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"STARS, HIDE YOUR FIRES..." – A STUDY IN SHAKESPEARE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL METHOD

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Abstract. *This paper examines Shakespeare's psychological craftsmanship displayed in his tragedy, Macbeth. A comparison is made to the work Crime and Punishment by the Russian author, F. M. Dostoyevsky, with regards to the motivations for the crimes of the both protagonists. Those motivations are traced in the psychological subtexts in the mentioned literary works, particularly in the suppressed feelings of inferiority. The emphasis is put on the fluid psychological development of Shakespeare's character, from a valiant knight to a merciless murderer and a tyrant. Several side issues, such as morality and ambition are also explored, as well as their influence on Macbeth's fate and eventual demise.*

Key Words: *Shakespeare, psychology, Dostoyevsky, crime, punishment, suppressed.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Macbeth, most probably written in 1606, and first published in the First Folio in 1623, is considered to be one of Shakespeare's four major tragedies, while at the same time being the shortest one of these. This obvious lack of the literary quantity does not in any possible manner affect the quality of the play – for Shakespeare's talents never lay in telling epic stories, filled with adventures and other diverse digressions, but in deep and striking characterizations, that do more for the credibility of the story than the tons of page-fillers found in the works of less talented authors.

In Plato's *Republic*, which is essentially a discussion on justice, Socrates uses the metaphor of a republic to represent human soul. In order to see its intricacies, he states, you need to magnify it to the largest possible extent so that all the details could be examined and explained. Thus, while elaborating on the workers, the soldiers, and the princes, it is quite obvious that he is truly referring to the human desires, will and mind. The same holds true as regards Shakespeare – little is known about actual historic Macbeth's rule over Scotland than that which is necessary for the depiction of his fictional

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character. The fall of Macbeth is not the fall of a king, a politician, but a fall of a human being, whose distinguished position is used to depict a great and powerful man, therefore making his demise look even more tragic. Macbeth is a king among the men for his superb qualities both as a human and a soldier before he slays Duncan and seizes the throne; following that, he diminishes in both aspects, until he is reduced to a base murderer with no emotions whatsoever, shallow and unmoved to the extent of his great fall. This complies with Northrop Frye's theory of tragedy, more specifically, the first phase of the tragic development of the hero, "in which the central character is given the greatest possible dignity in contrast to the other characters, so that we get a perspective of a stag pulled down by wolves. The sources of dignity are courage and innocence, and in this phase the hero or heroine usually is innocent."[1]

That this is true can be proven by an intertextual comparison. In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov treads a similar path, experiencing the same fears, exhibiting like ambitions, and suffering to the equal extent as the king of Scots. Of the two differences between them, one is truly important, and refers to Macbeth's complete fall, as opposed to Raskolnikov's subsequent moral rise. The other difference is evidence as well – Raskolnikov is a student, detached from any form of power as much as Macbeth is attached to it. The synchronicity of their destinies shows us that this is purely an aesthetic divergence – in Shakespeare's times the rulers of the earth were eclipsing the destinies of other people, all in accordance with the Elizabethan world-view; in Dostoyevsky's time, there were wide social movements of young intelligentsia in Europe, and the voice of an ordinary man was far more important than that of a chancellor or a tsar. This adds up to the universality of Shakespeare's work: human destinies always seem to be above a certain historical context – to quote Wright and La Mar: "the author reveals the tragedy that befalls two people who elect to follow a course of evil for the satisfaction of their ambition"[2], with the main stress, of course, being on the word *two people*.

The aim of this paper is to show Macbeth's ruin in the psychological terms: his ambition and the influences from both within and without, together with the underlying stress on Shakespeare's psychological method of writing. It will also be shown at which point his tragedy passed the point of no return and thus could not be, along with the accompanying emotional and rational chaos in his mind.

