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Man, Woman, or Both? Shakespeare's Treatment of Androgyny and Lady Macbeth's Disempowerment

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ABSTRACT

Androgyny is a concept that has been given comparatively little thought, particularly concerning its impact on Shakespeare's work. While some have evidently looked at Shakespeare's treatment of gender, the interest concerning androgyny or transverse nature has been limited. However, in the wake of gender studies and feminism in the late 20th century, androgyny garnered popularity among Shakespeare scholars. Since the 1980s, scholars have begun to view Shakespeare as an androgynous writer and continue to argue that he wrote from a gendered point of view. Suffused with Renaissance gender ideals, Shakespeare's characters are often depicted with intricate sexual moralities and gender identities worth pursuing. Lady Macbeth emerges as one such character whose dichotomy with gender has paved the way for controversial analyses of her character. Hence, this research has attempted to unravel how androgynous nature affects Lady Macbeth's character in Shakespeare's play Macbeth (1606) and how it leads to her eventual disempowerment within the play. With the aid of comprehensive textual analysis, this research has found that Lady Macbeth's androgynous nature reduces her role in the play and disables her empowerment, espousing the idea that androgyny in Lady Macbeth results in her ultimate downfall which culminates in her insanity and suicide. Therefore, this research has attempted to take a fresh look at Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, viewing her beyond a power-crazed matriarch and positioning her as a woman whose troubled conscience has created her identity dilemma in the play.

1. Introduction

“So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he him.” (Genesis 1:27)

The genealogy of Shakespearean scholarship has been marked by a dogged pursuit of gender-related themes for decades, emblematising the significance and complexities in which Shakespearean characters are presented, especially in terms of their masculinity and femininity (Kimbrough, 1982; Kemp, 2010; Rampone Jr, 2011; Aughterson & Ferguson, 2020). Modern scholars have been able to encourage the continuity of the debate by tracing androgynous and homoerotic impulses in Shakespeare's plays, opening doors to new and primarily queer interpretations of them (Menon, 2011). Almost all of his plays include at least one character modern scholars identify as androgynous or transverse (Menon, 2011). According to Kimbrough (1982), if a woman in any Shakespearean play deplores that she does not own the privilege to express her views in terms of love, or if a man states that he is made weak by his tears and abjured fighting, each one of them is trying to break the socially constructed “appropriate behaviour” for a woman or a man (Kimbrough, 1982, p. 18).

A profusion of research foregrounds that, unparallel to men, women in Shakespeare's plays have a higher leaning towards what can be determined as androgynous. Rackin (1987) expresses that “the androgyne could be an image of transcendence - of surpassing the bounds that limit the human condition in the fallen world of breaking through the constraints that material existence impose on spiritual aspiration or the personal restrictions that define our roles in society” (p. 29). She further notes that the androgyne can also become a laughingstock or an image of “monstrous deformity” of social and physical abnormality (Rackin, 1987, p. 29). She suggests that both of these kinds of women can be seen in Shakespeare's plays.

The cynosure of this paper is to explore the concept of female androgyny and how it affects the development of Lady Macbeth in the play *Macbeth* (1606). This research explores to what extent androgyny can be the cause of the disempowerment of Lady Macbeth. Furthermore, though androgyny has often been explored in terms of psychological and social constructs (Heilbrun, 1974), I will be contending that androgynous nature can also be verbal. As androgynous nature equals the state where an individual is both masculine and feminine due to social and psychological implications, therefore, the argument raised here is that an individual can assume androgynous qualities verbally and performatively, without the intervention of biological causes, and that these traits can be disempowering Lady Macbeth in the play.

To investigate this concept, this research focuses on Lady Macbeth's character. In gendered terms, she is a woman, yet, she is stoic and ambitious – traits often attributed to men by the patriarchal order. I have drawn attention to the idea that Lady Macbeth displays masculine characteristics, through her words, and how she becomes displaced within the play as a result of her “masculine-feminine” traits. She is disabled in terms of identity and character development within the play, meaning that her position as a woman is not improved.

1.1. Gender in the Renaissance Society

The late 16th and early 17th centuries were a period that witnessed significant social and economic transformations in England, accredited to Queen Elizabeth I's reign. One of the most significant changes was the subtle rebuttal of gender hierarchy marked by the emergence of the theatre.

