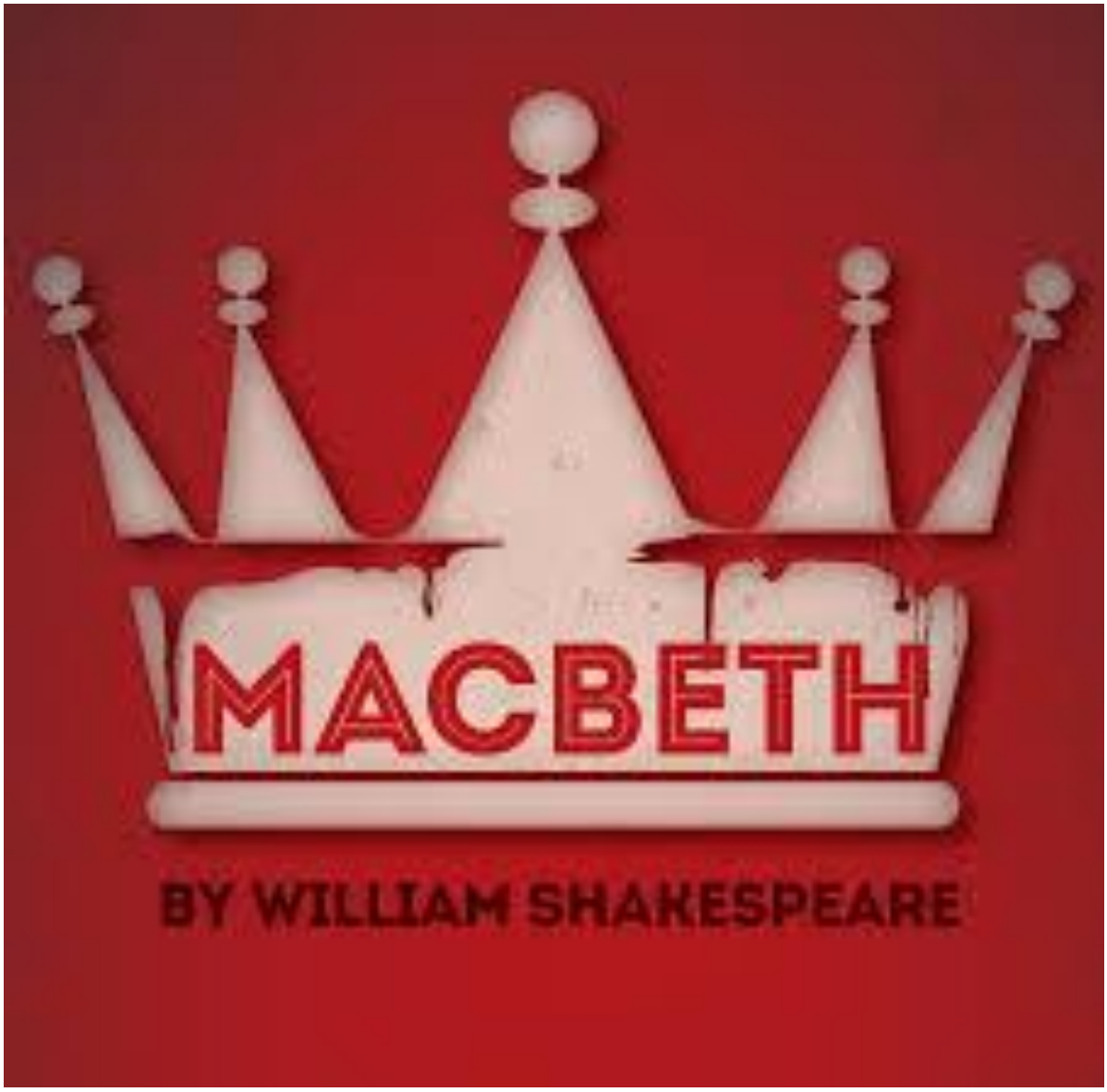

Macbeth Aim Higher

Name:

Teacher:

A Critical Analysis of Macbeth

For each reading, make your own Cornell notes and consider the following:

- Where are these ideas evidenced within the text?
- To what extent do I agree or disagree with the ideas put forward?
- What further questions does this leave me with and where could I explore possible answers?
- Can I use these ideas to link to any of the other texts that I study?

