



## ***Macbeth* in the Multidimensional Narrative of the *Unnecessary Woman***

Awfa Hussein Aldoory<sup>[a],\*</sup>; Arwa Hussein Aldoory<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>English Department, Tikrit University/ College of Education, Salah Aldine, Iraq.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 18 October 2016; accepted 9 December 2016  
 Published online 26 January 2017

### **Abstract**

No text is an isolated island. This basically indicates that every text may share a relationship of interaction with other texts, even though this relationship is not always recognized. The new created text out of the mating relationships between texts is what Graham Allen (2011, p.35) describes as “a practice and productivity”. The new created text can be the product of the interaction between different social texts, or between a social text on the one hand and a literary one on the other hand, or between different literary texts. The process of intertextuality, however, often conveys some sort of significance and purpose in its new context, whether it is to emphasize the meaning or importance of a specific occurrence, to invoke comparison between the two texts, or even to create humor by, for example, ridiculing the original text. Within this context Rabih Alameddine’s *An Unnecessary Woman* is a literary encyclopedia that is crowded with many allusions to different literary texts through the story of Aaliya, the aged woman and the translator who are preoccupied with translating literary works from English and French into Arabic. When each book is translated Aaliya packages it carefully and places it in the maid’s room where it will lie, with the other translations, unread. Alameddine’s narrative style which includes many allusions to many literary references may remind the reader of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Like Eliot, Alameddine refers to many literary texts, including Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. This paper aims at analyzing the historical background, characters, symbols, themes, and motives of Alameddine’s *An Unnecessary Woman* in order to explore how the text meets Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in certain points of similarities.

**Key words:** Appropriation; Intertextuality; Women; War; Lady Macbeth

Aldoory, A. H., & Aldoory, A. H. (2017). *Macbeth* in the Multidimensional Narrative of the *Unnecessary Woman*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 14(1), 50-57. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9154> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9154>

*The Lebanese civil war was an iconic event. Downtown Beirut became a metaphor for so many things: man’s inhumanity to man, ..., the impossibility of being human shaped our perceptions of war and human nature just as Vietnam did for our parents. We used it to understand how the world works.*

(Annia Ciezaldo, an activist)

### **INTRODUCTION**

In his celebrated novel, the Arab-American novelist Rabih Alameddine offers an enchanting portrait of Beirut during the civil war through the story of a book-loving, obsessive, seventy-two-year-old “unnecessary” woman. Aaliya Saleh lives alone in her Beirut apartment, surrounded by stockpiles of books. Family less, childless, and divorced, Aaliya is her family’s “unnecessary appendage.” Every year, she translates a new favorite book into Arabic, then stows it away. The thirty-seven books that Aaliya has translated over her lifetime have never been read by anyone. She is so devoted to Beirut, its gossip and turmoil. She wants her readers to love her city, too, even while relating what it was like to live through years of fear and violence during the years of the civil war. “Beirut,” she says, “is the Elizabeth Taylor of cities: insane, beautiful, tacky, falling apart, aging, and forever drama laden.”

The Civil War in Lebanon, the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982, thus, form a background to the novel that moves

back and forth through Aaliya's memories and the books which have been part of her life. One memory of that war-filled period is of reading Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* by candlelight while Beirut burned. She knows there is an alternative to the kind of life she has lived in Beirut:

My books show me what it's like to live in a reliable country, like England, France, or the US, where you flick on a switch and a bulb is guaranteed to shine and remain on, where you know that cars will stop at red lights....

She cannot help wondering, however, "if life is less thrilling if your neighbors are rational, if they don't bomb your power stations...when things turn out as you expect more often than not...Does reliability reinforce your illusion of control?"

