Analysis of *Macbeth* through Multiple Literary Lenses

We read to understand human beings on an individual level, but also to understand us as a society.   
  
  
You will complete all **three** assignments. However, it is your discretion as to which order they will be completed. I will be taking in questions **at the end** of Act 1, Act 3, and Act 5.   
  
You **MUST** **use MLA Citation** for your response. This includes, going to the Internet or other sources for addition help. I will NOT be marking papers that have not used proper citation.

Although, this is **not** an essay, you must still proper **paragraph structure**.

Each assignment should be roughly one page, double spaced, size 12 font.

* Tip: remember think about the deeper meaning behind your answers. Does it reveal something essential about the characters or the author; is it a social commentary; essentially, what do we learn as the reader from your analysis?



**NOTES: FEMINIST THEORY APPLIED TO *MACBETH***

**THE FEMINIST APPROACH**

Feminism is an evolving philosophy. Feminism in literature is an even newer area of study and thought. The basis of the movement, both in literature and society, is that the Western world is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, ruled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and judged by men).

The social movement of feminism found its approach to literature in the 1960s. Of course, women had already been writing and publishing for centuries, but the 1960s saw the rise of a literary theory. Until then, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men). Women were thought to be unintelligent (at least in part because they were generally less formally educated than men), and many women accepted that judgment. It was not until the feminist movement was well under way that women began examining old texts to reevaluate their portrayal of women and writing new works to fit the “modern woman.”

The feminist approach is based on finding suggestions of misogyny (nega­tive

attitudes about women) within pieces of literature and exposing them. Feminists

are interested in exposing elements in literature that have been accepted as the

norm by both men and women. They have even dissected many words in Western

languages that are clearly rooted in masculinity. Feminists argue that since the past

millennia in the West have been dominated by men—whether they be the

politicians in power or the historians recording it all—Western literature reflects

masculine bias, and consequently, represents an inaccurate and harmful image of

women. In order to fix this image and cre­ate a balanced canon, works by females

and works about females should be added and judged on a different, feminine scale.   
  
**Three main areas of study/points of criticism:**

• differences between men and women—how are they being portrayed

• women in power or power relationships between men and women

• the female experience the events. For example, are they depicted with sensitivity, harshness, etc.

Feminist Assignment:   
Choose **two** of the following questions to answer through a **close reading** of one of the scenes, of your choice, from the play. Use the **focus of study** as a your guide.   
  
**Finally**, if Macbeth was to be made into a modern

play/movie/TV series, would the male and female gender

dynamics be the same. Explain.

**Essential questions for a feminist reading**:

1. What stereotypes of women are present? Are female characters oversimpli­fied? Weak? Foolish? Excessively naive?

2. Do the female characters play major or minor roles in the action of the work? Are they supportive or independent? Powerless or strong? Subservient or in control?

3. If the female characters have any power, what kind is it? Political? Economic? Social? Psychological?

4. How do the male characters talk about the female characters?

5. How do the male characters treat the female characters?

6. How do the female characters act toward the male characters?

7. How do the female characters act toward each other?

8. Is the work in general sympathetic to female characters? Too sympathet­ic?

9. Are the female characters and situations in which they are placed oversim­plified or presented fully and in detail?

10. Do any of the work’s themes touch upon any idea that could be seen as a feminist issue? Is the theme supportive or disparaging of women?

**Focus of Study**

* The relationship of Macbeth to Lady Macbeth
* Macbeth’s relationship with women—Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters
* The dynamic of foil characters with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and their development/ change in the story--Act 1, compared to Act 4 and 5
* Lady Macbeth’s role in the tragedy
* Compare Lady Macduff to Lady Macbeth, wife and mother (Act 1, compared to Act 4, and possibly Act 5)

**NOTES: PSYCHOANALYTICAL/FREUDIAN CRITICISM APPLIED TO *MACBETH***

**PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

The terms “psychological,” or “psychoanalytical,” seem to encompass essentially two almost contradictory critical theories. The first focuses solely on the text itself with no regard to outside influences; the second focuses on the author of the text.