REDUCE- key words or questions from your notes	**WRITE NOTES- bullet point ideas as you read**
NOTE SUMMARY	

Psychoanalytical Criticism: Karin Thomson, Shakespeare Institute

The following essay deals with the effects of repressed emotion on the conscious and unconscious states of Lady Macbeth. In doing so it **explores the motives behind the actions of the two central characters**. An analysis of Lady Macbeth's repressed emotional complexes throws light [IV .iii.208-10] **Lady Macbeth shows a "false face" to everyone, including herself.** Her true self is only revealed in an unconscious state -in her sleep and her eventual somnambulistic state. With a great strength of will, Lady Macbeth dominates the situation in her waking state to achieve her obsessive ambition for her husband. In the preparation for the murder she is cool and calculating, manipulating her husbands will to the extent of her own. She redefines manliness for him as the ability to be unfeelingly brutal and goads him into proving this to her. The sexual energy involved in her persuasion is evident in her language. This energy is sublimated into ambition and culminates with Duncan's murder and the bloody rebirth of Macbeth as an unnatural son and heir to the throne.

Ambition, in Macbeth's case, develops into criminality and like an uncontrollable force destroys the better part of him as the play progresses. He is described as "valiant cousin" and "worthy gentleman " in the first scene, after the brutal murder of the king's enemies. However, his reaction to the witches' prophecy betrays a rather more devious nature. The witches instigate the tragedy by stimulating Macbeth's unconscious wish to be king. Macbeth starts with horror because **he is torn between private ambitions and his public face**. He wants to be considered valiant and worthy, but he also wishes to be king. The witches have offered this wish. Banquo, by contrast, is innocent of Macbeth's darker thoughts, and questions: "why do you start, and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair?" [I.iii. 50-51] Macbeth is already 'rapt' by a daydream of himself as king, which he passes on to his wife. His abilities, his power and skill as a bloodthirsty warrior are about to be turned on a society which doesn't suspect him. When addressing the king [I.iv .23-27] Macbeth uses words such as "service..loyalty..duties..love.. honour". Thirty lines later he states in an aside "Let not light see my black and deep desires". Macbeth's unconscious wishes have been brought forward into conscious thought where they will stay.

Lady Macbeth actively avoids thinking about what she has done. Progressively her unconscious works on her and betrays her in her dreams. **It does not seem accidental that her mental fragility increases as the bond between husband and wife weakens**. Her repressed fears emerge and cause the somnambulistic state in which she enacts a condensed panorama of her crimes. Lady Macbeth's predisposition towards daydreaming, the sublimation of her desire for a child and the repression of her guilt over Duncan's murder lead to this mental state. In her somnambulism Lady Macbeth repeatedly acts out the events connected to and resulting from Duncan's murder: Macbeth's murder of Banquo; the murder of Macduffs wife and children; Macbeth's terror at the banquet; the letter of the witches prophecy. All these events torment her, demonstrating to the audience, not only repressed guilt at her own crimes, **but guilt at helping to create a man who could commit these crimes**. The central symbol of her guilt and fear is the smell and sight of blood. She demonstrates compulsive neurosis in the continual washing of her hands, which she feels, are contaminated. "A little water" cannot clear her of the deed which "cannot be undone". Her contamination is of both body and soul. **Awake, Lady Macbeth exhibits emotionless cruelty, while in a somnambulistic state she shows pity and remorse. Her sleeping personality must be taken as her true one because the unconscious is uninhibited and uncensored.** Her true self is more powerful than the false warrior queen she plays in her waking hours. She ends in a state, which is neither awake nor asleep. Unable to live the lie or face the truth, her only escape is death.

Christian Perspectives on Macbeth Jane Kingsley – Smith Shakespeare Institute University of Birmingham

Macbeth's struggle with his conscience over the murder of Duncan is not merely an internal drama. Shakespeare externalises the forces of evil in his creation of the witches. And, whilst there are no good angels, **several characters are described as having some divine function or appealing to God**. Hence, Macbeth dramatises certain Christian beliefs that would have been understood as such by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Walter Clyde Curry writes: Shakespeare has informed Macbeth with the Christian conception of a metaphysical world of objective evil. The whole drama is saturated with the malignant presences of demonic forces; they animate nature and ensnare human souls by means of diabolical persuasion, by hallucination, infernal illusion, and possession. They are, in the strictest sense, one element in **that Fate which God in His providence has ordained to rule over the bodies and, it is possible, over the spirits of men.** (92-3) The new king for whom Shakespeare wrote his play, James popularised the idea of such forces of evil in his own work Demonology. Christian philosophy of the period imagined two opposing realms of good and evil, commanded by God and the Devil. The manifestation of each power on earth occurred internally in the spirit of man and externally in the activity of angels and demons. **Criticism of Macbeth inevitably centres on the symbolic battle between good and evil in the play. The characters are lined up on the appropriate sides.** Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, for their acceptance of demonic prophecy as well as their bloody deeds, are posed against the forces of heaven. The latter include most obviously Duncan and Edward, both 'holy' kings, Banquo who declares 'In the great hand of God I stand' (2.3.129) and Malcolm and Macduff who restore the kingdom to 'grace'. This structure of evil destroyed is viewed as an example of God's providence by most Christian critiques. **Providence can be seen in the destruction of the criminal Macbeth; the restoration of Scotland to its rightful heir and the end of Macbeth's dark reign; but above all, in God's victory against Satan.** One question the Christian critic must answer is **why God has not intervened sooner**. Macduff grieves at the murder of his family and asks: 'Did heaven look on/ And would not take their part?' (4.3.225-6).