Despite her love to her city, the protagonist narrates that she does not feel at home in it. For most of the novel, she walks through her neighborhood in West Beirut, remembering how it used to be, before the civil war. She recalls past memories and favorite books, as well as the bitterness of her family life. She is alienated from her relatives and her loved city, leading a life of "internal migration" that is mostly devoted to love of literature and translation. Aaliya was "married off" at sixteen "to the first unsuitable suitor to appear at our door, a man small in stature and spirit." The marriage lasted four years, and "nothing in our marriage became him like leaving it." It was her job at a bookstore, after her divorce, that enabled her to read virtually anything she wanted for fifty years. She had one best friend, Hannah, whose suicide deeply affected Aaliya for so long years. About her, Alameddine says: "She fell in love with books," so she spends her days alone in her Beirut apartment, translating her favorite books into Arabic; however she piles up her translations in boxes in the maid's room, keeping them unsold.

The Civil War in Lebanon, the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982, and Black September all form a background to the novel that moves back and forth through Aaliya's memories and the books which have been part of her life. One memory of that war-filled period is of reading Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* by candlelight while Beirut burned. She knows there is an alternative to the kind of life she has lived in Beirut:

My books show me what it's like to live in a reliable country, like England, France, or the US, where you flick on a switch and a bulb is guaranteed to shine and remain on, where you know that cars will stop at red lights....

She cannot help wondering, however, "if life is less thrilling if your neighbors are rational, if they don't bomb your power stations...when things turn out as you expect more often than not...Does reliability reinforce your illusion of control?"

Being a secluded woman, leading a life that is shaped by the traumatic experiences she lived during the civil war, is the frame that forms the backbone for the actions

of the novel. The chaos and violence which told the world of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* is fully represented in Alammedine's novel *An Unnecessary Woman* which depicts the painful consequences of the Lebanese civil war on the protagonist Aaliya.

War, similarly, forms a background to Shakespeare's famous tragedy, *Macbeth*. The play opens during war. War is disorderly and confusing. Therefore, with war upon Duncan's people, the people are probably confused about what could come. Macbeth led King Duncan's forces to victory against the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, Macdonwald and The King of Norway, in a battle that could have gone either way were it not for Macbeth's leadership. We learn that Macbeth killed Macdonwald himself in battle. King Duncan, overjoyed, decides to make Macbeth his new Thane of Cawdor. The previous Thane of Cawdor will be executed.

---

## 1. THE DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS AND THE READER IN *MACBETH* AND *AN UNNECESSARY WOMAN*

---

One of the most successive ways that create a bridge of interaction between the characters and the reader is when the character speaks directly to the reader without any mode barrier stands between the two. Such interaction is achieved in drama through the use of dramatic monologues and soliloquies, while it is achieved in fiction through the use of the first person narration. *Macbeth* and *An Unnecessary Woman* share the use of such dramatic and fictional techniques that enable the reader to delve inside the character and identify its personal features and thus become able to interpret it.

*Macbeth* as well many other Shakespearian tragedies are rich with dramatic monologues and soliloquies that reflect, on the part of the character, a kind of self-knowledge. When Macbeth succumb more and more to the forces of darkness, and with Macbeth's poignant realization of the horrible consequences of his actions, we as a reader begin to sense his feelings of sorrow and pain. One of the more powerful soliloquies occurs in Act 5:

My way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honor love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have ....

It is through this soliloquy and other soliloquies we see Macbeth painfully aware of his losses and the fact that his existence now is meaningless. Through these expressions, pathos for Macbeth is developed.

*An Unnecessary Woman* is narrated by means of first person narration. As a reader we mainly hear the voice of

Aaliya whose main struggle is how to give meaning and significance for herself and for her life as well. She says:

Giants of Literature, philosophy, and arts have influenced my life, but what have I done with this life? I remain a speck in a tumultuous universe that has little concern for me. I am no more than a dust, a mote—dust to dust. I am a blade of grass upon which the storm trooper's boot stomps. (p.159)

Aaliya's self-revelation meets what Virginia Woolf identifies as the psychological realism through which the reader is placed inside the mind of character which outside it there is nothing actually happen.

**Lady Macbeth in *An Unnecessary Woman*:** The components that constitute Lady Macbeth's character are recognized in the female characters of Alammedine's novel, namely Aaliya, her mother, Hannah and Fadia, to a certain extent.

