

Fair Is Foul, and Foul Is Fair: A Cultural Materialist Reading of Dissent in the Characterization of William Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth

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ABSTRACT

In patriarchal cultures, women are systematically oppressed as the inferior sex, which has been reflected in the literature of the times, as even many of the canonical masterpieces cast them into identifiable stereotypes. One of the dominant stereotypes that women have been traditionally molded into is the femme fatale: an alluring woman who with her mysterious magnetism, lures men into danger. *Macbeth* is a great Shakespearean tragedy that puts forth the enigmatic character of Lady Macbeth. Traditionally, she has been harshly cast as the quintessential femme fatale and Eve that lures Macbeth to his demise. In order to delve into the intricacies of this character type and why Lady Macbeth has been molded into it, this study intends to adopt a cultural materialist perspective, embedding the discussion of *Macbeth* in the social, cultural, and political fabric of the time of its production. Through an adoption of Alan Sinfield's notion of dissent, the writers aim to show how Shakespeare creates a multi-faceted character in Lady Macbeth, presenting a subversive woman and having her punished as a way of subduing backlash. Despite the eventual damnation she receives in Shakespeare's text, her dissenting voice makes itself heard, a woman in search of equality.

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Introduction

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest poets and playwrights who ever graced the British canon. Even today, he is still known to many as the father of English literature. His plays are among the most adapted in the language, and many of his lines still resonate in our times. He was a writer with an amazing sense of perception, one who tried his hand at histories, sonnets, plays, and comedies, writing masterpieces in each and every one of them.

Macbeth is one of his greatest tragedies, written in 1606, which concerns the Scottish Middle Ages. The choice of this topic is astute on the part of William Shakespeare, as it involves one of the ancestors of King James I, the monarch of both England and Scotland. In this play, Shakespeare shows Macbeth, the thane of Glamis, to have reaped victories in war. Coming upon three weird sisters on a heath, he and his friend Banquo are greeted with predictions about their future. Macbeth is hailed as the thane of Glamis, Cawdor, and the future king, whereas Banquo is

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said to father a line of kings. This episode is the beginning of the end for Macbeth and his way of life, as he is tempted to take matters into his own hands and murder the king. Further bloodshed ensues, resulting in the eventual downfall of Macbeth and his wife and the return of the crown to its rightful heir.

Due to the cardinal themes that the play discusses, it has been critiqued countless times, with much scholarly research devoted to the analysis of the characters, how they fare, what makes them behave, and the role of magic in the play. Similar to many of his other works, Shakespeare has fashioned a text that can be read and reread, lending a depth of understanding of human nature unmatched by many of his peers. One of the characters that has garnered a lot of attention is the infamous Lady Macbeth. She is the thane of Glamis's wife and plays an important role inside the text. Immediately after becoming the thane of Cawdor, Macbeth writes to her, informing her of the three witches' greetings and his new title. Once he comes back home, he sees that his wife has an agenda, that of killing the king. Most discussions regarding Lady Macbeth examine her role in the murder of the king, her coercion of her husband into following her plans, and her association with the witches and magic. Failing to analyze Lady Macbeth in terms of the society in which she lives and for whom she is written, the majority of the discussions tend to paint her as a portrait of evil.

Cultural materialism, as a literary theory that expresses the need for a focus on context, began to gain prominence in the 1980s with the publication of *Political Shakespeare* by Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore. When it came to history, this theory turns its attention to how the material conditions of life were important notions and have a high impact on how literature is produced. Works of art could not be created in a vacuum, without any line of meaning linking them to their material conditions. Instead, they are important artifacts impacted by the important cultural discussions at the time of production. Since the dominant culture ensures the presence and continuation of works that reinforce its dominant ideologies, other voices are silenced. Sinfield began to look into more hidden voices, that are traditionally not detected. He introduced the notion of dissent, how a voice could be detected still, even faintly. According to him, this dissenting voice is of importance because of the tension it creates in the text. It leads the reader to the realization that culture is not monolithic, not something unbreakable, or comprised of a single voice. There are tiny fissures created by those different ideologies fighting for a place. Whether they succeed, becoming dominant voices in the upcoming years, or remain marginalized is not of importance. The most salient point is the fact that a dissenting ideology existed and made its voice known, creating fault lines in the narrative of the dominant ideology.