However, Robert Rentoul Reed argues that **God's triumph is all the more impressive in the play because of this suspense: The bringing by God of a merely wicked man to judgement is worthy perhaps of a perfunctory glory** .If, however, He brings to judgement a wicked man who has usurped, against God's law, the throne of a kingdom and who, for his own ends, has delivered that kingdom over to Satanic powers, over which he maintains a nominal command, has God not translated His otherwise perfunctory glory into a kind of magnificent resurrection, in which is seen His real glory? Such, at least, is the suggestion of the denouement of this play. (197-8) The argument for divine providence may also be extended to explain the rise of Macbeth himself J. A. Bryant argues that God must have 'elected to correct Scotland in some way and prepare it for a much greater role in history under the treble sceptre of Banquo's descendant, James VI' (171). The reductive implications of this critical approach are obvious. **Macbeth becomes merely a foil to God's greatness or a pawn in the cosmic battle between good and evil**. Christian criticism can offer a more character-based approach but again, this depends on Biblical allegory. **Walker imagines the murder of Duncan as partaking of the central Christian tragedy, that is, the crucifixion of Christ.** Macbeth/Judas describes how Duncan/Christ: Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been So clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking-off, and pity, like a naked newborn babe, Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed Upon the sightless couriers of the air, Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye That tears shall drown the wind. (1.7.17-25) The storm during the night of the murder, the reference to the temple cracking and the linking of Macbeth with a second Golgotha all reinforce this association. The murder has also been likened to Cain's fratricide whilst Curry sees the moral degradation of Macbeth following an archetypal pattern

exemplified by Lucifer and Adam. **Angel/man's self-love leads him to desire what is denied him by God.** Crucially, it is at this point of turning away from God that **man is vulnerable to the influence of the Devil's agents** whether they are witches, demons or the promptings of another human being. Lady Macbeth's call upon 'murd'ring ministers', 'sightless substances' and 'thick night' to fill her with 'direst cruelty' (1.4.39-53) has often been referred to as a wish for demonic possession.

Macbeth's relationship with evil is similar to that of Marlowe' s Dr Faustus. **Macbeth imagines that he too has sold his soul to the devil for some temporal good:** 'mine eternal jewel/ Given to the common enemy of man' (3.1.68-9). Like Faustus, he is unable to repent. It is in these terms that Macbeth's decision to embrace evil and to wade in blood is explored. He is a man guilty of self-love who is influenced by the witches and by his wife to murder Duncan. Having achieved the throne, he continues in his course, not because of any predestination, but to defy providence which will give his crown to Banquo's heirs. Moreover, Reed argues that Macbeth's increasingly bloody acts are a deliberate attempt to silence his conscience but also to destroy his moral nature, which manifests his bond with God. **Macbeth struggles to become an enemy to providence and to God himself.**

There are **a number of obvious limitations to this critical perspective**. It cannot explain why an audience will identify with the murdering, 'hell-hound' Macbeth (for an excellent analysis of this imaginative sympathy sees Robert B. Heilman's 'The Criminal as Tragic Hero'). Furthermore, **Macbeth and his wife are inevitably reduced to puppets**, either literally possessed by evil spirits or subject to the great operation of divine providence. Neither of these perspectives allows for the complexity of Macbeth's characterisation nor for his own lack of religious guilt. **He does not show any repentance** at the end nor does he recognise his crimes as crimes against God, which the morality play certainly required (see Morris). It might also be argued that although there are a number of important Biblical allusions here these do not add up to an equal battle between good and evil. The latter is a far more powerful and immediate force in the play.

Macbeth and Feminism Dr. Caroline Cakebread Shakespeare Institute University of Birmingham

Shakespeare's Macbeth is a tragedy that embodies the polarities of male and female power, a play which seems to dramatize the deep divisions that characterize male-female relationships in all his plays. As Janet Adelman writes, "In the figures of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the witches, the play gives us images of a masculinity and a femininity that are terribly disturbed." At the same time, critics have tended to discuss the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in a way that further highlights this division, **viewing Macbeth as a victim of overpowering feminine influences** that characterize the world around him, **from the appearance of the bearded Witches at the beginning of the play, to the presence of Lady Macbeth throughout**. Sigmund Freud writes of Lady Macbeth, that her sole purpose throughout the play is "that of overcoming the scruples of her ambitious and yet tender-minded husband...She is ready to sacrifice even her womanliness to her murderous intention..."

