

Reimagining Macbeth: A Comparative Study of the Tragic Hero and Noir Antihero in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Jo Nesbø's *Macbeth*

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative analysis of William Shakespeare's Macbeth and Jo Nesbø's modern adaptation, examining the transformation of the protagonist from a classical tragic hero to a noir antihero. Utilizing a theoretical Framework of Aristotelian tragedy and noir theory, the paper explores how the core theme of ambition shifts across different historical and genre contexts. While Shakespeare focuses on a moral downfall driven by supernatural influence and individual fate, Nesbø reimagines the narrative with a realistic, corrupt urban environment shaped by social trauma and systematic decay. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates that while the destructive nature of ambition remains a timeless literary theme, its portrayal reflects the evolving cultural and social anxieties of the Jacobean and modern eras.

Keywords: Ambition, Tragic Hero, Noir Antihero, Moral Corruption

Introduction

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest playwrights in English literature. His works explore universal themes such as ambition, power, love, betrayal, and human weakness. Among his tragedies, *Macbeth* is considered as one of the most powerful and thought-provoking plays. It was written in the early seventeenth century. The play presents the tragic story of a brave Scottish warrior whose overwhelming ambition leads him to commit terrible crimes. Through the rise and fall of its protagonist, Shakespeare examines the destructive consequences of an uncontrolled desire for power. The play shows how ambition, when combined with moral weakness and external influence, can lead to psychological suffering and ultimate downfall.

In *Macbeth*, the protagonist is initially introduced as a loyal and courageous soldier who earns the respect of his king and fellow warriors. However, his encounter with the witches awakens a deep ambition within him. When they greet him with the prophecy, "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!" (Shakespeare 1.3.50), the idea of power begins to grow in his mind. At first, Macbeth is uncertain and disturbed by the thought of committing murder, admitting that "my thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, / Shakes so my

single state of man” (Shakespeare 1.3.138–139). Nevertheless, the prophecy and Lady Macbeth’s encouragement gradually influence him to pursue the throne.

Encouraged by Lady Macbeth, Macbeth eventually murders King Duncan and becomes the king of Scotland. This act marks the beginning of his moral and psychological decline. Although he achieves power, he cannot escape the guilt that follows his crime. After the murder, he expresses deep remorse, saying, “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” (Shakespeare 2.2.78–79). As the play progress, Macbeth becomes increasingly consumed by fear, guilt, and suspicion. His desire to maintain power leads him to commit further acts of violence, transforming him from a noble warrior into a ruthless tyrant. Shakespeare uses this transformation to show that ambition can destroy both the individual and the society around him.

The character of Macbeth is often discussed in relation to the concept of the tragic hero, which is a central element in classical tragedy. A tragic hero is usually a noble or respected person who possesses a tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall. In Macbeth’s case, his tragic flaw is his overwhelming ambition and desire for power. Although he understands the moral consequences of his actions, he continues on a path of violence and betrayal. His internal conflict, guilt, and eventual destruction make him one of the most memorable tragic figures in English literature.

In the twenty-first century, the story of Macbeth was reimaged by the Norwegian writer Jo Nesbø in his novel *Macbeth*. Nesbø’s work is a part of the Hogarth Shakespeare project, which invites contemporary writers to reinterpret Shakespeare’s plays for modern readers. In this retelling, the story is moved from medieval Scotland to a dark and crime-ridden industrial city. Instead of royal courts and castles, the narrative unfolds within a corrupt system of police power, criminal gangs, and political influence. Through this change in setting, Nesbø adapts Shakespeare’s tragedy into a modern crime narrative.

In Nesbø’s version, Macbeth is no longer a medieval warrior but a police officer who rises to power within a corrupt system. His ambition is influenced not only by prophecy but also by crime, drugs, and the desire for control in a violent urban environment. At one point in the novel, Macbeth reflects on the nature of power and realizes that “power was the only thing that could silence the chaos around him” (Nesbø 134). This realization pushes him deeper into corruption and violence. As a result, the character takes on the qualities of a noir antihero, a morally complex figure who operates within a dark and corrupt world.

This paper therefore examines how the character of Macbeth changes when Shakespeare’s classical tragedy is transformed into a modern noir narrative. By comparing

Shakespeare's play with Nesbø's novel, the study explores how ambition shapes the protagonist and leads to his moral decline. The paper argues that while Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a classical tragic hero whose downfall results from his tragic flaw, Nesbø reimagines him as a noir antihero shaped by the corruption and violence of modern society.