Bradley (1905) in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* says: "The center of the tragedy...lie in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action." (p.12) According to this context Lady Macbeth is the product of her circumstance. In other words, Lady Macbeth's lust for power springs from the conditions of war and the patriarchal social context that intensifies woman's roles of nurturing and nursing. Her lust for power resembles her desire to transcend the social norms and to release herself from a social system that confines her within the limits of the ruled and the receiver of power.

Macbeth, declares his wife to be a masculine soul occupying a female body. When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan's murder, and she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She seems fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. Macbeth seems terrified that their crime will be discovered. He fears that he has "unleashed forces that will ultimately tear him apart" (Dickson, 2009, p.213) At one point, lady Macbeth wishes that she was not a woman so that she could do it herself. Her remarkable strength of will persist through the murder of the king. It is she who steadies her husband's nerves immediately after the crime has been perpetrated. Aaliya, on the other hand, has a character that excels on the character of her husband who is a dull and disagreeable person. Their divorce for this reason, does not emotionally harm her.

The name of Alammedine's protagonist, Aaliya, refers to highness and greatness. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand is a woman of high rank. She is the wife of Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis and the Thane of Cowdor who would soon become the king after he assassinates King Duncan and ascends to the throne.

Both Lady Macbeth and Aaliya are childless. They never experienced maternal emotions. The experience of mothering and the close relationships with children usually intensifies women personalities and identities. Motherhood gives women a kind of self-esteem and self-

satisfaction Lady Macbeth and Aaliya's lack of such emotions could have probably influenced the formation of their identities. Lady Macbeth questions the connection between maternal nurture and destructive power when she mocks her husband's nerves before he kills Duncan:

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.  
I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked  
my nipple from his boneless gums  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this. (1.7. 55-59, *The Complete Works*, p.975)

Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to "unsex" her (1.5.48), stripping her of everything that makes her a reproductive woman. Being a woman and a mother makes her compassionate, so she wants the "passage" (1.5.51) of childbirth to be blocked. Femininity and maternity, in both works, are intertwined. They suggest compassion and kindness, while masculinity is synonymous with "direst cruelty."

Lady Macbeth and Aaliya lead an isolated life from the outer world. This fact leads them both to be engaged in the process of becoming in order to relocate themselves at a social context that is basically manly. Their process of becoming is motivated by a kind of "lust" that each one of their experiences in a different way. Lady Macbeth has a power lust; while Aaliya has a book lust. Fadia, Aaliya's neighbor remarks that while Lebanese during the civil war "was experiencing bloodlust, yours was booklust." (Alammedine, 2006, p.85) Aaliya believes that literature gives her life; whereas life itself kills her. However towards the end.

The connection between gender and power is a key element in understanding the characters of both Aaliya and Lady Macbeth. Aaliya is an extraordinary woman. She is intelligent with a sharp mind which tries to resist an ageing body and spontaneous overflow of memories: "I, Aaliya, the aged one, should get to bed-lie in my bed, call upon the gods of rest, instead of sitting at my desk remembering." (p.45) Aalia is a woman of strong will and determination. During the time of the civil war and the black September, Aeliya was among the few people in the neighborhood who never fled their homes. During these days she bravely kept an Ak-47 rifle lying next to her on the right side" where my husband used to sleep earlier" When three men break into her apartment some day during that time, she bravely rushes out with her rifle, chasing them, causing them to run out thinking that she is a mad woman. Aaliya is a woman who can control her fears despite her weariness that she can absorb it after a while. She describes fear as her "faithful companion" or a sister: "It belonged to me and I to it,..., my fear and I" (p.67).

Towards the end of the play, Lady Macbeth is reduced to a kind of psychological breakdown. Her continuous

sleepwalking seems an attempt to wash the imaginary blood from her hands. She grows so ill that the doctor says there's nothing he can do to help her. "The disease," he says, "is beyond" his "practice," and what Lady Macbeth needs is "the divine", not a "physician" (5.1.62,78). She is so consumed by guilt for her evil acts that she eventually loses her mind. When Aaliya's translation manuscripts are ruined in the apartment flood, she never gives up and despite her distress she begins to think that this destruction is "an opportunity to break free from the rules" she has set for translation. She starts to think what to translate next.