For many feminist critics, however, **the opinion of Freud and other critics that Macbeth is merely a victim of feminine plotting is an unsatisfactory response to this play.** On the most basic level, it is Macbeth who actually murders the king while Lady Macbeth is the one who cleans up the mess. A more fruitful approach would be **a closer examination of the different types of women who are being represented throughout the play, rather than viewing the women en masse, as part of a dark and evil force "ganging up" on Macbeth.** Indeed, feminist criticism can help to point the way towards a clearer understanding of the sort of society Shakespeare is portraying in this tragedy. Terry Eagleton points out his belief that **"the witches are the heroines of the piece",** As the most fertile force in the play, the witches inhabit an anarchic, richly ambiguous zone both in and out of official society; they live in their own world but intersect with Macbeth's. **They are poets, prophetesses and devotees of female cult, radical separatists who scorn male power** . For Eagleton, the witches, existing on the fringes of society, are not necessarily the "juggling fiends" (5.7.49) that Macbeth professes them to be at the end of the play. Instead, as feminist critics, we might well ask ourselves about the brutal nature of the society in which Macbeth is living and the effects that traditional labels of "masculinity" and "femininity" have on that society. The nature of gender roles in Macbeth--a play which is ostensibly about the exchange and usurpation of political authority amongst men--is brought to the fore at the very beginning of the play, in the figures of the three Witches in Act One, scene one: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12) they tell us. Marilyn French points out the role of the Witches in establishing what she sees as the dynamic of ambiguity that will characterize gender relationships throughout the play. As she writes: They are female, but have beards; they are aggressive and authoritative, but seem to have power only to create petty mischief. Their persons, their activities, and their song serve to link ambiguity about gender to moral ambiguity. The witches challenge our assumptions about masculine and feminine attributes from the very start, with their beards and their prophecies. In juggling with the contradictory values of fair and foul, they call into question the moral systems and standards upon which this play will operate. **Shakespeare's witches exist on the fringes of a society in which feminine attributes denote powerlessness and destruction (Duncan, Lady Macduff) and in which traditionally masculine values are equated with power.**

Indeed, Macbeth's first appearance, covered with blood and receiving high praise for the slaughter of others, gives us our first idea about the acceptable patterns of behaviour, which govern the "masculine" side of this world: For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name!-- Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel Which smoked with bloody execution, Like valour's minion Carved out his passage till he faced the slave, Which ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell to him Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops, And fixed his head upon our battlements. (1.2.16-23)

Macbeth receives the title of "brave Macbeth" amongst his peers for his role as butcher and killing machine. His ruthlessness is welcomed as valorous and wins him the accolades of his male peers. Thus, masculine power in the play, the society represented by Duncan, is more like the world of "juggling fiends" to which Macbeth links the witches when they cease to be of use to him at the end of the play.

Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full Of direst cruelty. (1.5.39-42) As Macbeth's "partner of greatness"(1.5.10), **Lady Macbeth's "sacrifice of her womanliness" to echo Freud--"unsex me here"--further highlights the importance of the acceptance of traditionally masculine qualities in order to achieve power in the play**. "Come to my woman's breasts/ And take my milk for gall"(1.5.46-47) she asserts, reinforcing the fact that she is trading her traditional feminine role as mother and nurturer in exchange for a power which accords with the violent, masculine world of which her husband is a part. **In this world, femininity is not an attribute to be equated with power** and, in the murder of Duncan (a king whom Janet Adelman describes as weak and ineffectual), feminine attributes lead to virtual erasure in terms of power politics. **Here, there is no place for vulnerability**. I have given suck, and know 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 sworn As you have done to this. (1.7.54-59) Lady Macbeth, in moving from nurturing mother to infanticide, represents a shift from the passive “milky" masculinity she associates with the weak men in the play to a power position which resonates with a sense of maternal evil. While this is one of the most disturbing points in the play, it also marks the crossing of a divide between male and female power, a transgression which is marked by such violent and disturbing imagery.

In the murder of Duncan, Macbeth also highlights the violent nature of male-female divisions, especially, as Janet Adelman points out, in envisioning himself as a Tarquin figure in approaching the sleeping king: "..thus with his stealthy pace,/With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design/Moves like a ghost" (2.1...). Tarquin, the rapist, the violator of female innocence, becomes Macbeth, the killer of kings and usurper of power. Here, **power relationships amongst men pivot upon images of male sexual aggression and violence**.

