

Mental Illness and Misogyny in the Presence of Power: An Analysis of Sympathetic Portrayals of Lady Macbeth

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Abstract

Lady Macbeth is one of the most prolific Shakespearean characters, so much so that the discussions regarding the play—named after her husband—are dominated by analyses of her actions, motivations, and influence on the literary world, particularly the role of the “evil queen”. I, following in the footsteps of the literary critics before me, will be assessing the relationship between Lady Macbeth’s role and presence in the play, including how it is adapted, and the larger ideological implications of her role in society as a woman who comes into power. I will discuss gender theory in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Shakespeare’s use of women in tragedy as well as how this use and treatment is adapted in a variety of other sources. I will be analyzing adaptations that portray Lady Macbeth in a sympathetic light, interpreting the source material in a way that highlights her struggles and motivations beyond the surface level of apathetic ambition and greed. These adaptations include the 2015 stage production from Tara Arts and various films: *Men of Respect* (1991), *Scotland, PA* (2001), *Maqbool* (2003), and *Macbeth* (2015).

Introduction

A pattern that may be noticed in Shakespeare's tragedies is the stripping of autonomy of the female characters. Women are forced into certain situations or taking certain actions that will then define their character. They are not taken seriously—which is commonly a catalyst for the tragic events that occur in the play. *Macbeth* refers to the titular character of General Macbeth, the man who kills the king to take the crown and the throne. Despite this, it is Lady Macbeth who has had a greater impact on popular culture and continues to be the center of conversation regarding the play. She takes on a prominent antagonistic role in the events of the story as she encourages Macbeth to carry out the murder plot because she wants to be the queen of Scotland. However, throughout the years since the play's original publication, innovative screenwriters, directors, producers, and the like have tried their hand at portraying Lady Macbeth as a sympathetic figure worthy of further analysis. These adaptors use the ambiguity of the play to their advantage, diving deep into their interpretations of Lady Macbeth's thoughts, motives, and life with Macbeth. Some decide to place her in a modern environment far from the Scottish moorland she is accustomed to, while others decide to retell the original tale with minimal changes to the setting and plot.

1. Lady Macbeth in Cinema

1.1 *Men of Respect* (1991)

In William Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1991), *Macbeth* is reimagined as an organized crime drama complete with exaggerated accents and Mafia references. As is expected in such a film, Lady Macbeth, now Ruthie Battaglia, is a stubborn mob wife with a bump in her hair and donned in expensive clothing. With all her cunning and striking dialogue, her role within the crime family is subordinate to the men around her. However, despite the difficulties brought on by her surroundings, she is still portrayed as a strong-willed woman with an affinity for violence to the same degree as the dangerous men she accompanies. In comparison to the source material, Ruthie as Lady Macbeth is more validated in her attitude of the established ruling figure, her wishes to have her husband succeed, and her behavior regarding her husband.

Leading up to the assassination of the syndicate boss Charlie D'Amico, the audience gets a glimpse of his relationship with the Battaglias. As is in the play, D'Amico stays overnight in their home as a guest, but, unlike in the original Shakespeare, he speaks to Ruthie in a way that is uncomfortably flirtatious. Duncan calls Lady Macbeth "honored" and thanks her for her hospitality, whereas D'Amico greets Ruthie by calling her "fox", a nickname she cannot refuse due to the natural power imbalance in their relationship to one another (1.6.13). His flirting is portrayed as

casual and even perhaps comedic, but this only adds to the unease that settles around his interactions with her. Ruthie is being forced into a spot of only half-heartedly batting him off, laughing whether or not she finds it funny. Her husband has had a new promotion to caporegime, and Ruthie starting a conflict with D'Amico would put his position in the family in jeopardy. This is doubly so because D'Amico had already passed up Mike Battaglia for successor in favor of his sons, and Mike does not have this same blood connection that would allow him some grace. Because of his situation, Mike cannot stand up to D'Amico about how he treats Ruthie. Like Ruthie, Mike has to laugh it off, although his discomfort could not match hers as she is the object of the infatuation. While Mike has to deal with comments like, "I think I'm gonna run away with your wife" from D'Amico, Ruthie has to deal with comments like, "C'mon, just give me a kiss". D'Amico's advances, even if they are in jest, can be identified as harassment.