Gender is an arbitrary concept that differs across cultures, societies, religions, and personalities. Stigmatised for centuries, gender has been conceptualised within the society as a factor specifying sexual

relationships. Renaissance English society was fascinated with gender politics and sexuality. Galen of Pergamon's one-sex model was used as the supposed theory of sexual distinction in Early Modern England where he argued that men and women were not essentially different; that, women had male organs inside the body. Galen's model paved the way for the patriarchal thought that the male body was the standard and the female body was its incomplete version (Charry, 2017).

Governed by the liturgical precepts of the Protestant Reformation, men topped the social echelon with women standing below them (Gowing, 2023). The church and patriarchy drew boundaries for both men and women. To overstep these demarcations was to topple the gender hierarchy. Upon marriage, this distinction was made more prominent. The man or the husband ruled over the household. Charry (2017) writes that "Men had a range of responsibilities as heads of households- they'd have to be good 'providers', adept, brave, as well as spiritual leaders of the family flock" (p. 49). The idea of the husband being the family despot, generous or malign according to disposition and preference, lording over his wife and children, was encouraged (Charry, 2017). Moreover, marital violence was regarded as commonplace; an act righteousness executed by the husband (Charry, 2017). And any amount of "companionship between husband and wife never fully replaced the hierarchical model in which the husband was the authority and superior" (Charry, 2017, p. 40).

While male sexual conduct was mostly overlooked, female sexual promiscuity was looked upon severely. Many books and pamphlets were written to educate women on social and sexual regulation. The Renaissance appropriation of ideal women stemmed from the Greco-Roman tradition (Kemp, 2010). These ideals include sexual control, domestic conduct, and maternal instincts, later evolving into stereotypes that formed the female identity. Above all, women

were defined primarily in terms of their status and their gendered relationships to men as daughters to be married, wives, and thereafter, widows.

1.2. Gender in the Renaissance Theatre

The emergence of the professional theatre in 1576 oversaw the slow disruption of the gender hierarchy. Arnold (2015) notes, "Crowds flocked to the Theatre when it opened in April 1576, willing to pay if only to the interior" (p. 66). The theatre was a wonderment to the Londoners. The stage, the seats with varying comforts, and the galleries with different views aroused their curiosity, urging them to visit it often.

For theatres to sustain there should be plays, and for plays, there should be actors. Acting was a privilege reserved for men. The strictly constrained moral conduct forbade women to appear on the professional stage, yet "they are believed to have performed in local festivals, pageants, and other civic and folk drama during this period" (Kemp, 2010, p. 111). Additionally, "there are records of women acting in Italy, France, and Spain from early in the sixteenth century" (Brown, 2021, p. 4). In England, however, the female characters in plays were performed by men and young boys until the Restoration in 1660, when female inclusion on the professional stage was legalised (Garcia, 2018).

During the Renaissance, the idea of a "boy actress" (Rackin, 1987, p. 36) roused many disputes between the church and society. Dressing male youth in female roles was not merely a dramatic practice, but rather an appalling *modus operandi* for achieving homoerotic attraction. In fact, it "upset patriarchal values, assaulted cultural boundaries, and unraveled the sexual separators of ambivalence, androgyny, and eroticism" (Cressy, 1996, p. 439). When portraying female roles, they assumed female traits, making them appear effeminate men. As a result, crossdressing and androgyny, along with theatre-going, became signs of

profound impiety towards God, a sacrilege against the reformed Anglican Church. This notion was heightened as men who performed female roles were frequently associated with prostitution, homoeroticism, and effeminacy and were thought to be "lascivious...monstrous...dis-honest and ignominious" (Thomas Beard as quoted in Cressy, 1996, p. 443).

Crossdressing worked in two ways, as Cressy (1996) notes; "the women of Renaissance England who begin adopting masculine attire, and second, the boys and young men who took female parts and dressed in female costume, in the course of dramatic performances on stage" (p.440). He elaborates that the first was regarded as a "challenge to patriarchal values" (Cressy, 1996, p. 440) while the latter as "marking the sexual ambivalence, androgyny, and muted eroticism" (Cressy, 1996, p. 440). Pamphlets like *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* (1620) attacked women wearing men's clothes, as seen in the following instance:

