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## **“A Woman’s Story”: Lady Macbeth and Performing Femininity in the Early 1600s – Late 1900s**

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“A Woman’s Story”: Lady Macbeth and Performing Femininity in the Early 1600s – Late 1900s

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2010

May 2019  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

This paper uses gender studies to understand the themes of gender performance further, and more specifically, femininity, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It also explores the many ways feminine gender performance has changed as society has changed. Thus, proving gender is performative rather than innate. It does this by examining first the text within the context of Elizabethan society. Moreover, by examining three pivotal performances of Lady Macbeth through history within the context of their social structures as well. The three performances are that of Sarah Siddons in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Ellen Terry in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and Judy Dench in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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Phyllis LeBert

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Feminist criticism of Shakespeare is still relatively new. It appeared on the scene a little over 40 years ago “with the publication of Juliet Desunberre’s *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* in 1975” (R. Levin 125). Many critics agree that Shakespeare’s plays “are not really about the particular characters that appear there but about some general idea,” and that his tragedies, in particular, are about “the role of gender in the individual and society” (R. Levin 126). Furthermore, Shakespeare’s plays seem to operate on a dichotomy, the “turn of polar opposition” between two themes; for instance, good vs. evil, masculinity vs. femininity, reality vs. the ideal, natural vs. supernatural, etc. However, these dichotomies are not oppositions of two outside sources but rather “the eternal struggle of yang and yin,” the struggle of humankind’s two natures (R. Levin 126). From a feminist criticism reading of Shakespeare’s tragedies, which always end in self-destruction, it is tempting to decry the cause of this self-destruction as the patriarchy. However, critics such as Richard Levin point out in his article “Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy,” that “we really cannot say that Lear would not have come to grief if he had not lived in a patriarchy, for if he had not lived in a patriarchy, he would not have been Lear” (“Feminist Thematics and Shakespeare” 127).

Instead, Levin and others believe the gendered components “cannot be causes [of suffering] in the usual sense: they are necessary *conditions* of the action but are not in themselves sufficient to *cause* it” (R. Levin 127). It is the actions themselves that precipitate the suffering later endured by the characters. Indeed, these actions are considered by the characters to be “a horrifying violation of the norms of their world” (R. Levin 127). Though they occur in a world where they are possible, they are still “regarded by that society as extraordinary calamities” (R. Levin 127). Levin offers some compelling evidence for this argument. He claims that in all of the tragedies,

the women are horribly mistreated, but in order for that to happen, the plays “require a negative treatment of males,” and these male characters are “usually loaded with deplorable traits” (R. Levin 131).

Despite Levin’s claims, it is false to claim that society does not operate on the idea that gender and sex are things that can be assigned based on a series of quantitative markers. Also agreed upon is that one’s “biological sex” and one’s “gender role” are two separate yet conflated identities. By knowing one “we can deduce the rest” (West and Zimmerman 132). Gender study predicates itself on the study of these supposedly quantitative markers and the differences between one’s biological sex and one’s performed gender. Historically, there has been an understanding that “sex [...is] ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology” but “gender [...is] an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means” (West and Zimmerman 125). We then “conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements” (West and Zimmerman 125).

Thus, a “gender role” is both something assigned by others, but also performed by the individual. It is “a routine, methodical and reoccurring accomplishment” (West and Zimmerman 125). How well one performs (or conforms), to his or her assigned gender role acts as a sort of social currency which one can “cash in” to form a sense of legitimacy as a member of one’s society. The “better” your gender performance, the more authentic it seems, the more others perceive you as competent in the community. Bolstering this is the idea that one’s gender performance is an expression of one’s essential nature. To put forth an inadequate gender performance is to be intrinsically flawed.

This division between the “masculine,” or male gender performance, and “feminine,” or female gender performance, has an incalculable effect on society. It influences everything from social hierarchy--who is subjugated to whom--to “the division of labor into women’s and men’s work” (West and Zimmerman 128). This division is seen as “natural and rooted in biology” (West and Zimmerman 128). For instance, until 2016, women were not allowed to join the infantry in the United States Army because they were thought incapable of performing the same physical tasks as their male counterparts, and it is still seen as odd when men choose to stay at home with the children while their wives go to work.

It is tempting to think of us, here in 2018, as more enlightened on the idea of gender performance. We are moving to unisex bathrooms and locker rooms. A woman is the Prime Minister of Germany, more and more men confess to wearing makeup; the LGBTQ movement has ushered in the idea that one’s biological sex and one’s gender role are two separate and sometimes conflicting identities. Additionally, as social and labor roles become less and less gendered, “female doctor” and “male nurse” are redundant terms. However, gender identity and its relation to one’s place in society is a question that has been deliberated upon for centuries. Shakespeare in particular pondered the congruence of identity and nature at length. He asks this essential question in many of his plays, but perhaps the play that best interrogates the “essential nature” of sex and gender identity is the play *Macbeth*, particularly as it pertains to Lady Macbeth and femininity.

While many of Shakespeare's plays meditate on the idea of gender and gender performance, the play *Macbeth* seems singularly focused on defining gender roles and solidly demarcating between male and female. In fact, "The major characters in the play are, with only two exceptions, strictly defined in gender and kinship terms" (Hogan 386). However, it seems as

though the harder the play strives to define the two sexes, the more confused they become and the lines between the two more blurred. For instance, the witches have beards, Lady Macbeth calls upon the fates to unsex her, and Macbeth describes his inability to act on his murderous impulses in terms usually associated with females and maternity - "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in" (Shakespeare 3.4.23-24). The play's significant characters are perpetually going outside of their gender roles, which leads to the play's tragic ending. In this way, the play concerns itself with the consequences of going outside one's gender role.

Their nonconformity is especially apparent when one considers that though *Macbeth* is a play about regicide it "proceeds on the values of a domestic tragedy," framed strangely by the relationship between Lord and Lady Macbeth (Liston 233). Conversely, their relationship exists solely within the liminal space of the play. The play does not provide a backstory beyond hinting that Lady Macbeth once had a child ("I have given suck"). We only know them in relation to each other and within the play. Other than the prediction of the witches, we are given no reason why Macbeth would be willing to commit a form of patricide or why his lady is so eager to embolden his treason. Moreover, while the play is bookended by the scenes on the battlefield, the principal actions of the play take place indoors. Though the sins of Lord and Lady Macbeth cause global consequences, they take place in the private sphere of their home.

The domesticity of the play combined with the play's tragic conclusion creates the sense that the moral of the play is that "when men and women step outside [their prescribed] gender roles, they lose their humanity. Their liberation from definition destroys them; paradoxically, in fact, confines them" (Liston 232-233). This paradox may not be immediately apparent because the gender-bending in *Macbeth* is far subtler than in plays like *Twelfth Night* or *Merchant of Venice*. There is no cross-dressing in *Macbeth*. Additionally, the consequences in *Macbeth* are

far more serious. The reason for this may lie in the character of Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most problematic characters. Many critical studies of the text paint Lady Macbeth as a militant, masculine character that goads her husband into treason and murder.

"Tradition has tended to take up a chastising stance towards the character, implicitly indicting her for failing to conform to the established notions of womanhood" (Burnett 1). Her

"femininity, perhaps more than any other female character in Shakespeare's works, is a site of contest in scholarship, categorized as corrupted, fraught, inescapable, and unnatural" (Phillips, "Unsex Me Here" 353).

However, these opinions are inherently flawed, as "implicit in such opinion is the assumption that Lady Macbeth can only be a "woman" if she obeys the laws of convention, that she shocks because she deviates from norms of conduct, and that she is redeemed when she shows herself as "feminine" in the final scenes (Burnett 1).

Because even though the argument of the play seems to be that stepping outside one's gender roles leads to one's eventual destruction, this does not account for the fact that Viola, Rosalind, and Portia merrily escape from their escapades. In fact, due to their bouts of gender-bending, they obtain their 'happily ever after.'

The reason for *Macbeth's* tragic ending, as opposed to Shakespeare's more comedic ones, is probably due to the fact that *Macbeth* is a play about politics. As such, it reflects the global political views of Elizabethan England. The Elizabethan era was an era in which the political negotiation of gender roles was very intense. A sole female sovereign was ruling England. Nonetheless, it was "a time when women were portrayed to be weaker than men" (Das 37).

Additionally, this was a time in which "historical records reveal the position of women in the society was extremely miserable" (Das 37). However, a woman, Elizabeth I, was on the throne. Thus, we have in *Macbeth*, a play that meditates on the political anxieties that come with

having a female authority on the throne in a time when "women were to be seen and not heard" (Das 37).

Due to its political nature, *Macbeth* is an excellent vehicle for studying the political gender narrative of the Elizabethan era. While *Macbeth* is mainly a meditation on gender-politics from a masculine aspect and "focuses on male preoccupations;" it is also a play that "concerns [...itself with] the drive to establish female autonomy in the face of unyielding masculine forces that struggle to declare their primacy" (Burnett 4). In the character of Lady Macbeth, specifically, we see "the attempts of a woman to realize herself by using dominant discourses of patriarchy as she lacks a powerful counter-language" (Burnett 2). This attempt at self-determination and Lady Macbeth's struggle to establish her 'femaleness' as equal to 'maleness' creates the illusion that Lady Macbeth is more militant and masculine than other Shakespearean women. In her quest for actualization, Lady Macbeth "atomizes anxieties about women and worries about the security of masculine identity" (Burnett 3). These anxieties about masculinity further support the misapprehension about Lady Macbeth's sexual identity.

One of the pivotal quotes critics use to point to Lady Macbeth's masculinity is that of "unsex me here." However, when reading the play through a gender politics lens, it can be seen that when "Lady Macbeth desires to be 'unsexed,' her words reveal the assumed discordance between feminine nature and political ambition. By putting these desires in masculine or gender-neutral form, Lady Macbeth explicitly suggests their unnaturalness. Shakespeare's language here induces tension and reflects the political gender tensions already existent in the Elizabethan world" (Das 46).

Similarly, Queen Elizabeth tried to rid her throne of gender politics and "sought to establish her own power by transcending the gender issue" by invoking "the title of King as

frequently as [she invoked the title of] Queen" (Das 46). However, her attempt at incorporating both male and female into one authority created a great amount of gender anxiety and tension. Though she "might incorporate both male and female sovereignty, [...] her body was a very human female one and hence to both Elizabeth and herself and to her people, an imperfect one" (Das 46). Given the anxiety regarding Queen Elizabeth's gender, one could read Lady Macbeth as a symbolic stand-in for Queen Elizabeth because she also performs her femininity in a way that places her outside the traditional gender feminine gender performance. By studying Lady Macbeth's gender performance, one can see how Elizabethan Era England negotiated gender politics.

Though Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in the 1600s, it is still a timely play. Gender politics today are as rife as ever. Because *Macbeth* is a play concerned with the definition of gender roles, if one studies different performances of *Macbeth* through the centuries, one can see not only the ways traditional gender roles have changed throughout the years, and the differences in the ways society has reacted to the fears related to the gender power struggle. Because one's gender identity is something that needs constant affirmation, it is then, by its very nature, changeable. As society changes, so do the expectations of one's gender performance. Accordingly, by analyzing several critical historical performances of Lady Macbeth, we will be able to view how the changing social expectations of femininity have colored the way historical actresses have performed Lady Macbeth on stage. These crucial performances include Sarah Siddons from the late 18th-century, her successor Dame Ellen Terry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Dame Judy Dench in the 1960s.

## Chapter 2: “The thane of Fife had a wife”: Gender Performance in *Macbeth* and Elizabethan and Jacobean Femininity (1558 – 1625)

Before we can begin to analyze the changing idea of femininity, it is important to understand gender performance as it pertains to the text of *Macbeth*. According to Judith Butler, all "gender is performative," meaning that both "'feminine' and 'masculine' are not what we are, nor traits we have, but effects we produce by way of particular things we do" (Cameron 329).

Alternatively, as described by Judith Butler,

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance of a “natural” kind of being (Gender Trouble 33).

In other words, being female or male is the same as playing a character upon the stage.

Due to this performative nature, gender becomes a set of actions performed repeatedly, and one's gender identity continually reestablished. Thus,

Gender has constantly to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms [...] which define “masculinity” and “femininity” (Cameron 329).

As these cultural norms change over time, so do the performative actions required to mimic the masculine or feminine identity. *Macbeth* is a play so determined to define gender roles; it is a perfect vehicle for examining gender roles and gender politics of 16<sup>th</sup>-century England. In *Macbeth*,

Shakespeare constructs a world of binary opposites where boundaries, as Marjorie Garber has observed, are “continually transgressed, and marked by a series of taboo border crossings” (Bernstein 31).

Indeed, there is a tendency in Shakespeare to want to break down the barriers between the sex-genders. Rhyming couplets united with alternating viewpoints and continual juxtaposition of opposites helps to highlight these barrier crossings. The Weird Sisters’ declaration that "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" is one example of juxtaposition (1.1.11). Another is their description of Banquo "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater" and "Not so happy yet much happier" (1.3.65-

66). Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to "look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't" (1.5.64-65). Later, an old man tells Macduff "That would make good of bad, and friends of foes" (3.1.40). It is important to note that the witches do the most rhyming; their spells are set in rhyming couplets. They are themselves taboo creatures, possessed of the supernatural. Another taboo border crossing is that from law-abiding citizen to murderer, which Macbeth does. Nevertheless, perhaps the "most significant of these border crossings is that of gender representation" (Bernstein 31).

*Macbeth* is a play that is strangely "loaded with sexual ambiguity; the bearded sisters, a murdered king as a 'passive female victim,' and Macbeth as a 'pawn to female figures'" (Bernstein 31). In many criticisms, "The witches and Lady Macbeth" are 'phallic women,' women who ensnare, manipulate and, to a degree, incorporate men" (Hogan 386). When Banquo asks, "What *are* these" in regard to the Weird Sisters, he is stating the central question of the play in terms of gender roles and norms in a time of gender and sexual ambiguity (1.3.39). This sexual ambiguity probably had its roots in the tension surrounding Queen Elizabeth as the central authority figure of England. Likewise, Lady Macbeth is often the "center of [the play's] disturbance in normative gender roles" (Bernstein 31). Still, Macbeth similarly disturbs the natural order of gender performance. His masculinity becomes twisted and perverted until he becomes a traitor and dies a bloody death, turning from a man of valor, a soldier who honors his king on the battlefield, into a "dead butcher" who murders kings, kinsmen, and children (5.7.99).

The play's sexual ambiguity is probably the reason that in previous readings of Lady Macbeth, critics describe her as unnatural, unwomanly, likely due to her use of language throughout the play. For instance, in her first scene, she delivers an extraordinary soliloquy full of brutal and violent utterings. She exclaims:

Come you spirits  
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
 And fill me from crown to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;  
 Stop up the access to the passage of remorse,  
 That no compunctious visitings of nature  
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
 The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
 And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
 Wherever in your sightless substances  
 You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
 That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
 Nor heaven peep through the blanket of dark  
 To cry Hold! Hold! (1.5.41-55).

This "headstrong attempt to unsex herself and her 'masculine indifference to blood and death' make her a terrifying presence, who is and is not a woman" (Bernstein 31). She is like the Weird Sisters whom Banquo claims "should be women, / and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so" (1.3.45-47). Like the witches, Lady Macbeth's gender identity is confused and ambiguous.

Yet, despite this ambiguity, unlike Shakespeare's other women, Lady Macbeth is highly conscious of her sexuality in an aesthetic sense; she openly comments on her body, speaking on her "woman's breasts" at the same time she asks the spirits to "unsex her" which further obfuscates her gender identity for the play's audience.. However, more than once, she conflates both gender and sexual identity, asking the "murdering ministers" to take away her "visitings of nature" or, in other words, stop her menstruation and ability to bear children, alluding to, yet diminishing her sexuality. The images she conjures are highly reminiscent of a woman's body, the "passage of remorse" could be the birth canal, and "thick blood" could allude to menstruation. Lady Macbeth also highlights and "makes explicit the contrast between the sexes" in her taunting of Macbeth's manhood later in the play (Waith 265).

In mentioning these things, Lady Macbeth causes a "conflation of sex roles and gender, and a demonstration that human beings are by nature sexual beings" (Liston 22). Moreover, as she disavows her femininity it "paradoxically only makes her reproductive body more rather than less abundantly present to the audience [...] her invocation confirms rather than denies her identification with the flesh (gendered female) rather than the mind (gendered male)" (Lamb 538). This idea of Queen Elizabeth as sexless yet sexed is a curious conflation to make considering that Queen Elizabeth I was also known as the Virgin Queen. This absence of sexuality in the person of Queen Elizabeth may have caused even more tension because she had no heir to the Tudor line and there were questions as to the crown's line of succession, destabilizing the crown—and in some ways the patriarchy—through her very essence.

*Macbeth* is a play curiously interested in the "social stigmas [women] have undergone" and "portray[']s intelligent strong women" who are given "virtues and strength" and three-dimensional characters (Das 55). In the play, Lady Macbeth gains power, not only through the destabilization of traditional patriarchal institutions but also through being a full three-dimensional human. Macbeth's downfall is not because of his murderous nature, but because he carries "the cultural preconception by which the male principle is equated with aggression, violence and ultimately murder [...] to its logical conclusion" (Greene 168).

One of the ways Lady Macbeth disrupts patriarchal expectations is through disordering the maid/wife/widow paradigm—amusing side note: it is probably no coincidence that the number three was a powerful number during this period, harking back to the Holy Trinity. This paradigm comes from "scholarly emphasis on the organization of early modern women's life cycles into the categories of 'maid,' 'wife,' and 'widow'" and arises from 16th-century patriarchal expectations that women's lives could be easily ordered and

categorized (Higginbotham 174). This obsession with order occurred "Following the Protestant Reformation's dissolution of the monasteries, the dominant Protestant ideology famously constructed all women as married or to be married" (Higginbotham 174). However, "research has shown [that] at any given time most adult women were widowed or had never been married" which frustrated these rigid classifications (Higginbotham 174). Even though she is married, and thus a wife, Lady Macbeth, like many other women in the 16th-century, upends this paradigm, creating a "linguistic tension over the inability to apply terms like 'maid' and 'wife' to female individuals whose lives challenged [this] social fiction" (Higginbotham 174). This "linguist tension" related directly to the tension inhabiting gender politics of the 16th-century.

As previously stated, Lady Macbeth was married and so did not fit into the "maid" category because "'maid' was a term that described women predominately in relation to their virginity and marital status. Thus, "maid" is a word that "carried with it the social directive that all unmarried women should be virgins" (Higginbotham 177). However, Lady Macbeth openly talks about her sexuality, and she is very definitely married. Case in point, as William Liston points out in "Male and Female He Created Them": Sex and Gender in "Macbeth," she is "not initially defined in her own right but regarded as an extension of her husband, by not giving her a first name, Shakespeare made sure Lady Macbeth would always be defined by her relationship with her husband" (234). Moreover, Lady Macbeth talks about motherhood as though she has personal experience, though she speaks of dashing her infant's brains out. So, Lady Macbeth cannot be a maid because according to the maid/wife/widow paradigm, a sexually active woman is either a wife or she is part of an "unspoken category," the category of "whore" as this schema marks women who fall outside of its "ideological strictures" as "sexually unchaste" (Higginbotham 178). Therefore, Lady Macbeth is a wife. However, she is a failed wife, for

As Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth is perceived and judged according to the roles and functions that a proper wife fulfills and performs. Given her station, there are two: to provide heirs to her lord, and to be his hostess (Liston 235).