Sinfield explains how meaning is embedded in the text and cannot be extracted from outside: “[n]or, independently of context, can anything be said to be safely contained. This prospect scandalizes literary criticism because it means that meaning is not adequately deducible from the text-on-the-page. The text is always a site of cultural context, but it is never a self-sufficient one” (1992, p. 49). As can be seen from Sinfield's comment, cultural materialism is far from a simple look at the text and coming up with explanations based on what the words entail. This method of criticism moves beyond the mere words on the page and takes history, philosophy, and politics as its grazing fields. Dollimore and Sinfield state that for cultural materialism as a method to offer a reading bringing about considerable change in perspectives, “a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment, and textual analysis” is necessary. They go on further to explain how each of these contributes to this new method: the historical context brings the work down from its literary pedestal and allows it to be embedded in history, the theoretical method allows the work to become separate from the criticism that constrains its meaning, political

commitments such as feminism and socialism allow the work to become free from the conservative outlooks that have been used to explain the work's meaning, and textual analysis "locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored" (1985, p. vii).

Sinfield explains that the conservatives have adopted three different methods of making sure that literature does not exceed into meanings that offend the political sensibilities: choosing the works comprising the canon, carefully interpreting any undesirable sections of the works, and attributing politically undesirable sections to representations of formal properties. As a result, the texts are usually closed to alternative readings. But these three techniques may also be used by dissident critics who consequently can take charge and produce their own dissidence-informed criticism. By choosing their texts, reading them in search of political implications, and ascribing political implications to the formal properties, they can produce their own readings (1992). There is a fourth method available to them as well, and that is reading a text in its context. According to Sinfield, "this strategy repudiates the supposed transcendence of literature, seeking rather to understand it as a cultural intervention produced initially within a specific set of practices and tending to render persuasive a view of reality, and seeing it also reproduced subsequently in other historical conditions in the service of various views of reality, through other practices, including those of modern literary study" (p. 22). Sinfield moves on to propose an additional fifth strategy, one that he claims Dollimore calls "creative vandalism," explaining it to be a "blatant reworking of the authoritative text," thereby producing a reading that is obviously against the conservative readings (p. 22).

When differing ideologies are at war with one another, the tension is manifest in the text. The incongruities show "the conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself. Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure" (Sinfield, 1992, p. 41). Put differently, ideology cannot wholeheartedly reproduce itself; it must inevitably create a hint of what it is always trying to repress, "the social order *cannot but produce* faultlines through which its criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray" (p. 45). This tension creates a disturbance in the otherwise smooth ideological surge. Sinfield believes such an outcome to be inevitable, stating, "gaps in ideological coherence are in principle bound to occur" (p. 74) and "representation . . . will incorporate the ground of its own failure" (p. 74).

This study adopts a cultural materialist perspective to investigate this play of Shakespeare's, trying to decipher how Lady Macbeth was truly portrayed. Through the concept of dissidence, it attempts to show how Lady Macbeth voices an ideology, a belief system, and a life that is against the dominant ideology of the time. She is the dissident woman and is harshly punished for her outrageousness, both because the audience would not tolerate such scandalous behavior with equanimity and because reality cannot be trampled upon when one desires to put a mirror up to nature. Through a discussion of the text and the surrounding material conditions of the time, the study endeavors to show that despite her marginalized position in the society, she takes the chance to speak. As a result of her daring endeavor, she is sentenced to madness and eventual death in infamy, all in an effort to contain her dissident voice and repair the damage she had done. But her eventual death cannot cancel the significance of her rebellion. Her voice may not have carried out booming across time, but there is an instance when she makes it known, faint yet distinct despite the general clamor, a voice of dissent.

Literature Review

In this play of great depth, there is a wealth of characters to be explored, but among these, the character of Lady Macbeth is crafted in a manner that has fascinated and disgusted the audience endlessly, appearing to be forever a site of contention. For instance, in the nineteenth century, the character of Lady Macbeth is the most abhorrent and most interesting Shakespearean woman to the audience (Barber, 2013). As a result, she has garnered boundless discussions into the notion of gender, how Shakespeare explored and viewed it, and how the notion may be viewed in light of recent developments in cultural affairs.