The title of Alameddine's novel suggests a woman, that is Aaliya, living on the margins of the society. She shares with Lady Macbeth the retreat from the outside world, creating a world of their own. Both female characters live a state of emotional dislocation, that is, when one lives in a world but he feels alienated in it. They emphasize the theme of what one does in the face of a meaningless and unnecessary existence that cannot be comprehended.

Being the product of external forces is what makes Hannah closely similar to Lady Macbeth. Hannah mourns the death of her husband. According to her, with his death she loses the future and she loses her children "who were dead before they were conceived." She feels that she loses what "was meant to become." Aaliya explains that Hannah's feelings of grief and sorrow are in fact feelings of nostalgia "for things that never existed." However, in spite of her grief and sorrow, Hannah decides to transcend them and to discard her "immature youth" and the "vestiges of her shyness." She decides to be "a woman and not a shy girl." /Aaliya tells the reader that Hannah she knew was born out of these circumstances. Like Lady Macbeth, Hannah ends her life with suicide and her attempts of suicide are preceded by troubles of sleeping. Aaliya explains that Hannah's "most fervent fantasy was to experience an uninterrupted night of sleep." (p.241) Aaliya further explains that Hannah spends her days and nights "troubled by the lacerating paralysis of insomnia."

Like Lady Macbeth and Hannah, Aaliya is the product of external forces and she, like them, suffers from sleep troubles. Aaliya announces frankly that "[she is] the way [she is] because [she] lived through a civil war...Like the bullet, [she is] too stray." Aaliya adds that war forced her and other people to live as strangers. In spite of the fact that they help each other during war time, they are unable to transform their relations into a friendship. As a result, Aaliya's life is marked by introversion that makes her hardly interact with others in meaningful conversations. Aaliya's inability to cope with community can be one of the main causes behind her sleep troubles: "I am tired, always tired. An amorphous exhaustion smothers me. I wish to sleep. I wish I were able to sleep." (p.243) She describes her sleep as "Restful sleep" and "fragment"

Among the distinctive features of Lady Macbeth are her strong personality and determinism. In fact she

is classified as one of the most powerful characters in English Literature. The greatness of Lady Macbeth lies almost wholly in courage and force of will. Bradley believes that neither Macbeth's "Vaulting ambition" nor the prophecy of the three witches will motivate the action of the play without the aid of Lady Macbeth. She is aware of her husband's nature which is "too full o' the milk of human kindness" In order to motivate him she believes that she "may pour [her] spirit in [his] ear,..." she plots all the details of murdering the king and because she knows that her husband's nature is like "th'innocent flower" she asks Macbeth to put "this night's great business into [her] dispatch" and to "Leave all the rest to [her]." When the King retires after a night of feasting, Lady Macbeth drugs his attendants and lays daggers ready for the commission of the crime. Macbeth kills the sleeping King while Lady Macbeth waits nearby. When he brings the daggers from the King's room, his Lady orders him to return them to the scene of the crime. He refuses because of his trembled and fearful spirit. She carries the daggers to the room and smears the drugged attendants with blood. Her ability to control and to direct the whole situation makes her meet Fadia, one of Aaliya's neighbors, in two points: first the strong determined personality and second, the conversions of the source of power. Aaliya believes that Fadia "possesses courage, a gumption that few of her generation have." (p.77) Fadia is her father's, Hajj Wardeh, great concern because she was the youngest among his three daughters and she is unmarried. Her obsession with Egyptian romantic movies makes her sneak "into theatres by herself when she had the chance." (pp.77-8) Her father is fully aware of the fact that he cannot forbid her from watching romantic movies or from going to the theatres because he and the whole family believe that his daughter "rule[s] the realm." Fadia has a kind of strong personality that makes her consider her father's demands "mere suggestions." When she is forced on something her "potent weapon" is "her pout" and her father "loved her so deeply that all it took was for her to curl her lips and push them out, squint her eyes and stare at him, and he would hastily rescind whatever it was that he had merely suggested." When her father tries to find the perfect suitor for her, Fadia declares that she "would not marry just anybody, and certainly not this son of her father's good friend. She would marry for love, and only for love." She also declares that "she wouldn't set foot inside her home unless her father relented." (p.79) The poor father obeys his daughter who does not care how her father will tell his best friend that his daughter is not interested in his son. This shows clearly how the father and the daughter exchange the role of power in such a way that makes the daughter a source of power while the father is a mere receiver of it.

