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Beyond the Patriarchal Dividend: Navigating Complicit and Hegemonic Manhood in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

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Abstract:

While Renaissance scholarship has often examined Shakespearean tragedies through an apolitical or sovereign lens, early modern manhood remains an important area of inquiry in studies of Shakespearean drama and the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Hence, to evaluate this, this paper examines William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth through the theoretical lens of R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities. The concept classifies the male characters in the plays as hegemonic or complicit, based on their roles and positions in Hamlet and Macbeth. It explores how both plays develop hegemonic and martial ideals while exposing the supporting characters who portray complicit masculinity to ensure their roles in front of the court and to secure patriarchal dividends.

Besides, the objectives of the research include the construction of hegemonic and martial ideals established within the social and political structures of the setting of the plays, and also focus on revealing the realities of the men showing complicit masculinity to secure their patriarchal dividend. And at the end, the research concludes with the tracing of Connell's crisis tendencies by exploring how these plays show intellectual paralysis and hyper-violent ambitions of the heroes.

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Ultimately, this qualitative, comparative study finds that Hamlet and Macbeth expose the instability and contradictions of sovereign and patriarchal power by revealing how hegemonic and complicit forms of masculinity sustain and erode established hierarchies of manhood.
Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Macbeth, Patriarchal Dividend, Crisis Tendencies, Gender Studies.

1. Introduction-

While early English drama has examined the political lens of monarchical society, divine rights, and dynasties, traditional literature has often treated early manhood as static rather than as a dynamic, socially constructed hierarchy.

Renaissance drama mainly focuses on anxieties about honour and male authority, yet critical evaluations often lack a precise framework for developing the realities of internal politics within gender itself. Rather than viewing the tragic hero's flaws solely as individual or psychological failings, this study considers how such flaws may also reflect the tensions between patriarchal expectations and the limitations of masculine ideals. To move beyond these readings, this paper applies Australian sociologist R.W. Connell's sociological framework of masculinities to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, to study the concept of manhood and masculinities in early English society via two different tragedies to offer a critique of inheritance, contradictions, and fragility of men during respective historical periods.

By analysing Shakespearean drama through Connell's lens, we can see that no single definition of manhood can be declared. In works such as Gender and Power (1987) and Masculinities (1995), Connell argues that masculinities, or manhood, is not fixed. It keeps shifting according to power; at the very top lies hegemonic masculinity. It is considered the ideal state of a man who is dominant and keeps women and non-conforming men below him. Rarely does someone meet this criterion, as living up to this ideal level is impossible, and hence, most men fall into complicit masculinity.

While they do not possess qualities of being considered as ‘alpha’, they still benefit from the system's perks to enjoy what Connell calls the “patriarchal dividend”. Meanwhile, other men are pushed down into subordinate or marginalised positions to ultimately keep the ruling structure safe, as these structures or systems of power are demanding, and hence, the system cracks within itself, creating what Connell refers to as crisis tendencies.

Applying the socio- framework, the gap between historical gender ideals can be bridged. Modern literary theory can examine the ideas of chivalry. Shakespearean texts, i.e., Hamlet and Macbeth, serve as comparison points because they represent two different societal male expectations, i.e., the thoughtful and scholarly prince and the warrior or hero. Both protagonists are expected and pressured to showcase strict patriarchal authority, and hence, they become tools for political propaganda, rather than being humans with natural characteristics.

This comparative study analyses how these texts interrogate early modern manhood through three primary ways. First, the paper shows the supreme martial and hegemonic ideals at the core of the socio-political ecosystems of the Danish and Scottish courts. Second, it analyses how supporting characters such as Claudius, Polonius, Banquo, and Macduff enact complicit masculinity. These characters navigate institutional compromises to secure their positions in courts or to secure their share of the patriarchal dividend. At last, the third point traces Connell’s concept of "crisis tendencies" by examining how intellectual paralysis and grief in Hamlet clash with violent ambition in Macbeth, causing rigid structures of male authority to collapse within.

