

Twisted Endings and Altered Realities in Shakespeare's Plays

M. Muthu Lakshmi, C. Bhoomika, M. Sasikala, G. Suba Sree Devi

MA English

Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous), Tirunelveli.

mmuthulakshmi152003@gmail.com

Abstract: *William Shakespeare's plays continue to engage readers and audiences through their complex characters, poetic language, and, most importantly, their strikingly unconventional climaxes. This paper presents an analytical study of three significant Shakespearean plays Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet with particular emphasis on how their endings move away from ordinary reality and challenge audience expectations. Rather than offering predictable resolutions, Shakespeare constructs twisted climactic moments that intensify dramatic tension and leave a lasting emotional impact. In Macbeth, the prophecy that the protagonist cannot be defeated by a man "of woman born" initially appears to guarantee his invincibility. However, the revelation that Macduff was delivered through a Caesarean birth subverts natural assumptions and transforms fate into a powerful dramatic device. In The Merchant of Venice, the courtroom scene involving the demand for a "pound of flesh" presents a conflict between rigid justice and compassionate mercy. Although the bond seems legally binding, Portia's ingenious interpretation of the law leads to an unexpected reversal that surprises both the characters and the audience. Likewise, Romeo and Juliet reach its tragic climax through miscommunication and dramatic irony. The lovers' suicides, caused by mistaken belief rather than deliberate intent, highlight the destructive consequences of fate and human error. This paper argues that Shakespeare deliberately distances his climaxes from realistic outcomes to enhance dramatic power and thematic depth. These unpredictable endings not only resist audience anticipation but also reveal Shakespeare's exceptional creativity in redefining the nature of tragedy.*

Keywords: Dramatic Irony, Reality versus Fiction, Shakespearean Drama, Tragic Endings, Twisted Climaxes

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest dramatists in history, William Shakespeare's works delves deeply into human nature, power, morality, and fate, making them timeless. His remarkable ability to combine theatrical originality with psychological depth, particularly in the development of unusual and thought-provoking climaxes, is the reason his plays are still relevant today. Macbeth stands out among Shakespeare's tragedies because of its strong emphasis on ambition, prophecy, and moral decay. By creating a climax that seems supernatural but is based in human activity, the drama deviates from realistic expectations. Shakespeare purposefully plays with language, fate, and reality to produce a twisted conclusion that calls into question the audience's preconceptions as well as the protagonist's self-assurance. The concept of prophetic certainty is central to Macbeth. Upon their initial appearance, the Weird Sisters present a modified reality where the natural order is upset. Macbeth appears to be promised complete power and security in their prophecies. The statement that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth" is the most important of these guarantees. Because of this speech, Macbeth develops a fictitious sense of invincibility, thinking that he is immune to human defeat. Shakespeare examines how language may warp reality through the use of this prophecy as a dramatic device. Because he takes the prophecy literally, Macbeth concludes that he is untouchable because all men are "of woman born." This misinterpretation erodes his last moral control and solidifies his despotism. As a result, the prophesy