At the end of this play, **power will be assumed by a man who is not born of any woman**, as the witches prophesy: "for none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.94-95). This prophesy is misread by Macbeth and yet it is extremely telling, since it predicts the complete eradication of female power which will ensue at the end of the play, with Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff dead. Now widowed, Macduff, who was born by caesarean section, is a man with no mother, especially since a caesarean birth in Shakespeare's time inevitably led to the death of the mother. In the end, it is in the divide between male and female worlds in Macbeth that the nucleus of tragedy lies.

New Historicist Criticism: Macbeth and Power Wiatt Ropp Shakespeare Institute University of Birmingham

Stripped of Shakespeare's poetic style and skilful characterization, Macbeth is revealed as little more than a petty tyrant. Like Machiavelli's Prince, **Macbeth seeks power as an end in itself and sees any means as justified provided it helps him achieve his goal**. It is a standard image of power: an individual, or small group, occupying a position of authority from which he (seldom she) attempts to force his will upon others. **Today's equivalent of a feudal monarch is the power-hungry politician, the cult leader, or the ruthless business tycoon.**

But **the new historicist conception of power is different**; rather than being a top-down affair that originates from a specific place or individual, **power comes from all around us, it permeates us, and it influences us in many subtle and different ways.** This idea of decentralized power, heavily indebted to post-structuralist philosophy (see Derrida and Foucault), is sometimes difficult to understand because it seems to have an intangible, mystical quality. Power appears to operate and maintain itself on its own, without any identifiable individual actually working the control levers. This new historicist notion of power is evident in **Macbeth in the way in which Macbeth's apparent subversion of authority culminates in the re-establishment of that same type of authority under Malcolm.** A ruthless king is replaced with another king, a less ruthless one, perhaps, but that is due to Malcolm's benevolent disposition, not to any reform of the monarchy. Similarly, the subversion of the play's moral order is contained, and the old order reaffirmed, by the righteous response to that subversion. In other words, what we see at the beginning of the play--an established monarch and the strong Christian values that legitimize his sovereignty--is the same as what we see at the end of the play, only now the monarchy and its supporting values are even more firmly entrenched thanks to the temporary disruption. **It is almost as if some outside force carefully orchestrates events in order to strengthen the existing power structures**.

Consider, for example, a military leader who becomes afraid of the peace that undermines his position in society. In response to his insecurity, **he creates in people's minds the fear of an impending enemy**--whether real or imaginary, it doesn't matter. As a consequence of their new feelings of insecurity, **people desire that their leader remain in power** and even increase his power so that he can better defend them from their new II enemy. II The more evil and threatening our enemies are made to appear, the more we believe our own aggressive response to them is justified, and **the more we see our leaders as our valiant protectors** (Zinn,Declarations of Independence 260-61,266). Military or political power is strengthened, not weakened, when it has some kind of threatening subversion of contain (Greenblatt 62-65).

The important point about the new historicist notion of power, however, is that it is not necessary for anyone to orchestrate this strengthening of authority. Duncan certainly doesn't plan to be murdered in order that the crown will be more secure on Malcolm's head after he deposes Macbeth. The witches can be interpreted as manipulating events, but there is nothing to indicate that they are motivated by a concern to increase the power and authority of the Scottish crown. It is not necessary to believe in conspiracy theories to explain how power perpetuates itself; the circular and indirect, rather than top-down, way in which power operates in society is enough to ensure that it is maintained and its authority reinforced.

The theatre illustrates this point in that the Renaissance theatre--its subject matter, spectacle, emphasis on role-playing--drew its energy from the life of the court and the affairs of state--their ceremony, royal pageants and progresses, the spectacle of public executions (Greenblatt 11-16). In return, the theatre helped legitimate the existing state structures by emphasizing, for example, the

superior position in society of the aristocracy and royalty. These are the class of people, **the theatre repeatedly showed its audience, who deserve to have their stories told on stage, while common people are not worthy subjects for serious drama and are usually represented as fools or scoundrels**. Revealing the inherently theatrical aspects of the court and affairs of state runs the risk of undermining their authority--if people on stage can play at being Kings and Queens, lords and ladies, then there is always the possibility that the audience will suspect that real Kings and Queens, lords and ladies, are just ordinary people who are playing a role and do not actually deserve their position of wealth and privilege.

Within the walls of the theater, it is acceptable to mock the actor playing a king, but never the king himself; **it is acceptable to contemplate the murder of a theatrical monarch, but never a real one.** Macbeth deals with the murder of a king, but Shakespeare turns that potentially subversive subject into support for his king, James I. Queen Elizabeth died without a direct heir, and a - power vacuum is a recipe for domestic turmoil or even war. The consequences of Macbeth's regicide and tyranny illustrate the kinds of disruption that were prevented by the peaceful ascension to the throne of James, son of Mary, Queen of Scots. The "good king" of England (4.3 .147) who gives Malcolm sanctuary and supports his cause as the rightful successor to the Scottish crown is an indirect reference to James I. Macbeth is about treason and murder, but Malcolm's description of the noble king (147-59), and the stark contrast between him and Macbeth, reinforces the idea that good subjects should see their king as their benefactor and protector.