Come then, you Masculine-women, for you are my Subject, you that have made Admiration and Ass, and fool'd him with a deformity never before dream'd of, that have made yourself stranger things than ever Noah's Ark unladed, or Nile engendered... you that are stranger than strangeness itself, whom Wise men wonder at; Boys shout at, and Goblins themselves start at; You that are the Gilt dirt which Embroiders Play- houses, the painted Statues which adorn Caroches,...(From *Hic Mulier*, as quoted in Charry, 2017, pp.51-52)

When Shakespeare began his career in 1592, 16th century England saw the acceptance of predefined gender roles being questioned. Whether or not Shakespeare intended to deal with gender and sexuality in his plays, the themes remain recurrent in them. He seems to have exploited gender binaries in assigning gender roles to his characters with greater liberty than his contemporaries. In fact,

Rackin (2005) observes that "instead of attempting to conceal the presence of a male actor's body beneath a female character, costume, many of Shakespeare's plays seem clearly designed to exploit it" (p. 73).

Shakespeare's plays include the full range of Renaissance gender and sexual hierarchies. The couples depicted in his comedies value chastity in women before marriage. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), stranded within the woods, exhausted, Hermia urges Lysander to "lie further off; in human modesty" (2.2.56-59). In *The Tempest* (1611), Prospero warns Ferdinand not to "break her [Miranda] virgin-knot" (4.1.15-22) before the marriage is officially ministered. Thus, it shows that the Renaissance idea of chastity and virginity was built on a strict code of morality. Femininity and masculinity are also present in his plays – especially in tragedies – accompanied by misogyny. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth upholds masculine virtues and scathes Macbeth to be "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (1.5.17). In *Othello* (1603), Iago denounces women saying, "You rise to play and go to bed to work" (2.1.113). Hence, the inference here is that Shakespeare was influenced by his contemporary beliefs concerning gender, and critiquing his characters' misogynistic lines or appraising him for his apparent proto-feminist ideas might be unfair.

Many scholars prefer to trace connections between Shakespeare's own sexuality and his works. Though a work of art is not always the reality, Shakespeare scholarship has been eager to notice subtle hints in the plays that may or may not reveal his true intentions of sexuality. Wells (2020) argues that Shakespeare was doubtless gay by studying his sonnets.

When a poet whose name is William writes poems of anguished and unabashed sexual frankness which pun on the word 'will' – 13 times in [Sonnet] No 135. It is not unreasonable to conclude that he may be writing from the depths of his own

experience. (Wells, 2020 as quoted in Alexander, 2014)

However, countering this argument Sir Brian Vickers states that "If you...say that his 126 poems are like this, then people stop reading them as poems. They read them as biographical documents, looking for imputed sexuality" (Vickers as quoted in Alexander, 2014).

Therefore, it is evident that scholarship continues about Shakespeare's sexual identity. Moreover, whatever might be his sexual orientation, as a dramatist Shakespeare, sought to create his characters as semblances of reality who could be universally related.

1.3. Androgyny and the State of being Androgynous

Androgyny is often considered as the ambiguous third sex, given its state of being neither entirely masculine nor feminine. In the simplest sense, it is the physical and psychological representation of the condition of possessing stereotypically masculine qualities and stereotypically feminine qualities. Heilbrun (1974) in describing androgyny says;

This ancient Greek word – from andros [male] and gyn [female] – defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes...are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate...it suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women be aggressive, as men tender. (pp. 143-144)

The concept of androgyny was made prominent later through Bem's (1974) psychological experiments. She coined the word "psychological androgyny" and reflected the idea that having combined qualities provided individuals with better

psychological balance. Singer (1976) says that;

Androgyny...in its broadest sense can be defined as the One which contains the Two; namely, the male (andro-) and the female (gyne-). Androgyny is an archetype inherent in the human psyche... [and] may be the oldest archetype of which we have any experience." (Singer as quoted in Kimbrough, 1982, p. 8)

In 1964 Carl Jung in his book *Man and his Symbols*, in speaking of the unconscious, expresses the concept of "animus" and "anima". He presents the animus as the unconscious masculine side of a woman, and the anima as the unconscious feminine adjacent of a man, each overseeing beyond the personal psyche.