Ruthie, like all Lady Macbeth figures, instigates the political assassination that kicks off the rest of the story. In *Men of Respect* (1991), though, her motivations are less unfounded than those of her play counterpart. King Duncan is, for all intents and purposes, not a negative figure in terms of monarchy. He is not presented as a tyrant or unnecessarily cruel; the malice of the play, in fact, is presented through King Macbeth—and, before his crowning, Lady Macbeth. Even excluding D'Amico's questionable behavior regarding Ruthie, he takes advantage of those around him in a way that is not present—or at least not overtly shown—with King Duncan in the play. Both authority figures pass up the Macbeth figure for succession, but it is a prominent aspect of *Men of Respect* (1991) that Battaglia is the correct choice. In the play, Macbeth believes himself to be the correct choice, and this is only entertained by the audience because he is the protagonist, but even his role does not carry his argument through the rest of the story, during which it is more and more apparent to the audience that he is not fit to be king. The audience is led to believe that Macbeth's military prowess and accomplishments give him reason to be named successor to King Duncan, even though those are not ways to become king when the king has living heirs. In the film, Battaglia has similar achievements to Macbeth in committing acts of violence in the name of his ruler—the film opens with a large-scale hit of which Battaglia is responsible. However, due to the nature of his life and job, his achievements win generosity from D'Amico that allows him to move up the Mafia ladder, unlike Macbeth's. D'Amico's passing over of Battaglia as heir is either an egregious oversight or an intentional slight to Battaglia and his loyalty. While D'Amico's rule and Duncan's rule can both be dictated by heritage, Duncan's is more strict due to regality being "divinely" chosen through blood—giving Ruthie more validation in her anger than Lady Macbeth. She tells him, "They use you. They have everything and we have nothing". In her eyes, D'Amico is taking advantage of her husband, primarily due to the scene in which D'Amico does not name Battaglia as his successor, where D'Amico praises Battaglia right before naming someone else as if trying to affect him psychologically.

Ruthie does suffer the same criticism as Lady Macbeth in how she interacts with her husband, but there are subtleties in her behavior that lead the audience to believe that she does not speak to her husband with malice, even if her words might be seen as cruel. A striking instance of Ruthie's treatment of her husband varying from Lady Macbeth is right after the assassination. While Lady Macbeth mentions having had a baby that is suspiciously absent by the start of the play, the audience knows that it was, at least, born, due to her referencing having breastfed. Ruthie, on the other hand, says, "I know what it is to have a life inside me and squashing it out because it's not the right time" and, "I know what it is to kill for you, Michael". Ruthie has had an abortion, and there is a chilling implication that the driving force behind the decision was Michael. Other than this moment, it does not seem like Ruthie bears resentment or bitterness towards Michael, even though, if it was his decision, she would have the right. In fact, Ruthie, despite her hard edges and tough love, seems to dote on Michael. This, perhaps, could be a way she expels her maternal instincts. After the assassination, Michael has a physical reaction to having committed this particular murder (although he has killed many before). He has a panic attack in the bathroom, and Ruthie unsuccessfully placates him with, "I got blood on me too—I'm not crying about it." While on the surface Ruthie seems to be doing more harm to Michael's psyche than good, it is important to note that Ruthie's apathy is a projection of her being strong in ways that Michael cannot be in his state of anxiety. Almost immediately after saying this, she washes her hands and shows him, in a lighter tone, "Water and it's all gone. You see how easy that was?" She is guiding him through this traumatic experience in a way she has been accustomed to in her world of violence.

Although it can also be said about Lady Macbeth, Ruthie is drowning in her loneliness. With no companions outside of her husband, and a mob boss that harassed her, she had no choice but to live in her own head. Michael acted out violently at their celebration out of paranoia, much like Macbeth seeing Banquo's ghost at the dinner, and, even though he ruined her party, Ruthie tells him it was alright. "You get some rest first," she says. Her disappointment at her lack of social interaction is quelled by her affection for her husband. It is not until after Matt Duffy's wife and child are murdered that she allows for her depression to consume her. She lies catatonic in bed with a newspaper bearing a headline about the Duffy family's untimely demise and says to Michael, "We don't have any friends." She directly attributes her state of lethargy to her feeling of isolation. Guilt eats at her, as it does with Lady Macbeth, but it is a severe depression brought on by loneliness that drives to her suicide. Unlike Macbeth, Michael finds Ruthie's corpse, crying out while clutching her body. Her death leaves him utterly devastated whereas Macbeth is not written with stage directions to act in such a way. This difference alone shows a stronger, emotional bond between the couple, positioning Ruthie as a figure worthy of grief. She is, despite being held back by a male-dominated world of violence, a strong-willed woman. She pushes for assassination, not out of pure