To Kimbrough, the play “contains a fierce war between gender concepts of manhood and womanhood played out on the plain of humanity” (1983, p. 176). He further explains that Macbeth is defeated because he is a follower of the societal conceptions of manhood that see it as being the same as machismo, and that the play on the whole shows the failure of the opposing notions of gender (pp. 177, 183). Jane A. Bernstein brilliantly exclaims that the play is rife with border crossing, especially that of gender, best exemplified by Lady Macbeth as a woman who asks to be unsexed and appears undisturbed by blood shedding, a typically male characteristic (2002). The power of the modern is very resonant in the play; it turns into a field in which themes of male authority in the construction of identity are threatened through the presence of the female, represented in Lady Macbeth and the witches (Adelman, 1996, p. 105).

Because of her actions, Lady Macbeth raises considerable anxiety in the audience. At the time, there is great concern regarding how women could interfere with patrilineage. This anxiety is due to the large role women played in infants’ lives. The fantasy of Lady Macbeth in the first act of the play shows this concern at work. She effectually destroys Duncan’s patrilineage with his murder and, instead of him, makes the bastard Macbeth a king, thus interfering with the course of politics (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 73). King-kok Cheung discusses the passage in which Lady Macbeth discusses infanticide and claims that in this speech, she creates an erotic fantasy that calls into question Macbeth’s potency. This method works on her husband, who chooses to align himself with his wife and thus partake of her power. Therefore, she continues to weave eroticism with the murderous act and replaces her husband’s moral concerns with anxiety regarding sex (1984). Others, such as Syeda Afshana, casually describe Lady Macbeth as “the real femme fatale” (2014, p. 118).

Her madness, too, has been the topic of much discussion. Lady Macbeth dies because her conscience is hounding her, a fact that is in stark contrast to her husband (Anderson, 1963). Miguel A. Bernard in his article, describes Lady Macbeth as a strong and great woman while going on to describe her downward-inclined fate as that of “a pathetic victim of hallucinations who ends by killing herself” (1962, p. 50). He also draws attention to the fact that she begins by scoffing at fears and scruples over the imaginings of the mind but later on becomes haunted by those very fears. Neely discusses Lady Macbeth’s disintegration and compares it to Ophelia’s. According to her, the meaning of the suicide of Lady Macbeth is not analyzed in the play, and it is not a cleansing and involuntary act like the one by Ophelia. She further claims that this suicide is preceded by “a state of gendered alienation” (p. 327). The hysterical woman and the witch are alike considered the fates relegated to women if they go beyond the bonds of the patriarchal family (Levin, 2002).

Discussion

Lady Macbeth emerges as a character who is remarkably independent, outspoken, analytical, ambitious, irreverent toward traditions, and most ostensibly, not a mother. These traits in a woman could make her a controversial figure at best, one who is defying her God-given responsibilities in order to tend to her own self-serving and misguided agendas. Not only is Lady Macbeth such a woman, but she is also approved of and supported by her husband, basking in the pleasures of marital bliss. In a sense, she is even more dissident than the three witches. She refuses to make her voice be subdued. First, because of the station of life into which she is living, she does not need to spend her hours on traditional household chores; she can simply be their overseer. When it comes to children, she says that she has given suck (Shakespeare 1.7.62), meaning that she has nursed and carried at least one child to full term, yet that same child is not present, making a mystery of the situation. She therefore has an abundance of time and energy to spend on herself and her husband. As is evident in her keen analysis of his character, she has not simply been his confidant. She has exercised her power of mind in order to investigate the true personality of her husband. Duncan talks about the non-existence of a way to read into character (1.4.13-14), but Lady Macbeth is an expert practitioner of this art. Because of this knowledge, this forbidden fruit of which she has eaten, she poses a danger to the audience. This woman, who has been deprived of all means of achieving her success, the one who has been confined and cribbed and curtailed, has not only befriended her prisoner and gained his trust, to the effect that he reveals to her his most secret thoughts, but has also analyzed him and discovered his weak points. She is certain that her counsel is invaluable to her husband, that no one knows him as she does, in all his glory or inconsistency. She is the one he can rely on for support, the one who can guide him toward the most expedient path to success.