According to these conventions, Lady Macbeth fails at both roles, that of hostess and mother. We know Lady Macbeth has given birth at least once because she says that "I have given suck and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (1.7.53-54). "What potency is to the male, maternity is to the female" but each time Lady Macbeth mentions motherhood, she does so in a perverse way (Asp 160). For instance, Lady Macbeth mentions milk three times in the play, and each time "the image has amounted to a perversion of nature" (Liston 237). She also wishes her milk, the very thing that feeds her babe, to turn to gall instead of "the milk of human kindness" and vows that she would have slaughtered her milking babe. She also perverts motherhood by being "a mother who feeds her 'Spirits' with gall rather than milk" (Burnett 12). She uses this galling milk, as opposed to the soothing milk of a mother, to inflame the spirits and Macbeth into action. She gives birth to violence, not children.

However, children become irrelevant when one considers it is motherhood itself that is problematic here. In point of fact, the text provides a plethora of images of problematic motherhood. Beyond Lady Macbeth's disturbing confession that she would smash out the brains of her infant, we have the witches adding to their "womb-like cauldron," "Finger of birth-strangled babe / Ditch-delivered by drab," and "sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow" ([Lamb 539]; 4.1.30-31; 78-79). This fear of motherhood stems from the fact that mothers, responsible for bringing up both female and male children, "could undermine patrilineal outcomes" rendering them "irreparably altered through marital infidelity, nursing, and infanticide" which meant that "maternal agency [was] a social and political concern" (Chamberlain 73). In fact, "Lady Macbeth's engineered murder of Duncan engenders the unlawful succession of a bastardized Macbeth" (Chamberlain 73). Additionally, Lady Macbeth,

as a de facto mother for Macbeth, who Hecate calls "a wayward son," is responsible for instilling his sense of morality (3.5.11). Nevertheless, this distorted fairytale causes Macbeth to exclaim to Lady Macbeth "Bring for men-children only: / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" which would be an unnatural act (1.7.74-76).

Lady Macbeth also acts as a de facto mother to Macbeth by using a form of narrative to goad him into action. She tells him a sort of fairytale. However, this fairytale does not end with the prince saving the princes. Instead, it is a twisted narrative wherein she would have "plucked my nipple from [her child's] boneless gums / and dashed the brains out" to achieve her ends that she uses to exert influence on Macbeth (1.7.57-58). Boys were often removed "from a feminine space to a masculine schoolroom environment" where they were beyond the influence of old wives' tales and other feminine narratives (Lamb 531). These narratives were believed to "exert permanent influence over young minds" (Lamb 531). Using a narrative framework, Lady Macbeth "authors a narrative of a murdered baby which profoundly motivates Macbeth to murder Duncan" (Lamb 537). This "maternal-seductive function" casts "Macbeth as an Oedipus figure succumbing to his own oedipal fantasies" (Hogan 385). Yet "the seductive mother is not entirely responsible for the son's violation of the law—if she *controlled* the son, he could not be *guilty* of the violation" (Hogan 386). However, Macbeth is found guilty; his death is seen by the audience to be restorative to the balance whereas Lady Macbeth's death is tragic.

Moreover, Lady Macbeth's malignant motherhood is undermined throughout her savage speech. By careful reading, we find that Lady Macbeth "so far from being cruel, is by nature intensely loving. More than half of what she said about the 'Babe' is exquisitely tender in phrase; and her tone is fierce only because of her fiercely concentrated, purblind concern for her

husband's happiness" (Elliot 67). Her love for her husband is selfless. This selflessness becomes apparent when one considers that though

She first appears in scene one act five, reading Macbeth's letter, and chills us as she starts to lay the plans that will culminate in Duncan's death after his fatal entrance [...] Yet nowhere, neither here nor elsewhere, does she ask for anything for herself, in her own right (Liston 235).

Her selflessness, however, is not the passiveness and gentleness expected of women at this time. It is a fierce and violent love for her husband that leads her to goad him towards murder.

Though her "castle bears the outward signs of pleasant seat in providing safety for the martlet but no protection for humanity: indeed, it harbors no humanity" (Liston 238). King Duncan says, when he sees the Macbeths' castle, that "This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air / Nimble and sweetly recommends itself / Unto our gentle senses" and Banquo agrees, commenting on a house-martin or swallow ("martlet" in the text) that has made its home in the castle masonry (1.6.73-75). Yet, what looks like "the innocent flower" is hiding a serpent inside. Duncan refers to Lady Macbeth as "our honoured hostess" and "fair and noble hostess," yet when Lady Macbeth does host, her guest, King Duncan, is murdered (1.6.11; 1.6.26). Duncan tells Lady Macbeth that "We are your guest tonight," indicating an implicit trust in the conventional performance of the roles of guest and hostess (1.6.27). However, Lady Macbeth has no intention of acting in a socially normative way.

Here is one of the few places where Lady Macbeth's speech acknowledges the social hierarchy of the day. She says to Duncan "Your servants ever / Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs, in count / to make their audit at your highness' pleasure. / Still to return your own" meaning that she recognizes that all she and Macbeth have is due to King Duncan and that she recognizes if he wanted he could recall it (1.6.25-28). Though she speaks fair, she intends foul.

Lady Macbeth perverts her role as a hostess and mother when she calls upon the spirits to fill her instead. She becomes host to the spirits instead. And "When she fills her entrances and exits to become male and impudently calls the 'battlements' hers, she plays out her solicitous role of hostess—now she's the vessel, the traditional woman, turning her mind to homely details ('blanket') as guests arrive ('visitings') and are ushered inside ('come')" (Burnett 12).

This same scene is another example of Lady Macbeth's failed position as hostess. When Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost and "the feast disintegrates, bonds of fellowship and rank are disregarded, and Lady Macbeth commands the guests, 'Stand not upon the order of your going, / but go at once'" (Asp 164). Here Lady Macbeth again ignores the dictates of social hierarchy and communal bonds; just as she did when she insisted that Macbeth murder King Duncan. Lady Macbeth disregards the "natural order" of things in favor of practicality. Whereas a good hostess would have insisted on the guests staying or leaving at their pleasure or at least in good order, she implores them to leave immediately.

Despite her position as a wife, in some ways, Lady Macbeth fulfills the function of whore. She uses her body and sexuality to control Macbeth. In her arguments with him before Duncan's murder, "she wages a sexual assault which can only be successful if Macbeth perceives her as intensely female (Asp 160). She becomes "the dominant seductress, commanding spirits to join with her in unholy union" (Burnett 12). She says she will "pour my spirits into thine ear" (1.5.23). In this context, "spirits" could be analogous to "seed" or semen. In this scene, "it is Macbeth who is the vessel, the weaker vessel, and Lady Macbeth who is the sexual aggressor" (Burnett 11). Her actions as a sexual aggressor are masculine and suggest that "Lady Macbeth metaphorically impregnates Macbeth in this scene by filling his ear with her spirit" (Burnett 11). Moreover, "the whole argument is couched in sexual terms" (Asp 160). However, when Lady

Macbeth is unable to act and murder Duncan while he sleeps, she proves herself impotent. Though she has asked the spirits to unsex her, she retains aspects of femininity. Later in the play, Lady Macbeth is unable "to forget that 'little hand' that cannot, finally, wield the knife" (Asp 169)—a knife, that, in a play rife with the "language of erotic love" and sexual innuendo, is conflated with male and maleness (Greene 156).

This scene also further sets up the play's definition of masculinity when, in Lady Macbeth's eyes, Macbeth loses his masculinity by not agreeing to do what needs to be done. When Macbeth claims, "I dare do all that may become a man," Lady Macbeth responds, "What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.45; 1.7.47-49). She says that his protestations "[Do] unmake you" (1.7.54). Furthermore, she tells him to "screw your courage to the sticking place" which implies male genitalia, and that cowardice is a form of castration. In her definition, masculinity lies in action. Coincidentally, it is also Macbeth's idea of manliness. After Duncan's murder, he tells Macduff "Let's briefly put on manly readiness" (2.3.135). By not acting in readiness when Lady Macbeth urges him to murder Duncan, Macbeth loses not only his masculinity but also his humanity. When Lady Macbeth asks, "What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me?" She "introduces another antithesis—that of man and beast" (Waith 265). Lady Macbeth's statement conflates the idea that one's gender identity relates to one's humanity.

Thus, when Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to unsex her, she is not only asking for them to imbue her with masculine energy and reasoning, but to take away her human instincts, "the idea that being human means accepting the limits imposed by social interconnectedness, by one's rank and role" (Asp 156). Additionally, Lady Macbeth's berating of Macbeth could be a sign of corrupted femininity. According to Karl Abraham, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud,

"healthy femininity equals acceptance of a supporting role and affirmation of a man's importance; always lurking, however, is a diseased femininity in which a woman's independence indicates her reluctance to shore up a man's sense of masculinity" (Glancy 37). Repeatedly she insults Macbeth's manhood, calling him "infirm of purpose" (2.2.52).

This definition of masculinity as action appears at the beginning of the play when King Duncan greets the Captain by exclaiming, "What bloody man is that?" and tells him "So well thy words become thee as thy wounds" (1.2.1; 1.2.43). These are men of action and valor, "When the play opens, Macbeth is presented as the most complete representative of a society which values and honors a manliness and soldier ship that maintain the cohesiveness of the tribe by extreme violence, if necessary" (Asp 154). To compound this, later in the play, the witches tell Macbeth to "Be bloody, bold, and resolute" (4.1.93). Blood, in this case, functions as a baptism into manhood. Contrast this to Lady Macbeth later in the play who tries to wash the blood off.

Later in the play, Macbeth himself sets up a syllogism in which "the valued man is the courageous man; the courageous man will dare even murder to right the wrongs done him; therefore, the valued man is he who will dare commit murder" (Asp 156). Hence, when Macbeth appears after the murder [Lady Macbeth] calls him 'my husband,' the only time in the play she addresses him by that familiar title that emphasizes the sexual bond between them," thus intimating that she feels he has fulfilled his masculine purpose and she can now fulfill the stereotypical role of female rather than having to take on a more masculine role (Asp 161).

However, once Lady Macbeth steps back into this feminine role, she begins to fade into the background and no longer appears as a force equal to her husband, a husband born in blood on the battlefield and dies with the blood of children on his hands. Her willingness to accept

male domination, even if just in words, erases her freedom, and her identity is wholly absorbed into his.

Though Lady Macbeth is traditionally read as sexually ambiguous within the play, Macbeth as well is guilty of gender boundary crossing. It is Macbeth who better fulfills the role of hostess as he is "much more conscious of the domestic demands imposed upon kinsmen and hosts" (Liston 235). He says "He's here in double trust: / First, as I am his kinsman, and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (1.7.12-16). Later, in act 3, Macbeth tells his guests "You know your degrees" and emphasizes "the structure of hierarchy and limit that governs social interaction. The feast itself is an archetypal human situation that involves feasting and communality" (Asp 163). Thus, showing that Macbeth is more in tune with the norms of human behavior and what is due to one's guest and one's host.

Macbeth also carries vestiges of motherhood with him when he compares Duncan to "a naked new-born babe, / Striding upon the blast, or Heaven's cherubim" (1.7.21-22). Later in the play, he talks about the two guards outside Duncan's chamber that he kills as a mother would talk about her sleeping babe. He says "one did laugh in's sleep, / and one cried 'Murder'" (2.2.20-21). The words "murder" and "mother" share similar phonics. "Mother" coming from the old English *modor* and murder coming from the old English word *morðor*. He also says that "they did say their prayers" like children kneeling before bedtime and that "One cried 'God bless us,' and 'Amen' the other" (2.2.22; 2.2.25).

Importantly, unlike Lady Macbeth, Macbeth is concerned with the souls of his victims. He says to Duncan "Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell / That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell" (2.1.64-65). Moreover, he tells Lady Macbeth after murdering the guards outside Duncan's

room that "I could not say 'Amen' / When they did say 'God bless us'" (2.2.27-28). Instead of being concerned with the guards' souls, however, Lady Macbeth tells him "Consider it not so deeply" (2.2.27-29). Lady Macbeth is oblivious to Macbeth's concern, yet in Elizabethan England, it was mothers who spiritually instructed their children. Macbeth continues to be concerned with the ecclesiastical edification of his victims; even going so far as to ask the men he has hired to kill Banquo, "Are you so gospelled to pray for this good man" (3.1.88). His chiding of the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance is reminiscent of "the same persuasive tack his wife had earlier used to entice him to murder" (Greene 172).

Furthermore, unlike Lady Macbeth, Macbeth is invested in his lineage. Not only does he tell Lady Macbeth to "bring forth men children only" (3.1.63). However, after he is crowned king, he broods about the fact that the witches prophesied he will not have any heirs, "No son of mine succeeding," yet "the seeds of Banquo kings" (3.1.69). To him, this speaks of impotence. However, according to Elizabethan notions of femininity, it would have been Lady Macbeth chiefly concerned with bringing forth heirs. Instead, however, she speaks of dashing out the brains of her children while Macbeth frets that he is "fruitless" and "barren" (3.1.60-61), phrases usually reserved to describe the womb. His fretting is not the first time Macbeth uses terms generally associated with motherhood. Later in the play, he feels himself to be "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in" (3.4.23-24). Moreover, in Act 4, Scene 1, it is to Macbeth that a child appears "like the issue of a king, / and wears upon his baby-brow the round / and top of sovereignty" (4.1.101-103). His visit to the witches gives birth to the apparition.

However, Macbeth's maternal essence is corrupted. He murders the children of Macduff and tries to murder Banquo's son in order to stamp out their lineage. "Macbeth's relations with mothers [leads] to sterility and death" (Hogan 390). Though Lady Macbeth says she would dash

out the brains of her infant, it is Macbeth, in point of fact, who does succeed in murdering children.

The crux of the play hinges on Macbeth killing Duncan, which is an unholy act, and killing one's king is tantamount to patricide, which is backed up by the text when Macduff tells Macbeth "Your royal father's murdered" (2.3.102). Indeed, throughout the text "Duncan is described as a father, both as authority and as progenitor" (Hogan 386). Not only is this murder taboo, but it could also be interpreted as a metaphorical act of rape as the weapon used was a knife. Duncan's "gashed stabs [look] like a breach in nature" (2.3.114). Duncan's murder is death by penetration, and "death by penetration of one mode of male rape on the stage" (B. R. Smith 423). This stabbing is "little more than another form of violence, which is a 'near universal mode of male behavior,'" yet it is a perverse mode of male behavior (Mohler 23). The text uses the word "breach" a second time, saying "their daggers / Unmannerly breeched" as though the daggers had been taken out of a pair of breeches, or men's pants, alluding to the act of taking one's pants off. The daggers in this instance can be seen as a metaphor for male genitals.

Duncan's murder upends the social order in more ways than one because

To give oneself up to lechery is to upset the rational order of the cosmos--and not only by placing body above spirit [...] The lascivious man exchanges the role of master for servant as well as the role of male for female (B. R. Smith 96).

As the porter says in Act II, Scene 3, "Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance" meaning that lechery causes one to desire the forbidden but takes away the ability to act, turning one from potent male to impotent female, upending the natural order of things (2.3.26-28), as the Doctor says in Act 5 "unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles" (5.1.69-70).

Perhaps the only part Lady Macbeth does not play is that of a widow. However, the play is full of foreshadowing of Macbeth's death. His violation of "all that may become a man" is a

death sentence. Thus, his death is a foregone conclusion. The performance of his death in the battle scene is dramatically unnecessary and is merely a moment of cathartic mimesis for the audience, alluding to the beginning of the play when the Thane of Cawdor is executed for treason, and with his death, the cycle starts anew. Additionally, Macbeth's death makes way for the true king to arise.

Throughout the play "[Lady Macbeth] plays variously man, witch, and conventional wife" (Burnett 10). By filling multiple roles, Lady Macbeth effectively confuses her identity within the maid/wife/widow paradigm and acts as a destabilizing influence throughout the play. She is masculine in her sexual aggression. However, perhaps most troubling to the ruling order of things is her confluence with the identity of witch. Witches are especially troubling to the patriarchy as "One of the means by which society polices gender stereotypes is to declare that they are natural and whoever deviates from them is unnatural" (Glancy 35). The witch sisters are "mysterious and powerful not only because of their knowledge but also because of the spontaneity and unpredictability that freedom from stereotype allows" (Asp 165). Because the three witch sisters are outside of a traditional power structure, they "are dangerous because they refuse to obey the dictates of the patriarchy" (Burnett 9). They resemble men with their beards but are women so "In a perverse way they suggest a debased image of the hermaphroditic figure, a figure whom sexual stereotypes are simply not applicable [...] the inhuman, as represented by these creatures, is also the sexually undifferentiated" (Asp 165).

Instead of residing by the hearth, "they assemble on the heath, away from the household" or traditional "female" spaces (Burnett 9). "They come and go as they please" (Asp 165). In addition "the first witch vows to estrange the Master of the Tiger and his wife, thus undermining the institution of marriage, one of the foundations of contemporary social order" (Burnett 9).

Moreover, they are gifted with foretelling, and in this case "Preternatural knowledge means control, domination; it is an intrusive, penetrating activity, a kind of masculine sexual equivalent" (Asp 165). Thus, Lady Macbeth, aligning herself with such supernatural elements, is troubling to Elizabethan patriarchal sensibilities. She does so early in the play as "even Lady Macbeth's first words [...] have a ringing, declamatory character which harks back to the witches' chiming pronouncements" (Burnett 11). Additionally, she imitates the witches when in her first soliloquy she says, "Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, / Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter" (1.5.54-55). The "all-hail" harkens back to the witches hailing Macbeth and Banquo in Act 1, Scene 3. Further, when she tells Macbeth that she will "pour my spirits in thine ear," she resembles the witches "pouring out ingredients to create a hellish mixture" (1.5.26; Burnett 11).

Additionally, gender roles are challenged in Macbeth because the idea of a "male monarch as savior" is shattered (Das 49). Though many scholars argue that "Shakespeare advocates a return to unquestionably patriarchal systems to restore harmony," a new interrogation presents the idea that the destructive element within the play is not the series of taboo gender crossings, but the return to the patriarchal status quo that is the true destructive force within the play (Das 51). Consider the fact that at the beginning of the play Lady Macbeth had created a liminal space for herself to occupy. In this liminal space, she is as powerful and important as her husband. Indeed, it is only at the end of the play when Lady Macbeth "resume[s] a traditional role, [and] retire[s] to subservience" that Lady Macbeth is punished with her madness (Burnett 13).

Thus in this interpretation, Lady Macbeth "does not destroy herself but is harmed by the patriarchy in her manipulation of female roles and in her efforts to find a voice to be heard and to become an authentic subject" (Burnett 12). She "fatally accepts a charade of quiescence and

dutifulness" at the end of the play (Burnett 14). It is then that "Macbeth rouses himself to contain the woman who precipitated him into killing Duncan" (Burnett 15). He "endeavors to relegate Lady Macbeth to a spectator role" by plotting his own crimes such as the murder of Lady Macduff and her children (Burnett 15).

It is fascinating to note that Lady Macduff is the opposite of Lady Macbeth in that she faithfully fulfills society's roles of femininity by obeying her husband and bearing him children, yet this obedience and performance of the traditional feminine role does not save her. Though "her chief concern was peace," she and her children are murdered (Liston 237). She is much unlike Lady Macbeth or the witches, yet in her death, there is a great deal of subversion when the Macduff line is extinguished, and she too fails to fulfill the role of wife and mother. Her failure is not due to any misbehavior on her part, but in fact, because Macbeth is creating a new patriarchal identity. Lady Macduff's only subversion lies in the argument she puts forth as a defense for her life. She says

Whither should I fly?  
I have done no harm. But I remember now  
I am in this earthly world; where to do harm  
Is often laudable, to do good sometime  
Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas,  
Do I put up that womanly defence,  
To say I have done no harm? (4.2.1819)

However, this is not a "womanly defense," it is, indeed "perfect logic, ideal logic: the kind of logic that reasonable men, rather than women, supposedly use" (Liston 236). However, this defense fails, as at the end of this speech, the murderers enter and slaughter Lady Macduff and her children. There is no protection for them either in "womanly defense" or in the logic of reasonable men. Instead, both prove destructive. This countermands the idea that Macbeth displays "fears caused by female rule manifested ... in a longing for the safety and tradition of the king" because in this case Macbeth, the king, is accountable for the murder of a mother and

her children (Das 49). Lady Macduff serves to show that "in a world ruled by men, who wield power arbitrarily and often violently, to speak of logic, merit, guilt and innocence is irrelevant" (Greene 175). In a better world, a world where Lady Macduff and her children are safe, those in power possess both the manly attribute of valor and the womanly attribute of gentleness.