In the Middle Ages, long before the physiologists demonstrated that by reason of our glandular structure there are both male and female elements in all of us, it was said that every man carries a woman within himself (Jung, 1964. p.31)

He states that the anima and animus manifest in dreams and influence the individual personal growth and their interaction with the opposite sex. Psychologically, androgyny can affect people both positively and negatively. While positive effects are given as balance and healthy thinking, negative effects are associated with aggressiveness and temperamental qualities.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Macbeth: An Overview

The early 17th century where Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* saw a great political spasm as the Scottish King James ascended the British throne. Serving as a reflection of the surging waves of political turmoil of the era, *Macbeth* is undeniably an intense theatrical performance. For this very reason, it is considered to be one of the most performed

plays of Shakespeare. Macbeth follows the fall of the titular character. Driven by the prophecies of the three weird sisters and fuelled by Lady Macbeth's ambitious force-feeding, his submerged desires take hold of him and make him commit bloody murders to become king.

The play features contemporary elements - like witches - in Jacobean England. Being a firm believer of the powers of witchcraft, King James I was obsessed with witch-hunting. He saw witchcraft as a means of heresy, ordered witch trials across the country, and issued the "Witchcraft Act of 1604" (Gaskill, 2008, p. 42). Women were more likely to be charged against witchcraft given the categorical slandering against their vulnerability to the powers of evilness (The National Archive, 2022).

However, there are records in which men faced the consequences of these witch trials (The National Archive, 2022). In the play, witches are presented akin to the contemporary beliefs, old hags enthralling men through their enigmatic and hauntingly accurate premonitions. Shakespeare's representation of witches as the evil cause of Macbeth's defeat is a clear sign of acknowledging King James I's interests.

Shakespeare gathered inspiration for his play from Holinshed's Chronicles which record the history of Scotland (Royal Shakespeare Company, n.d.). Macbeth's character is drawn from the 11th century Scottish King who ruled Scotland from 1040 to 1057. Like the Macbeth in play, the real Macbeth murdered King Duncan who was not as respected and honourable as the king in the play.

Though the play revolves around politics, it is deeply tied with gender roles of men and women. Still, it is doubtful whether Shakespeare was subverting the orthodox conventions of masculinity and femininity, or whether he was simply employing a dramatic effect. But what we know is that the play has a clear distinction of what is considered to be

manhood and womanhood. Shakespeare appears to disrupt and contrast the conventional ideas of masculinity and femininity, examining them in the form of androgyny. Liston (1989) avows that "probably none of Shakespeare's plays is so explicit in demarcating man from woman as is Macbeth" (p. 232).

Moreover, the entire play orientates around binary oppositions; good vs. evil, appearance vs. reality, kindness vs. cruelty, and masculinity vs. femininity. This binary is also seen in the witches' words, "fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.12). Similarly, Macbeth comments that "so foul and fair day I have not seen" (1.3.38). It shows the condition of one inhabiting two things at the same time. All of these hint at a potential androgyny, or a single entity inhabiting two.

2.2. Methodology

Being the central female protagonist of the play, the depiction of Lady Macbeth's character in the play is often considered as the villainous force that drives Macbeth to his downfall. Her gender ambiguity arises in Act 1, Scene V where she deliberately snuffs her femininity by "unsexing" herself. This would be interpreted as an act of verbal transgendering, or rather, verbal androgyny.

This research espouses the idea that Lady Macbeth repeatedly feels displaced because she is unable to come to terms with her sexual orientation guided by the notion where Freidrichsmeyer (1987) argues that "appealing as it is, androgyny will not bring about desired results and will instead prove itself dangerously counterproductive" (p. 63), hence, establishing the argument that Shakespeare's androgynous female is displaced within her androgynous nature, as a result of the inability to accept the socially constructed gender roles assigned to her by the patriarchy.

Several key studies, notably by Kimbrough (1982) and Rackin (1987) also used to

spotlight the central issue of this paper. Judith Butler's "Theory of Performativity" explored in her book *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is also used as a framework of this paper. Butler's theories are often thought to be progressive in gender studies. She posits the idea that gender is performative, considering it to be an "imitation" or "miming" of the dominant conventions of a particular gender. Throughout the book, she challenges the assumptions of gender by examining the works of critics and scholars such as; Simone De Beauvoir, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Sigmund Freud, and Julia Kristeva. In reviewing Butler's work, Nash (1990) claims that;

Judith Butler's voice, I would argue, is indispensable for feminist theory at this historical juncture. She reminds us that our theories, and the categories they deploy, construct and constrict us even as we construct and shape them. (p. 171)

Hence, Butler's theories are highly useful to understand the formation of Lady Macbeth's character in the play and to look at in what ways she is different from traditional construction of a female identity. Moreover, her assertion that gender is performative, provides crucial understand Lady Macbeth's assumed masculinity.