Ultimately, this study argues that Hamlet and Macbeth do not simply portray or endorse male power. Instead of showing total male dominance, the plays reveal that the protagonists are used to continuously try to be perfect, controlled, and aggressive men. These protagonists focus on showing, rather than performing, indicating the greed to save their patriarchal dividends. Rather

than presenting masculine dominance as a source of strength, the plays indicate how the pursuit of power and the burden to fulfil masculine expectations can contribute to the protagonists' downfall. In this way, Shakespeare's tragedies expose the destructive consequences of rigid gender roles and the contradictions within patriarchal structures.

1.1. Objectives-

The primary research objective examines the performance and structural collapse of manhood in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, especially in William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth, through R.W. Connell's sociological framework of masculinities.

The secondary research objective maps the construction of ideals of manhood, i.e., hegemonic masculinity and martial ideas within socio- political scenarios of the Danish and Scottish courts. It also analyses the heroes, Hamlet and Macbeth, alongside side characters like Claudius, Polonius, Banquo, and Macduff, who enact complicit masculinity to preserve their positions within their respective environments.

The third objective is to trace Connell's concept of "crisis tendencies" by evaluating how intellectual paralysis in Hamlet clashes with violent ambition in Macbeth, resulting in the breakdown of male authority.

2. Literature Review-

The study of gender has changed significantly over decades. Scholars have transformed their studies of patriarchy, as they used to see patriarchy as a universal and fixed system. Instead, scholars gradually came to see early modern manhood as historically shaped, conflicting, and

uncertain. Psychoanalytic and feminist approaches substantially influenced early work in this area. In her study *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, Coppélia Kahn argued that manhood in Renaissance drama was not biological but an insecure social status that had to be continuously proven. This identity was often defined against the maternal world (Kahn 12). Afterwards, in this psychoanalytic approach, Janet Adelman in *Suffocating Mothers* showed how tragic heroes try to control their mothers, or maternal bodies, to prove their own dominance and independence as a male. However, these attempts fail because of deep guilt and fears connected to the family (Adelman 10). Similarly, feminist critics such as Lisa Jardine, in *Still Harping on Daughters*, argue that female characters in Renaissance or early modern drama were often seen and used as objects in front of men to help males maintain their authority. At the same time, male authority could become unstable at any time due to socio-economic and political pressures (Jardine 42). These psychoanalytic and feminist studies revealed the emotional and psychological weakness of males in the Renaissance era. They shifted focus to domestic relationships. As a result, they paid less attention to the political structures and institutional hierarchies that shaped power and gender in society.

Gradually, during the 1990s, new Historicist and cultural studies focused on gender criticism. These approaches explore how ideas of political honour and power, humanism, and capitalism shaped Renaissance men's identities. Mark Breitenberg's Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England changed this point of discussion by arguing that patriarchal power isn't completely stable, but is gradually shaped by anxiety. Breitenberg argues that patriarchal masculinity generates anxiety and contradictions that can undermine the authority it seeks to maintain (2). Similarly, Bruce R. Smith's Shakespeare and Masculinity argues that masculinity in Renaissance drama is performative. It depends entirely on the observation, approval, and judgement of other men in

society. Further, Stephen Orgel, in Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England, develops this idea by showing how Renaissance theatre questioned the stability of gender roles. His work shows that the performance of authority was directly connected to the performance of theatre and therefore can be challenged or even subverted (Orgel 62). In addition, historians such as Alexandra Shepard, in Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England, showed how factors such as class, age, wealth, and authority created different men and different forms of manhood in early modern society. This challenged the idea of a single unified category of "man," showing that poorer and middle-class men often had to make difficult compromises to gain social status (Shepard 74). Although historical and cultural critics examined broad cultural anxieties, they often did not offer a systematic way to classify 'power' at different levels. In Connell's framework, hegemonic masculinity represents the dominant pattern that validates patriarchal authority, while complicit masculinity describes the position of men who benefit from this system and gender order, without necessarily representing its dominant ideals. By contrast, Marginalized masculinities occupy subordinated positions through their relationship with hegemonic masculinity and other structures of social power.