2. "STARS, HIDE YOUR FIRES, LET NOT LIGHT SEE MY BLACK AND DEEP DESIRES"[3]

In the works of writers such as Shakespeare, transitions in characters flow smoothly that in the end we feel that it ought to have been so. The final misery of Macbeth at the end of the play will be shown as a logical outcome, even though these two 'Macbeths', the one in the first, and the other in the last act of the play, are, in many aspects, two different men. In order to explain this psychological progression from the thane of Glamis to the beheaded king of Scotland, we have to focus our attention on his state of mind in the very beginning.

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[1] Frye, N., (1990), *Anatomy of Criticism*, Four Essays, 'The Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy', Penguin, London, p. 219.
[2] Wright and La Mar, (1973), (Macbeth) 'A Study in Evil', in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, New York, p. 10.
[3] Shakespeare, W., (1968) *Macbeth,* Penguin Group, London, p. 35.

At first, Macbeth is mentioned by an unnamed captain as a brave general and soldier, who distinguished himself in battles against the invading army. His loyalty to king Duncan is indisputable, and as a sign of a great trust, he is chosen to be the host to the king himself and his two sons. All these facts exist merely to emphasize his value and valour, and serve as a contrastive device to Macbeth's later doings.

The first glimpse of Macbeth's psyche is during the first encounter with the witches. At the resplendent prospects of becoming a king, he betrays his secret thoughts simply by looking startled, which is immediately noticed by Banquo. At this point we must call upon T. S. Eliot's theory of *the objective correlative*. According to Eliot, for the purpose of conveying the often inexplicable inner feelings and thoughts of characters, a playwright often chooses to use external objects so as to show what is happening inside the human soul. The sordid appearance of the witches reflects the darkness of Macbeth's intentions; their chanting that "fair is foul, and foul is fair"[4] indicates his loss of the moral compass; finally, their predictions of him becoming the king reveal his hidden ambitions.

'Hidden' is the key word. Of course, Macbeth cannot reveal that he desires to be the king instead of Duncan. He knows that Duncan has two heirs, and that in no near future will he be in a position to lawfully ascend to the throne. Having these considerations in mind, it can only be concluded that Macbeth had a violent manner of bringing down Duncan on his mind from the very beginning, and that he tried to conceal it as best as he could. The letter to Lady Macbeth is a solid proof that this overthrow was not only thought of, but actively planned as well. On this topic Bradley asserts a similar opinion: "Precisely how far his mind was guilty may be a question; but no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of *fear* at the mere prophecy of a crown, or have conceived thereupon *immediately* the thought of murder. (…) In any case the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his own."[5]

The aspect of secrecy plays a significant role. We cannot deny that in the beginning Macbeth is a *good* man with *bad* intentions. The bloodthirsty plans make the internal struggle even more horrifying – should he give in to his "black and deep desires", that he is obsessed with repressing? This struggle tortures him in turn, just like it tortured Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov at one point. The Russian student panics just about everything – whether his attire or the way he walks and talks are too marked for everyone to notice – and this obsession nearly breaks him down before committing the murder, just the way Macbeth's will was broken at the beginning of the play. Because of this subconscious pressure, Raskolnikov suffers from a neurosis, and decides not to kill the old woman. The same happens to Macbeth who informs his wife that "We will proceed no further in this business"[6], and adds that he would feel an immense guilt for betraying all the honours and gifts he had received from the king.

[4] Ibid, p. 25.
[5] Bradley, A.C., (1985), *Shakespearean Tragedy*, The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy, 'Macbeth', Macmillan, London, p. 288.
[6] Shakespeare, W., (1968) *Macbeth,* Penguin Group, London, p. 41.

3. "I DARE DO ALL THAT MAY BECOME A MAN, WHO DARES MORE, IS NONE"[7]

We observed that both Macbeth and Raskolnikov gave up on their plans in one moment, yet both went back to them in the very next. What could produce this sudden turn? Again we postulate that the cause lies in the psychological element. Macbeth had already faced the pressure from within and had not been able to cope with it – hence his decision to stop. However, in this crucial moment, when he found himself in a situation somewhere between a firm resolution and a mild reluctance, came yet another influence. This time it was from the outside, epitomized in the persona of Lady Macbeth. Of course, it is by no means our intention to cast the shadow of guilt utterly upon Lady Macbeth – her doings would have no particular effect if there was not present in Macbeth himself the original intention for his dark doings. She merely tipped the balance to the other side of the scales, but even that proved to be of tremendous importance in Macbeth's criminal development.