In the latter part of the play, Lady Macbeth appears on "an uninterrupted movement in the direction of the recognition of fallibility and eventual submission" until ultimately locked away as a mad woman in a nightgown (Burnett 15). Macbeth takes over the roles his wife once occupied. He becomes the mythic aggressor "call[ing] upon supernatural power, borrowing metaphors first enlisted by his wife" (Burnett 15). In Act 4, he conjures the witches, in a soliloquy reminiscent of his wife's earlier appeal to the spirits.

Moreover, unlike earlier in the play, he no longer plays the part of hostess. He invites Banquo to a feast he never intends for him to attend. At the beginning of the feast, he says, "our hostess keeps her state, but in best / Time we require her welcome" indicating that he is not the one who invites the guest this time, but Lady Macbeth instead (3.4.5-6). Likewise, at the feast, he does not act as a good host. Lady Macbeth must chastise him, saying

My royal lord,  
 You do not give good cheer; the feast is sold  
 That is not often vouched while 'tis a-making:  
 'Tis given, with welcome –to feed were best at home:  
 From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony.  
 Meeting were bare without it. (3.4.33-37)

Since he is not making his guests feel welcome, he is no longer concerned with the ties of kinship. Here he begins to see Banquo's ghost and Lady Macbeth must, as a good hostess, assure her guests that Macbeth is only having a fit or seizure. She tells the guests to "Feed and regard

him not" (3.4.68). Macbeth has "displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting," or broken faith with his guest (3.4.110).

Almost immediately after the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth begins her descent. The first indication of this is when she calls Macbeth "husband," but the second is when she asks Macduff "What's the business," and he replies

O gentle lady,  
 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:  
 The repetition in a woman's ear  
 Would murder as it fell (2.3.85-88)

Lady Macbeth does not argue; instead, Banquo enters, and Lady Macbeth must play innocent to all knowledge of the murder. Later in the scene, they view Duncan's lifeless body and Lady Macbeth becomes sick at the sight--or pretends to be sick, and cries out "Help me hence, ho!" (2.3.120). It is this act of frailty, pretend or otherwise that causes the men to treat her as one too weak a feminine for such things. Later in the play, instead of being able to speak to Macbeth directly as she was able to at the beginning of the play, she must tell a servant "Say to the King, I would attend his leisure / For a few words" (3.1.155-156).

Macbeth also begins to speak to her in gentler terms, he calls her "love," and "dearest chuck" and instead of telling her his plans, adjures her to "Be innocent of the knowledge" (3.2.32; 3.2.48). Unlike earlier in the day when Macbeth was content to stay behind as Lady Macbeth went to go stab Duncan, Macbeth now tells Lady Macbeth to "hold thee still" as inaction is ladylike and to act is masculine (3.2.57). When Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth again tries to use a narrative device on him, telling him that the idea of seeing a ghost is something that "would well become / A woman's story at a winter's fire / Authorized by her grandam," something an old woman would make up, not a virile man (3.4.64-65). However, this time, she is unable to compel Macbeth to act as she wishes. She also tries to insult his

masculinity again, and says, "What, quite unmanned in folly? ... Fie for shame" (3.4.74-76). But Macbeth continues to say that he has seen Banquo's ghost. Lady Macbeth has lost her power over him. Macbeth tells Banquo's ghost "What man dare, I dare" (3.4.100). At this point, Macbeth is secure in his masculinity.

Lady Macbeth's descent into "madness" and eventual suicide can be viewed as another form of subversion. For instance, her handwashing can be seen as a sort of cleansing ceremony to "eradicate the stain of patriarchy and to restore a sense of wholeness" (Burnett 16). She is said to "rise from her bed, [and] throw her nightgown upon her." Coupled with the fact that the actress playing Lady Macbeth traditionally wears a white nightgown, this scene means it can be seen as a sort of baptism, a return to a virginal self (5.1.5). This rebirth to a purer self does not necessarily mean virginal in the sense of sexual purity but as a restoration of Lady Macbeth's "sex" or humanity she renounced when she asked the spirits to unsex her. Her madness then is not in reaction to the murder, but to this rebirth. The "spot" that she cannot get out is her true self, the act of trying to wash it off is her attempt to fit into the stereotypical female role that Macbeth has now forced her into with his actions. She appears in "her very guise," that of a virginal female, yet this is not her true self (5.1.18). She is accompanied by her gentlewoman who "refuses to tell the doctor what she has seen and heard and fails (deliberately?) to remove 'the means of all annoyance' (5.1.73), thus facilitating her mistress' suicide," suicide, of course, being the ultimate denial of patriarchal submission (Burnett 16).

Moreover, there is a sense of feminine solidarity in the Gentlewoman's refusal to talk to the doctor; when he asks what it is Lady Macbeth says in her sleepwalking episodes, the gentlewoman tells the doctor "That, sir, which I will not report after her" (5.1.14). Even at the

doctor's persistence that "You may [tell] me, and 'tis most meet you should," the gentlewoman replies "Neither to you, nor anyone" (5.1.15-16). The gentlewoman is staunchly loyal to Lady Macbeth.

Additionally, "Lady Macbeth's demise is announced by the wailing of her women" which could imply a complete "removal from the masculine world" but also "implies a female unity, an attempt to find an authentic language" (Asp 167; Burnett 17). Moreover, as Lady Macbeth dies childless, "she removes herself as an instrument who can secure 'success'" as defined by an heir to the lands and family name and "insists upon her status as an autonomous subject rather than a powerless servant" (Burnett 18). Though Macbeth tells her to "bring forth men children only," she will bring forth none. She is in this way responsible for the discontinuation of the Macbeth lineage. However, because of her and Macbeth's actions, Malcolm, the true king, is crowned. So, in a way, Lady Macbeth gives birth to a line of kings, just not a line of Macbeths. However, this is a line of kings birthed through death, not life.

Though *Macbeth* ends in the crowning of a king, it is not calling for the return to male authority and traditional patriarchy. While Macduff sends to enlist the aid of the King of England to function as a "curative and restitutive" authority, it is Hecate and the witches who set all to rights, bringing Macbeth "Unto a dismal, and fatal end" (Hogan 386; 3.5.21). As William Liston writes in "Male and Female He Created Them," a more fitting moral of the play is something along these lines:

the norm against which Macbeth works is a traditional definition of man as valorous, firm, commanding, humane, and limited; and a traditional definition of woman as soft, maternal, nourishing, a helpmeet to her husband, human, and limited. The proper man and the proper woman are both richer than the simplistic stereotype even in the fairly restricted world of this play (238-239).

Thus "Macbeth loses the battlefield [...because of] his failure to allow the tender aspects of his character to check those tough characteristics which are celebrated by the chauvinistic war

ethic of his culture" (Kimbrough 177). When told that his wife has died, Macbeth is unaffected, treating her death as a mere inconvenience and saying, "She should have died hereafter" (5.5.16). Unlike Macduff, who when told his wife and children are dead breaks down and when counseled by Malcolm to "Dispute it like a man" replies "I shall do so: / But I must also feel it as a man" (4.3.219-221). His expression of "womanly grief" combined with his desire to go to battle is an expression of full humanity, as

Shakespeare sensed that so long as one remains exclusively female or exclusively male, that person will be restricted and confined, denied human growth. Each will be the prisoner of gender, not its keeper (Kimbrough 175).

Thus, "Macduff is a complete man: he is a valiant soldier, ready to perform 'manly' deeds, but is neither ashamed of 'human' feelings nor unaware of his moral responsibilities" (Waith 267). To Shakespeare, an ideal person contained a balance of both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine attributes. By examining the societies and changing ideas of gender performance through history, we will be able to see if we are moving further away or closer to this utopia of balanced gender identity, especially as it pertains to femininity.

### **Chapter 3: "Come to my woman's breasts": Sarah Siddons and Georgian Femininity (1755 – 1831)**

In the late 18th-century, Georgian English gender politics had shifted a great deal from the Elizabethan Era. The end of the Elizabethan era heralded the return of a male sovereign; which created a backlash against female authority and created new strife in gender and social politics. This backlash was due in part to Queen Elizabeth's lack of heirs and the subsequent War of Three Kingdoms and the Restoration. The commencement of the reign of King George should have indicated a return to normalcy. However, due to several ongoing-armed conflicts, and the Industrial Revolution, England was more uncertain than ever. This uncertainty led leading

politicians and philosophers of the day to retrench themselves in traditional ideologies concerning gender and gender roles.

Late eighteenth-century authors and philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Richard Polwhele and others argued that that “gender boundaries were indeed impassable, that gender identities could not be shed at will, and that gender categories were absolute” (Wahrman 27). Though this attitude was present in the 16th-century, it gained greater significance in the 18th-century as "the wars of the 1750s [...saw] a hardening of conventional gender divisions within British society" (H. Smith 72). At the time, authorities needed the populace to buy into the traditional gender paradigm because England was involved in several wars, most notably the Revolutionary War, the ongoing Seven Years War, and was about to be pulled in the French and Napoleonic wars. This wartime period "produce[d] a sense of dispossession and lawlessness" (Wilson 96). In order to maintain control and a sense of normalcy in the face of wartime panic, traditional roles and institutions were now regarded as sacrosanct.

This retrenchment to traditional gender ideology, and the idea that femininity consisted of a set of characteristics including "weakness, passivity, submission, decoration, beauty, [and] softness" had far-reaching implications (Phillips, "Unsex Me Here" 354). Historians began to erase any hint of masculinity in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. For, while most of the 17th and 18th-century “we find considerable appreciation for Elizabeth’s heroic manliness,” in the latter half of the century, this side of Elizabeth was obscured. Instead, accounts were rewritten to “hide as much as possible [...] by emphasizing Elizabeth’s femininity as against the manliness of her support staff” (Wahrman 17). Thus her “eighteenth-century reputation went through a transformation” (Wahrman 17).

As previously mentioned, this was due to several factors, one of which being that during the 18th-century Britain was involved in several long-lived armed conflicts. These conflicts caused a sense of uncertainty in the population. These conflicts especially “placed women in ambiguous relationships to state and nation” because in some ways they were called upon to bear a more significant burden (Wilson 94). Women at this time did not traditionally work outside the household, so when their husbands and fathers went to war, they were often displaced, having no money of their own with which to pay rent or maintain their previous way of life. As a result, they fell down the rungs of society and women who previously did not have to work now had to find employment. Additionally, the war demanded a toll on their bodies. While women have always borne the burden of giving birth, now with their sons ordered into battle at a higher rate than ever before, for some, it must have seemed as though they were bearing fodder for the cannons.

In order to counter this ambiguity and to ensure the cooperation of the female population, a new paradigm of femininity emerged. Patriotism became one of the core tenets of 18th-century femininity. Society expected women to birth and raise eager and robust soldiers for the front, brave food rationing, and bear loss with a cheerful smile on their face. Given the mores of the day “it was women’s duty to bring forth male bravery by putting aside their private feelings, and convincing their lovers that nothing was so much desired as their success in battle” (Wilson 109). Paradoxically, these “war[s] also afforded, indeed demanded, greater female activism in the ‘home front’” which provided them a greater sense of freedom than they had previously felt (Wilson 94).

The dawn of the Industrial Revolution was another factor that caused anxieties surrounding women and women's identities. As the male population engaged in battle, a crisis

emerged due to the shortage of able-bodied men left to work in the factories and farms. The strain on the workforce meant that women were required to fill the empty spaces left behind. Thus, it became no longer taboo for women to work outside the home. As more and more women entered the workforce, it disrupted the idea that women belonged solely to the domestic sphere and upended the previous paradigm of woman's identities.

As women left the privacy of the domestic sphere and entered the public one, their voices in politics and public policy became louder. These vocal women were urged on by the likes of Marie Antoinette, Maria Carolina, and Queen Charlotte, whom all had considerable influence on the politics of their nations due to "their husbands' unwillingness or inability to rule" (Strobel 3). Additionally, the rise of Rational Dissent during the Enlightenment meant that more and more women were encouraged to seek an education. As women had greater access to education, they became more confident and their voices and opinions became bolder. Female authors began publishing treatises calling for greater freedom for women—authors such as Mary Astell and Olympe de Gouges—all this culminating in Mary Wollstonecraft's famous *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*, which is said to have launched the Suffragette movement.

The Industrial Revolution also disrupted the paradigm of the traditional marriage because population migrations changed, due to more and more of the population heading for town centers to work instead of living outside of them to farm, which created "something like a crisis [...] with regard to marriage" because the populations migrating to larger town centers were disproportionately young adults and women which led to the number of women far outweighing the number of men in any given town. This dearth of men created an imbalance that led to "far more women remaining unmarried than earlier" (Hill 7).

Because women outnumbered the men it "hindered women's chances of marriage" with "many of them [...] destined to become unmarried domestic servants, some for life" (Hill 18). These unmarried domestic servants were outside of the existing paradigm, were thus disenfranchised, and retained fewer legal rights than married women because it was not until the 19th century that laborers' rights were taken seriously. Unwed and unemployed women had fewer rights still and almost no recourse but to turn to poor houses or prostitution. Though "Marriage deprived a woman of any legal existence," it was still a better alternative to having no real identity at all (Hill 6). In response to this crisis of unwed women, it became imperative to politicians, religious leaders, and philosophers of the day to maintain the traditional image of marriage.

With this retrenching of the long-established institution of marriage came the idealization of motherhood. No longer was bearing children enough; mothers were required to enter a state of blissful delight in the care and concern of their offspring. It was a natural, earthy sort of motherhood where mothers no longer handed off their children to wet nurses but nursed their children themselves. As a result, in the late 18th-century, there was a "distinctive shift [...] from maternity as a general ideal, broadly prescriptive but allowing for individual deviations, to maternity inextricably intertwined with the essence of femininity for each and every woman" (Wahrman 13).

Now more than ever, society expected mothers to form strong emotional attachments to their children. In truth, these maternal bonds were usually the only parental bonds. Fathers were not expected to do any of the child-rearing until the children were much older and then they usually only dealt with the sons. Mothers were the sole parental figures for girls; the fathers' only job was to secure them a good marriage. Sons did spend time with their fathers, but only once

they were old enough to learn the family trade. Because mothers were so integral to their children's lives at this time, "the mother [...] was the normative figure" in daily life (Wahrman 12). This idea of the mother as the feminine ideal created "a distinctive and historically nuanced fascination with the maternal" that characterized England in the 18th-century (Wahrman 12).

For example, Queen Charlotte maintained "ongoing efforts to fashion herself as the benevolent nurturer of the royal family and the fine arts" (Strobel 3). Thomas Burke's famous portrait "Queen Charlotte Raising the Genius of the Fine Arts" supported these efforts, which portrays Charlotte in a maternal role. For example, her eldest son portrays the image of Genius. This portrait "symbolized both the public and private roles of the English queen" (Strobel 4). However, it was also symbolic of the 18th-century's idealized female—that of a nurturing mother. It was toward Queen Charlotte that England looked (as the mother of the nation and as the mother to England's future rulers) for guidance as to how 18th-century femininity should be performed. Charlotte sought to portray herself as "an accessible maternal figure," and so England followed suit (Strobel 4).

Because of these factors—the ongoing-armed conflicts, the Industrial Revolution, and the retrenchment of patriarchal paradigms—"women's relationship to the nation, where the clash between dominant ideologies of patriotism and gender and individual identities seemed especially fraught" was irrevocably changed (Wilson 93). Instead of the maid/wife/widow paradigm of female identity that ruled the previous eras, a new paradigm was formed, that of wife/mother/patriot.

The theatrical productions of this era reflected these dramatic social changes. The theater is one of the better-documented forums of social and political thought of the 18th-century. In part because this is the period that gave rise to the idea of celebrity. Actors and actresses became

iconic figures in the social landscape. In some instances, it was not what was playing, but who was there that drew in audiences. To see Kemble act at the theater was to have taken part in an event, a shared social experience.

Accordingly, actors and actresses began to cultivate a sort of persona or image, and through this image "stars influenced the audience's understanding of both play and performance and provided meaning and association beyond the script" (H. Smith 52). For instance, Robert Wilks, an actor on the early 18th-century stage, cultivated "the persona of a heroic army officer protagonist so central to the pro-army play" (H. Smith 52). Due to the ongoing armed conflict in England, plays about the military or military figures were hugely popular. Hundreds of plays were flooding the theater whose hero was the courteous officer and whose heroine was virtuous, patriotic, and loyal. In cultivating the persona of an honorable military figure, Robert Wilks was able to earn a cache of respectability, whether or not his personal life bore this out.

Because the 18th-century stage so often portrayed current-day issues, it became a place where sociopolitical conflict and concepts could be acted out in a safe space. It was also a place for "British society to formulate, refine, and further think about patriotism and gender, particularly in times of military and political crisis" (H. Smith 51). Theater, by its very essence, is a shared "sociable experience, where groups within the audience actively participate in the 'creation of meaning'" (H. Smith 51). Thus, "dramatic texts were employed to publicize and popularize matters of political and social concern" (H. Smith 50). In light of the gendered tensions surrounding the 18th-century sociopolitical landscape, playwrights wrote plays that "suggested women could fulfill a patriotic role suitable to their sex by encouraging their husbands and lovers to acts of heroism in defense of their country" (H. Smith 70). Texts that

were written in previous eras and that were popular enough to be still performed were re-textualized and modified to conform to the prevalent ideas of masculinity and femininity.

However, the 18th-century theater had also become an outlet where it was possible to display the private and emotional sphere in a genteel way. Audiences often lavishly displayed emotion during these performances, laughing, crying, and even swooning. In earlier centuries, the stage acted as a place where the pervading moral ideals were propagated to the illiterate masses. It was the domain of liturgical dramas and morality plays. Although, by the 18th-century it was “no longer a tableaux of morality; but rather a mirror which reflected the emotional sympathies of an age where feeling took precedence over action” (Asfour and Williamson 39). The earlier ideas of tragedy—which arose from the writings of Aristotle—where characters were inexorably moved forward by the plot and emotional response in the audience, were discarded “in favour of character and intense emotional effects, reducing plot to ‘a series of moments with emotional impact and moral force.’” (Asfour and Williamson 39).

Instead of going to the theater for enlightenment, audiences at this time: “went to the theater to indulge themselves in the same emotions as those portrayed by the players” (Manvell 2). The theater was now a cathartic event where “Men would weep when moved to do so; fashionable women would fall into hysterics, fainting in the hot crush of the theatre pit.” (Manvell 2). Earlier in the eighteenth century, a highly-stylized version of tragedy was preferred but “As romanticism supplanted classicism, so passionate, individualistic acting dethroned the stately tableaux and ossified gestures of Kemble and his tribe” (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 360).

In opposition to the stylized version of acting that was popular with Kemble, was a new naturalistic kind of acting in which “Actors and actresses were expected to cleave their way into

the hearts of their audience, banishing all resistance, derision or would-be intellectual criticism by appealing directly and irresistibly to their emotional susceptibilities" (Manvell 2). This new naturalistic style of acting allowed the actors greater freedom in their movements and interpretations of the works, which was necessary to create those moments of mimesis, which led to the cathartic outpouring of emotions in the late 18th-century audience.