To address this gap, contemporary gender criticism has brought sociological models of power into literature and literary studies. One of the greatest theories of multiple masculinities was developed by Australian sociologist R.W. Connell. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt explain that gender operates through a changing hierarchy of power. In this hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity shows and represents the idea of manhood that is accepted across cultures, in particular society and period. It is supported by complicit forms of masculinity that gain a "patriarchal dividend," while subordinate and marginalised identities are used to be continuously suppressed and controlled (Connell and Messerschmidt 832).

Many scholars have studied masculinity in Shakespeare's plays from historical, cultural, political, and psychological perspectives. Jennifer Feather discusses the importance of studying ideals of masculinity in Shakespeare's works, particularly how male power becomes more visible when traditional masculine ideals are challenged (Feather 134). Cho Jae-hee examines how Macbeth's masculine identity is shaped by his relationship to maternal fantasies and patriarchal power (Cho 321). Further, Muhammad Hamid et al. use Connell's framework to examine Hamlet's inner conflict and the expectations placed on men (Hamid et al. 830). Similarly, Sam Gilchrist Hall studies the relationship between masculinity, violence, and tyranny in *Macbeth* (Hall 824).

These studies show the actual importance of masculinity and patriarchal power in Shakespearean criticism. Therefore, the research gap does not indicate that scholars have ignored masculinity in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Instead, this study focuses on comparing the two tragedies through the lens of Connell's theory of masculinities. It examines how hegemonic and complicit masculinities are connected to the patriarchal dividend and how the pressure and burden to maintain masculine power can create conflicts and instability. It also explores Connell's concept of "crisis tendencies" to understand how differences in gender relations can challenge established structures of masculine authority. Connell and Messerschmidt explain that gender hierarchies contain internal contradictions and hence can change through struggles between different groups and forms of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 847). By studying the Danish court in *Hamlet* and the Scottish court in *Macbeth*, the research explores how political power and societal expectations shape the characters. Rather than explaining their downfall through weakness or personal mistakes, the study examines how the contradictions within the patriarchal structures also contribute to their tragic endings.

3. Methodology-

This study employs a qualitative and comparative research design by combining new historicist literary criticism with R.W. Connell's sociology of masculinities, using William Shakespeare's Hamlet (c. 1599–1601) and Macbeth (c. 1606) as primary texts to investigate how early masculinity is constructed, performed, and destabilised within institutions of the era.

R.W. Connell's framework of multiple masculinities **serves as** the principal theoretical model. The analysis includes three main concepts, i.e., hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, and crisis tendencies. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a quality seen in a dominant man who demonstrates martial authority, holds political power, and has emotional and physical control and courage. Whereas, complicit masculinity examines people who aren't used to showcase dominant masculine traits, but they regularly benefit themselves from patriarchal structures by making involvement in politics, portraying loyalty to the institutions, or conformity. The term "patriarchal dividend" by Connell examines the social advantages gained by men in favour of participation or support of these courts and structures. Connell differentiates crisis tendencies within gender order from a crisis of masculinity itself, explaining that "crisis tendencies may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity" (Connell 84). In Hamlet and Macbeth, the psychological conflicts, escalating violence, and weakening authority faced by the protagonists can be examined as responses to pressure and contradictions linked with hegemonic masculine expectations.

The two plays are selected using purposive textual sampling because they show contrasting models of early modern masculinity. For comparison, Hamlet represents the intellectual scholar prince

whose identity conflicts with societal expectations of martial revenge. On the other hand, Macbeth represents the warrior whose identity rests on courage and military success, reflecting hegemonic ideals, before his ambition develops into excessive violence and tyranny.

The analysis consists of selected scenes, speeches, soliloquies, and dramatic actions that reveal the formation of masculine power. The analysis identifies relevant texts and passages through reading and organises them according to principles derived from Connell's framework. The textual evidence is examined with three principles: 'dialogue and rhetoric, dramatic action, and character relationships.'