greed, but out of loyalty for her husband. She was looking out for Michael because she wanted what was best for them as a unit rather than simply assuming power through him. The trajectory of her life led downwards, affecting not only her husband, but the audience as well.

1.2 *Scotland, PA* (2001)

Macbeth has been adapted into countless productions, including those of varying genres. *Scotland, PA* (2001) is a dark comedy, portraying the tragedy of Macbeth as a ridiculous tale full of slapstick and absurdity. The genre lends itself to bringing out a sense of sympathy from the audience. Because the nature of the killing is comical, it lessens the horror of witnessing a meditated murder. This is not to say there is no tragedy to the tale, as the Macbeths, named McBeth in this adaptation, are taken advantage of in dead-end restaurant jobs with no upward mobility. Pat, the Lady Macbeth figure, plays the role of the straight-woman—the competent companion to, as TMDb refers to him, her “doofus” husband. She is taken advantage of as a woman in the service industry and as the intelligence behind the scheme to take down the Duncan figure—not to mention as a wife.

Similarly to his play counterpart, McBeth, nicknamed Mac, is passed over for a position of power that is ultimately given to Malcolm. The audience is meant to see this decision as egregious, which is played up for both drama and comedy. “I’m gonna be rolling in it,” Duncan exclaims in response to Mac’s ideas for how to improve the restaurant for the future, giving no indication of Mac getting to have any credit for financial compensation for this suggestion. He is offered the assistant manager position while Malcolm is set to become the new manager—despite being a very young aspiring rockstar. Even before proposing the robbery and murder, Pat tries to appeal to Mac’s sense of self-worth and aim higher by pointing out how Duncan exploits them as workers—he sleeps in his office all day while they, particularly Pat as she is a server, have to put on a demeaning front for costumers. “You’re the one running that place and we live in a truck,” she says. How literal this line is is up to interpretation, as the audience does not see into their living space until they get a new house after getting the restaurant post-murder, but even so, their luxurious lifestyle after running the restaurant is still not entirely impressive, with a middle-class suburban style of architecture and a small above ground pool. Their ambitions were not as high as their stage selves, meaning they did not have as far to fall.

This version of Macbeth is not the same sharp and cunning strategist as in the source material. Partly due to the comedic genre of the film, Mac, while not unintelligent, stumbles through social situations and is more of an obstacle to their plan than part of it, and he even tells Pat that he will “take care of things”—and doesn’t. Pat knows how to speak to people in a way that benefits her, including Duncan, Lieutenant McDuff, and even the pharmacist at the local drug store. She takes on an amicable facade of

pleasantries both to stay on Duncan's good side and dodge McDuff's questions when he interrogates her. She is the one who thinks of the initial murder plan and how to navigate the police investigation that follows. Mac, on the other hand, is visibly uncomfortable when speaking with both Duncan and McDuff, and he even drunkenly causes a scene in front of McDuff in the McBeth house, swearing and making snide comments all the while. Ultimately, it is Mac's ungainly actions that lead to McDuff suspecting the McBeths as the murderers. During the murder scene, he makes mistake after mistake, from knocking Duncan out before getting the combination to the safe (and later forgetting to ungag him to get said combination) to almost letting Duncan escape (who is thwarted by Pat). Before both of the McBeths start down-spiraling into madness—Pat with her grease-burned hand and Mac with seeing the three “witches” when they are not there—they have to keep the police off their trail, and Mac, without consulting Pat, starts to deviate from what they had agreed upon together. Because of his refusal to talk to her, she is unable to assist him in avoiding scrutiny from Lieutenant McDuff and the general public. Her efforts throughout the movie are undermined by Mac's decisions.