All of this can be seen in the late 18th-century interpretations of *Macbeth*. To keep the play relevant, Macbeth was reformed, no longer the play's villain, he was a precursor to the Byronic hero. In response to this realignment, it became necessary for Lady Macbeth to go from a tragic figure to the overarching villain of the play. Early post-Restoration versions of Lady Macbeth's part emphasized her power and ambition. Lady Macbeth's seeming anathema to the feminine ideal, joined with her subversive nature made her an easy villain in Georgian England. In these performances of the play, actors performed Macbeth as a noble, reluctant murderer and the witches as comic diversions. They show Lady Macbeth as the criminal impetus, a cold, heartless woman who lured her husband to his evil plot. As a result, Macbeth's traitorous actions had to be reinterpreted and laid at the door of his unpatriotic and immoral wife.

Lady Macbeth is not the only reinterpreted Shakespearean character. As the image of Queen Elizabeth was effeminized, anything that came out of the Elizabethan era and contained strong female characters was in danger of being reconstrued. As a result, any masculine characteristics given Shakespeare's female characters in previous works were "now dismissed out of hand, amid barely concealed laughter" (Wahrman 28). For instance, Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Viola in *Twelfth Night* were also reconfigured. In their new constitution, the more they "tried to mask their femininity, the more irrepressibly it re-emerged" (Wahrman 27). At a time when women's bodies were under further scrutiny—as they were to be the bearers of sons

and soldiers and thus must be "the bearers of national values, [and] had to provide examples of domestic virtue that complemented and invoked masculine patriotism"—it was imperative that women had the appearance of virtuous patriotism (Wilson 108). To achieve this, "Women, their bodies and minds, must serve as the visible markers of national homogeneity and selfless femininity had to be put to work in the service of masculine vigilance" making a return to traditional femininity of utmost importance (Wilson 109).

But while Rosalind and Viola underwent a shift of interpretation that saw them become more feminine, Lady Macbeth underwent one that saw her go from "helpmate and equal partner in crime with ambitious husband to the controlling figure of the play" (Bernstein 32). This was in part due to David Garrick's portrayal of Macbeth as "a sensitive, noble hero," as a military figure, casting Macbeth in a gentler light than previously (Bernstein 32). However, Lady Macbeth's deviation from those of a traditional wife, mother and patriot, which were important at this time, caused her to be cast in a more villainous light.

Onto this stage entered Sarah Siddons (née Kemble). The daughter of acting duo Roger Kemble and Sarah Ward, Sarah Siddons was the elder sister of John Kemble (who became famous on Drury Lane in his own right). Sarah was born on July 5, 1755 and quite auspiciously, she shares the same birth year as that other tragic figure: Marie Antoinette. Sarah's childhood is cloaked in mystery as "Sarah herself and her parents spoke little of her earliest year" (Manvell 11). Even though Mrs. Siddons' family was all in the way of the theater, and though she had been appearing regularly on stage since a small child, her parents initially resisted her career path, hoping she would choose something a more respectable.

Theater was just then beginning to be viewed as a legitimate career path for a woman. Mrs. Siddons arrived on the theatrical scene which at the time "was one of the first arenas in

which women struggled to gain public acceptance” (Buchanan 413). Before Mrs. Siddons, “Actresses were proscribed from the British stage until the Restoration, of course, and had traditionally been viewed as dissolute ‘public women’” (McPherson, "Masculinity, Femininity, and the Tragic Sublime" 300). However, Mrs. Siddons remained undaunted, and her determination eventually won her acclaim and success. Mrs. Siddons became the leading-lady of the Georgian stage. It is her fame and success that made major headway in promoting the respectability of actress as an occupation suited to future wives and mothers; in a time that still “stressed the importance of such distinctions” between private and public lives (Wilson 93). By acknowledging society’s mores at large, by tiptoeing the line between art and artifice, between truth and convention, Mrs. Siddons was able to elevate the art of theater into respectability. Her efforts created a path for acting as a legitimate career for women. However, in order to do so, she had to adhere strictly to late 18th-century philosophy regarding the feminine ideal.

Mrs. Siddons is a compelling figure because she saw the sort of meteoric fame we attribute to today's superstars. Yet, "in the late-eighteenth century the meteoric rise of an actress to such level of fame was unique" (Buchanan 418). There was a sort of cult surrounding Mrs. Siddons. Plebeians and aristocrats alike sought her out. Her image was painted and repainted, sculpted, drawn, engraved, and printed. Queen Charlotte herself "appointed her Reader to the Royal Family, a position that required her to make frequent visits to Windsor Castle and Buckingham House to recite poetry and drama" (Buchanan 418). In addition, during her final performance, her exit off the stage as Lady Macbeth during the sleepwalking scene set off such thunderous applause that Mr. Kemble ended the play mid-act.

Her success was due in part to her acting style as well as her aura of respectability. Thanks to the change in acting style from the more rigid and prescribed version of previous

centuries to the more naturalistic and emotional style of the 18th-century, Sarah was able to bring nobility and domesticity to the stage, her acting calculated to appeal to pathos. It has been said that “few actors embodied a character, expressed emotion, or moved audiences more forcefully than Sarah Siddons” (Buchanan 413). Mrs. Siddons' emotionality is well known, but she was “initially admired less for her points than for transitioning quickly and seamlessly between feelings, thus conveying complex shades of emotion,” points, here, being the formulaic expression of emotion required by the era's rhetorical acting style (Buchanan 421). Mrs. Siddons was less concerned with hitting these points perfectly than with conveying complex emotions.

Her acting appealed to the emotional/feminine side of her audience, who enjoyed “play[ing] the woman with mine eyes” as a sort of mimetic catharsis (4.3.230). Attending the theater at this time was geared towards the release of pent up emotions. Audiences

went to the theater to indulge themselves in the same emotions as those portrayed by the players. Actors and actresses were expected to cleave their way into the hearts of their audiences, banishing all resistance, derision or would-be intellectual criticism by appealing directly and irresistibly to their emotional susceptibilities (Manvell 2).

The stage was the arena of pathos. Yet, she was able to be an actress of sensibility “without tainting herself with the stage’s vulgar emotions” (Pratt 62). As one critic wrote, “Her sorrow, too, is never childish, her lamentation has a dignity about it which belongs, I think, to no other woman; it claims your respect along with your tears” (qtd. in Pratt 63). This ability to bring a sense of respectable domesticity to the public arena of the theater is really her crowning achievement. She endeavored to create sympathy for her characters in her audience, moving the action from the realm of politics into the realm of the personal.

Because of her ability to bring nobility and domesticity to the stage, and her acting acumen, Mrs. Siddons became the leading lady of the late 18th-century. Her most celebrated and enduring role was that of Lady Macbeth, the character whom “years later became perhaps the

greatest achievement of her career” (Manvell 21). Mrs. Siddons played Lady Macbeth with an eye towards “focusing on private and domestic as opposed to aristocratic themes” (Asfour and Williamson 38). By examining her performance both as an actress and as a woman, we can see how the gender political landscape changed between the Elizabethan Era and Georgian England.

One of the ways Mrs. Siddons was able to achieve such fame and success was to cultivate her image as that of the feminine ideal. Like Wilkes, who cultivated his image of that of a noble hero, Sarah Siddons cultivated her image to be that of a noble, honest and devoted mother, a woman who followed the dictates of tradition and who had an acute awareness of the social niceties of the day. She cast herself into the rôle of a “model of domestic virtue,” and motherhood, she did this by creating a “stage persona [that] depended upon her elevation above the common run of humanity” (Pratt 58).

Mrs. Siddons worked hard to cultivate an image of domesticity, not only on stage but also in off stage depictions of herself as well. Like Queen Charlotte, Mrs. Siddons had a portrait of herself painted by Thomas Gainsborough. His famous painting of Mrs. Siddons simply titled “Mrs. Siddons” and greatly contrasts the painting of her done by Sir Joshua Reynolds' in which Mrs. Siddons epically portrays “The Tragic Muse”. Gainsborough's "Mrs. Siddons" shows the actress as someone calm and restful. It breaches the gap between the public and the private spheres, but does so in an understated and respectful way, which characterizes Mrs. Siddons's modus operandi. Despite her unconventional career, Mrs. Siddons maintained an aura of respectability by carefully working within the late 18th-century's paradigm of femininity—that of wife/mother/patriot.

Though the sole breadwinner, Mrs. Siddons continued to submit to her husband in public and private, he doled out to her an allowance from the money she made, and he made the

financial decisions for the family. Despite being more famous than her small-time actor husband, Sarah chose to go by Sarah Siddons instead of Sarah Kemble, a name which would have strengthened her place in the theatrical world due to her family's dynasty, a dynasty so influential that "history at the end of the eighteenth century is sometimes known as the age of Kemble" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 6). Indeed, the name Mrs. Siddons was very important to Sarah, and despite the prevalent idea that actors and actresses were promiscuous, Mrs. Siddons is said to have "preserved the purity of an unsullied name" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 8). So spotless was her reputation and so bright was her fame that a poem was written in her honor called *The Siddoniad*, which called her "the WIFE unblemish'd, and the mother dear" (qtd. in McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 10).

Yet, like all relationships, Mrs. Siddons's relationship with William Siddons was complicated. One critic who wrote under the name "Stage Trick" once wrote that:

What reason Mr. Siddons possess to play the Tyrant over a wife of such extraordinary abilities, by whom he is every day fed, I know not: but, in answer to those who make this assertion, ...I shall just hint, that it has been whispered by others, she wears the breeches every day of her life (qtd. in McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 12).

However, despite earning much more than her husband (who quit his career in order to look after the family business), it was her husband who held the purse strings. As in most marriages at the time, all property and money, no matter how obtained, belonged to the husband. Despite having no say in her family's expenditures and having a large brood, later in her career critics accused her of having an "inordinate interest in money" which, while somewhat acceptable in a man, was unpardonable in a woman (Buchanan 432).

Though Mrs. Siddons managed to promote the image of a pure and blameless wife, there was still some scandal attached to her name, as would be expected for someone working on the edges of social propriety. Known as "The Galindo Affair", rumors arose that Mrs. Siddons had

seduced the husband of a fellow actress, Catherine Galindo, who published a letter titled “Mrs. Galindo’s Letter to Mrs. Siddons” which was a “hysterical assault on the celebrated actress, an exposé charging her with hypocrisy, domestic inequity and adultery” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 19). Mrs. Galindo even published a set of 20 private letters between Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Galindo. At this time, Mrs. Siddons was around 47 years old and her career was long established. Though this scandal caused public comment, it did not appear to have dimmed her star.

This was not the only scandal of an adulterous nature Mrs. Siddons would have to weather. Just a couple of years after “The Galindo Affair”, a young law student would become obsessed with her, which would lead to him stalking her and sending her letters, ending in her being forced to seek legal protection from him. Some said that Mrs. Siddons “suffered, thanks to the wanderings of her husband, from a venereal disease” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 20). Additionally, Mrs. Siddons developed a laudanum addiction, “perhaps as a result of this physical complaint” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 20). Yet she never once publicly shamed or denounced her husband, showing to the world, essentially, an image of a devoted wife.

Mrs. Siddons created an image of herself as a doting mother by conflating her theatrical roles as maternal characters with her physical embodiment of motherhood. She did this by blurring “the lines between fiction and reality,” between her real life role as a mother and her fictional roles, by appearing on stage pregnant (Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 21). By appearing in roles such as Isabella, from *The Fatal Marriage*, Cordelia from *King Lear*, or Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* – all women with spotless reputations—and by frequently appearing on stage heavily with child, she “made use of [the] tendency to conflate the personal and the fictive through a strategy of public intimacy, ‘performing within the public realm with the express intent to expose private matters’” (Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 21).

At the time of her growing fame, she was also “increasing,” pregnant with her and William’s firstborn. As a matter of course, her “pregnancies were monitored and discussed in letters, journals, and newspapers of the day” (Buchanan 432). By the end of her career, Sarah Siddons “underwent multiple pregnancies, eventually giving birth to seven children” during her marriage to William Siddons (Buchanan 417). Through appearing pregnant on stage, she “[reveals] a great deal about the nexus of gender, the maternal body, and performance in public spaces” (Buchanan 416). Because “performance and text constitute two distinct sets of signs that are more or less equally weighted in the way an audience assigns them importance” Mrs. Siddons was able to create for herself a “maternal ethos” by “[joining] the virtual body of the character she represented with her actual body as a person” (Ellen Donkin, qtd. in Phillips, “I have Given Suck” 19; Felicity Nussbaum, qtd. in Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 21). Her “reputation as a devoted wife and mother in private life ... afforded her great liberty on the public stage, where her portrayals of ruined or immoral women were interpreted as acting feats rather than reflections of questionable character” (Buchanan 429).

Like Lady Macbeth, however, Mrs. Siddons’ family life can present some examples of problematic motherhood. Though she presented herself to the public as a “maternal persona, the image of protectress and nurturer,” her role as a cultural icon took its toll on her family (McDonald 11). For example, when her daughter Sally fell gravely ill while in Bath, Mrs. Siddons was touring in Ireland, and though she tried to reach the family in time, she arrived in England too late to reach her daughter’s deathbed. Upon hearing the news, Mrs. Siddons ““sank into speechless despondency, and lay for a day at Shrewsbury [...] cold and torpid as a stone and with scarcely a sign of life”” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 12). This was the second death of a child that Mrs. Siddons had sustained, her second daughter having passed five years previous.

The death of this daughter led Mrs. Siddons to “[receive] anonymous Letters [sic] perpetually to destroy her Peace [sic],” probably one condemning her for her daughter’s death (qtd. in McDonald, *Look to the Lady*13).

Additionally, Mrs. Siddons, always conscious of her image, occasionally used her children to silence critics. For instance, when she decided to leave Bath for the London stage, she brought her three children on stage as a way to “[quell] any objections the audience might raise about her pursuit of a more lucrative position in London” (Phillips, "I Have Given Suck" 24). This did not silence every critic, however, for “as soon as she became a success on the London stage, her salary became a topic for public comment” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 13). Accordingly, “the press gleefully took up the topic and public discussion, even denunciation, became frequent and widespread” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 14).

Mrs. Siddons’ family situation did sometimes take a toll on her career. In one performance, done while late in her pregnancy, the audience was said to have feared for her health. Her memoirs also show that she often waited until after her domestic chores were finished to study her parts. This led to her disastrous first appearance as Lady Macbeth when she was 20 years old. She wrote in her memoirs that the reason the part was so “unsuccessful, even embarrassing, [was] because she had procrastinated and then tried to cram for the part only after her family was asleep” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 11).

Though not overtly patriotic, Mrs. Siddons’s image of a queenly or stately authority was, in a sense, used to inspire patriotism. Mrs. Siddons’s air of nobility “allowed her audiences to retain a fantasy of royal power at a time of monarchical disintegration” (Pratt 58). She used her stateliness to add to her respectability and contradict any notion that she was dissolute or debauched, but it also promoted, through mimesis, a sense of patriotic duty to king and country.

This innate regality is on display in the (arguably) most famous painting of her done by Sir Joshua Reynolds, titled “Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse” in which she is portrayed as noble and almost heroic, with one critic saying “she looks, walks, and moves like a woman of superior rank” (qtd. in McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 22).

In addition, Mrs. Siddons embodied the very definition of queenliness, and many references to her ‘noble figure’ and ‘majestic form’ can be found scattering any number of writings on her history or performance. Her countenance was so regal that Tate Wilkinson, another famous theater presence at the time, once said, “if you ask me ‘What is a queen?’ I should say Mrs. Siddons” (qtd. in Asfour and Williamson 41). In fact, Mrs. Siddons herself writes in her own memoir about how upon meeting with Queen Charlotte for the first time, the queen was struck by how calm and reassured Sarah seemed, but Sarah writes, “I had frequently personated Queens” (Asfour and Williamson 41). As she “personated” these queens, she did so with a focus on the internal domestic spaces the queens inhabited. This contradiction of the political and the public versus the domestic and the personal echoes the tension of gender politics in Elizabethan England, which had carried on to the late 18th-century.

She was aided by her countenance, which was almost unanimously described as pleasing. In the 18th-century, “Beautiful was associated with elegance, pleasing control, repetition and the feminine” and Mrs. Siddons was considered very beautiful (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 31). Her beauty helped her maintain an image of goodness. Another term that appears frequently in reports of Mrs. Siddons is “sublime”. Though “The Sublime connoted power, extravagance, uniqueness and singularity” and was most often a masculine quality, Mrs. Siddons was just as often called sublime as she was beautiful by critics (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 31). She was able to marry the feminine ideals of beauty and goodness as well as the masculine ideals of

“Heroism, command, magnificence” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 32). In fact, she often played male roles, including the titular role of Hamlet. This ability to tap into the sublime and masculine was much like Queen Elizabeth herself who often described herself in masculine terms in order to maintain the type of authority typically reserved for men.

Mrs. Siddons played Lady Macbeth with respect and circumspection, but she also had a habit of skirting traditions to make the part her own. Thanks to the culture of print in Georgian England—an inclination that “contributed mightily” to the success of Mrs. Siddons—we have plenty of criticisms and reviews with which to work (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 1). This situation is unlike that of the Elizabethan era, in which “We know little about the acting style [...] because there were no newspapers, hence no formal reviews” —and the ephemeral nature of paper meant that private journals and letters have mostly been destroyed by age and decay (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 1). This inclination for printed media gives us an intimate glimpse into Georgian society and allows us to perceive previously obscured details of theatrical performance from earlier centuries. Due to publications at the time, know that the “eighteenth century did much of its Shakespeare in ‘modern dress’”; and we know that for all intents and purposes, to 18th-century audiences, Sarah Siddons was Lady Macbeth (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 368). As Georgian poet and writer “Charles Lamb simply wrote, ‘We speak of Lady Macbeth...when we mean Mrs. S.’” (Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 24). By examining how Mrs. Siddons chose to play Lady Macbeth, we see how changes in the landscape of feminine identity shaped how the 18th-century audience interpreted Lady Macbeth.

Mrs. Siddons did not see Lady Macbeth as inimical to Georgian ideals of femininity. Quite conversely, she saw Lady Macbeth as intensely feminine. She wrote in her own remarks playing the character that “instead of a being a ‘fiend-like queen,’ [Lady Macbeth] is a tragic

heroine slowly consumed by guilt and horror” (Phillips, "I Have Given Suck" 25). She also believed that Lady Macbeth's ultimate descent into insanity is due not to her own greed and ambition but is due to her loyalty to her husband. Siddons “believed Lady Macbeth had been a mother and ultimately sacrificed her own sanity for the sake of her husband by keeping his secrets” (Phillips, "I Have Given Suck" 25). Though late 18th-century audiences judged Lady Macbeth’s ambition harshly, Mrs. Siddons was able to create a sense of sympathy in the audience for this maligned character by appearing pregnant when playing her. Once again, conflating the fictive and public image with the real and domestic one.

Her appearance as Lady Macbeth while pregnant added a “new level of tension in the play not present if the couple is perceived as barren” (Phillips, "I Have Given Suck" 26). It “also radically changes the implications of her ‘unsexing’ speech” (Phillips, "I Have Given Suck" 26). The speech begins to take on even more disturbing connotations. It raises the question if, in asking to be ‘unsexed’, Lady Macbeth is killing her unborn babe, or “transform[ing] it into something other than human” (Phillips, "Unsex Me Here" 26). When Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to turn her milk to gall, does that mean she is willing to starve her child if it helps win her husband the crown?