Literature Review

Many scholars have studied *Macbeth* and discussed its major themes such as ambition, guilt, moral conflict, and the idea of the tragic hero. Critics often describe Macbeth as one of the most complex characters in Shakespeare's tragedies. One of the most influential critics, A. C. Bradley, explains that Macbeth is not an evil person at the beginning of the play. Instead, he is a brave soldier who slowly falls into wrongdoing because of temptation and ambition. Bradley writes that "Macbeth is not naturally cruel; he is tempted and gradually persuaded to commit evil" (Bradley 295). This view shows that Macbeth's tragedy happens because of his inner weakness and his desire for power.

Another important topic in critical studies is ambition and moral downfall. Many scholars argue that ambition is the main reason for Macbeth's destruction. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is respected by King Duncan and praised for his bravery in battle. However, after hearing the witches' prophecy that he will become a king, he begins to imagine the possibility of gaining power. Bradley explains that Macbeth's strong imagination makes him think deeply about the consequences of his actions even before he commits them (Bradley 296). Because of this, he experiences fear and doubt, but he still chooses to follow his ambition. As a result, ambition becomes the force that pushes him toward murder and tyranny.

Critics also study the theme of guilt and psychological conflict in the play. After Macbeth kills King Duncan, he immediately begins to feel guilt and fear. His mind becomes troubled, and he starts seeing visions and ghosts. According to the critic Harold Bloom, Macbeth's imagination is very powerful and it causes his mental suffering. Bloom states that "Macbeth's imagination is both his greatness and his ruin" (Bloom 517). This means that the same imagination that makes Macbeth thoughtful and intelligent also leads to his destruction. His visions, such as the ghost of Banquo, show that his conscience continues to trouble him even after he becomes king.

Another area that scholars frequently discuss is the supernatural elements in the play. The witches play an important role in shaping Macbeth's actions. Some critics believe that the witches control Macbeth's destiny, while others argue that they only reveal the ambition already present in him. Bradley suggests that the witches do not force Macbeth to commit

crimes but instead “appeal to the evil already latent in his nature” (Bradley 300). In this interpretation, Macbeth is still responsible for his actions because the witches only encourage the desires that already exist within him.

In recent years, scholars have also started studying modern adaptations of Shakespeare’s works. One important example is the novel *Macbeth* written by Jo Nesbø. This novel retells Shakespeare’s story in a modern setting. Instead of a medieval kingdom, the story takes place in a dark industrial city where crime and corruption are common. Because of this change in setting, many critics say that the novel belongs to the genre of noir crime fiction, which usually presents morally complex characters and a gloomy atmosphere.

Scholars studying Nesbø’s adaptation explain that the character of Macbeth is presented as a modern antihero. In this version, Macbeth is a police officer who rises to power in a corrupt system. His ambition is influenced not only by prophecy but also by drugs, crime, and political manipulation. Critics argue that this change reflects modern society, where power and corruption often exist together. As a result, Nesbø’s character is different from Shakespeare’s tragic hero because he lives in a morally uncertain world where the line between good and evil is unclear.

Although many studies discuss Shakespeare’s tragic hero and others examine modern adaptations of *Macbeth*, there are still few studies that directly compare the transformation of Macbeth from a tragic hero into a noir antihero. Most research focuses either on Shakespeare’s original tragedy or on the modern adaptation separately. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by comparing the character of Macbeth in both texts and examining how ambition shapes his transformation in different historical and social contexts.

Historical and Genre Context

Macbeth written by William Shakespeare around 1606, reflects the social and political concerns of Jacobean England. During this time, people strongly believed in the divine right of kings, which means that the king was chosen by God and therefore should not be challenged or overthrown. Any attempt to harm the king was considered both a political crime and a religious sin. The play was also written shortly after the Gunpowder Plot, a failed conspiracy in which a group of men tried to kill King James I and destroy the English Parliament. Because of this event, many people in England were anxious about betrayal, political violence, and threats to the king’s authority. Shakespeare’s tragedy reflects these fears by showing how the murder of a rightful king leads to chaos, guilt, and destruction.