According to the **first view**, and the one we will be focusing on, reading and interpretation are limited to the work itself. One will understand the work by examining **the conflicts, charac­ters, dream sequences and symbols.** In this way, the psychoanalytic theory of literature is very similar to the Formalist approach to literature. One will fur­ther understand that a character’s outward behavior might conflict with inner desires, or might reflect as-yet-undiscovered inner desires.

**Main areas of study/points of criticism of the first view:**

• There is an emphasis on the meaning of dreams. This is because psycho­analytic theory believes that dreams are where a person’s subconscious desires are revealed. What a person cannot express or do because of social rules will be expressed and done in dreams, where there are no social rules. Most of the time, people are not even aware what it is they secretly desire until their subconscious goes unchecked in sleep.

• According to psychoanalytic theory, which is based off of Freud’s theory, there are three parts to the subcon­scious, which is the largest part of the human personality. The three parts are:

1. The id—the basic desire. The id is the fundamental root of what each person wants. There is no sense of conscience in it, thus making it everyone’s “inner child.” Children, before they are taught social skills, operate entirely through the id. They cry in public, wet their diapers, and demand immediate gratification of their needs and desires, to name just a few things.

2. The superego—the opposite of the id. This is the repository of all socially imposed behavior and sense of guilt. While the id is innate, the superego is learned through parental instruction and living in society. Humans develop a superego by having parents scold them and other members of society criticize or teach them.

3. The ego—reality. The balance between the id and the superego. The ego takes   
 the desires of the id and filters them through the rule base in the superego and   
 comes up with an action that satisfies both entities. The ego realizes that the id   
 must be satisfied, but that there are certain socially acceptable ways to go about   
 satisfying it.

Psychoanalytical Assignment:

Choose **two** of the following questions to answer through a **close reading** of one of the scenes, of your choice, from the play. Use the **focus of study** as a your guide.   
  
**Finally**, respond to how you think **your conscious** would deal with murder compared to Macbeth and/or Lady Macbeth? What does that reveal about any similarities or differences between you and the character(s)?

**Essential questions for a psychoanalytic reading**:

1. What are the traits of the main character? How does the author reveal those traits?

2. What do you learn about the character from the way other characters relate to him or her? Is this similar or different from how the character view him or herself ?

3. What do you infer about the character from his/her thoughts, actions, and speech?

4. What discrepancies exist between the author’s portrayal of the character and how other characters react to him or her?

5. Is the main character a dynamic character (does he or she change through­out the course of the story)? If so, how and why?

6. What types of relationships exist in the work?

7. What types of images are used in conjunction with the character? What do they symbolize?

8. What symbols are used in the course of the story? What do they symbol­ize?

9. Do any characters have dreams or inner monologues? What is revealed about a character through dreams that would not otherwise be revealed?

10. Are there any inner conflicts within the characters? How are they revealed? Are they ever solved?   
11. Do any characters perform uncharacteristic actions? If so, what? What could these mean?

**FOCUS OF STUDY:**

• Examine the Weird Sisters and Banquo as extensions of Macbeth’s psyche.

* Compare Lady Macbeth immediately after the murder of King Duncan, and then in Act 5. Think about her dream. Why does Shakespeare use a doctor and a gentlewoman as the narrators of this scene?
* Examine the weather and animals, especially in Act 2. Think about parallelism, correlative objective, symbolism, etc.
* Examine the role/symbolism of the apparitions in the play, either as a whole or individually. Think about Banquo’s ghost in Act 3, and/or the children in Act 4.