actively influences Macbeth's decisions, driving him more into violence and moral decline rather than just foretelling the future. The key to turning prophecy into action is Macbeth's ambition. Macbeth is first shown as a valiant and devoted warrior, but his run-in with the witches reawakens a perilous thirst for power. Shakespeare demonstrates how ambition may change one's perspective by having Macbeth view murder as a necessity rather than a crime. The fulfillment of destiny as he perceives it takes precedence over reality. This distortion of reality is accelerated by Lady Macbeth. She reinterprets morality and portrays evil as strength by challenging Macbeth's bravery and masculinity. The concept of altered reality is furthered by her well-known invocation to "unsex" herself, which represents the rejection of natural order. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth work together to create a society in which killing is acceptable, conscience is suppressed, and gaining power is the ultimate objective. The convoluted nature of Macbeth's denouement is greatly influenced by its supernatural elements. The witches' apparitions, which give half-truths wrapped in absolute guarantees, intensify Macbeth's delusion of confidence. Dramatic irony is produced by the second set of predictions, which warn Macbeth to be wary of Macduff while also reassuring him of his safety. As the audience eventually comes to realize how false these prophecies are, Macbeth continues to be blinded by his conceit. Shakespeare builds suspense with this theatrical irony. Macbeth is separated from reality and human judgment by his dependence on supernatural assurance. Because he believes in visions more than reason and prophesy more than ethics, his growing solitude is a reflection of his moral disintegration. The discovery that Macduff was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped" marks the pinnacle of Macbeth's finale. This scene exemplifies one of Shakespeare's most startlingly bizarre conclusions. Once appearing to guarantee Macbeth's fate, the prophecy turns out to be a linguistic trap. Macbeth's tragic misconception is revealed when the witches' altered world crumbles. Natural presumptions about birth and humanity are challenged by this discovery. Shakespeare redefines what it means to be "of woman born," challenging the assumptions of the audience. The revelation of human error, rather than supernatural intervention at the end, is the twist. Macbeth's failure to thoroughly examine prophecy is what ultimately brings him to ruin, not only fate. In contrast to certain tragic heroes, Macbeth only receives a portion of the credit at the end. He admits the witches' treachery when he discovers the prophecy's deceit, but he won't give up. Even as he clings to what remains of his honor, his ultimate choice to fight Macduff shows a melancholy acceptance of his fate. By giving Macbeth some humanity again, this scene highlights the intricacy of Shakespearean tragedy. Thus, Macbeth's conclusion is not just violent but also disconcerting. It is up to the viewer to decide if Macbeth's demise was due to his own desire or fate. Shakespeare purposefully avoids resolving this issue, which enhances the play's thematic complexity. Shakespeare's ability of dramatic composition is seen in Macbeth, where he manipulates reality. He produces a finale that defies simple reasoning by letting prophecy serve as both truth and deception. The play's conclusion embraces moral and psychological complexity rather than realistic certainty. Shakespeare demonstrates through Macbeth that tragedy depends on the dissolution of illusion rather than just death. The perils of unbridled ambition and unquestioning confidence in fate are shown by the twisted climax. Shakespeare does this by turning Macbeth into a potent examination of how changed circumstances can result in unavoidable devastation. Shakespeare's mastery in manipulating traditional conclusions to subvert audience expectations and moral presumptions is best seen in *The Merchant of Venice*. Here, reality is created and shaped by law, interpretation, and the social hierarchy that controls Venetian society, in contrast to Macbeth, where altered reality results from prophecy and psychological distortion. The drama examines how human sympathy and strict adherence to legal formalism can clash, resulting in a climax tension that unnerves both characters and viewers. Shakespeare presents the courtroom as a place where reality becomes negotiable and the power of the law may both uphold and skew justice by centering the conflict between Antonio and Shylock around an apparently unbreakable bond. Shylock's demand for a pound of Antonio's flesh is the main plot point in *The Merchant of Venice*. The connection seems legally solid at first glance, citing Venice's stringent contractual framework. Shakespeare, however, utilizes this scenario to show that law is a social construct influenced by rhetoric and human perception rather than an unchangeable fact. Instead than invalidating the legal system, Portia's court intervention modifies its structure to produce an unanticipated result. Shakespeare highlights the erratic nature of reality under human rule and the whims of the law by permitting Shylock to assert his



rights but eventually limiting him through formalities. The setting in the courtroom turns becomes a testing ground for moral thinking. The resolution reveals the law's vulnerability to hyperbole and selective interpretation, notwithstanding its portrayal as unbiased. In addition to being morally dubious, Shylock's literalistic quest for justice is also legally justified. Recognizing that justice in practice frequently deviates from justice in concept, the audience is compelled to face the gap between law and equity. Shakespeare creates a different reality through this tension, one in which following the law does not correspond to being morally upright. Portia's well-known discourse on mercy serves as a dramatic irony device as well as a moral precept. She promotes mercy as a divine quality, but by depriving Shylock of true compassion, her acts undermine this ideal. As a result, the conclusion raises ethical questions since, although victory is gained, Shylock's identity, faith, and independence are sacrificed. Shakespeare emphasizes how those in positions of authority can manipulate reality to suit their needs, so reaffirming the idea that social hierarchy is inextricably linked to legal and ethical systems. Shakespeare makes the audience consider the moral concessions made by social and legal systems by denying Shylock any genuine reconciliation. The play's resolution illustrates the effects of structural inequity by maintaining a lingering tension rather than offering moral closure. Shakespeare accomplishes this by turning what may have been a traditional humorous conclusion into a nuanced, ethically dubious ending. Shakespeare's larger strategy of deceiving narrative expectations is best illustrated at the conclusion of *The Merchant of Venice*. Through interpretation and creativity, the conclusion reshapes reality rather than offering simple satisfaction or punishment. The seeming surety of Shylock's contract is overturned by Portia's legal argument, which is founded on technical flaws. This philosophical twist reflects *Macbeth's* central theme, which is that human sight and knowledge are fundamentally unstable and that results are contingent rather than predestined. Shakespeare also criticizes prejudices in society. Systemic injustice is brought to light by the Venetian Christians' victory over Shylock, which calls into doubt the validity of social and legal authority. Shakespeare creates a complex reality in which moral and factual certainties are consistently postponed by arranging the climax around both legal reasoning and social power. The inequitable administration of justice and the effects of established hierarchy are left for the audience to consider. Language, the law, and social conventions all function as mediators of reality in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare shows that results are negotiated by human participation, interpretation, and language; they are not set in stone. Unexpected climaxes are created in the courtroom by the intersection of moral reasoning, literal reality, and social context. The loss of Shylock's possessions, religion, and independence symbolizes the unpredictability of reality when morality and the rule of law conflict. The Christians' relative success, on the other hand, highlights how authority is selective and exposes the shaky underpinnings of social order and justice. Shakespeare's skill in creating fictitious worlds through social and legal structures is most demonstrated in *The Merchant of Venice*. The play's climax defies traditional closure, proving that moral justice cannot be guaranteed by the law alone. Shakespeare instead depicts a universe where interpretation, authority, and moral compromise mediate reality, making it flexible and contingent. The twisted conclusion highlights the relationship between law, mercy, and power while challenging audience expectations and leaving ethical problems unanswered. Shakespeare continues to examine the frailty of human systems and the effects of warped vision in this play, underscoring the timeless value of his inventive storytelling devices. In contrast to *Macbeth* or *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* presents an alternative perspective on transformed reality. In this case, time, misunderstandings, and human error rather than prophecy or legal manipulation are the causes of the instability. Shakespeare uses temporal misalignment to create the tragic finale, when random occurrences and postponed knowledge combine to create disastrous results. The play highlights how reality in human experience is frequently brittle and temporary, demonstrating his ability to turn everyday situations into remarkable dramatic intensity. Time is manipulated in *Romeo and Juliet* to control the series of events that culminate in the lovers' deaths. A world where fate and human agency coexist is produced by miscommunication, hasty decisions, and the quickening of events. Shakespeare portrays time as a force that has the power to alter reality. Dramatic irony highlights the discrepancy between perception and reality since the audience is aware of Juliet's staged death. Romeo's later suicide, which was motivated by ignorance rather than willful evil, shows how brittle human comprehension is when pressured by temporal contingency. Dramatic irony plays a major role in the play's climax. Romeo acts as though Juliet has