Pat and Mac are a loving couple. The audience becomes endeared to them by looking at their relationship and interactions with each other in a way that a reader of the original play cannot. Pat and Mac are flirtatious and gravitate towards each other like they can't keep their hands to themselves. They protect each other, and, in one memorable line from the film, Mac takes responsibility for the murder by saying, “Pat had nothing to do with it,” to McDuff. However, there are several instances in which Pat is fending for herself or giving more support than she is receiving. On more than one occasion, a man flirts with Pat in an offensively crude way or makes a vulgar innuendo to her with Mac as a witness, and he does not do anything about it. In one instance, he even defends the man by using the man's alcohol consumption as an excuse. In contrast, she comforts Mac when he is struggling. When Mac is uncomfortable with confronting Duncan, she caresses his face and tells him that it is okay. “I think you are doing a fucking excellent job,” she says before kissing his worry away. When he expresses his doubts on whether or not he could go through with the plan, she says, “Well, we're just going to take it one step at a time, okay?” Rather than belittling him for his vulnerability the way Lady Macbeth would in the play, Pat takes care in the way she handles Mac's emotions. While she is not letting him back down from killing Duncan, she reassures him.

While *Scotland, PA* (2001) is fundamentally playful, Pat's trajectory is still positioned as a tragedy. Her insistence on Mac moving up the proverbial ladder regarding his career is not darkened by the focus on his manhood that is apparent in the play. She pushes him because she genuinely believes that he is being taken for granted and pushed aside when he is meant to do and be more. She is not putting his masculinity into question because her wanting more for him is out of care for him and

his efforts. As hardworking as Mac is, he would, in her mind, be stuck on a shameful plateau with no way up or out without her support and her guidance. She, while extreme in her methods, is the only one of the two of them who is striving for more. Pat goes through life with grace and precision in a way that is impossible for Mac. Despite the degradation of her day-to-day job, the way Mac ignores her efforts to give them success, and the cossetting she feels her husband requires, Pat carves out her place in the story as the driving force behind the events of the film.

1.3 *Maqbool* (2003)

Lady Macbeth's counterpart Nimmi of *Maqbool* (2003) is victimized by *Maqbool's* king figure, Abba Ji. Nimmi's encouragement of the murder of Abba Ji is not motivated by the greed that drives Lady Macbeth. There is no textual implication that *Macbeth's* King Duncan is tyrannical. In fact, before his death, he is portrayed as a kind and almost weak man. Abba Ji is a cruel man, manipulating and puppeteering the people around him for his own gain, including the young Nimmi, whom he has commandeered into a sexual relationship in trade for her security. Lady Macbeth's role in the death of King Duncan solidifies her as a villainous woman who will do anything to fulfill her too-high ambition, whereas Nimmi's role in the death of Abba Ji solidifies her as an exploited woman desperate to escape her situation.

The primary difference between Lady Macbeth and Nimmi is their relationship with King Duncan and Abba Ji respectively. Other than being the wife of Macbeth, who (prior to the assassination) is the king's friend and general, Lady Macbeth does not have a strong connection to the king herself. Nimmi, on the other hand, is Abba Ji's mistress. Lady Macbeth's involvement in the assassination of King Duncan was not personal between her and the king; she just wanted to fulfill the prophecy she had heard of her husband taking the throne. Nimmi's involvement in the murder of Abba Ji was personal to her, as she wanted to rid herself of his forceful presence. Although both Lady Macbeth and Nimmi's mental state deteriorated after having assisted with a murder, the circumstances that led to the murder of Abba Ji are a reflection of Nimmi perhaps having already had declining mental health. Abba Ji presented himself as a crude and malicious figure, but even if his demeanor wasn't so, the imbalance of his relationship with Nimmi would have had an effect on her either way. Age differences in sexual and/or romantic relationships lead to status asymmetry due to different life experiences and financial imbalances. According to a study published in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, the younger partner in a relationship with an age disparity "may experience relatively large declines in mental health after initiating sexual intercourse" and "the stress associated with having an older sex partner—not simply having an older romantic partner—may be uniquely associated with decreased emotional well-being" (Meier et al. 26). While mental illness is not a legal defense or excuse for violent crimes (shy of the insanity plea), Nimmi's mental state offers an

explanation for why she was ready to kill her older sexual partner. This explanation does not apply to Lady Macbeth.