The comparative analysis proceeds in four stages, i.e., (a) Identification of the dominant masculine ideal, (b) mechanisms of enforcement, (c) moments of crisis, and (d) comparison of the results of the two plays, according to Connell's concepts. This procedure distinguishes between a character's personal reasons and socially expected masculine behaviour. Therefore, the methodology moves from textual evidence and theory to comparative interpretation.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 The Myth of Identity and Showcase of Royal Power

Applying R.W. Connell's sociological framework to Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth deepens our understanding of early modern tragedy. Rather than viewing the protagonists' failures through the Aristotelian lens of hamartia or through psychoanalytic theories, this study shows that their downfalls are entirely symptoms of hierarchy. Mark Breitenberg's study presents patriarchal masculinity as inherently anxious, arguing that the structures sustaining male authority also produce contradictions and vulnerabilities (Breitenberg 2). The concept of masculinity, as shown

in Elsinore and the Scottish court, makes it clear that Renaissance manhood is not a sustainable identity, but a performative friction that demands constant struggle.

In Hamlet, the court of Elsinore shows the death of the hegemonic standard. Old Hamlet's ghost is traditionally outdated in terms of honour and welfare, and now he demands that his son avenge him. Bruce R. Smith's study similarly emphasises that masculinity in early modern drama depends on public recognition and scrutiny by other men (Smith 35). Yet the ghost's demands force Hamlet into conflict with prevailing masculine expectations, exposing the instability of hegemonic masculinity, as the scholar is expected to become a warlord despite his intellectual identity. Similarly, in Macbeth, the hegemonic ideal resembles state-sanctioned slaughter. When Macbeth learns that he has been named Thane of Cawdor, he asks, "Why do you dress me / In borrowed robes?" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1.3.114–15), suggesting that the new position is somehow unfamiliar to him. Later, after becoming king, he reveals the same insecurity: "To be thus is nothing, / But to be safely thus" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 3.1.51–52). The contrast between possessing power and feeling secure indicates that achieving masculinity does not guarantee stability.

In Hamlet, the ideals of masculinity are represented by the older Hamlet, whose military reputation continues to shape what manhood looks like. He appears in "fair and warlike form" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.1.55), wearing the same armour he wore when he "the ambitious Norway combated" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.1.72). His image represents a feudal idea of masculinity in which he settled conflicts through fighting, revenge, and bloodshed. When the ghost orders Hamlet to "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.5.31), it is not just asking for justice; it is also demanding that Hamlet prove himself as a hegemonic man by following a violent model of masculinity and authority.

A similar idea appears at the Scottish court in Macbeth. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth strongly portrays this image. King Duncan receives a report from the captain, praising Macbeth for his actions in battle and noting that he "unseamed [Macdonwald] from the nave to th' chops, / And fixed his head upon our battlements" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1.2.24–25). Duncan doesn't condemn his violence; instead, he praises Macbeth by saying, "O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1.2.26). This shows that violent behaviour was a sign of masculinity, and the behaviour was always rewarded when it was used to protect and serve the state.

However, this idea of masculinity is unstable, as achieving this level of perfection expects men to become emotionally detached and willing to use violence. In both plays, hegemonic masculinity therefore becomes a difficult or impossible standard. Overall, a man's status and worth are closely connected to his ability to fight, dominate, and shed blood.

4.2 Complicit Masculinity, the Patriarchal Dividend, and Female Exploitation

The most significant intervention of applying Connell's taxonomy to Renaissance drama is the radiance of complicit masculinity. Traditional literary criticism focuses entirely upon tragic heroes, overlooking the institutions and bureaucracy of corrupt courts. However, as Connell and Messerschmidt outline, hegemonic masculinity survives and thrives because a section of society is used to try to extract a "patriarchal dividend continuously"—the social, economic, and political benefits accrued simply by being male within a patriarchal system (Connell and Messerschmidt 832).