The structure of Shakespeare’s play also follows the ideas of classical tragedy described by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. According to Aristotle, a tragedy usually

presents a noble character whose downfall is caused by a tragic flaw, also called *hamartia*. This flaw leads the character to make serious mistakes, which eventually bring about suffering and destruction. Aristotle explains that tragedy should evoke emotional responses in the audience, stating that, “tragedy... through pity and fear effect[s] the proper purgation of these emotions” (Aristotle 13). Macbeth fits this model of a tragic hero. At the beginning of the play, he is a brave and respected warrior who serves his king faithfully. However, his tragic flaw is ambition, which slowly leads him to commit terrible crimes. As Macbeth murders King Duncan and later commits other violent acts to protect his power, he becomes a tyrant. In Shakespeare’s tragic world, supernatural forces such as the witches appear to influence events, and the natural moral order must eventually be restored through justice.

In contrast, the novel *Macbeth*, written by Jo Nesbø in 2018, places the story in a completely different setting. Instead of medieval Scotland, the story takes place in a dark and unnamed industrial city during the 1970s. This city is filled with crime, corruption, drug trafficking, and political manipulation. The atmosphere of the novel is similar to that of noir crime fiction, a genre that usually portrays a bleak world where morality is unclear and characters struggle within corrupt systems.

Because of this new setting, the character of Macbeth is also very different. In Nesbø’s version, he is not a noble warrior or a Scottish thane. Instead, he is a SWAT police officer who rises through the ranks in a corrupt police department. His past is marked by poverty, childhood trauma, and drug addiction. These experiences shape his personality and influence his desire for power. Rather than being guided mainly by prophecy and supernatural forces, Nesbø’s Macbeth is shaped by the violent and unstable society around him. His ambition grows as he becomes involved in crime networks and political conspiracies. The novel therefore presents a character who is deeply flawed and morally uncertain.

Critics often describe such characters as noir antiheroes. Unlike the traditional tragic hero, who usually has a clear sense of morality but fails because of a tragic flaw, the noir antihero operates in a world where moral boundaries are blurred. According to the film and literature critic James Naremore, noir protagonists “struggle less with moral choice than with moral chaos” (Naremore 20). This idea helps explain the character of Nesbø’s Macbeth. He does not simply struggle between right and wrong; instead, he lives in a world where corruption and violence are everywhere, making moral decisions extremely difficult.

The transformation of Shakespeare’s story into a modern noir narrative shows how literature changes according to the concerns of different historical periods. Shakespeare’s

play reflects the fears of Jacobean England, especially the fear of political betrayal and the violation of divine authority. The murder of a king in the play represents a disturbance of the natural and moral order. Nesbø's novel, on the other hand, reflects the anxieties of modern society, where corruption, crime, and addiction often influence systems of power. By placing the story in a dystopian urban environment, Nesbø shows how ambition and the desire for control can grow within a broken social structure.

Therefore, the movement from Elizabethan tragedy to modern noir fiction not only changes the setting of the story but also reshapes the inner struggle of the protagonist. Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a tragic hero whose downfall is caused by ambition and moral conflict. Nesbø, however, presents him as a noir antihero, a character shaped by trauma, corruption, and the harsh realities of modern society. This shift demonstrates how the same story can reflect the fears and values of different times and cultures.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses two important literary theories to understand how the character of Macbeth changes from a tragic hero to a noir antihero. The first theory comes from the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who explains the idea of tragedy in his work *Poetics*. Aristotle states that a tragic hero is usually a person of high position whose downfall is caused by a fatal flaw, known as *hamartia*. He also explains that tragedy should create emotional responses in the audience. According to Aristotle, tragedy works "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (Aristotle 10). This means that when audiences watch the suffering of the hero, they feel sympathy and fear, which help them understand the consequences of human weakness and moral failure.

The character of Macbeth in Macbeth closely follows this classical model of tragedy. At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is a noble and respected warrior who serves King Duncan faithfully. However, his strong ambition becomes his tragic flaw. His desire for power leads him to murder the king and seize the throne. Even though he commits terrible crimes, Macbeth is aware of his moral decline. His feelings of guilt, fear, and psychological conflict make him a complex tragic hero. Because the audience can see both his ambition and his suffering, they experience pity and fear as his downfall unfolds.

In contrast, the idea of the noir antihero comes from modern film and literary criticism. Scholars such as Paul Schrader and James Naremore explain that noir protagonists are very different from classical tragic heroes. These characters usually live in dark and corrupt societies where moral values are unclear. According to Schrader, noir stories often present "a world of moral ambiguity and social corruption" (Schrader 54). In such a world,

characters struggle not only with their own weaknesses but also with the corruption that surrounds them. Naremore similarly argues that noir heroes face a chaotic moral environment rather than a clear moral conflict (Naremore 19).