The manipulation and questionable actions of Lady Macbeth and Nimmi are not entirely comparable because the nature of their actions come from separate places. Lady Macbeth wants King Duncan dead so that she can be queen. Nimmi, while also politically/financially gaining from Abba Ji's death due to his planning on replacing her as his mistress, wants Abba Ji dead so that she can be rid of him. Nimmi's plan comes from a sense of survival rather than one of greed such as Lady Macbeth's. Post-assassination Lady Macbeth's character takes on a more sympathetic role as she declines into insanity while racked with guilt, but this is only effective due to how shockingly apathetic and heartless she seems to be at the beginning of the play. To prove a point of how she follows her word, she says, "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" (1.7.63-66). This is a gruesome image to put in her husband's mind for no reason other than to emphasize how driven and intense she is as she goads Macbeth into killing King Duncan. Nimmi's acts of manipulation were much milder, like when she lies about Maqbool struggling with the setting up of Abba Ji's daughter's wedding. She does this so she can have an excuse to spend the night with him and not go back to Abba Ji's bed.

The difference between how Lady Macbeth and Nimmi are treated in their stories is also shown in their relationship with the respective titular characters of Macbeth and Maqbool. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are married nobles and, at least before the assassination of the king, seem to be a loving couple. Macbeth does not treat Lady Macbeth poorly until they are both losing their sanity due to the murder. Lady Macbeth pushes Macbeth into committing the murder by threatening, insulting, and emasculating him, but this pushing led to Macbeth's transformation into a callous tyrant who has a distinct lack of empathy for Lady Macbeth's downfall. While Macbeth's apathy for his wife's death is certainly jarring and perhaps inhumane, it was Lady Macbeth's encouragement that helped shift his character to act in such a way. She calls him weak and unmanly, only to find that his manly actions are cruel even at her expense. In a reference to Kimbrough, Levin states, "Macbeth's downfall is caused by 'a definition of masculinity which comes from dominant societal norms that equate machismo with manhood'" (Levin 126). Maqbool, however, interacted with Nimmi in negative ways even before the murder, including striking her in the face when she was flirting with him and calling her derogatory and misogynistic names. Nimmi tries to find solace in Maqbool away from Abba Ji only for Maqbool to also treat her like a subordinate rather than an equal. The treatment of Nimmi's femininity as something wicked mirrors Othello's view of his wife Desdemona and Hamlet's view of his mother Gertrude, as Shakespeare uses this theme in many of his tragedies, putting the role of women in catalyst positions for the events of the plays. Nimmi's relationship with Abba Ji is a point of contention with

Maqbool, despite him knowing that she would be in danger without the security that her relationship with him brings her. As a lower-class woman, the society she is in is not made to support or uplift her and any upward mobility she would take would have to be through a man.

Lady Macbeth, while a complex character that undergoes sympathetic change during the course of the play, is the main antagonist of the play. She ultimately becomes a victim of the tragedy, but she is also the driving force behind the creation of that tragedy. After hearing of the prophecy, Lady Macbeth almost immediately decides (and accepts) that homicide is the way to fulfill it. It is through her actions that the play unfolds the way that it does, even if she is not the person to actually commit the murder. Nimmi, while being very flawed, is more of a victim than a villain. While Lady Macbeth is manipulative, Nimmi is more mischievous. Like Lady Macbeth, Nimmi encourages the murder that takes place, but not only is it for different reasons, but Maqbool actually mentions that her life would be better with Abba Ji dead before she ever said it. Nimmi is not a victim of circumstance like some other Shakespearean women in tragedy, but she is a victim of the social climate in which she has found herself trapped.

1.4 *Macbeth* (2015)

Macbeth (2015) is a strikingly dark adaptation, encompassing the mournful and grim tone of the play rather than taking on a comedic outlook on the tragedy like some other modern films. This film is fitting of the label tragedy. Straying away from the lighthearted ridiculousness that is utilized in other films, Justin Kurzel intrepidly keeps elements of the original play, thus creating a gritty, brutal film. Due to Lady Macbeth being granted more screentime, Kurzel takes some artistic liberty in flushing out her character and allowing for her to flourish beyond what has originally been put on the page. Lady Macbeth, in Kurzel's *Macbeth*, is a haunted woman, psychologically torn apart by her dead child, placed in a position below her husband by said husband himself, and fundamentally remorseful.