Lady Macbeth herself is no fool when it comes to how she is allowed to proceed in the world. Many interpretations insist that she is a monstrosity since she asks to be rid of her sex. She is shown to be a woman who desires nothing more than to be a man, copies masculinity, and has nurtured those elements of the masculine inside herself. But to her detractors, she goes further in her subversion. She does not even have the common decency to adapt the system to her own aims. On the contrary, this essay argues that Lady Macbeth is comfortably female and does not look down on femininity. What she does in the invocation to the murdering ministers is on another plane altogether, since she specifically asks to be unsexed. She understands that to be confined in the constraints of gender, whether male or female, is a folly. She sees how her husband's and others' notions of manhood are detrimental to the achievement of their goals. Gender is a construct that is imposed on people's lives, depriving them of the chance to do as they desire. It places unmoving, inflexible, and terrible barriers around them, confining them even more than they otherwise would be. It is in this situation that to be sexless is to be free. It would free her to be able to think clearly and to act uninhibitedly, without undue concerns. Chamberlain claims that Lady Macbeth's invocation to be unsexed expresses a desire to topple down societal constructs with regard to gender and the roles associated with it. According to her, Lady Macbeth refuses to yield under the authority of men and instead wants an amorphous and vague power and autonomy that are free from the confines of gender (79-80).

Many have taken Lady Macbeth to be the Eve-like originator of the regicide, but in a number of lines in the play, Lady Macbeth mentions the fact that the idea was her husband's. When, in

answer to her plots, her husband voices his disagreement, she says, “What beast was’t, then, that made you break this enterprise to me?” (Shakespeare 1.7.53-55) and also, how Macbeth thinks of the crown as “the ornament of life” (Shakespeare 1.7.45-46). In the scenes that have been presented, Macbeth has not said anything to his wife to this effect. But it is apparent from the fact that he does not contradict her that she is not lying. She says that previously the time and place were not right for the endeavor. Therefore, Macbeth had not only broached the subject with his wife but had also talked of actually carrying it out; therefore, the line wherein she says he “wouldst wrongly win” (Shakespeare 1.5.23) becomes more understandable. Macbeth has this burning ambition within him for a while but on previous occasions is counseled against doing the deed, perhaps because his claim to the throne was not as great as it now is as the thane of both Glamis and Cawdor, or else because the suspicion upon him would not have been shaky enough to be dispersed. Again, this understanding makes clear her lines near the beginning, wherein she wonders how fate and metaphysical aid are now in favor of her husband becoming king.

Another thing that is often highlighted with regard to Lady Macbeth is how she uses her womanly guiles to propel the matter forward and have her husband do what she commands. Thus, she does not believe in the least in gendered behavior. It is true that she talks about manhood and being a man, but these are not the beliefs that she upholds, yet she is not above reminding others not to be contradictory in their actions and words. She threatens her husband that she will no longer consider his love worth much (Shakespeare 1.7.42-43). In the bubble of their marriage, they could be naked, leaving vulnerable all that they were and all that they had. He could reveal his most secret and darkest thoughts to her, and she could in turn disclose the words and energies that would have otherwise burned in her mind. Their great love is what creates this vulnerability. Her cry that she will no longer believe his love is not a threat. It is not a coercion method but a genuine concern that Macbeth has not been truthful.

As a result of the success of her plans, she is boastfully pleased. She talks about men, saying what has quenched them has given her fire (Shakespeare 2.2.1-3). She is not mistaken in her claim. While men have tended to think of women as accessories, she is about to alter history. When her husband comes back from the murder site all bloodied and distraught, she needs to muster her courage and do the necessary thing. Her actions here have been interpreted to mean that she is heartless, but what has to be remembered is that the murder has already been committed. For it not to be a senseless crime without the desired consequences, it must not be dwelled upon. If Macbeth can keep his constancy and be schooled, he can go forth with what has been done and use it as the stepping stone to his greatness as a ruler, without any need for further bloodshed.