This idea helps explain the character of Macbeth in *Macbeth* written by Jo Nesbø. In this modern retelling, Macbeth is not a noble warrior but a police officer working in a violent and corrupt city. His life is influenced by drug addiction, political manipulation, and criminal networks. Because of these influences, his ambition becomes connected to a larger system of corruption. His struggle is not only personal but also social. The world around him is already morally broken, and this environment shapes his actions and decisions.

Unlike Shakespeare's tragic hero, who experiences a clear moment of moral realization, Nesbø's Macbeth exists in a darker and more uncertain world. His ambition leads him into deeper corruption, and his downfall reflects the collapse of the society around him. Therefore, his character fits the model of the noir antihero, a figure who is flawed, morally complex, and trapped in a corrupt environment.

Using these two theoretical perspectives, Aristotelian tragedy and noir theory helps us understand how the character of Macbeth changes across time and literary genres. Shakespeare's version presents a tragic hero whose personal flaw leads to his downfall within a moral universe that ultimately restores order. Nesbø's version, however, presents a noir antihero whose fall reflects the corruption and instability of modern society. Through this comparison, it becomes clear that while the theme of ambition remains central in both works, the meaning of the protagonist's struggle changes according to the cultural and historical context of each text.

Character Transformation: From Tragic Hero to Noir Antihero

The character of Macbeth changes significantly when we compare Macbeth with *Macbeth*. Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a classical tragic hero, a noble figure whose ambition leads to moral collapse and tragic downfall. In contrast, Nesbø reimagines Macbeth as a noir antihero, a morally complex character shaped by a corrupt social system. By examining both texts, it becomes clear that the same character can reflect very different ideas about power, morality, and human weakness.

Macbeth as a Tragic Hero in Shakespeare

In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth first appears as a brave and loyal warrior who serves King Duncan with great courage. Early in the play, he is praised for his heroic actions on the battlefield. A soldier describes him as "for brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name" (Shakespeare 1.2.16). This introduction establishes Macbeth as a respected figure who has

earned honour through his loyalty and bravery. The idea of the tragic hero was explained by the philosopher Aristotle in *Poetics*. Aristotle argues that tragedy should create emotional responses in the audience. He explains that tragedy works “through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (Aristotle 13). Macbeth fits this pattern because his downfall is caused by a tragic flaw that is his ambition.

The witches’ prophecy awakens this ambition. When they greet him by saying, “All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!” (Shakespeare 1.3.50), Macbeth begins to imagine a future where he holds royal power. According to the critic Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespeare often shows how political ambition can disturb both personal morality and social order. Greenblatt notes that “Shakespeare’s tragedies reveal the dangerous desire for power that lies within human nature” (Greenblatt 175). This idea helps explain why Macbeth begins to consider murdering Duncan even before Lady Macbeth persuades him.

Another important aspect of Macbeth’s character is his moral awareness. Even when he plans to kill Duncan, he understands that the act is morally wrong. He admits that his only motivation is “vaulting ambition” (Shakespeare 1.7.27). This moment shows the internal conflict within Macbeth’s mind. The scholar Jonathan Dollimore argues that Shakespeare’s tragedies often portray characters who recognize their moral failures but are unable to escape them. Dollimore writes that tragedy exposes “the destructive consequences of human ambition and political power” (Dollimore 89).

After murdering Duncan, Macbeth begins to experience intense guilt and psychological disturbance. His conscience troubles him deeply, and he imagines that the blood on his hands can never be washed away. He cries, “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?” (Shakespeare 2.2.78). According to the critic Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare often explores how guilt affects the human mind. Garber explains that “Macbeth’s tragedy lies in the conflict between his imagination and his actions” (Garber 719). Because of this conflict, Macbeth becomes increasingly fearful and paranoid.

As the play continues, Macbeth transforms from a loyal soldier into a tyrannical ruler. His ambition pushes him to commit further crimes, including the murder of Banquo. Eventually, rebellion rises against him, and he is defeated by Macduff. His death represents the tragic fall of a once noble hero. The audience feels pity because Macbeth was once honourable, and fear because his ambition led him to destruction.