The opening scene of the movie is meant to shock the audience—the very introduction of what type of story this will be is a funeral for Macbeth's baby. The blanched cheeks and gray lips of a child that was toddler-aged at the oldest contrasted against the dark earth the body was laid on. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, shrouded in black fabric over their heads, were just leading two in a group of mourners, surrounding where the child lay. Their grief was shared by others, but not on a level that could be comparable to how the Macbeths felt, particularly Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth reverently places a sprig of berries on her son's chest, tears freely falling from her devastated and ashen face. They light the funeral pyre, as the remains of their child turn to ash and smoke. This entire scene gives weight to Lady Macbeth's dialogue in the play, in which she implies having had a child despite there not being a child present by the time the play takes place. Lady Macbeth's absent child is not explained in the play,

giving those spearheading adaptations the opportunity to show on screen their own conclusions they've drawn from how they interpret the source material. While it is a widely accepted notion that Lady Macbeth did indeed have an infant that died before the events of the play take place, Kurzel has taken the artistic liberty to show the audience the dead child, solidifying Lady Macbeth's desperation that drives her actions for the rest of the story.

The dinner scene following Macbeth's crowning in the banquet hall is famous in both the play and the majority of its adaptations. Kurzel's interpretation of this scene shapes Lady Macbeth's character in a way that is not explored in the play. Kurzel's Macbeth is rougher with her than his play counterpart, as shown by him grabbing her by the arms and digging his fingers into her shoulders. She has to yank her arm out of his grasp because he will not relinquish the clutch he has on her. He drapes his noticeably larger body over her—a display of not just simply holding her up but rather dragging her down as she struggles under his weight. She cares for him in ways softer and more affectionate than those of the sexually charged insults her play counterpart hurls his way. Although cut from the final product of the film, Kurzel's script has a heart-wrenchingly tender scene:

“Lady Macbeth kisses him again, warmly, more firmly now. [...] and lays him down, stroking his head and easing him to sleep. As she does, however, she notices something: His hand is TREMBLING inadvertently. [...] Softly she takes it and presses it with her hand, caressing it until the trembling ceases.”

This is not to say that Macbeth does not love her, but that there is an imbalance in their relationship, with her in a more caretaking role.

While Lady Macduff's murder is a private stabbing set away from the main action, Kurzel turns it into a spectacle. Lady Macduff and her children are publicly executed—burned at the stake. Lady Macbeth is among the spectators looking on in shock and horror at the display of violence at the hands of Macbeth himself, rather than the anonymous assassins of the play. Lady Macbeth, in Kurzel's adaptation, attempts to stop Macbeth from carrying out the murder of the Macduff family. Before he sets out, she grapples with him before he shoves her away and she stumbles back in shock. There are two lines spoken by Lady Macbeth that each only show up once in the play but are repeated in a different context in the movie—“Hell is murky,” and “What's done cannot be undone,” (Shakespeare 5.1.38) and (5.1.71). The film, other than showing the original appearances of these lines, contains both of these lines within the scene of Lady Macbeth trying to prevent Lady Macduff's demise. These are lines in the play that are spoken by Lady Macbeth to herself during her somnambulism; she uses these as both self-admonishment and acknowledgment of her sin. In the movie, she first says these lines to her husband to discourage him from following through with the murder of Lady Macduff and her children, showing that despite her willingness to plot the assassination of King Duncan, she has limits. Kurzel's script states, “Lady Macbeth

hesitates at their fore -- as though for a moment she might try to step forward and release these prisoners,” regarding Lady Macbeth witnessing the men having taken Lady Macduff and her children. While this glimpse of rebellion is not shown on screen, Lady Macbeth’s expression is shown dimmed in a shadow of grief. Her blank stare implies that this event is the catalyst for her descent into madness. Macbeth undergoes a dark and twisted transformation, leaving Lady Macbeth burdened with the notion that she no longer recognizes the man she married. “Why are you silent?” He asks her. In response, she cries—grief-stricken for not only the mother and children executed in front of her but for her husband.