Following the murder of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth's role in the plot is diminished and reduced

to sleepwalk. Her powerful and active actions are transformed into a mere weakness. In fact her active role is absent in the last part of the play. This brings her closer to Aaliya's mother whose powerful actions and authoritative ideologies are exposed through her relationship with her children when she was young. Aaliya tells us that in the past her mother wouldn't allow her to take her shoes off until it was time for bed. She believes that "ladies should never be without shoes" (p.229). For Aaliya's mother boys are allowed to be "shoeless, sockless, barefoot, or wearing their underpants as freedom fighters' face masks..." because "boys will be boys." (Ibid.) As an aged woman, Aaliya's mother becomes unaware of anybody in the same way Lady Macbeth becomes in the last part of the play. Aaliya's niece in describing her grandmother says: "She doesn't always know you're speaking to her. Sometimes you have to touch her, otherwise you might be sitting here for hours and she'll be off in her own world." (p.227) Lady Macbeth and Aaliya's mother unawareness of the world they are surrounded by may resemble the idea that both of them are "Devoid of worries and responsibility, of mundane earthly concerns..." (p.220).

**Metamorphosis of Characters:** The metamorphosis of characters is an important motif which contributes to the development of actions in both literary works. It is best represented through the characters of Macbeth in Shakespeare's play, Ahmed and Aaliya's eldest brother in Alameddine's novel. Like Macbeth, Ahmed and Aaliya's eldest brother turn into torturers and murderers throughout the course of actions. Macbeth's character changes a great deal over the course of the play. Macbeth, at the beginning of the play, is a strong soldier who fights for the King without mercy but his strive for ambition and his curious nature with the encouragement of his wife leads him to fulfill the witches' prophecy. He murders King Duncan to take his throne. This betrayal throws Macbeth into a state of guilt and fear, prompting him to murder again and again to satisfy his paranoia. By the end of the play, he becomes an evil tyrant and is rightfully deposed and killed for his crimes.

When Aaliya meets Ahmed again during the civil war, she notices changes in his character and in his facial expressions as well: "His eyebrows wove together, almost becoming one, giving him an expression of permanent starkness." Ahmed is transformed into a sullen person: "He withdrew unto himself. His skies clouded with black." (Alameddine, 2006, p.37) When Aaliya first met him in 1967, he was a lanky and wispy teenager; however he was an independent person who "claimed to be an individualist." (Ibid, p.36) Ahmed was living with his mother at Sabra camp. They soon became friends. He was a caring person and an attentive companion. By 1977, Ahmed was living in a lively neighborhood in Beirut. When Aaliya told him that she was in need of a rifle to protect herself during these hard

days, he was ready to help for a price, that is sex. Ahmed became a powerful person during the war, one of its eminent torturers.

The character of Aaliya's eldest brother is also transformed throughout the course of the novel. Before the war, he was a passive and a coward person who worked as a doorman at a three-star hotel. He was often mistreated and humiliated by one of his managers. During the years of the civil war, the eldest brother turns into an ill-mannered, "bad wolf". He joins a militia group and possibly insists to avenge himself from his humiliator who has been found dead on a side street, bound and tortured. Both Macbeth and the eldest brother embody the theme of betrayal. The eldest brother is responsible for the elimination of his boss in the same way that Macbeth's hands are stained with the blood of his king.