Macbeth as a Noir Antihero in Nesbø

In *Macbeth*, the character of Macbeth is presented in a very different way. Instead of a medieval warrior, he is a police officer working in a corrupt city dominated by crime, drugs,

and political manipulation. This modern setting changes the nature of Macbeth's character and his moral struggles. Nesbø's protagonist is shaped by trauma and addiction, which influence his decisions and ambitions. He rises through the ranks of the police department but becomes involved in corruption and criminal activity. Unlike Shakespeare's character, whose ambition is awakened by supernatural prophecy, Nesbø's Macbeth is influenced by the violent environment around him.

The critic Mark T. Conard explains that noir narratives often portray characters trapped in corrupt societies. Conard writes that noir fiction presents "a dark vision of society where corruption and moral uncertainty dominate" (Conard 23). This description closely matches the world of Nesbø's novel. Another scholar, Lee Horsley, notes that noir protagonists are often morally ambiguous figures who operate within unstable social systems. Horsley explains that "the noir hero is usually flawed and trapped in a corrupt environment" (Horsley 45). This idea applies directly to Nesbø's Macbeth, whose actions are shaped by the crime networks and political conspiracies around him.

As Macbeth gains power in the city, he becomes increasingly violent and ruthless. His ambition pushes him toward betrayal and murder in order to maintain authority. However, unlike Shakespeare's tragic hero, Nesbø's character does not experience the same level of moral reflection. Instead, he appears trapped in a world where corruption is already widespread. Eventually, his rule collapses as violence and political conflict increase. His downfall reflects not only his personal ambition but also the corruption of the society in which he lives.

Comparison

When the two texts are compared, it becomes clear that the character of Macbeth changes according to literary tradition and historical context. Shakespeare's Macbeth follows the Aristotelian tragic hero model, in which a noble character's tragic flaw leads to downfall and emotional catharsis for the audience. In contrast, Nesbø's Macbeth represents the modern noir antihero. Instead of living in a structured moral universe, he operates within a corrupt society where justice and morality are uncertain. His character reflects modern anxieties about crime, corruption, and political power.

Therefore, the transformation of Macbeth from tragic hero to noir antihero demonstrates how literature adapts classic stories to new social and cultural environments. While Shakespeare focuses on moral conflict and tragic downfall, Nesbø presents a darker vision of ambition shaped by corruption and social instability.

Ambition and Psychological Collapse

Ambition is one of the most important forces that shapes the character of Macbeth in both *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and *Macbeth* by Jo Nesbø. In both works, ambition drives Macbeth toward power, but it also leads to his psychological collapse and destruction. However, the way ambition is presented in the two texts is different. Shakespeare's play belongs to classical tragedy, where ambition appears as a moral flaw within the hero. In contrast, Nesbø's novel reflects the dark tone of noir fiction, where ambition is strongly influenced by social corruption, trauma, and power struggles.

In Shakespeare's tragedy, Macbeth is first introduced as a brave and loyal warrior. He serves King Duncan faithfully and earns respect for his courage. However, the witches' prophecy awakens a powerful desire in him. When they greet him with the promise of kingship, Macbeth begins to imagine a future where he holds ultimate power. Even before committing the crime, he understands that his motivation is dangerous. He openly admits that he has "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself" (Shakespeare 1.7.27). This moment reveals that Macbeth is aware of the moral consequences of his desire. The critic Harold Bloom explains that Macbeth's ambition grows from his imagination and inner desire for greatness. Bloom notes that "Macbeth's tragedy lies in the power of his own imagination" (Bloom 515). In other words, Macbeth destroys himself because he allows his ambition to control his thoughts and actions.

As Macbeth moves forward with his plan to kill Duncan, his mind begins to experience intense psychological pressure. After committing the murder, he immediately feels the weight of guilt. He imagines hearing a mysterious voice saying, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep" (Shakespeare 2.2.47). This hallucination shows that Macbeth's conscience is deeply disturbed. In Shakespeare's tragic universe, guilt acts as a moral punishment for wrongdoing. The scholar Stephen Greenblatt explains that Shakespeare often portrays the struggle between power and morality. Greenblatt observes that "Shakespeare's tragedies explore the destructive desire for power" (Greenblatt 179). Macbeth's psychological suffering reflects this conflict between ambition and moral responsibility.