In Hamlet, Claudius can be understood as an example of complicit masculinity because he uses diplomacy and political strategy to maintain his authority rather than relying solely on military

strength. In his first speech as a king, he addresses the threat from Fortinbras by sending Cornelius and Voltemand to Norway to negotiate with the Norwegian king. Claudius explains that he has sent them “to Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.2.27–28). His decision to use diplomacy, rather than jump straight into war, shows how political negotiation can maintain masculinity and protect the state. Claudius therefore illustrates how a man can safeguard his position within the existing power structure through political strategy rather than military strength. Claudius, Polonius, and Banquo expose the dark nature of patriarchal dividend while Macduff demonstrates the conflict between masculine expectations and family responsibilities. These men are used to extract power by hook or crook, either by using conspiracy or treating female bodies as collateral damage to maintain their networks in patriarchy. Polonius’s command to Ophelia to "Tender yourself more dearly" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.3.107), as well as Claudius’s marriage to Gertrude, was a political move, showing how female bodies were used as scaffolding to support male ambition without women’s consent. This interpretation aligns with Lisa Jardine’s analysis of how women and marriage supported male authority within early modern social and political structures (Jardine 42).

The conflict is clearest in Macbeth. The Scottish court has a much stronger idea of masculinity, and Lady Macbeth believes she must reject her feminine nature to gain power in the patriarchal system. She asks the spirits to "unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1.5.40–42). Janet Adelman’s analysis of Macbeth explores how masculinity is constructed through attempts to distance the male subject from maternal dependence and vulnerability (Adelman 130–31).

Banquo’s silence about Macbeth’s tyranny also indicates signs of complicit masculinity, as he chooses to stay silent for the interest of his own family. He privately says, "Thou hast it now: king,

Cawdor, Glamis, all, / [...] and, I fear, / Thou play'dst most foully for't" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 3.1.1–3). The word “foully” expresses Banquo’s suspicion that Macbeth rose to power through moral corruption. However, Banquo was insufficient to challenge Macbeth himself, and his concern about the witches’ prophecy for his descendants complicates his position. His silence allowed Macbeth to retain power, while Banquo continues to consider his family’s future. The scenario reflects complicit masculinity because Banquo was indirectly trying to benefit from the political system, without directly challenging it.

Polonius also shows this form of masculinity by controlling women to strengthen his own position. He treats his daughter, Ophelia, as an object to gain influence at court. Later, he says, "I will loose my daughter to him" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.162). The verb “loose” suggests that Polonius intends to place Ophelia in Hamlet’s path so that their relationship can help and serve his own purposes. Rather than letting Ophelia make her own decisions, he uses her as an instrument in his political investigation. This language reveals how patriarchy allows fathers to exercise control over their daughters, while openly showcasing that control over women was part of their social responsibilities.

On the other hand, Macduff eventually fights Macbeth and helps restore political power by leaving his wife and children behind to oppose his violence. Lady Macduff criticizes his decision by saying, "His flight was madness. When our actions do not, / Our fears do make us traitors" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 4.2.3–4). This shows that, to achieve desired masculine expectations, Macduff had to sacrifice his personality and family. Malcolm tells him to "Dispute it like a man" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 4.3.220), and suggests that men should control emotions and grief to remain masculine. However, Macduff replies, “I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man” (Shakespeare, Macbeth 4.3.221–22). The contrast between Malcolm’s command and Macduff’s

response challenges the idea that manhood requires restraint. By insisting that he must feel the grief, Macduff presents emotions and expressions as comparable to masculinity. His response exposes the actual limitations of the gender order that expects men to showcase strength while suppressing their own emotions.

In both plays, men, by hook or crook, can protect their positions in the patriarchal system, but women often suffer as a result.

4.3 Crisis Tendencies: The Conflict Between the Scholar and the Warrior

The ‘crisis tendencies’ in the soliloquies of Hamlet and Macbeth reveal the contradiction within the gender order, showing how ideas meant to sustain masculine authority can also destabilise it. By comparing Hamlet, the intellectual, with Macbeth, the warrior, the study shows that early modern masculinity was much harder, or nearly impossible, to maintain. Coppélia Kahn’s study presents masculine identity in Shakespeare as insecure and repeatedly defined against femininity (Kahn 12). However, this study shows that the main problem doesn’t just arise from the “other” gender of nature, i.e., women, but also comes from the contradictions within the patriarchal system itself.