Lady Macbeth’s appearance as visibly pregnant also changes the meaning of the witches’ prediction that Banquo will beget kings, but Macbeth will not. If his wife is currently visibly pregnant, what happens to the babe? When the witches fill their cauldron with the “Finger of a birth-strangled babe,” the visible pregnancy of Lady Macbeth makes that image all the much more disturbing. It also evokes a new interpretation of the bloody child Macbeth sees when he confronts the witches a second time. Additionally, at the end of the play, when Lady Macbeth dies, it could be implied by Mrs. Siddons’ pregnant body, that she died in childbirth rather than

by suicide. The “cry of women’ [...] now implies, perhaps, a death in childbirth – a death that had been a possibility since Lady Macbeth’s first appearance onstage” yet “Alternately and worse, it could signify the suicide (as Malcolm claims) of a pregnant queen, an infanticidal maternity of the kind that provides the witches’ magic in 4.1” (Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 29). The pregnant body of Mrs. Siddons opened new interpretations and new possibilities in the only way new life can.

We know from her own writings that Mrs. Siddons’s Lady Macbeth was not only a feminine being, but a sexual one as well. In addition, “though she appears not to have interpreted it so on the stage, the intense femininity and sexuality of Lady Macbeth” is something Mrs. Siddons did write about in her performance notes (Manvell 13). She also saw Lady Macbeth as one who was strangely honorable. Her crime stemmed from her unwavering loyalty to her husband and not due to her ambition alone. In her writings, Mrs. Siddons describes Lady Macbeth as “a person who was ‘fair, feminine, nay, perhaps, even fragile’ and yet had the energy and strength of mind to enthrall her husband, ‘a hero so dauntless, a character so amiable, so honourable as Macbeth’” (J. R. Brown 119). Yet critics at the time did not agree— the poet Thomas Campbell writing that though Mrs. Siddons viewed Lady Macbeth’s conduct as full of “dutiful and unselfish tenderness” he did not see it that way (qtd. in Phillips, “I Have Given Suck” 27).

Mrs. Siddons believed that the fact that Lady Macbeth needed “to summon evil powers” meant that her “wickedness [was] not inherent but a result of opportunity and ambition, ambition not so much for herself as for her ‘naturally benevolent’ husband (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 40). In regards to Lady Macbeth’s eventual insanity, Mrs. Siddons writes that “[Lady Macbeth’s]

feminine nature, her delicate structure, it is too evident, are soon overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes” (qtd. in McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 40).

Despite Mrs. Siddons viewing Lady Macbeth as a feminine creature, she portrayed her in a way that appears to be masculine. She used many big, energetic movements instead of the traditionally demure and restrained feminine movements. Her "exuberant physicality on stage [was] unconventional in terms of feminine decorum [and] her vocal manner and her roles were often perceived as manly" (Buchanan 423). Often critics and authors described her in masculine terms, "[extolling] her 'unexpected powers of almost masculine declamation,' the 'vigour' or 'masculine firmness' of her performance, and her tendency to portray 'strong heroic virtues'" (Buchanan 423).

While Sarah Siddons played Lady Macbeth with the utmost propriety, she did sometimes ignore longstanding traditions. In the 18th-century, “Every theatrical piece, from *Hamlet* to *The Rivals*, contained moments known as ‘points’: familiar speeches, crucial episodes, even single lines” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 24). However, Mrs. Siddons breathed new life into Lady Macbeth when she “decided to rethink these conventions, to approach the points in a fresh and sometimes controversial manner” (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 25).

For instance, during the sleepwalking scene, Lady Macbeth had always held the candle aloft, yet Mrs. Siddons decided to set the candle down, so she could pretend to wash the blood from her hands. This caused an uproar for “As she prepared for the role [of Lady Macbeth], a rumor gradually leaked out into the theatrical community that she intended to change one of the habitual antics performed by all Lady Macbeth’s in recent memory" (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 359-360). Yet, Mrs. Siddons pulled the maneuver off. Though "Before the

performance there was outrage; afterward [there were] ovations" (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 359-360).

By putting down the candle, Mrs. Siddons "came nearest to embodying the delicacy she saw in the character" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 42). She managed to "identif[y] and exploi[t] the moments in which the alteration of tone or the sudden gesture might enhance the apparently natural representation of the character" and her own interpretation of it (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 26). She managed to "dazzl[e] audiences with an interpretation that entailed variety, animation, rapid transition, and, occasionally, outright surprise" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 42). She rapidly changed her expressions from "hope and surprise to disappointment, depression, contempt, and rekindling resentment" in her speeches and by doing so increased the dramatic tension in the play (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 44). She also used the sense of space by drawing suddenly near her husband from across the stage when she delivered "the chilling line expressing willingness to destroy the child she has nursed" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 44). As Lady Macbeth's passion and determination diminished towards the end of the play, so too did Mrs. Siddons' animated actions. She suited her actions to the character's circumstances, and performed her monologues as though "the speech were a musical score" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 45).

Mrs. Siddons also emphasized Lady Macbeth's madness by wearing a white nightgown in the sleepwalking scenes, which "initially shocked her audience because of its association with madness" (Bernstein 33). In addition, she powdered her face with white powder which some censors called a "vulgar assistance" (*Remarks on Mrs. Siddons* 5). Another way Mrs. Siddons broke with tradition was in her ability to lend her lines emphasis and nuance that was not previously there. As Robert Speaight writes of one performance:

Much of the detail has come down to us. The long pause – Mrs. Siddons could pause as long as Kemble, though with better reason—on “made themselves ----- air”; the sudden energy on “shalt be what thou are promised”; the association of “my spirits in your ear” with the spirits she has just invoked; the downward and decisive inflection on “We fail” ... (qtd. McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 360)

That line “We fail” has been commented upon in more than one performance. In this private moment together, before the murder is performed, Macbeth has asked Lady Macbeth “if we should fail?” (1.7.59). Here, “He is not yet thinking of external difficulties ... He means: must not we, even if we combine our two will-powers in one fearful effort, recoil at the last minute” (Elliot 69). She responds, “We fail?” as though failure were not an option. In Mrs. Siddons’s performance, that” downward and decisive inflection” imbues her words with a “come what may” feeling instead, here, failure is an option but it is inconsequential (qtd. McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 360).

Despite her unconventionality, Mrs. Siddons’s willingness to work within the bounds of Georgian propriety allowed her to create a liminal space within which she worked. Moreover “without violating the formality and decorum of the stage, Mrs. Siddons succeeded in giving her roles an individual stamp” (McDonald, *The Bedford Companion* 360). And though she did do things that shocked audiences, she was able to conform to conventional social norms. She was a respected actress, and while she was comfortable breaking some traditions, such as the candle incident mentioned previously, Mrs. Siddons shied away from oblique acts of nonconformity—for instance, sublimating Lady Macbeth’s sexuality in favor of decorum. However, her intuitiveness led her to believe her character to be more than she appeared. In the next chapter, we will see how 19th century attitudes on femininity differed from those of the 18th-century through the performance of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth.

#### **Chapter 4: “Look like th’innocent flower”: Ellen Terry and Victorian Femininity (1837 – 1901)**

Our view of Victorian society and thus Victorian ideology on gender performance comes to us mostly in the form of novels. From Charles Dickens to Willkie Collins to Lewis Carol, the image of the ideal Victorian woman abounds in literature—and the consequences of falling short of that ideal. The Victorian woman had science and the emerging middle class to thank for these new definitions of femininity. “Through the Reform Bill of 1832 and other legislation” the burgeoning middle class that began to emerge in the late 18th-century bloomed into full force (Newman 15). The middle class distinguished itself from the upper and lower classes by “simultaneously assimilat[ing] and alter[ing]” the ideals and values of the “old gentry”—such as frivolity and ostentatiousness (Newman 15). As a burgeoning entity, “This newly established social power could begin the work of asserting its hegemony and policing its boundaries” (Newman 15). The middle class needed to police its boundaries in order to assert its authority and identity, and they did so mostly by using religion. Their border policing fundamentally changed the ideals of Victorian femininity. Because of the Christian ideals of humility, charity, and submission, Victorian women soon made to be invisible, chaste, and angelic, the moral centers of the household.

Because of this, Victorian femininity was seemingly more concerned about a woman’s “virtue” than previous eras. Though in previous eras it was important to remain “chaste,” there was not as much as an emphasis placed on it as in the Victorian era. Unlike previous eras in which the loss of maidenly virtue was considered merely sinful, in “Victorian sociological discussions of fallenness assume that the physical experience of losing virginity prior to marriage determines a woman’s mental, social, and bodily downward spiral” (Braun 352).

The loss of one's virtue was a life and body altering circumstance that affected one's psychological make-up as well as defiled one's body. There was no going back from it. To be "fallen" in Victorian society was to be ostracized from one's peers both physically and mentally (Braun 347). Not only was "chastity ... the cornerstone of female morality," the inability to remain chaste indicated a "lacking [of] the autonomy and coherence of the normative masculine subject" (qtd Braun 345). Additionally, "mainstream Victorian discourse associates female sexual fall with shame and with a concomitant loss of agency" (Braun 355). In Victorian ideology, the further one was from the "masculine" the closer one was to being as helpless and amoral as an animal. To Victorian women the ostracization this entailed was a fate worse than death. As Gretchen Braun writes in "'Untarnished Purity': Ethics, Agency, and the Victorian Fallen Woman":

Maidenly demise is preferable to sexual fall, and should physical chastity be compromised before marriage, an outcast state--from respectable society and perhaps even from God's grace—is inevitable. A lonely and early death often follows (342).

The rigidity of this ideation exists even in the cases of rape and assault. Braun once again writes:

Historical evidence suggests that within mainstream Victorian culture, a woman who lost her virginity through forcible rape would garner sympathy, but would nonetheless be regarded as 'fallen': fundamentally altered in spiritual character as well as body" ("Untarnished Purity" 353).

Though separated from their peers, these fallen women were nevertheless to be pitied. However, this "sympathy also occupies a tenuous and sometimes highly vexed place in many Victorian depictions of fallenness" (Anderson 51). Because "As a victim, the fallen woman may come metaleptically to symbolize those forces that determine her ... she does not typically function as a villainous or vicious agent" (Anderson 53). However, though their fallen state was not, perhaps, through their own machinations, but due to the lack of masculine qualities—qualities such as self-control and rationality—and outside forces, these women were still viewed

as a threat to the patriarchy because they “[challenged] the very possibility of a self-regulated moral existence” (Anderson 53)

These views, as archaic as they seem now, were supported by the growing field of science. As Darwinism took hold of imaginations everywhere, the idea of women as the direct opposite of man was cemented in all areas of Victorian life. Whereas “The masculine mind exhibited ‘unimpressibility, judgement, physical courage, and the like,’” the feminine mind was meek and mild (Edwin Drinker Cope, qtd Boddice 329). The Victorian social paradigm consisted of five classes: men, women, children, savages, and animals; animals of course being lowest on the social scale and men at the apex (Boddice 333).

Men were the farthest removed from animals. Though they still “retained the vestiges of animal strength, but [were] otherwise far removed from brutish tendencies” (Boddice 333). Women, on the other hand, were secondary to men because they were considered to be more driven by emotionality and needed men to guide them in most matters. Yet, despite their secondary nature, they were regarded as the keepers of the family’s tradition and virtue. They were “thought to be the intellectual storehouses of instincts and habits; essential but essentially static” (Boddice 327).

Derived from the teachings of Charles Darwin, whose ideas had taken Victorian England by storm with his ideas of evolutionary development, these ideas from Victorian “evolutionary discourse ... enshrined female inferiority as natural law” (Boddice 321). As, “Woman was evidently inferior ... the theory of natural selection was put to use in proving it” (Boddice 324). Due to the theories of Darwin, Victorian society believed that “aspects of Victorian femininity—narcissism, passivity, submission, silence—[were] most inimical to creative activity” (Mermin 69). Women were thought to be emotionally driven, and incapable of higher thought. Many

accepted this view, including noted women's rights activist and first woman ordained as a protestant minister, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, who writes in her series of essays *The Sexes*

*Throughout Nature:*

Hence the sharp-sightedness, the direct insight, the quick perceptions; hence also their warmer prejudices and more unbalanced judgements, and their infrequent use of the masculine method of ratiocination[sp]. In this the child is like a woman. It's feelings directly impel its actions. The immediate sensation or perception seems also to be the impelling power of the savage and of all animal instincts" (Blackwell 131-132)

Darwinists also believed that men had a greater capacity for intelligence. As Jill Conway writes in "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution":

Male intelligence was greater than female, men had greater independence and courage than women, and men were able to expend energy in sustained bursts of physical and cerebral activity. Men were thus activists and excelled in the species-preserving capacities of egoism. Women on the other hand possessed the social talents. They were superior than men in constancy of affection and sympathetic imagination. They were patient because of their passivity and the need to store energy – not, as feminists claimed, because patience is one of the qualities of the oppressed" (53-54).

These same critics ascribed to men the sole ability to create. It was believed that the "female imagination cannot go beyond the personal and superficial" (Mermin 65). Thus, women were unable to have grand ideas or any amount of creativity. Never mind the existence of female authors such as the Bronte sisters, Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin, George Eliot, or even Jane Austen. Though we study their writings today for their subtlety and acute observation of humankind, their writings at the time were described by critics as being inferior and frivolous, and worst of all, emotional.

This tie to emotionality was why Victorian women were considered inferior to men; it was thought that "women's 'mental chariot' could easily be overwhelmed by their emotions, either through hysteria or 'comparative childishness'" (Boddice 333). "This staggering reduction" of women's intellectualism created a social paradigm in which "women only exceed[ed] children and animals by the power of volition, which lower beings were said to lack"

(Boddice 333). According to the thankfully debunked science of phrenology, because “average brain weight of women” was less than that of men, it was “a marker for lesser intellectual capacity” (Boddice 324). As women’s brains were smaller, they were considered more childlike. Therefore, their “Subjection, and inferiority were the natural result of the woman’s child-like brain” (Boddice 324). In Victorian ideology, only the male mind was capable of genius and “By such reckoning, women, children and savages were closer to animals than had previously been thought” (Boddice 326, 334).

Clearly “gendered power relations of male force and female inferiority underwrite Darwin’s evolutionary narratives; thus, Darwin adjusts his definition of instinctual sexual behaviors in animals so that he can project modern patriarchy across the border between animals and humans” (Bernstein 69). Thus, logically, from this viewpoint, women “were like animals if they were like children; therefore they were also like savages; and therefore they were like uncivilized white men” (Boddice 334). And while

Animals might ‘approach’ reason; the best of women might outstrip the average man; but the truly manly mind had powers of abstraction, judicial temerity and original thought beyond anything else. The manly mind was therefore not simply a scientific reinforcement of the opposition between the sexes, but an expression of extreme exceptionalism (Boddice 334).

The act of childbirth also rendered women inferior as it was believed that “The energy required for this act entailed an ‘earlier cessation of individual evolution’” than their male counterparts, again, leading to women’s intellectual inferiority (Boddice 326-327). Queen Victoria also believed childbirth lowered women to the level of animal, and once wrote to her daughter that:

What you say of the pride of giving life to an immortal soul is very fine, dear, but I own I cannot enter into that; I think much more of our being like a cow or a dog at such moments; when our poor nature becomes so very animal and unecstatic” (Fulford 115).

Ironically, it was motherhood that “signifie[d] a woman’s mature community participation” in Victorian ideology--as long as the child was legitimate (Braun 343). Motherhood not only signified a woman’s full participation in her community, in the eyes of Darwinism, it was their saving grace as “Darwin attributed the mental disposition of women – their ‘greater tenderness and less selfishness’--to ‘[their] maternal instincts’” (Boddice 326). It was due to their “maternal instincts” that women were able to act as the moral center of the family. Thus, to over-educate these female minds would be to do them a disservice because “Not only would higher education ‘hinder those who would have been the best mothers from being mothers at all’, it would likely ‘spoil them’” (Boddice 327).

Additionally, “The ‘desirable’ woman [...] was imagined as characterized by ‘depths’-- such as moral uprightness, thrift, heightened sensibility, and emotional intensity—rather than ‘surface,’ such as the aristocratic manners and sartorial finery by which upper-class women displayed the wealth and status of the family” (Newman 7).

The proper Victorian woman was an “obedient and devoted wife and the caring mother committed to raising her children properly” (Yildrim 118). She “was believed to have a key role in the welfare and order of the society as a whole” (Yildrim 118). And “The women who attempted to go beyond the confines of this patriarchal system were not only criticised harshly but also marginalized. As long as a woman accepted that her place was in the home, she had less trouble and conflict and would be regarded as more virtuous” (Yildrim 118). In fact, invisibility was one of the hallmarks of a proper Victorian woman. This “repudiation of feminine exhibitionism is one of many ways in which feminine desire was made problematic. It also functioned in the process by which the middle class came to assert its cultural dominance over the gentry and to calibrate all femininity on its terms” (Newman 3).

By censuring the wealth displayed by the upper class, through “a moral code that equates feminine modesty with the renunciation of display. It is as though the gentry were inoculated against its own excess through this salutary injection” (Newman 3). “Victorian science implicitly justif[ied ...] the status quo” yet this “naturalisation of the social status quo not only reinforced the subordination of women; it also accounted for the subordination (and therefore limits of citizenship) of certain types of men” (Boddice 330, 331). In other words, men only from the gentry and nobility.

However, “The advent of the industrial revolution and the rise of market economy shook the foundations of deeply embedded Victorian gender constraints. Women soon proved to be an immense source of labour for the industry.” (Yildirim 120). Change was taking place, yet the “the industrial revolution did not eliminate the Victorian view that a working woman would have a tendency to become an irresponsible wife” (Yildirim 120).

In Victorian ideology, the woman’s job was to maintain the private sphere in such a way that the Victorian man was able to go forth and do business in the public sphere without worry. Termed the “Angel in the house,” this was a “Victorian feminine ideology [...] coined by Coventry Patmore” (Yildirim 114). But Patmore was not the only one to espouse this ideology. Like Patmore, “Dickens believed that a woman needed to be the ‘Angel of the House’, devoting her life to housekeeping and child rearing” (Yildirim 116). A woman was to pay great attention to her manners and keep the home a sacred place where high moral standards were expected. She was to symbolize purity and domesticity” (Yildirim 117). These women were expected to be morally and spiritually uplifting, to stay mostly in the private sphere, and to provide emotional-stimulus and release for overtasked men of affairs”—invisible and always waiting in the wings (Mermin 69).

They were also called the “angel in the house” because they were tasked with upholding the spiritual values of England. In fact, “for Victorian women there is no such clear distinction between their religious and their social roles;” they were one and the same (Mermin 65). Mother was synonymous with spiritual leader. Despite being considered as needing men’s guidance in most matters, they were to “[serve] as signposts and guides for men, whose animal passions lay close to the surface” (Boddice 335). This is paradoxical, of course, since “as embodiments of animalistic atavisms, they required male strength, reason and guidance” but also served “as embodiments of the rich tapestry of civilised morality” (Boddice 335).

However, as Aşkin Yildirim writes in *Angels of the House*:

In the Victorian social pyramid, regardless of her origins, a woman was always considered secondary both in the family and society. A woman’s virtues received praise as long as she conformed to the prescribed roles of a loving and loyal servant for her husband and children (117).

But despite invisibility being prized as a feminine trait, women were also expected to be beautiful. The “Victorian gender view imprisoned women to the realm of physical attraction and an object of the house. Although she was often praised as the symbol of beauty and moral purity, this approach was hypocritical in many respects” (Yildirim 118). Women were expected to remain “unseen.” They were to adorn the private sphere only. And yet, a woman’s beauty--in regard not only to her physicality but her manner of dress and deportment-- “signal[ed] the social status of the couple” (Newman 2). This created a paradox regarding “feminine display throughout the nineteenth century [that was...] powerful, shifting, and contradictory” (Newman 2). This is because “Beauty became the emblem of a poignant national dream in the 1860s” (Nina Auerbach, qtd. McDonald *Look to the Lady* 55). Yet, paradoxically, “Nineteenth-century association of femininity with the natural, the spontaneous, the unaffected” was also an important idea (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 72).