Macbeth's mental collapse becomes even clearer as the story progresses. In order to secure his power, he orders the murder of Banquo and later the slaughter of Macduff's family. These acts reveal how ambition has transformed him into a tyrant. At the same time, Lady Macbeth also begins to suffer from overwhelming guilt. During her sleepwalking scene, she desperately tries to wash imaginary blood from her hands while crying, "Out, damned

spot! Out, I say!” (Shakespeare 5.1.30). The critic Marjorie Garber explains that guilt in Shakespeare’s tragedies often appears through disturbing psychological images. Garber writes that “Macbeth’s imagination becomes the source of his torment” (Garber 722). Because of this torment, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth gradually lose their mental stability.

While Shakespeare focuses on moral guilt and psychological conflict, Nesbø’s novel presents ambition within a modern noir setting. In Nesbø’s version, Macbeth is not a medieval warrior but a police officer in a corrupt city dominated by drugs, crime, and political manipulation. His ambition develops in response to his difficult past. As a child, he experienced poverty and abandonment, and as an adult he becomes addicted to a powerful drug called “brew.” These experiences shape his desire for power and control.

In this modern world, ambition is connected less with moral transgression and more with survival and influence. Nesbø expresses this idea through the statement “Power doesn’t corrupt. It reveals”(Nesbø 212). This line suggests that power simply exposes the true nature of individuals who already live in a corrupt system. The noir genre often portrays such morally uncertain environments. The scholar Mark T. Conard explains that noir narratives present “a bleak vision of society filled with corruption and moral ambiguity” (Conard 23). This description perfectly fits the world of Nesbø’s novel.

Because of this environment, Macbeth’s psychological collapse in the novel appears different from the collapse seen in Shakespeare’s tragedy. Instead of experiencing spiritual guilt, he suffers from paranoia, addiction, and traumatic memories. His hallucinations and violent reactions are often connected to drug withdrawal and emotional instability. The critic Lee Horsley notes that noir protagonists are often trapped in dark social systems. Horsley writes that “the noir hero is shaped by a corrupt environment that limits moral choice” (Horsley 47). Nesbø’s Macbeth reflects this idea because his actions are deeply influenced by the violent society around him.

Another important feature of noir fiction is the sense that characters cannot escape their past. The film critic Paul Schrader explains that noir characters are often “trapped by their past and doomed to repeat it” (Schrader 11). This description clearly applies to Nesbø’s Macbeth. His ambition pushes him toward power, but his past trauma and addiction constantly pull him toward destruction. Unlike Shakespeare’s tragic hero, who recognizes his moral failure, Nesbø’s protagonist remains trapped in a cycle of violence and corruption.

When the two texts are compared, it becomes clear that ambition and psychological collapse are shaped by their literary traditions. Shakespeare’s Macbeth follows the structure

of classical tragedy, where ambition appears as a personal flaw that destroys a noble hero. His guilt is spiritual and moral, leading to madness and death. In contrast, Nesbø's Macbeth represents the modern noir antihero. His ambition grows within a corrupt society, and his psychological collapse results from addiction, trauma, and political violence rather than moral reflection. Despite these differences, both works ultimately show that ambition can be destructive when it is driven by the desire for absolute power. Whether in the moral universe of tragedy or the dark world of noir fiction, Macbeth's story demonstrates how the pursuit of power can lead to psychological breakdown and the loss of human identity.

Conclusion

This comparative study of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Jo Nesbø's modern reimagining demonstrates that while the destructive nature of ambition remains a universal literary theme, its expression is radically reshaped by the generic and historical frameworks of Aristotelian Tragedy and noir fiction. By tracing the evolution of the protagonist from a classical tragic hero defined by moral failure and spiritual guilt to a noir antihero shaped by systematic corruption and social trauma, this research highlights a fundamental shift in how literature conceptualizes human agency and downfall.

The originality of this study lies in its synthesis of these two distinct theoretical traditions to bridge the gap between classical and contemporary literary criticism. While existing scholarships often examine these texts in isolation, this analysis provides a new perspective on how the noir genre functions as a modern vehicle for Shakespearean themes, replacing the divine order of the Jacobean era with the moral chaos of a dystopian urban environment. This shift suggests that the modern protagonist's struggle is no longer just an internal battle of the soul, but a reflection of a broken social structure.

Ultimately, this research contributes to Shakespeare adaptation studies by illustrating the enduring elasticity of the *Macbeth* narrative. It confirms that Shakespeare's work provides a timeless foundation for exploring power and corruption, even as its heroes evolve to reflect the anxieties of a more cynical, modern world. By placing these two versions of Macbeth in direct conversation, this study offers a framework for future scholars to examine how other classical archetypes might be reimagined through the lens of modern genre conventions.

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