**NOTES: NEW HISTORICISM APPLIED TO *MACBETH***

* **NEW HISTORICISM**
* A common tendency in the study of literature written in, and/or set in, a past or foreign culture is to assume a direct comparison between the culture as presented in the text and as that culture really was/is. New Historicism asserts that such a comparison is impossible for two basic reasons.
* First, the “truth” of a foreign or past culture can never be known as estab­lished and unchangeable. At best, any understanding of the “truth” is a matter of interpretation on the parts of both the writer and the reader. This is most blatantly evident in the fact that the “losers” of history hardly ever get heard. The culture that is dominated by another culture is often lost to history because it is the powerful that have the resources to record that history. Even in recent past events, who really knows both sides of the story? Who really knows the whole of the Nazi story? Or the Iraqi story? New Historicists argue that these unknown histories are just as significant as the histories of the dominant cul­ture and should be included in any worldview. Since they often contradict “tra­ditional” (i.e., the winner’s) history, there is no way to really know the ironclad truth.
* Second, while the text under consideration does indeed reflect the culture in which it was written (and to some degree in which it is set), it also *participates* in the culture in which it is written. In other words, its very existence changes the culture it “reflects.” To New Historicists, literature and culture are born of one another. For example, although Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* certainly reflected the culture of the south during the mid-20th century, it also became a tool to raise awareness of and change certain elements of that culture.

**Main areas of study/points of criticism:**

* Traditional history is, by its nature, a subjective narrative, usually told from the point of view of the powerful. The “losers” of history do not have the means to write their stories, nor was there usually an audience interested in hearing them. Most cultures, once dominated by another, were forced to forget their past. To maintain its sovereignty, the dominant culture simply did not allow the old, defeated culture to be remembered.

• The powerless also have “historical stories” to relate that are not to be found in official documents, mostly because they played no hand in creat­ing them.

• The questions to ask are not: “Were the characters based on real people?” “Are any characters or events in the text drawn from the author’s life and experiences?” or “Is the text an accurate portrayal of the time period in which it is set?” Instead, ask ‘What view or understanding of the relevant culture does this text offer?” and “How does this text contribute to or shape the understanding of the culture it represents?”

* The text, rather than being a static artifact of a definable culture, is a par­ticipant in a dynamic, changeable culture. Every time someone reads it, he or she brings a unique set of experiences and points of view that change the meaning of the text, however slightly.

New Historian Assignment:   
Choose **two** of the following questions to answer through a **close reading** of one of the scenes, of your choice, from the play. Use the **focus of study** as a your guide.   
  
**Finally**, explain how one would write a play based off of our **current political climate** (nationally or globally). What would be the **themes** of this political play? What would the audience **learn** about people/society? Explain.

**Essential questions for a New Historicist reading:**

1. What events occurred in the writer’s life that made him or her who he or she is? What has affected his or her look on life?

2. Who influenced the writer? What people in his or her life may have helped her form her worldview?

3. What did the writer read that affected his or her philosophy?

4. What were the writer’s political views?

5. At what level in the social order was the writer raised? How did his eco­nomic and social situation affect him?

6. From what level in the social pecking order did the writer’s friends come? How were they employed?

7. How powerful was the writer socially?

8. What concerned the writer about society? What did he or she do about it?

9. What type of person was the writer in his or her society?

10.What was happening in the world at the time the book was written? What was occurring during the time in which it’s set?

11. What were some major controversies at the time the book was written? The time in which it is set?

12. Who was on either side of the controversy? Who were the powerful? Who were the powerless?

13. Why were the powerful in their positions of power? What qualities did they have? What events transpired to get them to their positions?

14. How did the public/critics receive the work when it was first published?

**FOCUS OF STUDY**

* Examine the text for clues to the political situation in England in 1606-1607
* Examine *Macbeth* as representative of pre-English-Civil-War Literature (MB-1606-1607 ECW-1642)
* Examine the role of Banquo as a means for Shakespeare to secure his king’s patronage
* Examine how *Macbeth* is written both to entertain and perhaps educate various levels of Jacobean society
* Examine what *could* be Shakespeare’s motivation for writing *Macbeth* in relation to the political climate of the time  
    
  Adapted from The Multiple Critical Perspectives of Macbeth. Prestwick House, Inc. 2005.