Lady Macbeth is a unique character in Shakespeare's plays. With a presence in the drama that amounts to no more than some three hundred lines, she manages to be both a major and a memorable character. Their relationship throughout the play is certainly peculiar. They are very supportive of each other, exchanging affectionate letters, discussing everything to the smallest details, giving each other advice, and sharing mutual ambitions and fears. Moreover, they seem to behave in the opposite ways in the different parts of the play – in the beginning Lady Macbeth is more determined and courageous than her husband, a balance which is completely reversed in the last act. Still, the influence that Lady Macbeth can exert upon her husband in the first two acts, which was crucial for Macbeth's fall, proves to be vast.

Lady Macbeth uses this great sway over him to further their plans of becoming royalty. A keen psychologist as she proves to be, she chooses not to simply persuade him, but to question that which is most precious for him: his manhood. Lady Macbeth was aware of his unstable nature from the very beginning. Did she not, having read the letter from Macbeth, utter these words:

> "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd: yet do I fear thy nature,
> It is too full o' th' milk of humane kindness…"[8]

During the conversation with him, she repeats the same basic idea, using a somewhat different phrasing:

> "…Art thou afear'd
> To be the same in thine own act , and valour,
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem?
> Letting I dare not, wait upon I would,
> Like the poor cat i' th' adage."

Lady Macbeth essentially challenges his ego. She calls him a coward, a man without resolve, who can only wish, but does not dare to actualize his wishes, a man who gives

[7] Ibid, p. 42.
[8] Ibid, p. 36

false promises, and most importantly, a man who is, having all these traits, not truly a man. One must understand Macbeth in order to understand why this blow dealt by his wife was so successful. His soul was that of a warrior, and for him competition was something normal, a part of the ordinary life, a discipline in which he had already proved himself, earning the title of a general, and a thane of two regions. His skills, strengths and qualities were widely recognized by the king and his companions. It was henceforth natural for him, having achieved such success, to want the recognition from the one person he holds dearest in his heart: his wife.

The scope of this paper does not allow us to enter into a more elaborate discussion whether such dilemma is, in its essence, false or not. We are of opinion that it cannot be really determined what makes a man a good warrior, a loyal husband, or a true man in his own right. What represents bravery in one man's mind can be a completely different concept in another's. For example, while there are many people who believe that defending oneself against a much stronger foe is a *par excellence* example of bravery, the others would assert that it would be much braver to defend a weaker person struggling against his or her stronger opponent. Or, on the other hand, what could be the image of an ideal woman? Many men would answer that she ought to be beautiful, and as many of them that she ought to be at least loyal; others would expect of her to share their views on life. The list of both dilemmas and the corresponding required qualities grows ever longer the more one delves into meditating upon such topics. Yet, these perspectival mystifications were what allowed Lady Macbeth to gather so persuasive arguments. And she was further helped by the very human nature, prone to uncertainties and insecurities, and ever-prepared to defend itself and prove its worthiness.

In such considerations, as we have stated, there could be no absolute truth. As there could not be one in the case of Raskolnikov's essay about two types of people, Napoleons and lice, to which, in his quasi-intellectual folly, he felt obliged, and because of which he had the need to show to people of what 'material' he was built. It was Raskolnikov's monomania, his intellectual obsession that caused him to set the standards that cannot be truly set, or not at least in such a simplistic Manichean black-and-white duality, where a person or a thing is either good or bad, either earthly or divine. Macbeth makes the same mistake. From his lofty position he only seems to see things in black and white (seeing them, indeed, more in black, and even blood-red tones, as is presented with the imagery of the play). His logic is as follows: if he does not dare to murder the king, but in the same time his wife vows to kill a child of her own if that was her promise in the first place, then he is not brave – or at least not *as brave as* Lady Macbeth. Thus, he is psychologically put into an inferior position in which he, an accomplished warrior who has faced and slain numerous enemies on the battlefield is now not an equal to his wife, not *as good as* her.