Shakespeare was not coerced into flattering his king. There was official censorship in his time, but it is unlikely that he needed anyone to tell him what he could or could not write; he knew the types of stories that were acceptable to authority and desirable to his paying public. Whether or not Shakespeare felt constrained by these limitations, or even consciously recognized them, is not the point; the point is that he worked within a set of conventions and conditions which relied upon and reinforced the governing power relations of his time, and so there was no need for him to be manipulated by a government censor looking over his shoulder. If Shakespeare had not known the boundaries of the acceptable, or had not conformed to the demands of power, he would never have become a successful playwright. **According to new historicism, our own relationship to power is similar to that of Shakespeare's: we collaborate with the power that controls us. Without necessarily realizing what we are doing, we help create and sustain it, thus reducing the need for authority figures to remind us what to do or think.** Once we accept the cultural limitations imposed on our thought and behaviour, once we believe that the limits of the permissible are the extent of the possible, then we happily police ourselves.

ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE IN MACBETH

by Thomas de Quincey

The following essay was originally published in Miscellaneous Essays. Thomas de Quincey. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865. pp. 9-15.

From my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this**: the knocking at the gate,** which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that **it reflected back upon the murder a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity;** yet, however obstinately I endeavored with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see *why* it should produce such an effect.

Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror; and for this reason, that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life; an instinct, which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind, (though different in degree,) amongst all living creatures; this instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of 'the poor beetle that we tread on,' exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? **He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him;*** (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them--not a sympathy of pity or approbation.) In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic; the fear of instant death smites him 'with its petrific mace.' But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion -- jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred -- which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look.

In *Macbeth*, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakespeare has introduced two murderers; and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated: but, **though in Macbeth the strife of mind is greater than in his wife**, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her -- yet, as both **were finally involved in the guilt of murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both**. This was to be expressed; and on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, 'the gracious Duncan,' and adequately to expound 'the deep damnation of his taking off,' this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature, i.e., the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man -- was gone, vanished, extinct; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader's attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister, in a fainting fit, he may chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle, is *that* in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis, on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, **has felt powerfully, in**

the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man -- if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting, as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now apply this to the case in *Macbeth*. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart, was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in; and **the murderers are taken out of the region of the human things, human purposes, human desires**. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is 'unsexed;' Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder, must be insulated -- cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs -- locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested -- laid asleep -- tranced -- racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, **that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds; the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced:** the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O, mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers -- like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert -- but that, the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!

Michael Fassbender: 'Macbeth suffered from PTSD'

The star of Justin Kurzel's version of Shakespeare's great tragedy tells the Cannes film festival that the warrior-turned-murderer's treachery is the result of battle fatigue

Henry Barnes

Sat 23 May 2015 12.14

The murderous treachery of Macbeth would today be diagnosed as the result of post-traumatic stress disorder, Michael Fassbender told the press at the Cannes film festival.

The actor, who plays Shakespeare's tragic warrior in a new film adaptation by Australian film-maker Justin Kurzel, said the director helped him realise it was the cumulative effect of months of grisly battle that drives Macbeth to murder his king after the war is over.

"Never did it occur to me before this that this character was suffering from PTSD," he said. "You have a soldier who's engaged in battle month-after-month, day-after-day. Killing with his hands. Pushing a sword through muscle and bone. And if that doesn't work picking up a rock and using that".

Kurzel's version of Shakespeare's great tragedy opens with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, played by Marion Cotillard, laying one of their children to rest. In a subsequent battle scene Macbeth is shown hallucinating images of the witches that will deliver the prophesy that predicts his tyrannical path to power.

"We know from soldiers today coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan that they have these hallucinations," Fassbender said. "You could be walking down the Croisette here and then it's Basra. All of a sudden it's Basra".

Macbeth is Kurzel's second feature after Snowtown, the director's take on the Snowtown "bodies-in-barrels" murders, which were committed in Australia during the 1990s. His version of the Assassin's Creed video game, for which he will re-team with Fassbender and Cotillard, is in pre-production. Kurzel said he was keen to avoid his version of Macbeth being lead by previous adaptations of Shakespeare's text.

"I was reading that a production of Macbeth is made every four years," he said. "If that's so it's one of the biggest blockbusters out there"

He said his version is less about the unchecked ambition of a ruthless husband and wife and more about a couples' grief.