But from the moment of the murder onward, Macbeth, who has been tainted with patriarchal worldviews, keeps away from his wife. As the king and the ultimate patriarch and to consort with a woman is beneath him, which is the beginning of his downfall. Lady Macbeth is not happy with how the situation is panning out. She has seen her husband being eaten by fancies, and she knows that he is not strong enough to tolerate them on his own. He no longer confides in her and has given her the secondary and accessory role of the queen, leaving her powerless. She and her husband have destroyed Duncan’s reign, but now they are in “doubtful joy” (Shakespeare 3.2.9). Consequently, when trying to appease him in his fit during the banquet (Shakespeare 2.3.126), she needs to take recourse to the language of patriarchy to be heard, since this is now all by which he abides.

The next and last scene during which one sees Lady Macbeth is the one in which she is greatly troubled and sleepwalking. Many assume she is suffering from a pang of conscience, that she is troubled due to the blood she has led to be shed. But what this essay contends is that her way of life has been thrown into the sear, and not much is left for her to do. Now, she sees that while she has led her husband to the seat, she has also alienated him. He no longer tells her his plans and has confined her to a life from which she may not venture. She cannot believe “the old man to have had so much blood in him” (Shakespeare 5.1.41-42), because the blood they shed could not be stopped. She herself could put an end to the murderous motives once they served their purpose, but she had not believed her husband to be so enmeshed in them. When saying, “The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?” (Shakespeare 5.1.44-45), she is expressing concern over the situation of the wives, illustrating how women are secondary and can easily be cast aside. Even in this troubled state, she continues counseling Macbeth, as this has been her role. As she says, “What’s done cannot be undone” (5.2.71); she has brought tragedy upon her sex.

In her death, she voices her greatest dissent—though it is unspoken on stage and often lost in various interpretations. She has what no woman of the land could be said to possess: autonomy, a treasure she later lost. As a woman and invalid, she would not be punished by the advancing troops—of whose approach she must have heard something. She commits suicide to free herself. Like a Roman soldier, she knows she would be enslaved and knows there would be nothing left for her to enjoy. Her autonomy and voice are taken away. Thus, in the ultimate act of voicing dissent, she kills herself, taking away the chance for others to force her into their narratives. She removes herself because that is the only freedom left to her.

According to Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean works spring out of “a sublime confrontation between a total artist and a totalizing society” (1988, p. 2). Now it is undeniable that Shakespeare wrote for the masses. He was also having his masterpieces acted out in court; therefore, it was most understandable that he would create works that catered to popular notions of morality. His were not off-off-Broadway, avant-garde performances in which he could shake the audience into a new understanding of the societal issues, yet he could indeed introduce the dissenting voice. He could not possibly have this voice win out in the end, because to do so would radically reduce his chances of being accepted. For the sake of being novel, one could potentially lose the audience that they could otherwise get, thus shaking the whole system and losing the chance to impart the moderate knowledge they could have fed the audience through less outlandish modes. This is what Shakespeare does. He introduces the dissenting elements but does not go the extra mile of having them subvert the system in the end. Even if superficially, they need to be subjected to some form of punishment when it comes to denouement. Then, once the text is performed, the fault line where they voice their truest self could be seen, its uneven ridges from where it is whitewashed and plastered still felt.

At a time when women were not granted the same scope of action and power as men, Lady Macbeth enjoyed considerable autonomy, even for a woman of her status and rank. Understandably, the character could create a lot of tension for the audience. This is a woman who is going directly against the grain of the society and the dominant ideology of the times. She is exercising power in a way that was directly against the orders of God, the church, and the society. She is betraying her sex, casting aside what is deemed appropriate for it, and instead adopting the guise of masculinity. Even so, she is not doing this with a social veneer of acceptance, that is, of doing it while pretending to be a man, but is exercising it blatantly. She is not pretending to comply with the system, not trying to say she approves of it, nor is she doing away with it completely. She

is not willing to be exorcised from the society; therefore, she manipulates it to her own desire so that she could be accommodated inside it.