---

## 2. THE THREE WITCHES

---

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* opens with the three witches who are described as the three weird sisters. It is believed that these witches are the incarnation of evil in the whole universe. Three witches greeted Macbeth with three predictions separately, one after another: First Witch: **All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!**/Second Witch: **All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!** /Third Witch: **All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!** (1.3) Many critics believe that Lady Macbeth is the fourth witch as the whole action in the play can never be motivated without her aid. Accordingly, four witches in *Macbeth* can be viewed as destructive forces that motivate the bloody and tragic action of the play.

Alameddine refers to Aaliya's neighbors, Fadia, Marie-Therese, and Joumana as the three witches. As Aaliya shares them the same building she can be described as the fourth witch just like Lady Macbeth: "I looked like the witch from Hansel and Gretel." (p.40) Aaliya describes the meetings of the three witches and how they chatter and gossip. She hears them while they "make plans, compare notes, exchange recipes, and exhibit every newly purchased inessential." (p.56) She listens to their "Years of conversations" (Ibid.) However, unlike *Macbeth's* witches who are destructive forces; Alameddine's three witches can be viewed as an aiding force. From a feminist point of view the three women reflect the feminist concept of solidarity. This is clearly recognized when Fadia expellees Aaliya's mother, brother and sister from Aaliya's apartment. It is also recognized when the three woman help Aaliya with the water that floods the maid's room and thus all what Aaliya had translated are moistened. Aaliya says that these "weird sisters are coordinated" They work together for Aaliya's sake and as if they want to defend her, they "surround [her], orbit [her] like planets on Dexedrine..." (p.246).

### The Insignificance of Life in *Macbeth* and *An Unnecessary Woman*

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle  
Life's but a shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing

(Macbeth, Act 5, scene 5)

Macbeth utters these words shortly after he is told that his wife, Lady Macbeth, has died. Macbeth tackles the idea that life is a short bad play without any meaning. Life is also symbolized as a flickering candle, which is easily snuffed and our lives are just as easily ended. Life for Macbeth is a tale told by an idiot man and this tale is full of bombast and melodrama (“sound and fury”), but without meaning (“signifying nothing”). Within this context, one of the main connotations of *An Unnecessary Woman* is the insignificance of life. Almandine points out to this idea in an implicit and explicit ways. He consciously borrows from Macbeth the same words and scatters them within the text. Aaliya's main conflict springs from her feelings of the insignificance of her life. She fails to be a wife, and a mother. Even the literary works she translated are kept unread. She says: “Nothing is working. Nothing in my life is working.” (p.159) Her life is full of the sounds of bombs and explosions resulted from the civil war. When she speaks about her dreams she says: “I'm such an idiot.” (p.160) She dreams that one day she will have friends and she will spend time with them talking about art and literature. She dreams that she would establish a salon and it would be the envy of the whole world, “if only the world knew about it.” (p.161) How can the world know about her and about her imagined salon if she lives an introverts life? She realizes this fact and she realizes that her days “will pass—at a sad and sluggish pace, but it will pass. Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow creep in this petty pace.” (Ibid.) She knows that life is a “collection of scenes.” (p.222) and these scenes will reach their end; they will die and “All our dreams of glory are but manure in the end.” (p.160) She believes that “Death is the only vantage point from which a life can be truly measured.” (p.25)

**Translations as Lying Corpses:** Once Aaliya completes a translation, she reads it one last time before she places them inside a shut box at the maid's room. These translations are buried as corpses, aimless and motionless, like macbeth's victims who are buried at a courtyard outside his castle. Aaliya is committed to the process of translating as Macbeth becomes committed to the process of murdering. Once the translation of a book

is done, “the wonder dissolves and the mystery is solved.” (Alameddine, 2006, p.107)

### 3. DARKNESS VS LIGHT AS A MOTIF IN *MACBETH* AND *AN UNNECESSARY WOMAN*

The dichotomy of light and dark is a form of imagery used in *Macbeth* to produce a contrast between the good and the evil, as well as to set the mood and setting throughout this tragic play. Darkness encapsulates the whole atmosphere of *Macbeth*. A. C. Bradley asserts that “all the scenes which at once recur to memory take place either at night or in some dark spot” (Bradley, 1905, p.134), scenes as Duncan's murder, Banquo's murder and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking provide a glance of the significance of darkness and night in the play. Macbeth describes night as filled with “flying creature” for it is mysterious and dangerous. Images of darkness and night suggest evil abounds. Lady Macbeth talks to herself into a murderous state of mind, she calls upon the night to hide her deed from heaven and from herself:

Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen night see not the wound it makes  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry “Hold, hold!”