3. Results and Discussion

In the play, Lady Macbeth defeminises herself by calling upon the "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5. 30-31). Throughout the play, Lady Macbeth's assuming of masculine qualities is primarily perceivable more in her words than in her actions. Therefore, her androgyny can be termed as verbal androgyny, since it does not significantly extend to her actions, except for a few instances. The play deals with the binary forces of masculinity vs. femininity, good vs. evil, and appearance vs. reality, supporting the idea of a dual consciousness within a singular entity. Therefore, this discussion also sheds light upon how Lady

Macbeth's masculine femininity collides with Macbeth's apparent feminine masculinity and the notion of inherent two consciousness within the single individual.

3.1 Androgyny and the Distortion of Gender Hierarchy in the Play

3.1.1 The Gender Trouble with the Witches

At first glance, the play centres on the consequences of regicide and the intervention of evil propensities to the succession of power. Intentionally or not, Shakespeare makes a clear-cut distinction between what is believed to be manhood and what is believed to be womanhood. His heterogeneous characterisation subtly dishevels the contemporary gender roles where men were associated with war, violence, and cruelty, and women were associated with domesticity, maternity, and kindness.

Shakespeare begins his play with the three witches who are bearded, "withered and so wild in their attire" (1.3. 40), and eerily chanting the words, "fair and foul". Their words artfully encapsulate the plot of the play. When they claim that "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1. 12), it is a momentous reflection of the idea of one being two things. We could infer these words as a prefiguration of the binaries in the play. The women themselves are represented as both masculine and feminine in appearance, signifying the idea of the androgynous nature. The androgynous positioning of the witches is biological as their physical difference is noted. During the Renaissance, the beard was extremely fashionable. and as Fisher (2001) notes "the beard is not simply imagined to be a morphological attribute found in sexes...but rather it is imagined to be a "sign" of masculinity and a means of "distinguishing" men from women" (p. 167). Hence, Shakespeare's bearded witches not only signal at androgyny but counters the general perception of witches being solely women. In

17th century England, witches were largely women who had simply rejected the traditional prototype of femininity (Charry, 2017). Therefore, Shakespeare's witches also bring out the idea of women who repelled mainstream gender ideals.

The witches' hegemonic role in the play indicates that Shakespeare was dissuading from the gender binaries of his era. Being "masculine-feminine" women, the witches exert power over Macbeth, controlling his dark desires. While it transgresses the notion of masculinity as the superior norm, it also gives the idea that androgynous nature is evil and grotesque. The witches remain as a negative force against Macbeth's integrity.

3.1.2 Macbeth's "milk of human kindness"

While the androgynous witches become the sign of evilness, Macbeth becomes the symbol of masculinity. He is universally perceived as a valiant soldier. Ross refers to him as "Bellona's bridegroom" (1.2. 56) enacting the idea that Macbeth is the epitome of a warrior. Still, he seems morally distraught when the witches' prophecy presages his fate. At first, he allows fate to determine his fortunes: "If chance will have me king, why, chance/ may crown me/Without my stir." (1.3. 147-149). When he realises that the ominous divination is becoming true, he lets the desires to sink in, calling "Stars, hide your fire/ Let not light see my black and deep desires." (1.4. 52-53). The psychological conflict arises when Lady Macbeth brings in the plan of murdering Duncan. Macbeth is overwhelmed with emotion. It is surprising how a man of a warrior's calibre should falter in murdering an old man in his sleep. This suggests that his masculine identity is not perfect. Lady Macbeth accuses him of being "too full o' th' milk of human kindness", nailing the notion that Macbeth harbours feminine sympathies. It makes us question to what extent Macbeth is masculine.

Higgins (2016) claims that "One reason why Macbeth may feel the need to continuously restate his masculinity may be because he has become genuinely confused about his own definition of masculinity" (p. 2). Macbeth's ideas of masculinity stem from the idealistic illustration of a "warrior man" that he is often referred to. Ironically, when he ascends the throne, his conflicted psychological state reveals that he differs from Renaissance masculinity. Similarly, his psychological conflict is heightened at Duncan's murder.