It is for these reasons that Macbeth felt attacked and in a need to defend himself against the accusations which denied all that he was supposed to be. The only solution was to take some practical steps, and through the material evidence prove to Lady Macbeth that he was *as strong as* her. His chief hubris, ambition, was now fuelled by yet another tragic flaw – pride. And to extinguish hubris, as Heraclitus said, takes more than to extinguish fire. The tragic flames that were burning inside of Macbeth's soul were by no means extinguished – there was never such an attempt – but were additionally stimulated by the character of equally ambitious and, in that moment, far more daring Lady Macbeth. He became a furnace, in which sins were boiling, ready to explode and deliver its deadly contents.

4. "O, FULL OF SCORPIONS IS MY MIND, DEAR WIFE…"[9]

In a night filled with howls and shrieks, with the sky flashing with lightning, and the whole Scotland descending into an overall nightmarish atmosphere of darkness and horror, Macbeth walks on the path of a murder, and one thing he sees is a phantomlike knife in front of him. Nothing could describe better the terrifying magnitude of the deed he is going to commit. In one sense, the murder of Duncan and the "supernatural" occurrences across the country show us the disturbance of the Elizabethan natural order, in which king was, primarily for his honours and responsibilities, a person right below the God himself and his angels, and whose violent death was supposed to have such consequences. On the other hand, it might just serve our analysis as yet another objective correlative describing Macbeth's psyche in that moment. It is in a tremor, aware of what it has done. Yet this moment is of a crucial importance in our analysis, being the last moment of choice for Macbeth, just as it was the last moment of choice for Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*.

They are presented with a dilemma: should the boon acquired by the act of assassination be used, should the possibility to become a king, in Macbeth's case, or to become rich, in Raskolnikov's case, be seized? From here on the destinies of the two protagonists diverge. Raskolnikov chooses not to use the riches – he hides them, and steps onto the long road of repentance. With Macbeth, it is quite the opposite. He chooses to become the king, and to entangle himself even more in the crime. The other reason for the continuation of his fall is the lack of a positive person who would bring about the repentance, like Sonya Marmeladova in Raskolnikov's case, as opposed to Lady Macbeth, ever-supportive in evil deeds.

First, he kills the king's guards so as to blame them for the murder. Then Malcolm and Donalbain, king's sons, are implicated in their father's death, and are forced to flee from the country. Macbeth is crowned, but is still not satisfied, still insecure and doubtful whether he will be discovered. He was not alone when the prophecies of the witches were exclaimed. And now that they have all come true, Macbeth is afraid of Banquo's suspicions. The chaos in his mind is at its peak: there is nobody he could trust, nobody to lean on, except for his wife. And to her he confesses the following words:

> "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife:
> Thou know'st, that Banquo and his Fleance lives."[10]

To this Lady Macbeth answers:

> "But in them, Nature's copy's not eterne."[11]

Again, Macbeth has to commit a murder, and once more, he is prompted by his wife to do so. And while the murder of Duncan was done with the numerous changes of moods and the efforts to acquire the resolve for the endeavour, the assassination of Banquo was executed rather quickly and easily. Lady Macbeth does not need to persuade him any more. Dieter Mahl's theory may lend us support for such an argument: "There is a clear contrast between the agonized decision to kill Duncan and the calculating chill of the arrangements to rid himself of Banquo. Neither supernatural visions nor the energy of

[9] Ibid, p. 63.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

Lady Macbeth are needed, and no moral scruples seem to weaken his determination although he is fully aware of Banquo's 'royalty of nature'."[12] The three assassins are quickly summoned and sent to do their errand, and in no time are Banquo and his son intercepted, with Banquo getting murdered, and his son, Fleance, fleeing.

No murder is perfect, and now the murderer in Macbeth could never find peace. In his eyes, everyone is a potential traitor; what he did could happen to him as well. For, who knows if there is another Macbeth with his Lady, dreaming of becoming a royal pair?