But beauty was one of the few avenues open to women to gain power. Women were able to leverage their beauty into desirable marriages. Besides beauty and wealth, the only other way women were able to form eligible connections were through their “achievements” or “the ability to sing, play an instrument and speak a little Italian or French. No other intellectual activity was required or expected from Victorian women” (Yildrim 118). Women were mostly considered “beautiful and ineffectual angel[s]” (Matthew Arnold, qtd. Mermin 67).

Perhaps it is surprising that the “Victorian ideology of women is perhaps best represented by Queen Victoria herself” (Yildrim 117). Having a female sovereign in a society that considered “women [...] in politics [...] absurd” created a sort of “paradox of ideal femininity in nineteenth-century English society” (Boddice 332; Newman 1). This is mitigated somewhat because though Victoria was the ruling power of England, and as such its most public persona, she was also seen to be the epitome of devoted wife and mother, in part due to her reaction to her husband’s death. She withdrew from public life for a time after his death and this was seen as proof of her wifely virtue. This allowed her ministers and advisors to take a greater role in the rule of the country than previously.

Though she did eventually reemerge to lead the country and the numerous colonies under British rule at the time, she was only seen in mourning black and widow’s caps until her death in 1901. Though her wearing of widow black is often seen as a sign of her devotion to Albert, it can also be seen as an attempt on Victoria’s part to disappear into the background as her ministers and advisors continued to serve a larger role than they had before her self-sequestration. In fact, one of the ways “feminist critics have conceived of femininity in the later eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries [is] in terms of invisibility” (Newman 7). This is because Victorian women were not to be seen or heard.

Yet change was happening. The “Industrial Revolution altered long-standing gender roles in the Victorian Era” (Yildirim 120). Now, more than ever, women had the chance to escape the confines of domestic roles and spaces. Though they still faced discrimination and exploitation, this “influx of women to the working life led to the spread of feminist ideas and accelerated women’s suffrage movement towards the end of the Victorian era” (Yildirim 120). Additionally, prominent Victorian writers like Edith Simcox and Virginia Wolfe wrote openly about women’s subjugation. Simcox complained of the ‘vague notions about an Ewigweibliche [the eternal feminine]’ in her assertion that ‘natural’ gender differences were really cultural and mutable” (Boddice 330). In addition, male scholars like John Stuart Mill wrote the *The Subjugation of Women* where he argued “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (32-33).

American feminists joined the clamor. Prominent feminists like Helen H. Gardener argued that “the inferiority of female intelligence was only a direct result of the restrictions placed on it by men and, at a meeting of the International Council of Women, she set about destroying the implications of brain-weight evidence” (Boddice 325). Observing that only men of note had their brains examined, while the women’s brains belonged to those of prostitutes and tramps. These arguments set the stage for the declaration for British women of full women’s suffrage in 1928.

As society underwent massive changes between the 18th and 19th centuries, so too did theater. For instance, “the Victorians favored elaborately detailed, spectacular physical productions, with beautifully costumed stars playing before multiple, massive sets, and hundreds of extras to swell the crowd scenes” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 53-54). Unlike that of

previous eras, Victorian theater demanded authentic costumes and “archeological accuracy in theatrical production[s]” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 54). This was due in part to the “paradigm shifts in science, politics, industry, philosophy, religion, and other disciplines that shaped the audience and its entertainers” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 54). Additionally, English acting had moved on from the earlier acting on the English stage of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was “cool and polished” to more “emotional [and] spontaneous” performances (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 70). Unlike the eighteenth century stage, 19th century theater did away with rhetorical points, acting at this time “was in the process of becoming less ceremonial, more apparently spontaneous” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 70).

Furthermore, Victorian audiences perceived Lady Macbeth’s madness in a different light than had to do with how they viewed her madness at the end of the play. The Victorians were obsessed with the grotesque, and one of the literary tropes that came out of this obsession was “the mad woman in the attic.” Jane Eyre, Mary Shelley, George Eliot, Emily Dickinson and the Bronte sisters all used this trope in their novels. Psychology was a burgeoning field and thus it was starting to be understood that certain emotional traumas could lead to “madness.” In the case of these female writers, the “madness” was a response to the mistreatment and misogyny from men that their characters endured. However, there were two different kinds of madness.

The first kind, the respectable kind, was neurasthenia, which “had a certain amount of cachet for the male sufferer, but was seen as less desirable in women” (Archimedes 36). Neurasthenic complaints were thought to be the result of an “educated and successful [male] pushed to exhaustion by virtue of his driving ambition and hectic way of life” (Archimedes 36). Since women were not supposed to be ambitious or overly educated, this condition was generally

judged to be unladylike; but the female sufferer was usually written down as “elegantly enervated or downright cantankerous” (Archimedes 36). Though stigmatized in women, having neurasthenia was still a genteel illness.

The second form of madness was hysteria, which was a more ungovernable form of neurasthenia. As Sondra Archimedes writes, “whereas neurasthenics were thought of as quietly anxious, hysterics were deemed troublesome and uncooperative” (Gendered Pathologies 36). Hysteria then crossed a taboo “boundary of acceptable behavior” (Archimedes 36). The complaint usually attributed to some disorder of female biology. Any recalcitrant or rebellious woman was said to be suffering from hysteria. Both neurasthenia and hysteria were akin to a nervous breakdown, which “Mid-Victorian readers would recognize [...] despite its severity, as a morally neutral organic malady, which depleted agency and damaged selfhood, yet from which one might recover” (Braun 362).

It was different from the morally taboo “madness” or suffering from moral insanity, which was defined by Dr. James Cowles Prichard in his *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (1837) as “a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses [...] without any insane illusion or hallucination” (16). Instead, a nervous breakdown was “the malady of a fundamentally ethical protagonist overtaxed by an emotionally and morally complex problem [and...] it often correlates with a character’s positive moral growth” (Braun 362-363).

This is different from previous eras, which thought demonic possession or witchcraft was responsible for hysteria; the “early seventeenth century witnessed the evolution of the witch into the hysteric” (J. Levin 24). This evolution reduced the power of femininity by taking away the fear associated with the image of a primal powerful female witch, and replaced it instead with

the image of a “woman who fulfills patriarchal expectations and suffers for it: she is an “ailing nurturer,” asexual, domesticated, and non-threatening” (J. Levin 24). It became a medical diagnosis: *Hysteria passio*, a term that dates back to the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Hippocrates, who viewed “the womb as a hysterical organism, roaming wildly within the female form” (J. Levin 27). By the Victorian Era, this idea became connected to “feminine frailty” along “with uncontrollable sexuality” and it was theorized that “sexual dissatisfaction or abstinence could unhinge the uterus (that is the internal Mother), causing it to wander and to emit noxious vapors” (J. Levin 30). The uterus was often called “The Mother”, and hysteria was sometimes called “Suffocation of the Mother” (J. Levin 30).

The term hysteric was most often applied to misbehaving young women, widows, and unmarried women, in other words “women who were relatively free from patriarchal controls; these labels sought to explain inappropriate behaviors and expressions of sexual desire,” and thus place the hysteric back within the patriarchal paradigm. These were women who needed to be controlled (J. Levin 30). It is intriguing then, that the Victorians also viewed hysteria as an over taxation of emotions caused by moral growth, creating a tension surrounding the hysteric. Hysteria is then a liminal space in which growth takes place. A woman might succumb to hysteria due to some moral falling or overabundance of sexual desire, but at the end of a hysteric episode, they would have attained some level of maturation. Thus, hysteria itself is an act of atonement.

It can be argued that “Lady Macbeth enacts the transformation of the witch into the hysteric [...] this historical shift unfolds during the course of the narrative: Lady Macbeth begins the play by invoking evil spirits and ends in a fit of hysterical somnambulism” (J. Levin 38). Somnambulism, of course, is a symptom dividing hysteria from moral insanity. She “[stands] as

an intermediary figure; combining features of both prototypes [the witch and the hysteric], she exposed the instability of patriarchal classifications” (J. Levin 38).

On one hand, Lady Macbeth is a witch, a perversion of nature, as she asks the spirits to take her milk for gall, her “maternal nursery is itself figured as noxious and corrupting, analogous to the forces of witchcraft,” thus conjuring up fears of the corrupted mother, whose “Maternal milk could both nourish and destroy the morals of the hapless babe” (J. Levin 40). However, viewed as the victim of hysteria, she “emerges as an intermediary between the witch and maternal ideas; she registered continuing anxieties about the maternal body and imagination, but at a reassuring remove” (J. Levin 43). She becomes an almost comforting figure, one who supports the need of patriarchal governance because of its struggle against it. She is then “the exemplar of disorderly femininity most in need of proper patriarchal governance” (J. Levin 45).

This nebulous image combined with the charm and beauty of Ellen Terry created, for the Victorians, a more sympathetic representation of Lady Macbeth than seen previously. For her, “Vulnerability was the key to her conception” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 95). However, though “she described Lady Macbeth as fragile and womanly but perforce played her as grand and tragic” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 95). Terry viewed “the women she played as—in a healthy, theatrical sense, of course—living beings” and tried to play them as such (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 85).

Ellen Terry may have been born 100 years after Sarah Siddons, but she was just as celebrated (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 51). The two women also shared many other similarities. For instance, Terry, like Siddons, came from a theatrical family—her parents were actors-- and “She had been working in the theater since the age of nine” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 58). Like Sarah Siddons, Ellen’s mother continued acting after having children. This was

somewhat surprising given that women at this time--who might have previously enjoyed a public life--were expected to return to a private domestic life after having children. However, "The potential conflict between Miss Yerret and Mrs. Terry—that is, between career and motherhood—was resolved by making the children part of the business" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 60). This led to Terry's childhood spent playing both female and male parts such as Puck and Cupid. "She had played a series of boys in several farces and burlesques" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 61). But "By the time she turned sixteen, managers had begun to cast her in leading female roles, notably Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and Julia in *The Rivals*" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 62).

Terry's romantic relationships were like Siddons's in that they both married willfully, but where Siddons's marriage allowed her to stay in the theatre, Terry withdrew from the theater and at 17 married artist G.F. Watts for whom she was a model. It is said that "At their first meeting Watts recognized his attraction to Ellen, arranged that she continue to model for him, and shortly resolved to marry her" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 62). However, the marriage was not universally happy. Evidentially, "Watts and Ellen Terry shared a dream that neither of them could quite admit: that of creating a new theater through an art that was also an act of love. Through this love, this art, their marriage would glorify them both" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 62). However, like the Macbeths, their ambition and marriage would end in failure with a legal separation taking place just 10 months later. Reasons for this separation remain unclear but probably had to do with the large age discrepancy between them and the fact that "for all her youthful desire to please, Ellen Terry did not conform happily to the routine and structure" her marriage and life as the wife of an artist with a patron required (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 63).

Terry married twice more. Second was her marriage to Charles Kelly in 1878. He was a fellow actor and although they shared the same love of theater, the marriage did not last. “Kelly was overshadowed by his wife’s stardom at the Lyceum, as William Siddons had been by his famous spouse, and his violent temper was exacerbated by drinking” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 66). Ellen Terry did not obey the imperative of Victorian femininity to reside in obscurity, invisible and domestic. The couple was divorced three years later. Terry’s final marriage occurred in her sixties to the handsome James Carew, an American actor she met when they performed George Bernard Shaw’s *Captain Brassbound’s Conversion* together in 1906. Carew was in his thirties. “Predictably, the marriage didn’t endure, although their friendship sustained itself until the very end of her life” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 66).

Terry’s marriages are not the only significant relationships in her life. Ellen Terry also had an “intensely affectionate relationship with [George Bernard] Shaw, although it was almost entirely epistolary” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 66). However, many say that her relationship with Henry Irving was the most important relationship in her life. Theirs was an “artistic marriage [...] that has been called ‘the greatest partnership in the history of English Theatre’” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 67). It seems only natural that their relationship would be so intense as “They worked together daily for over two decades” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 67). Over the intervening years, there has been speculation over whether or not their relationship was sexual; however, “the threat of pregnancy” probably precluded or prohibited any sexual intercourse because unlike Sarah Siddons who was able to use her maternal body to exude an aura of respectability, Ellen Terry’s unwed married body would have created open scandal and ended her career (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 68).

Again, like Sarah Siddons, “Ellen Terry was a star” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 73). Nevertheless, there are some fundamental differences; for instance “Whereas Mrs. Siddons was revered, Ellen Terry was beloved” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 52). Moreover, unlike Siddons, Ellen Terry was bestowed with the title of Dame in 1922 (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 52). Similarly, Terry’s version of femininity differed materially from Siddons’s. Where Siddons was “noble” and “majestic,” Terry was “charming.” As Russ McDonald writes in *Look to the Lady*:

One word [was] employed more frequently than any other in connection with the acting of Ellen Terry, a noun both flattering and potentially derogatory, one that, although she protested it, is unquestionably apt in capturing her manner both on the stage and off. The word is *charm*” (69).

Her beauty was a much-discussed topic. Luckily for her, “Her particular brand of beauty was consonant with Victorian preferences” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 55). In fact, she was often a subject for sketches and paintings by Oscar Wilde and artist G.F. Watts. Her beauty was such that it led Oscar Wilde to compose a sonnet to her (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 56). Her beauty lent her a certain level of feminine cache. Her face seemed “vulnerable and sensitive, sympathetic, fragile” all ideal traits in the Victorian woman (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 57).

Equal to her beauty, her femininity “is another object of praise” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 69). As “Victorian notions of femininity [...are] compris[ed of...] such various qualities as physical beauty, emotional sympathy, intuition, submissiveness, and strength. [...] It is safe to say that Ellen Terry’s stage persona embodied a persuasive combination of these traits” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 71). As such, “Even in plays in which the female might be considered dominant, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, reviewers tended to emphasize her exploitation of ‘feminine’ qualities” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 71).

Like Sarah Siddons, Terry had an air of nobility, Charles Hiatt, a noted critic of the Victorian stage, described Terry’s portrayal of Portia as “an imperial and yet an enchanting

woman, dazzling in her beauty, royal in her dignity, as ardent in temperament as she is fine in brain and various and splendid in personal peculiarities and feminine charm” (qtd. McDonald *Look to the Lady* 69). But more often reviewers would describe her performances in extremely feminine terms. For instance, “A Boston reviewer described her Ophelia as ‘supremely delicious. In the early part it was artless and girlish, yet womanly withal” (qtd. McDonald *Look to the Lady* 69).

Additionally, Edward Burne-Jones was said to have called Ellen Terry’s performance “a revelation of loveliness [...] a glimpse into Nature itself” (qtd. McDonald *Look to the Lady* 71). She was praised for “her exceptional qualities of sound and delivery” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 74). And “reviewers describe her as gliding floating, swimming, and—believe it or not—“the very poetry of motion”” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 76). Her “style of motion was famously nimble and ‘natural,’ and graceful movement was a valuable component of her celebrated charm (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 76).

However, Terry hated the word “charm.” Though “the word charm is employed in a complementary sense, a description consistent with Victorian notions of feminine propriety and attractiveness;” Terry felt the word was condescending and did not give credit to how much work she put into each role (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 69). This goes back to the scientific theory that women were incapable of intense study or thought. Terry was proud of the amount of studying and effort she put into her performances and wanted recognition for them. This idea of a woman’s worth calculated by her intellectual efforts instead of her beauty or charm or ability to remain invisible goes against the very idea of the Victorian feminine ideal. However, this was not the only way Terry broke with Victorian ideology.

For instance, after her failed marriage to G.F. Watts, she returned to the theater, but her heart was not in it. Within two years of returning to her family's home, she eloped with William Godwin. They never married because Ellen was still legally married to Watts. They were together for six years and had two children. Because she was still legally married, her children were considered legitimate. Yet, her friends did not visit her while she was living with Godwin. Lewis Carroll wrote "All this time I held no communication with her. I felt that she had so entirely sacrificed her social position that I had no desire but to drop the acquaintance" (McDonald *Look to the Lady* 64-65). "Given the cultural disapproval of cohabitation and sexual activity outside marriage" it seems incredible that she was able to take to the stage again after her illicit relationship with Goodwin (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 65). That she was able to continue acting after her affair with Godwin is testament to how much the British public loved her. It also shows that she was discreet about her affairs, which was necessary if she intended to act again. Indeed, during her liaison with Goodwin, she had stopped working. Additionally she was still legally married to Watts, and thus her children were technically legitimate" so she did not have the stigma attached to producing bastards (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 65).

This is fortunate for her because though "Actresses had historically been granted greater liberty in their personal lives than ordinary women" they were still somewhat beholden to Victorian ideology. However, it is true that

from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century the theater-going public usually didn't inquire too closely into the domestic arrangements of their leading ladies, or at least didn't allow those arrangements to diminish admiration for the performer (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 65).

As in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century English were obsessed with print media. Therefore, we have plenty of print accounts of Ellen Terry's acting—and even some

sound recordings. In the print accounts, “many contemporary reporters praise her exceptional qualities of sound and delivery” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 75)

Terry favored a more naturalistic approach and it is thanks to her that “the trend toward the natural was accelerated in the last quarter of the century” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 70). As previously mentioned, up until now, actors had relied on “points” to perform. However, “Ellen Terry’s intelligence and originality made her want to improve on the conventional characterizations” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 80). The theater of

Ellen Terry’s childhood, was an enterprise steeped in tradition: everyone knew how the major parts had been played, which was how they should be played, and so the main task was to pass on the stage traditions an business to the newcomers (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 80).

But “She often refused to accept, or at least openly questioned and attempted to revise, unexamined tradition and bits of business attached to the major Shakespearean role[s]” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 81). For instance, when playing Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, “Terry deliberately lightened the traditional interpretation, taking special pains to banish any suggestion of the bossy dame” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 90). Terry, famous for her marginalia,

admonished herself [in regards to Beatrice]: ‘she must be always merry and by turns scornful, tormenting, vexed, self-communing, absent, melting, teasing, brilliant, indignant, sad-merry, thoughtful, withering, gentle, humorous, and gay, Gay, Gay!’” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 90).

Her marginalia is responsible for much of what we know about Terry’s acting style. Her scripts, preserved in Kent at Smallhythe, “are covered with handwritten notes about interpretation, but even more numerous are the indications of specific technical effects. Many of these have to do with vocal inflection” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 76). The examples of marginalia these scripts contain show a deep study and understanding of the script. They include “guides to movement on stage” as well as blocking, gestures “and even justification for certain

moves” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 76). “Her notes and letters also speak to her character’s motivations;” she humanized them in many ways, “for instance, she writes that she believed Juliet to be angry with her nurse and wanted to play it for emotion rather than for laughs. Another time she writes that she believed Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* was full of jealousy” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 84).

She did the same with Lady Macbeth. This can be seen in the infamous fainting scene that takes place after the murder of Duncan. Unlike “Siddons’s viperous Lady” who “devised the collapse as a Machiavellian tactic ... in Terry’s performance, the faint is unquestionably genuine, very much a physical collapse foreshadowing the internal pressures of the sleepwalking scene” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 97). Additionally, she wished to impart a sense of softness to Lady Macbeth.

This desire is evident in her marginalia where she writes next to the passage about dashing out the brains of her babe that this is “Only an exaggeration, as she is in a fury...She loved her babies and she could not kill the man who looked like her father” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 96). Repeatedly, Terry writes in her marginalia that she views Lady Macbeth as tender and loving. In the margins next to the scene after Duncan’s death when Macbeth describes how he could not say “Amen,” (2.2.26), she writes that Lady Macbeth must think Macbeth to be ill. Her notes indicate she wished to perform the line “Consider it not so deeply” in a way that was “not stern and angry but with some feminine consideration mixed with alarm” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 96).