Religious elements are present in the original play, referencing spirits and the divine, but Kurzel’s *Lady Macbeth* shows a more explicit display of practicing faith. After the atrocity of Lady Macduff’s execution, Lady Macbeth is seen traveling on horseback to a village, empty and ruinous save for the chapel. She sits, swathed in fabric, and delivers her famous “Out, damned spot!” monologue as a prayer. Rather than desperately scrubbing at her skin in a bathroom, which is the more literal sense of cleaning a stain, she is pleading directly with God about her unclean soul. Kurzel’s *Lady Macbeth* is reckoning with the events of the play in a spiritually deeper sense than she does in the play. The crack in Lady Macbeth’s psyche is shown through vivid hallucinations rather than exclusively muttering nonsense in her sleep. In the chapel, she sees a vision of a sickly child—her dead son. She, broken and beaten with grief, wanders out into the harsh elements of Scottish Winter with fewer layers than she started with, exposed to the unforgiveness of the weather. It is nature, then, that takes her life, leaving her skin as blue and raw as her heart.

Macbeth (2015) explores Lady Macbeth’s character with deliberate care, giving her a deep sense of empathy that is absent in the source material. Lady Macbeth, in the play, does seem to feel regret after the assassination of King Duncan as evidenced by her guilty descent into madness, but her remorse is not as palpable as it is shown in Kurzel’s adaptation. Kurzel’s *Lady Macbeth* is grief-stricken about the loss of her son, which is either a cause for or amplifies her compassion in the film, something that manifests in her reaction to the public execution of Lady Macduff and her children. She is also, while not in a relationship completely void of love, at the mercy of her husband, who is portrayed in this film as an even darker character than the original play suggests.

2. Commonalities

2.1 The Macbeths’ Relationship

Scholars and adaptors alike may investigate the relationship between Lady Macbeth and her husband, and their findings can be a determining factor in the perception of Lady Macbeth that is created. Sympathetic portrayals and readings of Lady Macbeth

are commonly associated with adaptations and interpretations of their relationship that emphasize the love between them. It is easy to write off Lady Macbeth as a malicious force that aids in Macbeth's downfall, particularly due to her chipping away at his emotional state by calling his masculinity into question. It would be simply incorrect to act as if her antagonistic gibes and actions were not present in the play, but her role in the story would be much less compelling if these were not coming from a place of love. Villainization of Lady Macbeth can then be linked to the absence of love.

In all of the movies previously mentioned, the physical chemistry between the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth characters are clearly depicted on screen. Whether it be the soft, loving gazes of Reilly's Mike and Ruthie and Morrissette's Mac and Pat, or the raw sensuality of Bhardwaj's Maqbool and Nimmi and Kurzel's Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, the portrayal of passion on screen allows for the audience to see more into Lady Macbeth's life before the events of the movie take place—even past the political assassination. This passion can even find its way onto the stage, with the most positive reviews of the Tara Arts 2015 production of Macbeth mentioning the “sexy relationship” between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (Viney).

2.2 Pressure of Social Standards

Audiences may also become sympathetic towards Lady Macbeth when she is presented as a victim of misogyny, as women in power are, in the end, still women. Macbeth is a play that places emphasis on masculinity, femininity, and “the dialectic of gender conflict” (Berger 73). Shakespearean tragedies such as this, according to Marilyn French, show a “supreme value on masculine principle” and a “blindness to or rejection of ‘feminine’ values” (French 200). From this interpretation, it may be thought that the cause of the tragedy itself is patriarchy or masculinity, or the violation of those. As proposed by Levin, limiting the tragedy to the “two abstractions” of gender identity are “supposed to encompass and divide [...] human experience”, and this is not true, as the feminine and the masculine are not so cleanly divided in any of Shakespeare's works (Levin 126). While Macbeth explores masculinity in the tragedy that unfurls on stage or screen, broader generalities derived from this interpretation can lead to misconceptions or purposefully inflexible interpretations, such as Lady Macbeth being completely subservient to her husband (128). Happy endings, as seen in *As You Like It*, also occur in Shakespeare's works under a society of patriarchy, which can call into question the nature of the adaptations that lean into the proclamation of misogyny against Lady Macbeth. It is evident to me that these portrayals hold up to this criticism by not claiming that the masculine is strictly a cause of the tragedy, but rather a product of it. Macbeth's obsession with the masculine and manliness (which is encouraged by Lady Macbeth) is just one of the factors that leads to the perversion of Macbeth's character (Ramsey).