Macbeth is certainly a character that is characterized by a lack. Although he manages to achieve success, he never appears to derive pleasure from it. And as regards his ambition, which might have been seen as responsible for his heinous crimes, it is of interest that this said ambition only motivates him when the chance for action presents itself. This hollowness of Macbeth signifies his underlying cowardliness and moral reprehensibility. His wife is the one who detects this lack in him, this lack of motivation or strength of character, and she moves in to fill the emptiness it has left in him. Shakespeare creates Lady Macbeth as a woman who dares to do more in a patriarchal society, an inhospitable environment in which she manages to succeed. But because of the limits of this society, she could not carry the ball to the finish line. Therefore, her death and previous mental agitation can be used to work as substitutes for poetic justice. She has caused death and havoc, she has gone beyond what she was supposed to, and she is now paying for her transgressions. She is reaping what she has sown.

To the audience, she is juxtaposed with Lady Macduff, the other prominent woman inside the play. Contrary to Lady Macbeth, she has dedicated herself to following the rules and died a paragon of feminine virtue. She is left behind by her husband when the political situation is too rough. But what society does in her situation is abhorrent. Her husband has left her behind in a situation from which he himself has fled. Now all she is left to do is nag and complain to the men who come visit her. These same men have the audacity to say she must school herself and tell her that her husband is wise and right. She is not allowed to have a voice even when she is slighted. She takes the only defense she has, talking to her child about how his father is dead (Shakespeare, 2000). This is a beautiful line that merits thinking. No scope of action is left to this woman; therefore, the only thing she can do and can justify doing is to tell her son her husband is dead—a form of wishful thinking on her part, or a way of saying that to her, the man is dead. She interestingly insists upon this, repeating it again and again. Later on, when someone comes to warn her of danger, her feminine instinct makes her say she has committed no sins. In her last moments, she acknowledges that as a woman, she is not taught to handle the real world. Even though she is mad at her husband, she still defends him, a paragon of virtue. She dies, as a woman should, while defending her man.

In the Shakespearean text, Lady Macbeth is not portrayed as a femme fatale. She is a woman who is a pioneer in her age, someone from a marginalized group who tries to carve a niche for herself in the world, an effort for which she is punished. Her dissenting voice is effectively muffled so as to contain the threat she poses to the system, restoring the order she disrupts. It is too easy to blame the tragedy on her; the femme fatale sets out to corrupt Macbeth, a woman haunted by blood thirst, a seductress. This is a stance that many later writers and adaptors have taken on, removing her tooth and having her grovel on the ground. But Shakespeare creates a far more nuanced character than that, a woman who fights to have her voice heard and refuses to let patriarchy dictate her fate, even in death.

Conclusion

Macbeth is a text that concerns itself with notions of power, both within the family and in the state. Turmoil rises in this environment when different participants give up their positions and begin to covet more than has traditionally been their share. Amid the general chaos, Lady Macbeth strives for a more prominent position in the family and Macbeth yearns for a greater share of political responsibility.

In Shakespeare's creation, Lady Macbeth is drawn as a woman who relishes great freedom of action and independence inside the framework of her marriage. Prior to the fateful events that led the Macbeths to become sovereigns of Scotland, they enjoyed a great relationship, one that could be said to embody the quintessential essence of marital bliss, one that is unmatched in other works of the Bard. Macbeth not only loves his wife, but also confides in her as well, relying on her sound advice. It is in this environment that she has come to know almost all about her husband. She is fully aware of what his weaknesses and strengths are and where exactly they lie. Consequently, she takes it upon herself to help her husband wipe the doubts from his person and brace himself to achieve what he has always deemed to be the best thing in life. In order to do so, she first resorts to logical reasoning, a method that, up to now, has worked best for her. Then, in an effort to win the argument, she begins to introduce the language of patriarchy into the relationship, trying to have her husband become concerned with the notion of manhood and preserving his masculinity. Once the deed is complete, she expects him to roll back into the easy flow of things, the ones they had enjoyed previously, but unfortunately for her, this is not possible. Macbeth retreats more and more into his masculine shell; he no longer confides in his wife and gives in to the dominant role of the king, trying to be the supreme patriarch both in the state and in his household. It is as a result of this ultimate reliance on the values of patriarchy that he brings about his demise. He not only makes his thanes discontented and unhappy with his rule because of excessive cruelty and tyranny but also loses the one companion he had in his life and alienates her. Accordingly, he is left alone in life, with no one to speak for him or work in his favor.

