

Institute of Education and Humanities/
Yr Athrofa Addysg a'r Dyniaethau

**MA Dissertation Approval Form/
Ffurflen Gymeradwyo Traethawd Hir MA**

Student Name/ <i>Enw Myfyriwr</i>	Adam Smith
Degree Scheme/ <i>Cynllun Gradd</i>	Philosophy MA
Start date/ <i>Dyddiad cychwyn</i>	October 2020

I have completed/ ~~about to complete~~* Part 1 of my degree.

*Please delete as appropriate.

Yr wyf wedi/ ar fun cwblhau Rhan 1 o fy ngradd

** Dileu fel sy'n briodol*

Title of Dissertation: <i>Teitl eich Traethawd Hir</i> See attached
Short Introductory Bibliography: <i>Llyfryddiaeth rhagarweiniol byr</i>

Please indicate whether ethical approval for project is needed – YES/NO
Nodwch a oes angen cymeradwyaeth foesegol ar gyfer y prosiect - OES / NAC
OES

Please indicate whether sufficient resources are available for the project – YES/
NO
Nodwch a oes digon o adnoddau ar gael ar gyfer y prosiect - OES / NAC *OES*

The above topic, proposal, and supervisor have been agreed:
Cytunwyd ar y pwnc, y cynnig a'r goruchwyliwr uchod:

Signed : Programme Director/
Llofnod Cyfarwyddwr y rhaglen

Date:.....
Dyddiad

Please return this form to your Programme Director.
Dychwelwch y ffurflen hon at eich Cyfarwyddwr Rhaglen.

(Working title) An existentialist approach to comedy and tragedy: can we imagine Macbeth happy?

Existentialism spans the divide between philosophy and literature. The link between existentialism and literature was explored by Sartre, and many existentialist oeuvres were more literary than philosophic.

Iris Murdoch spent her career writing between philosophy and literature and was incidentally the first to write about Sartre in English. In her chapter “Comic and Tragic”, she examines these two genres by reference to Shakespeare. My paper will be an exploration of comedy and tragedy under existentialist philosophy, with specific reference to Macbeth.

Tragedy was theorised by Plato and Aristotle and has since fascinated philosophers and literary theorists alike. The philosophy of tragedy has been examined, for example, by Hume and Hegel. The proto-existentialist Nietzsche famously wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann edited *Tragedy and Philosophy*.

Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy (and my favourite play) is Macbeth. The play characterises many existentialist themes. I am not the first to notice this: my point is simply to use Macbeth as a maypole around which to weave several strands of (mainly existentialist) philosophy and literature.

I want to show that comedy and tragedy are Jungian shadows of each other. Deep inside the existentialist *angoisse* there is a small box marked “in emergency break glass”. Comedy is what is inside the box. My thesis is that, in every tragedy, there is a comedy waiting to be released, to emancipate us.

If philosophy is a way of life, and if life is tragic, could existentialism be similarly emancipatory? In *mancipum*, there is ownership and there is the grasp of a hand. Macbeth is a play concerned with taking ownership, with what it means to be a man, in which the hand is also a theme. Existentialism may ultimately be an opening of the hand, a ‘letting go’. Macbeth’s tragic mistake was not letting go of the dagger and then not letting go of the murder.

The comic self and the tragic self exemplify the connection with existentialism. The comic self responds to the implicit tragedy of relating to the self as though it were ownable. Macbeth is a fine example of a man finding that he does not own himself. Existentialism is a fine philosophy to apply when we give up the thought that we can own ourselves. Can we imagine Macbeth happy?

Aims/objectives

The dissertation will attempt to address the following questions:

- Why is existentialism the branch of philosophy that is most at home in literature?
- Is there an existentialist philosophy of comedy/ tragedy?
- Does comedy emancipate us from tragedy and can the same be said for existentialism?

Note: I am aware of the danger that this could become a paper in literary theory and that I need to write philosophy. The literature is only being used as a prop: the philosophy needs to take centre-stage.

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