"[It's about] how you replace something you've lost," he said. I've experienced that in my own life. I was very interested in how desparate you can be to fill a hole left by grief".

Cotillard, the French Oscar-winner who's in Cannes for a fourth consecutive year, said that she found playing Lady Macbeth in English with a Scottish accent difficult. She said it was hard to be swept away by a character who lives in a world where "all is gloom".

“She grapples with her fears and that turns her into a bit a monster,” she said. “There’s a lot of love between these two characters but they’re just too damaged to allow in anything luminous”.

The film, financed by StudioCanal and FilmFour, was shot partly in Scotland. Kurzel said the Scottish countryside “eats you up”, noting that at one point Cotillard had, indeed, been swallowed by a boghole. When asked what the worst and best things about shooting in Scotland were Fassbender replied: “Whisky and whisky”.

An excerpt from an interview with Kurzel regarding playing the part of Macbeth:

Just as you say, it’s not only the killing of many people: you have a soldier that’s engaged in battle month in, month out, day after day, but the fact that his battle takes place with his bare hands. I mean, the sword is the weapon of choice and what it takes to pierce someone’s skin, drive the sword through somebody’s muscle, break through their bone and then take the sword out again and, if the sword fails, pick up a rock, smash someone’s skull. Those kind of images, definitely I tried to dig up and explore to try and find that fractured character right at the beginning.
The idea that he is seeing hallucinations; we know from soldiers today coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan that describe post traumatic stress disorder and the fact that they have these hallucinations. They can be walking down the Croisette here and next thing it’s Basra, and it’s real time Basra. So that made so much sense from the beginning with the character. The fact that, is he seeing the witches? Are they there? Are they not? And his sort of unhinged behaviour.

BRITISH LIBRARY ‘Unsex Me Here’: Lady Macbeth’s ‘Hell Broth’

- Article by:Sandra M. Gilbert
- Themes:Tragedies, Gender, sexuality, courtship and marriage
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Sandra M. Gilbert considers how Lady Macbeth in her murderous ambition goes beyond prescribed gender roles, but in doing so only succeeds in monstering herself and becoming a parody of womanhood, until madness again confines her to feminine helplessness.

Throughout most of literary history, **Lady Macbeth – the scheming spouse who plots the villainy at the centre of Shakespeare’s devastating ‘Scottish play’ – has been seen as a figure of ‘almost peerless malevolence’**. Monstrous and murderous, she was based on a woman described in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* as ‘burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene’. Yet actors who played this part have often debated her character. Writing in the early 19th century, the great Sarah Siddons declared that this infamous heroine was ‘a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition has almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature’, and recalled that she first learned the part ‘in a paroxysm of terror’, so fearful that the rustling of her own silk dress seemed ‘like the movement of a spectre pursuing me’. But later in the century the charismatic actor Ellen Terry thought it **‘strange’ that Lady Macbeth should be seen ‘as a sort of monster’, claiming that ‘I conceive [her] as a small, slight woman of acute nervous sensibility’,** who was perhaps ‘not good, but not much worse than many women you know – me for instance’. The critic Anna Jameson similarly declared that ‘the woman herself remains a woman to the last’.

From a more recent perspective, however, Lady Macbeth has come to be seen not primarily as a fiendish avatar of evil but as an incarnation of gender trouble whose efforts to implement her dreams of power question the sexual hierarchy into which she has been born. Almost her first words in the play, after she receives her husband’s letter reporting his encounter with the witches, dramatise the inversion of gender roles that marks her marriage. The hesitant Macbeth is, she fears, ‘too full o’ th’ *milk* of human kindness’ (1.5.17, my italics) for his own purposes, and worse still, hers; his effeminate milkiness suggests that, despite being a dutiful warrior, he’s a kind of timid ‘milquetoast’. To combat this, Lady Macbeth plans to ‘pour my spirits in thine ear, / And chastise with the valour of my tongue / All that impedes thee from the golden round’ (1.5.26–28) of the Scottish crown; literally, she’ll ‘screw his courage to the sticking place’ (1.7.60) by giving him a good talking-to. **But the fantasy, and ultimately the act, of *pouring spirits* into someone’s ear, is symbolically masculine**, even while in a Shakespearean context, it is villainous. On the one hand, **Lady Macbeth’s plan evokes classic representations of a passive Virgin Mary impregnated through the ear by the Holy Ghost**, or *Spirit*, of the Lord in a sort of divine sexual act. On the other hand, her bold (valorous) idea also recalls the poison murderously poured by Hamlet’s wicked stepfather, Claudius, into the ear of his sleeping brother, the rightful king. Either way, **the lady’s boastful intention signifies her rebellion against the submissive role to which her culture has assigned her.**