(1.5.50-54, complete works, p.974)

Lady Macbeth wants the power of evil, in the form of the night, to cover her actions. Night time is seen as a period of secrecy and deceit, during which evil can take place almost freely. Michael Bakhtin describes *Macbeth* as “a dark carnival in which all formal values are satirized and deranged” (qtd. in Harris, 2010, p.163) Images of light and darkness are associated in this play representing good and evil. King Duncan introduces images of light when he names Malcolm as his successor and commends Macbeth for his bravery in battle:

“...But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine  
On all deservers” (1. 4. 41-42, ibid)

Images of darkness, in this play win over images of light. Evil has managed to overpower good. Macbeth, who represents evil, has taken the throne of Scotland away from King Duncan, representing good. In Alameddine's novel *An Unnecessary woman*, images of light and darkness are repetitively interwoven to introduce parallel images of Beirut before and during the civil war and to highlight the protagonist's personal life. Darkness is full of mystery. During the civil war, it covers the city of Beirut whenever the government electricity is down. If generators are not turned on, Beirut sinks in the deep world of darkness. It also possibly suggests paradoxical

images of life and death: "From the dark I come and into the dark I return" (Alameddine, 2006, p.60) Darkness is also presented through the black color which suggests death or mourning. Joumana and Fadia are happy to see their third "witch" companion takes off black after six months of her husband's death: "It's better that you took it off," Joumana says. "he'd have wanted you to. Your husband hated black." (Ibid., p.57)

Being a woman who is devoted to literature and translation, Aaliya every New Year lights two candles for Walter Benjamin. Candles here have a positive connotation as it is in act five, scene one of *Macbeth*, when we see a candle accompanies Lady Macbeth in her sleep-walking. If we take her sleep-walking speech to be a kind of self-confession of the dark deed, the candle may be seen as an image of burning repentance that re-humanizes her character in the final moment of her life. The candle may also resemble her only companion, highlighting her loneliness and Macbeth's neglect towards her. The candle can be seen as representative of life, and of the soul. The image of flashlights in *An Unnecessary Woman* can be considered parallel to candles, suggesting light and life. Aaliya keeps two flashlights at her apartment to help her resume her daily life whenever electricity is shut down.

#### 4. PATHETIC FALLACY IN *MACBETH* AND *AN UNNECESSARY WOMAN*

Pathetic fallacy is a literary device that attributes human qualities and emotions to inanimate objects of nature. By employing pathetic fallacy, writers try to bring inanimate objects to life so that the nature of emotions they want to convey are understood in a better way because it is easier for the readers to relate to the abstract emotions when they observe it in their natural surroundings.

The tragic action in *Macbeth* is accompanied by thunder and lightning in addition to darkness. Such atmospheric conditions may echo the conflict inside Macbeth. In other words, they resemble the psychological state of Macbeth on the one hand, and nature's refusal to murder the king on the other hand. Darkness is another atmospheric element that permeates the play. G. Wilson Knight explains that darkness gives birth to the mysterious atmosphere of the play. Darkness, abnormality, mystery hideousness are all unified by one emotion that is fear. This is confirmed by Macbeth's horrified feelings as well as by the word "horror" uttered by Macduff in act 2, scene 3.