In a precise and remorseless manner Lady Macduff and her son are eliminated, while Macduff, the primary target, manages to escape the execution. Though no other crimes of Macbeth are specified from there on, we can guess that numerous more people are killed, imprisoned or expelled from the country. Is this not concordant with Plato's view of tyranny? For Plato, the character of the tyrannical men is such that they are drunkards, at the same time enamoured and delirious. In the end they resemble wolves, prowling for everybody, and everybody prowling for them, never certain if their life or crown would last longer than one of their sleepless nights. The following quotation, taken from the conversation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth following the murder of the king, presents us with the evidence that tyrannical Macbeth has indeed killed sleep:

> "Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more:
> Macbeth does murther Sleep, the innocent Sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in Life's feast."[13]

5. "OUT, OUT, BRIEF CANDLE, LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW…"[14]

The last phase in Macbeth's psychological development is in the total opposition to the beginning of the play. The sympathy we feel for Macbeth in many ways stems from his suffering, his diverse emotions, his high achievements and the great honours he received. Now he is stripped of all that. His soul has become barren, incapable of emotionally relating itself to any other human being, even Lady Macbeth, who, completely consumed by guilt, is wandering across the palace in an endless sleepwalk. Ironically, while Lady Macbeth *lives* in a perpetual nightmare, Macbeth does not sleep at all. As G. Wilson puts it, "He is plunging deeper and deeper into unreality, the severance from mankind and all normal forms of life is now abysmal, deep."[15] He cannot even feel anything else any more, fear in particular. At one point he says:

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[12] Mehl, D., (1986), *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p. 120
[13] Ibid, p. 47.
[14] Ibid, p.101.
[15] Wilson Knight, G. (1968), *The Wheel of Fire*, 'Macbeth and the Metaphysic of Evil', Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, p. 155.

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors,
Direness familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me…"[16]

All this fearlessness is supported by Macbeth's great self-deception, having its source in the second meeting with the witches. Again, they basically tell him what his deep suspicions are, but this time he does not listen to them. Instead of pausing for a moment and trying to decode their sayings, he takes them at face value, discarding the deeper allegorical meaning they are supposed to convey. Once more, Macbeth entertains the aforementioned quality of judging things only by their appearance, the trait in which he is fairly persistent throughout the entire play. Things either *are* by "widely accepted" standards, or they *are not at all.* There can be no metaphor, no hidden meaning, because Macbeth's mind is focused only on retaining power. He does not have time to ponder upon a possible deeper sense of the second prophecy, with all of his enemies plotting ceaselessly and waiting for him to make a wrong step. Therefore, since trees cannot uproot and *walk*, and there is no human being that was not *born* out of a mother's womb, he is safe from any dangers whatsoever, or, in other words, *invincible*.

The causes of such a state of mind have been stated in the previous sections – the starting doubts and insecurity, the psychological pressures, the covering up of the criminal tracks, the cruel removal of all potential enemies – all these made Macbeth become so brutal and plain, a shadow of his former self, having kingship and power just for the sake of them. But, what are the results of it?

Firstly, it is a sense of a great disillusionment with life. Everything has become pointless and futile for Macbeth; no goal is true enough to be striven towards; there is no greater meaning, but that life is a transient feeling of the world, concluded by death. When informed about the demise of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth enters into the famous soliloquy about the event itself being vastly unimportant, and could have happened any day after, without major effect upon the scheme of things. In this Macbeth reminds us of the protagonist of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, who, after witnessing the horrors of the World War II, came to the conclusion that death simply happens. "So it goes", says Billy Pilgrim after mentioning any kind of death, whether of people, animals, plants, or even things.