After the murder, Macbeth is a more dominant man in comparison to the start of the play (Greene 158). This is apparent in some films more than others, such as *Throne of Blood*, where Lady Macbeth's adapted figure is told what to do. Before his transformation brought on by the vicious crime he commits with his wife's command, he is, by Lady Macbeth's description, a sentimental and soft man. She pushes for him to strive for more, for the crown, and yet "nowhere, neither here nor elsewhere, does she ask for anything for herself, in her own right" (Liston 235). She is not ambitious for herself, but for Macbeth. This is an aspect of the play that is highlighted in several films that show a sympathetic portrayal of Lady Macbeth. These films focus the motive of Lady Macbeth's actions towards wanting better for her husband rather than seeking power for herself. This is especially true in modernizations, as whatever the Macbeths would gain is not regality.

Famously, Lady Macbeth states "unsex me here [...] Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall" (1.5.48-55). This is her presenting her 'femininity' (the natural process of childbirth) as a weakness. This removal of her femininity, however, is a point of contention that helps create the situation they are in. The desperation they have to get Macbeth in line for the throne and to keep it once he has it is partially due to the fact that they have no heirs. According to Richmond, this might have left a deep feeling of unsettlement (and on Macbeth's part, resentment) because they have failed to complete "essential fulfillment as human beings" and Lady Macbeth "ought to produce" (Richmond 22). The loss of Lady Macbeth's baby has been implemented in multiple adaptations as one of the agents to the action of the film and, in turn, a point of sympathy for the audience. As Lady Macbeth mentions having had a child that is not present in the play, it is up to interpretation what became of this child. In some films, Lady Macbeth had to have an abortion, and in others, her child dies very young, usually in infancy.

2.3 Descent into Madness

This loss of her child (either born or unborn) can also be presented as a factor into her decaying mental state. The lack of heir and loss of child aligns with the early 17th century idea of hysteria, with the position of the mother as a demonic force and a suffocating state (Levin). The idea of the "antimother" puts women at odds with their own bodies, and "the self divided mother required medical intervention and patriarchal governance in order to fulfill her predestined maternal role" (34). This might apply to Lady Macbeth, as she was unable to fulfill her "duty" as a mother—so much so that she defies motherhood with a grotesque description of infanticide. The adaptations that focus on the loss of her child viscerally depict Lady Macbeth's psychological struggle. The womb as a corrupting force dominating the mind of the female figure, while is not a reputable scientific idea in modern society, can be explained as a societal pressure on women to become mothers, even if they do not want to. It is up to the audience's

interpretation for whether Lady Macbeth wanted her child in the first place, but it can be spun by adaptations into ways that provoke an appalled feeling for her situation from audiences. If Lady Macbeth already struggled with her mental health, the archaic idea of a woman's diabolism and malice transmitting to their offspring could be a genuine fear of hers. Lady Macbeth is not "domesticated" by the events of the play, and certain adaptations use this fact as a way to give her depth rather than demonize her.

Her inability to follow through with the murder and yet feeling guilt so strongly that it leads to somnambulism and hallucinations is explored by certain adaptations. The play itself depicts Lady Macbeth as starting off in a psychological state that is already ailed by neuroses. As noted by Robert Munro, "we can trace signs [...] that are, according to modern medical psychologists, the surest preludes to the awful malady with which, we know, she was afterward afflicted" (32). Even at the start of the play, due to her fixation and isolation, she is represented by Shakespeare "in the attitude of one suffering from the effects of an ever-increasing monomania" (32). Lady Macbeth is never seen with other friends, and so this isolation and loneliness is adapted on screen. By herself, she is trapped with her own psyche, and, as it gets worse as the play progresses, this means more danger for her. Her descent into guilt, paralleled with her descent into madness, was made worse by the consequences of her plan weighing on her.

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