In *An Unnecessary Woman* darkness and the rainy weather are included as backgrounds for many episodes in the novel. Atmospheric conditions such as stormy weather, heavy rain, and sounds that interrupt the silence of darkness resemble feelings of loneliness and sadness that Aaliya always carries inside her: "All I am is lonely." (p.114) After describing herself as an embodiment of

loneliness, she describes the weather: "A winter wind starts a low moan outside my kitchen window. Rain comes." (p.115) Another episode that describes Aaliya's "weary" soul, is preceded by another description of a night that is marked by "storms and heavy rain, of bumps and sounds in the dark." (p.261) The last episode in the novel clearly reflects how the term pathetic fallacy is employed for the sake of reflecting Aaliya's sadness after what had happened with her translated manuscripts. She says:

My soul screams, my voice is mute. I am now destitute. Who among the angels will hear me if I cry? I stand in the dark and the dark, amid my wasted life, not knowing what to do, unable to make any decision, and weep... Whatever remains of my self-worth seeps out of me, flows out of me, and follows the water down the drain. (p.265)

These disturbed and sad feelings are echoed by the rain outside her apartment:

It's raining hard, raining harder, raining harder still, the drops like mourners goading one another into a rising frenzy of laments. It rains as if the whole world is about to collapse, as if the sky is going to plummet.... (p.273)

#### 5. BLOOD, RED COLOR, AND THEMATIC KEY WORDS

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* exhibits a great deal of symbolism. One heavily used symbol is that of blood, which stands for murder and guilt. Moreover, Shakespeare employs this symbol to characterize Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Blood symbolism serves as a continuous indicator of characters' emotional progression. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's reactions to blood underline their inverse attitude changes. Macbeth moves from immeasurable guilt to callous killer, while Lady Macbeth starts as the callous killer and falls to a state of despair. Thus, the blood symbol allows the reader to not only see the character changes of *Macbeth*'s two main characters, but also compare and contrast these changes.

*An Unnecessary Woman* rests upon the background of the civil war, consequently killing and murdering are imbedded within the whole scene. Aaliya says "if brother could kill brother, then anyone was suspected, anyone and everyone." (p.37) The smear of death and blood permeates the text through the repeated reference to the red color, for example "red wine", "red eyelids", "red dahlias", "red cares", "red poppies", "red kitchen table", "red face", "red plate", "red hair", "red plastic lobster", "red tub", and "red breakfast table." The repetition of this color may make one believe that Aaliya's consciousness is possessed by the visual and the sensory scene of blood and murdering: "While a traffic war rages around me and chaos rules (lest you forget this Beirut), I flash to a theory about why we desperately wish to live in an ordered world, in an explainable world." (p.97)

The Shed and degraded humanity are two thematic concerns in the two literary works as the two imply the idea of betrayal. Macbeth's murder is not only a betrayal of the king; it is also a betrayal of his humanity. In fact civil war itself enhances the idea of the betrayal of humanity. This is confirmed when Aaliya says: "How can do I talk about the betrayal we felt when Lebanese killed Lebanese once more?" (p.193) As an individual who witnesses the conditions of the bloody civil war which is marked by "Killing", "decay", and "destruction", Aaliya is filled with terror and sorrow that perch on her heart and devour it like an eagle preys on small victim. For this reason Aaliya says: "Degradation is my intimate,... my soul is weary of my life." (p.256) In fact, if one places the two literary works in their historical context, he will notice that the two are about the turmoil of a solitary mind and heart and about the disturbance in the life of the state.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Alameddine, R. (2006). *An unnecessary woman*. New York: Grove Press.
- Allen, G. (2011). *Intertextuality*. U.S.A.: Routledge Press.
- Bradley, A. C. (1905). *Shakespearian Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: McMillan.
- Dickinson, A. (2009). *The rough guide to Shakespeare* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.roughguides.com>
- Harris, J. G. (2010). *Shakespeare and literary theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Proudford, R. (1014). *The Arden Shakespeare completed works*. London: Bloomsbury Press.
- Wells, S., & Taylor, G. (2005). *William Shakespeare: The complete works* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford New York: Clarendon Press.
- Wilson, K. J. (2001). *The wheel of fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. London: Routledge Press.