Hamlet’s downfall stems from the conflict between his scholarly nature and the role society expects of him. His education at Wittenberg taught him about human nature. He says, "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.303–04). However, the ghost and society want him to be violent, and as a result, he delays taking revenge. Hamlet realises that “The time is out of joint” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.5.188), but he cannot accept the violent role forced on him. Later, he struggles with his identity as a scholar, as he must transform into a warrior, leading to emotional and psychological turmoil. For instance, in the graveyard scene, when he

reflects upon the death of Alexander the Great, he observes that even “Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 5.1.220–21). The contrast between Caesar’s former power and his physical remains shows that death is natural and most powerful men eventually die. This challenges the belief that power and masculinity can last forever, highlighting the limitations of worldly power in the face of death.

On the other hand, Macbeth follows an opposite path. His downfall or crisis comes from his nature of violence and deep masculine ideal. Unlike Hamlet, he does not hesitate to use violence. He eventually becomes king through ruthless behaviour, but after gaining power, he finds no real happiness or security. The greed for power made him heartless. Violence helped him gain power, but at the cost of peace of mind. He ultimately grows empty and says that life is "a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 5.5.24–26). The metaphor of the “walking shadow” presents life as insubstantial, while the “poor player” comparison reduces human ambition to a brief performance that ends with little lasting significance. The words “struts and frets” also suggest a combination of display and anxiety. Therefore, Macbeth’s language erodes the heroic image associated with rise to power. The path of violence he initially opted for left him unable to find meaning or security, exposing the contradictions within the gender order he sought to uphold.

The ghost's demand for revenge included violence and bloodshed, but because of Hamlet’s scholarly nature, he found it difficult to accept. The conflict becomes clearer in his soliloquies, where, via self-criticism, he says, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.550). He also looks at himself and connects his hesitation to cowardice: "Am I a coward? / Who calls me villain? (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2.2.598-599). He condemns his lack of courage, saying, “But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2.2.604). Therefore,

Hamlet's delay shows a conflict between the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and his intellectual identity, reflecting a conflict between different ideas of masculinity, i.e., the educated scholar and the violent man. Hamlet's struggles show how the demand for authority and violent revenge exposes the contradictions within the gender order, set by patriarchy, weakening the very masculine authority they are meant to establish.

After killing Duncan to gain the highest power, Macbeth realises that, instead of power, his life lacks peace and security because violence cannot provide them. Afterwards, his thoughts fill with fear, suspicion, and guilt. He tells his lady, i.e., Lady Macbeth, "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 3.2.36), showing how deep these mental wounds were. He was brutally affected. He also realises that after this huge success, he produced only a "fruitless crown" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 3.1.61), suggesting that his kingship will leave no lasting legacy for his own ancestry because Banquo's descendants will inherit the throne. Macbeth later realises he has gone too far, and there is no point in turning back: "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (Shakespeare, Macbeth 3.4.136–38). His downfall also showcases the instability of a gender order that directly links masculinity with violence, domination, and the constant need to defend power.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, reading Hamlet and Macbeth through R.W. Connell's sociological lens on masculinities shows that Shakespearean tragedies offer a profound critique of early modern gender systems. These plays are not just simple stories of kings and war; by showing unrealistic expectations of hegemonic masculinity and the compromises made to gain power, Shakespeare shows the harmful effects of patriarchy.

This analysis also contributes to Renaissance scholarship by applying Connell's sociological ideas to Hamlet and Macbeth. Instead of viewing tragedies through the lens of history or psychology, it shows how ideas about masculinity shape characters' actions. Therefore, the tragedies of Hamlet and Macbeth aren't simply caused by weakness or ambition, but are also a result of a social system that connects masculinity with power, violence, and emotional control.

Hamlet struggles because he cannot fulfil the role given to him, the warrior, whereas Macbeth suffers. After all, he takes the role too seriously. Hamlet tries to reject the violent nature of his father, while Macbeth becomes trapped in his own violence, which he uses to gain power. In both cases, characters try to fit into strict expectations of masculinity within society, and eventually it leads to psychological, political, and physical destruction.

Long before masculinity became an established field of academic inquiry, Shakespearean dramas explored how society shapes masculinity. When manhood is dependent on surviving by controlling others using violence and hiding emotions, it does not create much strength. Instead, it becomes a source of suffering, flaws, and tragedy.

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