Additionally, where Siddons made it clear that her Lady Macbeth was responsible for pushing Macbeth to murder Banquo and Fleance with the line “But in them Nature’s copy’s not eterne” (3.2.38); Terry chose to show that her version of Lady Macbeth was “less inherently

wicked and less directly engaged in her husband's career of crime, [and so] spoke the line innocently" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 98). "Terry deliberately carried this strain of fragility to the sleepwalking scene ... Whereas Mrs. Siddons had pretended to scoop up water with one hand and pour it on the other" Terry writes in her notes "Rub the Palms of hands" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 98). In doing so she "consciously played against the style of her great predecessor" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 98). Because of this softness and fragility, Terry is able to transform Lady Macbeth from a wicked witch to a hysterical woman, "strung up, past pitch" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 97).

However, this version of Lady Macbeth did not entirely win over the audience. Though "The reviewers seemed to understand her interpretation but couldn't quite accept it" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 98). These critics were "awed by her beauty, intrigued by her fragility, and disappointed at her lack of wicked grandeur" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 99). Despite that, the *Daily Chronicle* did write that Terry delivered "the most exquisite interpretation" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 96).

Lady Macbeth may not have been exactly the right vehicle for Terry, her fluttery nature deprived her of a sense of majesty, but like most actresses of the day, "Terry was a victim of [...] her culture's patriarchal theatrical structure" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 89). It was a culture that allowed the leading man and managing partner to pick out the repertory. One that, despite Terry's "exceptional sensitivity to the demands of the theater: a rare combination of instinct, experience, tradition, freshness, and above all, imagination," gave more credit to her beauty and grace than her intellectualism (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 77). While "It is misleading to say that her looks were a determinant of her success because that is to imply that they substituted for the ability to act," they did seem to have constrained her in some ways (McDonald, *Look to the*

*Lady* 100). However, the times were swiftly changing, as we will see with Judi Dench and Post-War England.

### **Chapter 5: “Unsex me here”: Judi Dench and Post-War Femininity (1945 – 1990)**

Approximately 40 years before the start of World War I, a woman by the name of Harriet Law “climbed onto a platform in Newcastle upon Tyne to defend Eve’s rebellion against God” (Schwartz 1). This presaged this coming of First-Wave feminism, but by 1830, the age of Freethinking Women’s Rights had begun and from that point on it has accelerated rapidly. The so-called First-Wave of feminism spanned the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Its efforts and accomplishments were astounding in their magnitude.

One could say First-Wave feminism started in 1867, with the founding of the London Society for Women’s Suffrage, their mission being to campaign for the right for women to vote. Three years later, in 1870, their efforts led to the passing of The Married Women’s Property Act, which allowed married women to keep their own property when they married rather than transferring it to their husbands. The property would then remain with them even if they divorced. By 1888, the Women’s Suffrage movement had spread, and that year approximately 1,400 women went on strike to protest low wages and the Women’s Trade Union League secured the first equal pay resolution. In 1918, twenty years later, and fifty years after the founding of the Society for Women’s Suffrage, women over 30 were finally granted the right to vote. In that same year, the Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act passed, allowing women to become members of Parliament. Ten years later, in 1928, the right to vote was granted to all women in Britain.

In 1941, unmarried women between 20-30 years of age were conscripted to the war, either by working in munitions factories or on the fronts as nurses. In 1958, women were allowed

to sit in the House of Lords; and in 1967 the contraceptive pill became available, though its availability was limited; and the Abortion Law Reform Bill decriminalized abortions in England for pregnancies meeting certain requirements (for example, pregnancies that threaten the health of the mother). 1970 saw the passing of the Equal Pay Act, which ensured women were paid at the same rate as men.

All of this is the background to 1971, the year the Women's Liberation Movement makes their first march through London. Then, in 1974 birth control became widely available through the National Health System, and shortly after in 1975 the National Abortion Campaign was formed. In 1975, women were guaranteed maternity leave. And in 1979 Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first female prime minister. Second-wave feminism had arrived, and the feminine ideal was drastically altered.

By the 1970s, the idea of femininity had changed as drastically as women's rights. Advertisements especially appealed to women's sexuality for profit. These advertisements informed women that just because they had a cervix, vagina, and breasts, they were not fully feminine unless they were consuming "certain products, products that go beyond the surface femininity of lipsticks, hairpins, and dresses" (Levine 37). These products, the vaginal deodorants, douches, tampons, and pads, legitimized the sexual aspects of the feminine body that were previously taboo and at the same time they bound the female body to this taboo. Through these products, "The sexed body was commodified in the basest possible form—in effect, women were exhorted to buy femininity by purchasing products to manage their female anatomy and reproductive health" (Levine 37). Furthermore, as Elana Levine writes, these products

promised to make women's bodies cleaner, fresh, more appealing, and more socially acceptable, their advertisements implying that women's bodies were naturally defective and desperately in need of cosmetic improvement ("Having a female body doesn't make you feminine" 37).

These advertisements both opened up “the discourses of sex and the female sexed body” and “reinforce[d] social ideas of sex as shameful and women’s bodies as tainted” (Levine 37).

Feminists of the 1970s rejected these taboos in favor of physical and mental liberation and self-actualization. Additionally, they “rejected traditional standards of feminine beauty as oppressive and objectifying women” (Hillman 62). These feminists rejected the high-heels, make-up, and longhair of previous generations. They believed “By failing to look like a traditional woman [females] challenged the notion that men and women were as different as socially constructed roles of gender made them out to be” (Hillman 62). These were the “bra burners” of Second-Wave Feminism that the media “derided [...] as ‘ugly’ and ‘unfeminine’” (Hillman 63). In addition, many believed that “feminists hoped to destroy womanhood and gender difference altogether” (Hillman 63). Thus, perhaps now more than ever, women’s appearances, their “dress, hair, and fashion styles [...] became the sites of cultural battles over the meanings of feminism and womanhood” (Hillman 63). But for feminists, the argument “for the rejection of traditional feminine beauty standards [was] in order to create their own definitions of female personhood through new forms of self-presentation” (Hillman 68). For these women, not only was appearance political, but so was everything personal. For them, everything from “sexual relationships, marriage, and motherhood” was fraught with “political ramifications and consequences that needed to be addressed” (Hillman 66). It is interesting then to view the 1979 version of *Macbeth* starring Judi Dench through their view point.

Judi Dench was born in 1934, just six years after the death of Ellen Terry, to a doctor from Dorchester, and his wife, in Heworth England, outside of Yorkshire. Unlike Siddons or Terry, she did not come from a theatrical background. However, “she may have begun the process of founding a theatrical family,” as her late-husband, brother and daughter all have done

work on the stage. Again, unlike Siddons and Terry, Dench received formal acting training “at the Central School of Speech and Drama.” A fact which “marks one of the major differences between the twentieth-century theater and that of earlier periods” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 106-107).

Previously, theatrical companies had operated as de facto training schools. Or they took on young actors to train as apprentices. After the Reformation, women were allowed on stage and their “children were often required by the company to perform a variety of juveniles, fairies, and other similar parts.” A practice similar to when Siddons used her children on stage to help provoke the maternal image for which she was so famous. Like Terry, Dench’s star began rising early. At the Central School, she was announced on the class bulletin board as “the member of the class most likely to succeed” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 107).

However, like Siddons, who was “was a failure with the critics and the public in her first London season and returned, unhappy, to the provinces,” Dench’s debut on the main London stage was a disaster. She was very young, only 22, when “Within less than a week of graduating, she was summoned for an audition at the Old Vic.” Even though she was given the part of Ophelia in the company’s production of *Hamlet*, “the result was critical backlash.” However, “debuts are imperfect predictors of future success, especially in the theater.” And again, like Siddons, she proved her detractors wrong” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 107-109).

Dench’s career was unlike those of Siddons and Terry in many other ways as well, and “those differences tell us much about the particulars of theatrical culture in the end of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.” Her career can be contrasted to her predecessors in many ways. For instance, “Like Siddons, she is highly respected; like Terry, she is much loved” and as has been explored in previous chapters, “both [women] unmistakable

products of their cultural moments,” just as Dench is of our own. (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 104).

One of the main differences between Dench’s career and “those of her predecessors, however, is that she has established a more varied artistic resume than either of them. This can be somewhat accounted for by the “wider range of media available to her, specifically film and television” (McDonald *Look to the Lady* 104). However,

it is also attributable to a greater artistic range: whereas Siddons was known mainly as a tragedienne and Terry as a comic actress, Dench has achieved great success with both tragic and comic roles” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 104).

Regardless of whether it is the wealth of opportunities Dench has had compared to Siddons and Terry or whether it is her talent alone, “Judi Dench is now one of the most famous actresses in the world.” At the beginning of her career in the late 1950s to the late 1980s, “she devoted herself almost entirely to the English stage.” She spent several years “labor[ing] in relative obscurity” but she shot to fame in the 1990s when she won for herself an Academy Award for best supporting actress for just 8 minutes of screen time as Queen Elizabeth I in John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*. She also appeared that year as another of Britain’s monarchs, Queen Victoria in *Mrs. Brown*, also directed by John Madden. Now, Like Siddons and Terry, she is “arguably, as they were in their times, the greatest actress in the English-speaking theater” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 105-106).

Her success is attributed to several factors. Unlike Terry, Dench “did not attain her unrivalled status on the theater on the basis of great physical beauty.” Although she did possess “a gamine quality” related to Terry’s *charm*. Unlike Siddons, she did not have height or a royal bearing, in fact “Judi Dench is uncommonly short for one who has played as many formidable, even heroic women.” In fact, “her stature has sometimes made her the object of derision.” In addition, due to the twentieth-century obsession with lithe, tanned actresses, Twentieth-century

critiques have somewhat harshly commented on her weight as well as her height. Like most women, she has been “susceptible to unwanted pounds, and the thickening middle brought on inevitably by age” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 109-111).

However, critics unanimously agree that “Of all her gifts, the most valuable and memorable is the voice,” something for which Terry was also praised. As Russ McDonald writes in *Look to the Lady*, “She is possessed of a distinctive vocal instrument, a sound that is unmistakably hers and yet uncommonly versatile at the same time.” He also writes that “She has access to a very wide range, first a range of volume, from a whisper to a shout. More important still, she commands a wide span of pitch.” But perhaps “The most famous property of her voice is the crack in it [...] In fact, John Miller’s biography of her is entitled *Judi Dench: With a Crack in her Voice*” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 111).

Additionally, Like Siddons and Terry, Dench is praised for her quick mind, and “virtually all her critics [say] that she immediately projects intelligence.” But whereas “Siddons was praised for her mercurial style, her talent for shifting moods with lightning speed and full authority, Judi Dench is the modern mistress of such gifts.” Another characteristic praised by her critics is “one that might be called *warmth*.” Here, “The huskiness of [her] voice contributes to that impression.” Furthermore, like Ellen Terry, Dench has a sort of “personal magnetism.” There is “virtually universal agreement on Dench’s personal kindness and generosity, both artistic and otherwise.” And like Siddons, Dench likes to “involve herself in the drama as a whole,” not just on stage but in making personal connections with the cast as well (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 112-113).

Like Terry, Dench uses her imagination in her preparation for roles, but unlike Terry and who wrote pages and pages of notes and Siddons who studied her text closely, Dench “does not

read the play before the first day of rehearsal.” This is not due to “indolence nor lack of curiosity [...] but rather a desire for spontaneity, a desire to create something afresh” (MacDonald, *Look to the Lady* 121)

Unlike Terry who did her contemplation of her characters privately, “she prefers to ruminate on her own so she will have liberty to imagine, to feel, to inhabit another skin” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 121). This is akin to Terry who also believed that in order to act one must “project oneself into the body and mind of another” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 77). In the same vein, “Judi Dench’s approach to a role [...] implies that the actor is a kind of vessel or, better still, a kind of instrument that channels the spirit of the fictional character being personated” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 122). Dench has a stunning “capacity for duality” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 123)

This is an important attribute to have when acting Shakespeare because his plays are often explorations of the dual nature of man. *Macbeth* is both an exploration on the duality of man and the duality of gender roles. Like most of Shakespeare’s plays, it is “based on competing and equally compelling points of view” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 123). Both the Macbeths’s and Macduffs’s points of view are presented with empathy, just as the play shows the dangers of being all masculine or all feminine, a corrupted essence in Shakespeare’s mind. The ending of the play shows that to be truly human is to be a balance of both. This is part of “What makes Shakespeare’s and Dench’s gift distinctive” both are able to express “two emotions or ideas or impulses occur simultaneously, and we know they are present at the same time” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 123).

Indeed, “Judi Dench is most remarkable in her capacity for revealing the multiple facets of complex characters she plays.” For instance, when playing Viola in *Twelfth Night*,

“Dench processes a special talent for recognizing and subtly engaging the audience in the simultaneous pathos and humor.” And when playing Lady Macbeth, she shows us both darkness and fragility. This “knack for suggesting multiple facets of a single character translates over time into an exceptional versatility, which gives her access to a very long and diverse list of roles” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 124, 126).

Although Dench did mostly theater in the beginning of her career, her first foray onto the screen started with roles on television melodramas and sitcoms for British television. In 1979, “Thames Television rushed to record the Trevor Nunn *Macbeth* at the end of its two-year stage run in Stratford and London” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 128). “Such televised theater, of course, was not really “television” as we think of it (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 128). Nevertheless, she did eventually take on roles such as M in the James Bond movies, which led to her worldwide fame. However, it is undeniable that despite her roles on tv and film, “Like Sarah Siddons and Ellen Terry in theirs, Judi Dench is the greatest Shakespearean actress of our day” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 131). Yet, where “Siddons subdued her audiences with grandeur, [...and] Terry beguiled hers with charm,” Dench has been able to achieve success both on the tragic and the comedic stage. (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 131).

However, unlike Siddons and Terry, thanks to modern day freedoms, she is able to “serve as a trustee or director of no fewer than 183 charities” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 113). While this speaks to her personal kindness, it also speaks to the freedom modern women have today that they did not in the past to involve themselves in the public sphere.

Judi Dench was also known for her keen sense of humor. This comes out in many of her roles,

and she uses it to her advantage to show the duality of her many of her characters. But it also led to a humorous episode in which, like Ellen Terry, Dench was given the title of Dame

Commander of the British Order of the British Empire.

during a performance [of Cleopatra] shortly thereafter [she was made Dame], Michael Bryant, the distinguished veteran actor playing Enobarbus, turned upstage to Dame Judi as Cleopatra and said in a stage whisper—"I suppose now a fuck is well out of the question" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 114).

Again, like Terry, Dench has an extraordinary "capacity for vulnerability," but unique to her is a "willingness to take professional risks" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 115). This risk taking and vulnerability comes through in her performance of Lady Macbeth in the 1979 Trevor Nunn version of *Macbeth*.

Dench seemed on the path to assume Terry's role as a great comedienne. Due to her small stature and lively personality, "by the end of the [1960s, Dench] had become the chief proprietor of the comic women" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 132). Like Terry who "dazzled audiences with her beauty", Dench also received praise for her "'comely,' 'divine' appearance" as Imogen in *Cymbeline*. However, where Terry chose to play Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* as "glowing and impishly witty, Dench appeared spinsterish, reserved, and obviously insecure. This initial reticence magnified the effect of her confession of love" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 135). Nevertheless, being typecast by critics as a comedienne, Dench was rehearsing the part of Lady Macbeth for Trevor Nunn's productions just a scant few weeks after the opening night of the production of *Much Ado About Nothing* for which she had won so much praise.

*Macbeth* "was the play that opened her path to other tragic parts" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 136). Judi Dench's "opportunity to play Lady Macbeth came about" because of the way

the RSC company worked; all the actors must be kept employed at all times and Trevor “required a vehicle for Dench and Ian McKellen” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 139).

Nunn had directed the play before but this time he wanted to do it “from a totally different angle.” He wanted to emphasize the ritual, claustrophobia, and psychological terror contained in the play. In order to do so, he chose to have the play performed in what was once a wardrobe shed for the company, now a small venue called The Other Place. The stage was just a circle drawn on the floor, and “the actors, when not actually performing, sat on the packing crates outside the circle, observing the action with the audience.” Trevor Nunn’s version of *Macbeth* was “practically Elizabethan in its simplicity.” The only props were swords, daggers, and a throne (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 139).

The costumes were utilitarian; it is impossible from viewing them to determine a time period. Everyone is dressed in black except Duncan, Lady Macduff, and her child. In fact, the only colors on set were the red of the blood and the occasional glint of metal. In the taped version, the camera uses uncomfortably close shots of the actor’s faces to emphasize the claustrophobia and to include the viewing audience in the action of the play. It is as though the actors are addressing the audience, not each other. The play too, “was treated as a ritual reenactment” (Mullin 352). In the staged version, the audience itself took part in “an enactment of ritual, a performance that partook of exorcism and Satanism. The audience joined the actors as silent participants in this quasi-religious ceremony” (Mullin 355).

Ian McKellen “appeared as a lithe, angular warrior [...] sensual, enthralled by his wife before the murder” (Mullin 355). Dench, “Aware of her reputation as a comedienne, [...] had no intention of attempting the passionate fiend that the Lady was often conceived to be.” Like Siddons, Dench saw Lady Macbeth as a feminine character. And like Terry, she had an air of

fragility which could have been “judged to a hindrance” like it was for Terry. Instead, she used it to her advantage, “inspired perhaps by the claustrophobic physical atmosphere, [she] managed to suggest both vulnerability and malevolence.” According to Russ MacDonald in *Look to the Lady*, in the staged version, Dench enters the stage “reciting rather than reading her husband’s letter, apparently having read and re-read it until she knew it by heart” or as one recites a catechism learned as a child. In the 1979 version taped for Thames TV, she enters wringing the letter like a handkerchief, and half recites, half reads it (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 139, 140)

She is dressed in all black in a shapeless dress and a tight head covering, which is interesting given the cultural battleground that was feminine appearance. It is at once both an outfit that is sexless and sexual. The shapelessness of the costume means that in order for Dench to communicate her frailty and femininity to the audience, she must do so using only her acting. In this, she succeeds. For instance, when Macbeth enters the scene and they embrace and begin kissing, “we are made to feel uncomfortably close to that obscene and disturbing love making” (Mullin 357). They speak their lines about murdering Duncan with passion, as one would speak to a lover. In this scene, Lady Macbeth is intensely sexual. Her fondling of Macbeth’s face and fierce whispers bespeak a woman who is passionately in love with her husband, and like the hysteric before her, one with an overwrought sexual appetite.

Dench was aware that her small stature would make her appear more vulnerable than the audience might expect the great and terrible Lady Macbeth to appear. Although the sternness of her black outfit does help her regain some authority. But rather than let her “frailty threaten to subvert Lady Macbeth’s intentions,” she uses it to show the duality of Lady Macbeth’s nature (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 140). For instance, when she quotes the line “I have given suck and know / How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me” her voice is drenched in sadness and

Dench allows the famous crack in her voice to be prominent (1.7.54-55). This is evidence for the fact that Dench did not believe that “that Lady Macbeth was [...] capable of murdering Duncan on her own, [and] that the traditional harpy was a misrepresentation of Shakespeare’s design” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 140). Instead, she believed that Lady Macbeth’s calling to the spirits was “an effort to suppress her vulnerability” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 140). Indeed, when she asks the spirits to fill her with “direst cruelty,” she cries out as if in pain.

