

Macbeth is bewildered between knowing and not knowing; he confesses, “You make me strange” (3.4.112). In her introduction to the second part of her book, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth writes about this uncanny return of trauma, “While the images of traumatic reenactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control” (p. 151). Macbeth hears a sound of knocking, he hears other mysterious sounds: “How is ’t with me, when every noise appals me?” (2.2.58). Although these sounds are very familiar, he does not know where and from what world they come. He cannot understand this reenactment, because trauma “has never from the beginning, been integrated into understanding” (Caruth, 1995, p. 153). Trauma narratives do not aim at explaining and representing violent events but to convey their incomprehensibility, “what returns to haunt the victim ... is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way its violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth, 1996, p. 12). And this is what mostly hurts trauma survivors; the occurrence of traumatic event cannot be comprehended, because at the moment of crises the victim is unprepared and mostly busy surviving rather than understanding what is going on; “something is ‘remembered’ which has never been ‘forgotten’ because it was never at any time noticed - was never conscious” (Freud, 1914, p. 149), and that is why, in their book *Traumatic Pasts* (2001), Paul Lerner and Mark S. Micale argue that,

It seems impossible to define trauma by external, objective criteria. Rather, as observers have long claimed for the clinical realm, trauma turns out to be not an event per se but rather the experiencing or remembering of an event in the mind of an individual or the life of a community. (p. 20)

Macbeth was looking at his hands; they were alive and moving but the trace of blood was mysterious and incomprehensible; it was a wound in his mind, a “sealed memory, kept as a crypt or as an unconscious” (Wolfreys, 2002, p. 136), which had to be cured in the presence of a therapist who could listen to his agonies; the reader of a literary work can play the role of this therapist, and this is the aim of most of literary researches concerning trauma and its victims. In

the opinion of Cathy Caruth, the harbinger of literary trauma studies, the aim of trauma studies is "to ask how we can listen to trauma beyond its pathology for the truth that it tells us, and how we might perhaps find a way of learning to express this truth beyond the painful repetition of traumatic suffering" (Caruth, 1995, p. xii).

The pointlessness of life and the feeling of aimlessness are evident in trauma victims; the traumatized individual's mind is in permanent travel between repression and reliving; "the history of a traumatized individual is nothing than the determined repetition of the event of destruction" (Caruth, 1996, p. 53). And life becomes hollow and meaningless amidst this clash. Macbeth's lengthy soliloquy at the end of the fifth scene of Act five discloses his reluctance to live such an agonizing life,

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. 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. (5.5.19-28)

It seems that Macbeth prefers death to life; he frequently talks about murdered Duncan who is now at peace and, like Lady Macbeth, he prefers to die. He has committed the murderous act but instead of peace of mind he has strange things in his mind; his agony is aggravated with the apparition of Banquo's Ghost and the horror of the traumatic night returns. In modern trauma theory, there is an emphasis on the destructive role of traumatic repetition on victims' lives and their tendency toward death. As modern neurobiologists maintain,

The repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration. And this would seem to explain the high suicide rate of survivors. (Caruth, 1996, p. 53)

Unlike the traumatized Lady Macbeth, Macbeth does not commit suicide but some of his lines such as "Duncan is in his grave; / After life's fitful fever he sleeps well" (3.2.22-23), "Better be with the dead, / Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace" (3.2.19-20), and "I have liv'd long enough" (5.3.22) testify to the fact that he is fed up with the frequent shift of repression and repetition of trauma.

Unlike Lady Macbeth, Macbeth has sought a rather stable status towards the end of the play; he intends to fight with Malcolm and Macduff and confesses his guiltiness by stating that "my soul is too much charg'd" (5.7.34). This is the main difference between Shakespeare's male and female characters: just like Hamlet and Ophelia, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth exchange their insane role; "Shakespeare's male characters regain sanity, while women plunge into irreversible madness, oblivion and absence from the stage" (Šofranac, 2011, p. 50). Lady Macbeth is drowned

in the chaotic ocean of her sense of guilt and trauma and is “troubled with thick-coming fancies, / That keep her from her rest” (5.3.38-39), and this brought her suicidal tragic end. Lady Macbeth's mental disorder has thus been followed through her life “through all the phases of its evolution, from the birth of the first complex in her mind to her final dissolution and suicide” (Coriat, 1912, p. 88).

III. Conclusion

There is a gap among literary works on trauma in *Macbeth*. Though there are a lot of precious literary contributions to *Macbeth* and psychoanalysis, there are very few to *Macbeth* and trauma. In this article, the authors intended to read *Macbeth* with a somewhat different outlook i.e. that of trauma, which invites future researchers to more and more analysis. At the end of the present article, an important conclusion can be drawn: Macbeth and his wife are not instinctively tyrant and mad but are victims of an unresolved trauma which leads to a more severe form of trauma in their later life. Lady Macbeth is not a criminal, but the victim of a pathological mental dissociation which is due to her repressed desires and past emotional shocks. She is traumatized but she is not insane and her ambition comes from her repressed desire to have children. Macbeth is also a victim of trauma, who is haunted by his ambitious thoughts induced by the weird sisters, and wants to accomplish his repressed desire of possessing a kingdom. It is hoped that this study will help the real trauma victims and prevent their silent death. With regard to silent death of trauma victims, the doctor in the play says: “I have / known those which have walked in their sleep who / have died holily in their beds” (5.1.56-8). In this age of trauma, the literary study of trauma allows us to bring into significance the agonies of modern humanity.

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