Despite this detailed care with which Shakespeare had portrayed his main female character, Lady Macbeth has been criticized and viewed as a monster for a number of reasons. First of all, her intense and profound relationship with her husband makes her appear to be unnaturally controlling, leading the audience to feel uneasy about her worthiness as a woman. Then, she further strengthens this initial impression by invoking the evil spirits to eradicate her sex so that she is better able to fulfill the role for which their great endeavor calls. Remarkably, many have taken this as her manipulation and perversion of gender, one that makes her an anomaly. Already, her childlessness has created tension in the minds of the viewers, since she is not successful in fulfilling the one role that was given to her, the one she was supposed to fulfill. As a result of these disruptions, Lady Macbeth has been viewed by many as the embodiment of pure corruption, a woman deeply and irredeemably evil.

This study is undertaken with the intention of discussing the intricacies of the evolution of Lady Macbeth, a Shakespearean creation who has been morphed into an embodiment of evil and dangerous femininity for far too long. What needs to be mentioned is that Shakespeare is not a writer who deems it his sole responsibility to pass judgment on his characters or devotes himself to the creation of types. Instead, he portrays the human condition as he perceives it, providing a sea of meaning in the relations that the different characters bore towards one another. No character of his may be said to be completely flawed or entirely noble; instead, there are tinges and hues with which they have been drawn. Even when creating a minor character solely for the sake of comic

relief, he is sure to portray it with enough nuance; therefore, as could be seen in some adaptations, even his minor characters could be expanded to play a more remarkable role. For Shakespeare, people are not types; they are differentiated based on their situations, backgrounds, and the worlds they inhabit. No feature is the sole determiner of how they act, but their behavior is a result of the different forces at work in their environment. This is a notion that may not be denied and has been one of the points that contribute to the affection and herald of the world toward the long-deceased Bard. Surprisingly, when it comes to Lady Macbeth, the spouse of the eponymous protagonist of his tragic masterpiece, a single-minded and less-than-ideally nuanced view has been adopted. Other characters have changed quite considerably, switching loyalties, trades, looks, or even genders, yet for the most part, Lady Macbeth remains the ungodly woman of hell.

In order to better understand the representation of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's text, the work was analyzed through Alan Sinfield's concept of dissent. According to this theory, the oppressed can still make their voices heard inside a text despite the roaring of the dominant ideology. This voice may not lead to a subversion of the dominating system of thought, but this is not a matter of import to Sinfield; what he deems significant and remarkable is the fact that these dissenting voices are creating a fault line, a ridge in the otherwise speckless narrative of dominance. From this vantage point, Lady Macbeth and her place inside the social order of the time are discussed. At the time in which the play was first presented, women did not enjoy a prominent place in society and were mostly limited in their scope of action. In such circumstances, a character such as Lady Macbeth could not be allowed to enjoy her boundless and subversive freedom but had to be disciplined in the end so as to reaffirm the structures of patriarchy, her punishment being viewed as a just re-establishment of order.

The study at hand puts forward a discussion of Lady Macbeth in the hopes that it could usher in a new understanding of the Shakespearean masterpieces, perhaps reminding scholars that with the changing of times, more rigorous attention must be paid to the characters that have become too familiar to sight. Shakespeare was a wildly conservative man, one who did not shy away from holding beliefs radical for his time but extremely sensitive in the manner in which he presented them to his audience. Unlike his contemporary, the hapless Christopher Marlowe, he did not particularly engage in rattling the audience's sensibilities. His characters are portrayed with utmost nuance and care, and even his villains cannot be honestly condemned as wholly malicious. Therefore, in order to bring a fresh perspective to the study of Shakespearean women, one must allow the fruits of decades of work by feminist critics to inform their analysis so as to prevent biases from occluding a new understanding, all the while keeping in sight the difficult and volatile cultural materialist conditions of the work's time of production. It is hoped that this could bring about a surge of new and enthralling readings of the masterpieces of the Bard.

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