So it goes with Macbeth who now, at the end of his life, has nothing to hide, though he still calls for darkness. Now it is a different kind of darkness, not the one intended to cover his black desires, but darkness that ends life, which, to him is:

"…A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing."[17]

With such bold convictions he charges into battle, and we see in practice that he indeed fears nothing, not even death. For, when it is revealed to him that Macduff was not

[16] Shakespeare, W., (1968), *Macbeth*, Penguin Group, London, p. 100-1.
[17] Ibid, p. 101.

ordinarily born (and indeed, what is truly revealed is that Macbeth misinterpreted the prophecies) - he still chooses to fight the inevitable:

"…And damn'd be him, that first cries hold, enough."[18]

With these words ends the life of Macbeth, the king of Scotland, who has in the end proven, at least to himself, not to be a coward, and that no other man could really do more than he could, but who has, in the process of doing it, completely lost himself and his soul.

6. CONCLUSION

The first and foremost objective of this analysis was to show and prove the fluency of Shakespeare's psychological craftsmanship, which was, according to Bradley, result of a significant effort on the playwright's behalf: "He appears actually to have taken pains to make the natural psychological genesis of Macbeth's crimes perfectly clear…"[19]. The critic also calls the play "the most remarkable exhibition of the *development* of a character to be found in Shakespeare's tragedies"[20]. The attempt to achieve that was through the descriptive analyses of Macbeth's psychological during the play, which provide us with glimpses into the gradual growing of his character.

The entire discussion would prove to be somewhat pointless if some practical conclusion could not be drawn in this paper. Literary masterpieces are prone to a multitude of discussions and views, and it would be naïve to state that the topic chosen was grasped so completely that there is nothing left to say, so that the rest would only be silence, as Shakespeare tells us in *Hamlet*. There is always something to say about Shakespeare's dramas, which form a source that can never be fully depleted. And, of course, there is always something new to be found in what Shakespeare wanted to say to his audience.

Macbeth tells us plenty things, yet we must concentrate on the themes in the context of this text. We saw the dark side of the ambition and how, unless controlled by the use of the moral code and humane means, it can come to control the ambitious one: for Macbeth barely questions the morality of his actions, often justifying them with what he sees fit at the moment, whether it is a prophecy, or a sense of an imminent danger coming from some of his false allies; its final consequences in the figures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, both devastated in their own ways. The power of certain, often vague, beliefs and prejudices is explored as well. The overwhelming need of Macbeth to prove that he is "worthy" and "man", and the corresponding need of Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's masterpiece to prove that he is "a Napoleon", are shown to have their tragic outcomes. The effects of the brutality and mercilessness are investigated, leading to one of the most quoted soliloquies in the history of literature. And lastly, *Macbeth* could serve as a political fable, investigating the lure of power and the dangers of attaining it simply for its own sake, largely useful for modern politicians and rulers, who could find so much to learn from this drama – even though we are somehow not very convinced that they would learn anything at all, even if they happened to read it, or see it at the theatre.

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[18] Ibid, p. 105.
[19] Bradley, A.C., (1985), Shakespearean Tragedy, The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy, 'Macbeth', Macmillan, London, p. 289.
[20] Ibid, p. 301.

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"ZVEZDE, SAKRIJTE SVOJE VATRE..." – STUDIJA O ŠEKSPIROVOM PSIHOLOŠKOM METODU

Danko Kamčevski

U ovom radu se proučava Šekspirova veština pri bavljenju psihološkim dimenzijama likova, na primeru njegove tragedije, Magbeta, a u poređenju sa delom ruskog autora F. M. Dostojevskog, Zločinom i Kaznom. Predmet istraživanja su motivacije za oba zločina i one se pronalaze u psihološkom podtekstu ovih književnih dela, naročito u potisnutim osećanjima inferiornosti. Stavlja se naglasak na fluidni psihološki razvoj Magbetovog karaktera, od odvažnog i časnog viteza, do nemilosrdnog ubice i tiranina. Nekoliko sporednih pitanja, poput moralnosti i ambicija su takođe predmet istraživanja, a naročito se ispituje njihov uticaj na razvoj Magbetove sudbine i njegov krajnji pad, i u moralnom i u ljudskom smislu.

Ključne reči: *Šekspir, psihologija, Dostojevski, zločin, kazna, potisnuto*.