passed away, even though the audience is aware that she is still alive. The play's main theme that human actions, no matter how well-intentioned, can have irrevocable consequences is emphasized by this misalignment between perception and knowledge, which also heightens emotional engagement. Shakespeare's use of time manipulation raises the emotional stakes and transforms a personal tragedy into a thought-provoking statement about life's unpredictable nature. He creates a world where fate seems both contingent and inevitable at the same time by highlighting the importance of timing and misunderstanding. Romeo and Juliet deprive the viewer of this kind of closure, in contrast to traditional tragic tales that provide conclusion through moral or social reconciliation. Shakespeare does not depict this reconciliation as restitution for the great loss suffered, even though the Montague–Capulet feud ends after the lovers' deaths. The young lovers' deaths come too late to avert catastrophe, implying that human misery frequently results from the confluence of chance, mistake, and social strife rather than just moral flaws. Shakespeare makes sure that the spectator feels the full weight of ambiguity and loss by declining to offer moral or narrative solace. Shakespeare creates a world where human limitations such as ignorance, a lack of communication, and rash decisions have a greater influence on results than fate or divine will. The terrible results of decisions made without complete knowledge are made clear by Romeo and Juliet's deaths. In this way, the play's altered reality is psychological, social, and temporal: social institutions reinforce misinterpretation, perception fails, and communication fails. Shakespeare's awareness of these interconnected elements shows how sensitive he is to the intricacy of the human condition and the transience of lived reality. Shakespeare's wider thematic concern in changing worlds is best illustrated by Romeo and Juliet's climactic resolution. By denying foreseeable conclusions, the play heightens its emotional impact rather than providing catharsis through reconciliation. The couples' simultaneous deaths highlight the unpredictable nature of human experience by generating a moving contrast between spectator expectations and story development. Shakespeare is innovative in that he views tragedy as a result of human limitations, knowledge, and time rather than just moral failure or cosmic vengeance. Shakespeare continuously subverts traditional narrative expectations in Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet by creating twisted endings and alternate realities. In each play, reality is a mediated experience influenced by time contingencies, law, prophecy, and misunderstandings rather than a set substance. These techniques result in climaxes that defy closure, cast doubt on moral presumptions, and force viewers to confront ambiguity critically. The contingency of time and human limitation turns ordinary circumstances into irreversible tragedy in Romeo and Juliet; law and social hierarchy manipulate outcomes and challenge notions of justice in The Merchant of Venice; and linguistic prophecy distorts perception and undermines moral certainty in Macbeth. Shakespeare shows in all three that human understanding is brittle and that moral and narrative closure is merely temporary. His plays persist because they expose the instability present in both societal systems and human intellect, provoke thought rather than offer a straightforward resolution, and unnerve rather than reassure. Shakespeare is recognized for his ability to write endings that are philosophically significant, emotionally stirring, and intellectually challenging. He ensures the drama's lasting relevance across generations by redefining tragedy as a place where unpredictability, contingency, and human limitation intersect through the investigation of altered realities and twisted climaxes.

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