According to a review in the *Times* of the staged version, “Miss Dench makes no attempt to pass herself off as a tigress. Gentleness, the same warmth and gentleness of her comic work, now enables you to follow her precise feelings as a killer” (qtd. McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 140). She shows real instances of fear, jumping and startling at noises, and manages to “[imply] both wickedness and fear” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 140). In the taped version, when Macbeth comes to her after the murder and says he heard a voice saying, “Macbeth hath killed sleep” she says, “Consider it not so deeply” as one would to soothe a child. Dench’s Lady Macbeth is unafraid to show emotion and is often seen with tears in her eyes or on the verge of crying.

For Dench, “the banquet scene was the crux of the play, both for Macbeth and for herself” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 142). There is a shot in the taped version where Macbeth is raving at Banquo’s ghost, his raving “express[ing] the modern horror of psychopathic dementia not demonic evil” (Mullin 358). However, in the background, you see Dench framed between two men, alone, her lips trembling in fear. After the banquet, she diminishes and “answers in one-lines” for the rest of the play (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 142). When she forbids the leave taking, it is out of fear that Macbeth will speak of his crimes rather than a need to dominate. After “The couple’s departure from the banquet [which] signified the

spiritual devastation she had wreaked upon herself” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 42). She tells Macbeth “you lack the season of all natures” (3.4.140) and cries in real grief. She has lost something precious to her, perhaps it is Macbeth or perhaps it is part of her humanity.

As the play continues, the stage gets more and more foggy. Eventually all that can be seen are the faces and vague outlines of the cast. The fog further blurs their humanity. Lady Macduff, like Duncan earlier, is wearing white, as is her child. This contrasts her with Lady Macbeth in black. But, like Lady Macbeth, her clothing is shapeless, and she wears a covering on her head. Unlike Lady Macbeth, there is no hint of sexuality around Lady Macduff. Though she has a child; her white vestments make her seem virginal. When she gives her speech about a “womanly defense” she emphasizes the line “I remember now / I am in this earthly world,” which is in direct contrast to the supernatural feeling of the production (4.2.77-78). It also highlights a direct contrast between the idea of a virginal mother giving birth (a natural birth versus the unnatural birth of Lady Macbeth gave to the spirits and the witches to the magic). This unnatural motherhood is also shown in scene 4.3 when Macduff and Malcolm greet Ross; if the father of a nation is the king, the mother is the land and as Ross says of Scotland under Macbeth’s rule “It cannot / Be called our mother, but our grave” (4.3.65-66). Macbeth’s unnatural fatherhood, won by murder, has corrupted the country. Perhaps, when Lady Macbeth drew the spirits up from the earth in the beginning of the play, she had tainted the spirit of Scotland. Instead of Scotland as a motherland, giving birth, it has become an open grave, taking the lives of those whom it should be sheltering. This unnatural fatherhood and motherhood are highlighted by Macduff’s line “He hath no children” (4.3.217), highlighting the absence of Macbeth’s offspring—offspring needed if one is to pass on a crown.

The emphasis on the supernatural in this play is a way to emphasize the femininity of Lady Macbeth and the witches. By emphasizing lines such as “he hath no children” (4.1.218) and “I am in this earthly world,” (4.2.70) as well as the emphasis on the rituals of Duncan’s robing and the passing of the goblet as if the banquet were a communion highlighting the contrast with the witches’ black mass, in which they sing their spells like a Gregorian chant. This contrast makes it seem as though the witches’ magic was responsible for the fog and violence.

The witches represent a corrupt womanhood that is all powerful and deadly. But Lady Macbeth’s frailty, especially during the sleepwalking scene, creates a duality that negates this power. Like Terry, Dench rejected previous traditions that had survived for tradition’s sake and “reject[ed] the dreamy glide favored by many of her predecessors” instead, she

enters rapidly, manically, desperate to find means of removing the blood. Stalking back and forth, she seems almost cornered, with the immobility of the doctor and servant magnifying the effect of the rapid pacing (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 142).

And where Terry had whispered the line “The Thane of Fife had a Wife,” “Dench changed the vocal emphasis by stressing the pronoun, ‘Where is *she* now?’” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 143). This is not the only vocal change she made: where Siddons used a shuddered sigh to mark the part of the text that reads “O, O, O” after the line “All the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten this little hand,”(5.1.32) Dench chose to “elid[e] the sounds into a single extended wail apparently signifying unbearable spiritual pain” (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 143). The wail is very loud and held uncomfortably long. The Doctor and the Gentlewoman act as priest and confessor. Lady Macbeth, in her hysteria, confesses to her part in the murder of Duncan. And yet, it in this version, it does not appear as though they blame her for the wickedness that transpired. The Doctor merely says, “The heart is sorely charged,” (5.3.33) like the hysterics of the eighteenth-century, Lady Macbeth’s hysteria and confession indicate a moral growth. It is the confession of the spiritually overcharged and burdened. When she dies, the women moan and cry

in solidarity for their fallen sister. This is a different reading on Lady Macbeth than previously, instead of a temptress who causes her husband's wickedness, she is one who was led astray and seeks redemption. Critics called Dench's performance "revelatory" (McDonald, *Look to the Lady* 143). Her Lady Macbeth is both human and flawed; in short, she is a human being.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

As previously noted, Shakespeare's plays are representational. They are not so much about the plots and the characters as they are about ideals. This is particularly true of his tragedies which he uses to contrast dichotomies. The tragic action occurs not because of humanity's dual nature, but because those natures become unbalanced. In *Macbeth*, the two natures that Shakespeare mainly contrasts are those of femininity and masculinity. In this play we see how it is not the natures themselves that cause destruction, but instead the actions by these characters that place them outside the traditional performance of these gender roles.

However, these actions take place due to the social structures that have grown around the dichotomy of maleness and femaleness. In order to enforce the superiority of men and the frailty of women, the patriarchy must demand homogeneity from all members of society, even as this heteronormativity oppresses those supposedly superior males. In order to enforce these differences between men and women, their identities and actions must adhere to tacitly agreed upon markers. Men must perform maleness just as much as women must perform femaleness. In this way, gender is a social construct, assigned to one according to their societal ideas. And in order to remain a good standing member of society, these performances must be constantly performed and affirmed.

However, society is constantly changing and with it, the rules that apply to gender performance. As science and technology move forward, so does our understanding of biology

and human nature. *Macbeth* has been an especially good vehicle for studying these changes in gender performance because it is a play in which gender and relationships are at the forefront and in some ways a character's gender or relationship to another drives the action of the play. It is a play about kings and battle that takes place mostly in domestic spaces and between man and wife.

Unlike Shakespeare's other plays that seem to be focused on gender performance, like *Twelfth Night* and *Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth* is a play that ends in tragedy. This is due in part because of the problematic nature of Lady Macbeth. She does not conform to the standard Elizabethan performance of femininity, but she remains extremely feminine. In fact, it can be argued out of all of Shakespeare's leading ladies, she is the most intensely feminine and definitely the most sexual. And when Lady Macbeth steps outside of her supposed gender role, she is not necessarily doing something punishable. Moreover, other Shakespearean heroines step outside of their roles and instead of being punished are instead rewarded for their daring.

The reason *Macbeth* ends in tragedy is probably due to its concern with politics and with the fact that during Elizabethan England, gender politics were rife with anxiety. Despite the traditional belief that women were weaker and less rational than men, a woman was on the throne of England, yet women were still treated as second class citizens. Lady Macbeth can be seen as a warning of what happens when one mixes politics with women. But by studying her character closely, we see that she is merely a warning of what happens when nature becomes unbalanced.

This close reading also helps us see that beyond her supposed unnaturalness is actually a balanced nature that becomes unbalanced due to the actions of the men around her. Additionally,

by studying how Lady Macbeth has been played throughout history, we have seen how gender performance has changed since Elizabethan England.

In Elizabethan England, femininity consisted of three stages: maid, wife, and widow. These stages were supposed to be moved through linearly. Yet, Lady Macbeth weaves through these stages. She begins the play as a wife reading her husband's letter. She passes outside of the normal paradigm to ally herself with the witches, calling upon the spirits. She asks the spirits to take away her monthly menstruation and ability to have children, divesting herself of the things that make her biologically female. She positions herself as a mother when she speaks of the infant whose brains she would dash out to achieve her ends.

Yet she also represents the ugly side of these stages. She is a grotesque mother as she gives birth to both Macbeth's ambition and malevolent spirits. She a fraudulent wife as she ignores the ties of marriage and kinship and instead of protecting her guests, plots to have them murdered under her roof. And she uses her sexuality to urge her husband to his crimes, in some ways implanting her seed of ambition in him. Lady Macbeth also moves beyond any of these stages because in the very act of questioning her husband's wisdom and strength, she corrupts the Elizabeth ideal of femininity which was meant to affirm men's superiority. Lady Macbeth also figuratively moves into the stage of widowhood even though her husband is still alive, as the play constantly hints at Macbeth's death.

Later in the play, Lady Macbeth embraces traditional femininity, and in doing so she begins to fade into the background of her husband's machinations. She is reborn and is later scene wandering around in a white nightgown. It is only in the few scenes before her death that she finally becomes a maid. Her course through paradigm of Elizabethan femininity is almost circular. But in gaining her maidenhood she seems to have lost her sanity, and in the end, her

life. She begins the play balanced, having both good and bad parts. But she ends the play as purely feminine, frail and meek.

This unbalance is also how Macbeth meets his end. He embraces Elizabethan masculinity too fully. He must perform actions that constantly affirm his masculinity through violence and bravado. Unfortunately, the actions end in bloodshed and death. Lady Macduff is also unbalanced. She embraces her femininity too fully as well. And in the end, this leads to her murder. Only Macduff, who has both feminine and masculine qualities is left alive at the end of the play.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we see a shift in the feminine ideal. This is due in large part to the Industrial Revolution. Political uncertainty after King George ascended to the throne led to authorities retrenching themselves in traditional gender roles. However, the ongoing Industrial Revolution and all the significant changes it had wrought on society also left its mark on 18<sup>th</sup> century social and gender hierarchies. As women joined the workforce and moved out of the domestic sphere, they were able to voice their opinions more loudly. They were able to begin to advocate for themselves. Yet these women were still expected to be passive and to fulfill the roles of wife and mother along with the added roles of patriot, colleague, and advocate. And they must do so with fresh faced beauty.

These women were able to look to other women in power like Queen Charlotte, to set the example. Though Charlotte positioned herself as loving wife and doting mother, she also held considerable sway over the throne of England. And it is due to her considerable sway that the Georgians began to idolize motherhood. As Queen Charlotte positioned herself as a nurturer, women hoping to conform to societal norms must do the same.

This is reflected in the 18th century staging of *Macbeth*. The 18<sup>th</sup> century stage was not just used for entertainment, but also as a forum to explore and study political and social issues. It had also become, at this point, a place that was safe for emotional displays, where mimesis led to catharsis.

Because England was involved in several wars at the time, war heroes were all the rage. They were seen as the honorable epitome of manliness. Thus, Macbeth, himself a soldier, no longer fit Georgian society's view of a villain. As a war veteran, he was inherently good, full of valor and honor. Thus, 18<sup>th</sup> century performances of Macbeth must position him as victim to whom tragic action happens, not a villain capable of performing tragic actions. Therefore, Lady Macbeth must be the antagonist of the play.

As previous chapters have mentioned, Sarah Siddons was the star of the 18<sup>th</sup> century stage. Her identity was so intertwined with that of Lady Macbeth that to many of her fans, she *was* Lady Macbeth. Siddons was stately and elegant. She had a commanding presence. And moreover, she was able to create a public persona that balanced both her feminine and masculine attributes. She was able to position herself as a domestic figure and a loving mother as well as a public figure with a handsome countenance.

She was able to do this by appearing to adhere strictly to societal norms within her marriage and domestic life. However, she often brought the domestic to the public forefront when she did things like appear on stage heavily pregnant. Like Queen Charlotte, she strongly positioned herself as a nurturer. Through her public persona, she created a Lady Macbeth who is both violent and loving. We know from Mrs. Siddons's notes and letters that she saw Lady Macbeth as intensely feminine and who possessed a robust sexuality. However, due to social

norms, she chose to play her Lady Macbeth with much prudence, careful to remain respectful and modest.

We also know from her notes that she did not see Lady Macbeth as someone inherently evil. The heinous acts she committed were not out of a reprobate heart, but were instead necessary actions Lady Macbeth must perform out of love for her husband. Late 18<sup>th</sup> century society viewed femininity as being nurturing, patriotic, and passive, and to Sarah Siddons, Lady Macbeth was these things. However, Georgian society may not have seen it that way. To them, she was a corrupted version of femininity; and this corruption brought about her ultimate destruction. Had Macbeth not have been positioned as a tragic hero by the Georgians, Lady Macbeth might not have become the militaristic and brutal figure we have to think of her as.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we once again find a woman on the throne of England. But unlike Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria was married and had several children. This helped to soothe any anxieties surrounding having a woman on the throne because it was assumed that her husband would be there to guide and temporalize her womanly weaknesses. Yet as Queen, Victoria was undoubtedly a public figure at a time when women were being driven back to the domestic sphere due the constraints of 19<sup>th</sup> century society which demanded that women remain in the private sphere and thus invisible. We see this crystalized and distilled mostly through reading the novels from this time. In the writings of Dickens, Chopin, the Bronte sisters and others, we see that the Victorian idea of femininity shifted due to the introduction of evolutionary science and the emerging middle class. For instance, as the middle class sought to distinguish themselves from the upper and lower classes, they created a rigid hegemony of ideals and values.

They did this mostly through the Christian religion. By invoking the ideals of humility, charity and submission, the Victorian middle class sought to reestablish the domestic sphere as the

proper place for women. Victorian women were extorted to be virginal, modest, and moral. But most importantly, they were to remain invisible in the public sphere. Women who acted outside these boundaries suffered more than in previous eras. While remaining chaste was always an object to women in previous eras, due to the Victorian understanding of psychology and physiology (mainly based on Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Freud's Theory of the Unconscious), acting outside of social expectations not only breached the social contract, it also violated one's psyche and body to the point of transformation. A woman who had lost her virtue was no longer composed of the same substance as before. Now, thanks to Darwin's Theory of Evolution, women were now thought to be lower on the evolutionary rung than men were.

Men, on the highest rung, were the furthest evolved beings. Their minds were capable of reason and self-control. Women, as less evolved beings, were closer to animals. They acted on emotional impulse and lacked the brainpower needed for rationality. However, paradoxically, they were ascribed as the moral center of the family. With the backing of science, the patriarchal powers of the Victorian era were able to de-humanize women. Before they were different but equal to men in a physiological sense; now they were both mentally and physically inferior. However, despite these constraints on 19<sup>th</sup> century women, more and more were entering the public sphere as the Industrial Revolution continued. Though these working women were thought to be irresponsible mothers and bad wives, they were needed numbers for the overtaxed workforce.

Thus, women were not destined to remain in the domestic sphere. Despite withdrawing from public for many years after the death of her husband, and letting her ministers make policy and governing decisions in her stead, Queen Victoria once again appeared on the public stage and led the country and its colonies for many years. Her reappearance led the way for women's emergence on the political stage to begin in earnest. As more and more women joined the work

force, they were able to make their needs and wants heard not just publically, but politically. They began to organize, American women joining their English sisters in the fray, soon the International Council of Women was formed.

As this upheaval in Victorian society can clearly be seen in novels and writings, it can be seen just as clearly on the stage. For instance, thanks to sudden blooming of the sciences, English audiences wanted realistic sets and costumes. Acting itself underwent a change as well. Victorian staging no longer relied on “points” and instead actors and actresses were free to be more spontaneous. Audiences wanted to see a more emotional and natural performance.

Therefore, Ellen Terry’s *Lady Macbeth* would be a very different performance than Sarah Siddons’s. For one thing, where Sarah Siddons was noble and statuesque, Ellen Terry had a charming sense of vulnerability. Her *Lady Macbeth* was a sympathetic creature. The audience’s sense of sympathy towards *Lady Macbeth* stemming from both Terry’s well-documented beauty and seeming fragility, and the more emotional performance compared to previous eras. Here, *Lady Macbeth* was no longer guilty of the machinations of her husband’s downfall. Instead, she is a weak willed creature. One vulnerable to the vulgarities and pitfalls of her feminine nature.

Terry saw this vulnerability in *Lady Macbeth*. In her marginalia, Terry wrote that she did not see *Lady Macbeth* as wicked, but as someone caught up in intrigue unawares, her actions done out of love for her husband. We see this new interpretation especially in the performance of *Lady Macbeth*’s fainting scene. Instead of acting as though *Lady Macbeth* was feigning her distress, Terry acted as though *Lady Macbeth*’s distress was authentic. Because of Terry’s decision to play *Lady Macbeth* with authentic emotion, her madness at the end of the play is no longer punishment for her actions, but an overwrought-ness brought on by a fragile mind and disordered body—

in essence, by her female nature. However, as we see with Dame Judi Dench, the feminine ideal was soon to change again and this time even more drastically.

After the First World War, the Women's Rights Movement had gathered steam and spawned the first wave of feminism. Women began campaigning for the right to vote and keep property after marriage. The Society for Women's Suffrage and The Women's Trade Union League secured resolutions that created equal pay laws. Finally, in the late 1920s, women gained the right to vote. Their success is largely ascribed to World War 2 and its ongoing war efforts. So many men died on the battlefield that even women were conscripted to join the army ranks. With so many women in the public sphere, the plight of women changed rapidly. By 1958, women were not only in the public sphere, but had also joined the ranks of politicians and policy makers. Abortion was decriminalized in England, the Equal Pay Act was passed, and the Women's Liberation Movement and Second-Wave Feminism tore through the western world like a storm as Margaret Thatcher became England's first female Prime Minister.

With these changes to women's rights and women leaving the domestic sphere, other things also left the domestic sphere, things like sexuality and sex appeal. Though the Women's Liberation Front and Second-Wave Feminism touted freedom from systemized feminine performance, the continuing pressure of outside forces to conform to a certain ideal counteracted this notion. Now the feminine ideal was no longer dictated by social norms, but by the marketing department of cosmetic and feminine item manufacturers. Second-Wave feminists fought back against these forces by burning bras and refusing to wear makeup or having long hair. They tried to create their own definitions of femininity, definitions provided by self-determination instead of outside forces. By eschewing things that were considered feminine, they hope to delineate women as equal to men in all ways.

This era of upheaval was where Judi Dench took the stage as Lady Macbeth. Her performance with Ian McKellen in 1979 highlights the idea that, due to the broadening definition of femininity, one does not need to look or act traditionally feminine to be feminine. Dressed in a stark black costume that hides all tell-tale biological markers of femininity (including Dench's hair), Dench managed to make her Lady Macbeth incredibly sexual and vulnerable. She does this almost exclusively through body language. Her Lady Macbeth is caressing and passionate with her husband. Her voice cracks when she speaks of the babe she has held. Dench believed that Lady Macbeth's appeal to the spirits was not initiated out of evil intentions, but out of a desire to repress all tenderness and vulnerability in the face of what must be done. And yet her Lady Macbeth still trembles in fear. Unlike previous versions of Lady Macbeth, Dench's version is one of duality. Lady Macbeth is not all one thing or the other. She is both brave and afraid, mother and murderer.

While Judith Butler has taught us that gender is performative, and Shakespeare has taught us that nature must be balanced, Lady Macbeth has shown us that one's gender does not need to be performed perfectly in order to be affirmed. As gender performance has changed over the centuries, it has broadened in definition and appearance. Women no longer need to have long hair or shave. Some men wear makeup. Sarah Siddons has taught us that women can be both sublime and majestic. Ellen Terry has taught us that women can be both impish and beautiful. And Judi Dench has taught us that femininity does not have to conform to physical or social norms to exist. And all have done so through their performance of Lady Macbeth.

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