Lady Macbeth’s passion to transcend her role as a woman becomes even more explicit in her famous call to the diabolical ‘Spirits’ (whom her own ‘spirits’ may reflect):

Come,
. . .
unsex me here,
...
Make thick my blood,

. . .
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose,
…
Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall … (1.5.40–48, my italics)

Unsexed by her own will, Lady Macbeth is now no longer a conventional 'lady': because **she has refused to behave as dutifully as her society suggests she should**, she seems to become an inhuman creature, a dark parody of femaleness whose blood is too 'thick' and clotted for menstrual fertility and whose maternal milk is bitter, dangerous, galling. In unsexing herself she almost appears to have dehumanised herself and stepped out of 'nature' – that is, out of the natural order of things in which the 'milk of human kindness' nurtures moral feeling

In fact, as a diabolical creature Lady Macbeth has aligned herself with the three Weird Sisters, whose violation of sexual norms ('you should be women', says Banquo, 'And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so') proclaims their witchcraft (1.3.45–47). And just as the witches cook up the vile 'hell-broth' that motivates Macbeth's treachery (4.1.19), his unnatural wife stirs up the feast of blood that is the 'great business' of the play (1.5.68). Decisively plotting the implementation of her husband's fell desire, she advises him to act innocent and 'Leave all the rest to me' (1.5.74). **When Macbeth, still wavering, confides his own ambivalence about murder in an image of maternal tenderness, describing feelings of 'pity, like a naked new-born babe' (1.7.21), she responds with a savage description of a mother's most unnatural fantasy, infanticide:**

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (1.7.54–59)

Then, once her plans, along with the king and his servants, have been executed, sleep – 'great Nature's second course' (2.2.36) – is murdered too, and much more of the natural order is subverted; so much so that darkness blots out daylight, a mere 'mousing owl' kills a proud falcon (2.4.13), and Duncan's horses – the 'minions of their race'– turn wild and, incredibly, 'eat each other' (2.4.15–18).

Ironically, Lady Macbeth is often portrayed as accomplishing her purpose by adopting traditionally 'feminine' tricks. Some actors depict her as seductive, luring her husband towards crime by playing the part of his 'dearest chuck' (3.2.45). As the critic Stephen Greenblatt has noted, too, **the Macbeths' marriage is one of Shakespeare's most extraordinary dramatisations of 'spousal intimacy', a companionate union in which 'husband and wife speak to each other playfully, as if they were a genuine couple'**. This representation of conjugal closeness may help explain the sympathy with which, say, Terry and Jameson commented on Lady Macbeth's womanliness. Certainly, as Siddons astutely noted, even after the two have been overcome by guilt, '**Unlike the first frail pair in Paradise, they spent not the fruitless hours in mutual accusation.' Where Milton's Adam and Eve blame each other for the Original Sin that expelled them from Eden, the Macbeths continue to protect each other, each one eventually suffering in isolation from horrifying remorse.**

Indeed**, by the end of the play, the couple have been restored to their 'proper' gender roles.** Macbeth gains in murderous masculinity, ordering killing after killing like a gangland boss, including the deaths of the dutifully domesticated Lady Macduff and the 'pretty ones' (4.3.216) who are her children, while Lady Macbeth lapses back into the feminine helplessness she had

earlier rejected. Her loss of control is most theatrically manifested in her guilt-ridden sleep-walking scene. Here the sleep, whose murder she had commanded, overwhelms her, forcing her to confess her sins while failing to 'knit up the ravell'd sleeve of care' (2.2.34). And though Macbeth too had wished to purify himself of crime, grandiosely fearing that he could not be cleansed by 'all great Neptune's ocean'(2.2.57), his sleep-walking lady, enacting an obsessive-compulsive ritual of hand-washing, whimpers that 'all the *perfumes* of Arabia will not sweeten this *little* hand' (5.1.50–51). **Madness, curiously, forces her back into the stereotypical femininity that her transgressive yearning for imperial power had repudiated.**

Over the years, many efforts have been made to rehabilitate Lady Macbeth. Since the late 20th century, for instance, as William C Carroll has reported, a number of writers, especially feminists, have produced prequels or sequels to the play in which the wicked heroine is revealed as a sympathetic, motherly woman. 'Perhaps today's Lady Macbeth needs Women's Liberation', mused the critic Ruby Cohn in 1976, and her comment predicted the appearance of such spin-off novels as Susan Fraser King's *Lady Macbeth* (2008), Lisa Klein's *Lady Macbeth's Daughter* (2009) and R J Hartley and David Henson's *Macbeth: A Novel* (2012). It seems unlikely, however, that any revisionary perfume can sweeten the 'hell-broth' of crime and punishment stirred up by one of Shakespeare's most unnerving characters.