Macbeth: Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? (2.1. 33-38)

Macbeth's mental agitation resonates through these lines. He does not want to murder Duncan and he is plagued with his conscience. This proves Lady Macbeth's conjecture of Macbeth being "too full o'th' milk of human kindness". It is quite evident that Macbeth displays both masculine and feminine qualities. His masculine ambition desires the opportunity, yet his feminine integrity collides with his ambitions creating a psychological conflict. In this case, Macbeth strikes as an androgynous man. He is physically masculine but mentally he displays guilt and kindness which are typically associated with femininity.

3.1.3 Lady Macbeth's Machinations of Masculinity

Then, there is Lady Macbeth who transgresses the feminine representation of the play. However, her transgression is veiled behind her ambition. It is clear from the beginning that she is dissatisfied with her assigned gender roles. When Macbeth's letter

arrives announcing his promotion, Lady Macbeth promptly lets her desires carry her away.

Lady Macbeth:...unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty...

Come to my women's breasts

And take my milk for gall, (1.5. 31-33, & 37-38)

She negates her femininity and attempts to assume masculinity, which she associates with "direst cruelty". What is important here is that her perception of masculinity, which is a more extreme version of what Macbeth has in his mind, is misleading. This assumption of masculinity can be deemed as androgyny; however, she only assumes it verbally. Throughout the play, she commands and makes threats as if she is a man making demands, yet none is displayed in her actions. Despite unsexing herself, she still battles with her maternal conscience which incapacitates her to kill Duncan while he is asleep because he resembled her father.

Unlike the weird sisters, Lady Macbeth's androgyny is not physically marked. She appears to be a dignified lady and a loyal wife. That being the case, the argument raised here is that her androgyny, or the condition of being both masculine and feminine, is only verbal. This leads us to coin the new idea as "verbal androgyny" as opposed to biological androgyny. It signals that one does not necessarily need to possess biological demarcations to be deemed as androgynous, but rather it could be assumed through words. The masculine-femininity which Lady Macbeth upholds is more of a verbal condition of androgyny. Her verbal taking of masculine behaviour breaks the gender hierarchy and clashes with her own feminine psychology. When the deed of murdering is

done, her feminine morality and guilt contrast with her assumed masculine cruelty, making her unable to navigate her conscience. Her downfall is due to the distorted version of masculinity that she assumed.

Thus, the play appears to underscore that there is neither perfect masculinity or femininity, but distorted versions of androgyny. While Lady Macbeth embodies "masculine-femininity", Macbeth aligns with "feminine-masculinity". This distinctive characterisation illustrates how Shakespeare has exploited the extreme Renaissance gender ideals.

3.2 Lady Macbeth and the Formation of her Androgynous Identity

Much of the scholarly ink has been spilled on the fascinating and insoluble character of Lady Macbeth. Her ambition surpasses her femininity and her wickedness eclipses her wifely faithfulness to Macbeth. A complex woman in every sense who drives the play as much as it drives her. What is immediately notable about her character is her masculine femininity. The moment she appears on the stage, she positions herself as a woman inherently aware of her husband's weakness and she wishes to chastise him for that. By all accounts, she strikes up as a strong woman. Alfar (1995) asserts that Lady Macbeth ideologically falls into the paradigm of strong female characters who seek power in literary tradition.

Lady Macbeth: Yet I do fear thy nature;

It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness.

To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great,

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it. (1.5. 3-7)

She calls Macbeth too just and fair in his dealings. The way she utters the words

provides proof for her contempt for feminine kindness. She believes that Macbeth is “too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness” (1.5. 4). The “milk” inevitably aligns with maternity. In addition, to be maternal is to be kind. Kindness was not an attractive trait for a man, at least according to Lady Macbeth’s opinion. She upholds the idea that a man must be defined in terms of violence, strength, and cruelty. Her conjectures are not entirely faulty. Charry (2017) quotes Thomas Elyot (1532) who says that during the Renaissance “A man in his natural perfection is fierce, hardy, strong in opinion and covetous of glory, desirous of knowledge” (p. 49). Involuntarily, it highlights that a man’s honour lies with the extent to which he is capable of violence. To be kind and amiable is to be “full of fear, anxiety, doubt, care, peevishness” (Richard Burton, 1814, as quoted in Charry, 2017). In this context, Lady Macbeth’s surmise that her husband is more maternal in nature is a spurring claim of his feminine masculinity, and it paves the way to Lady Macbeth’s formation as an androgynous woman because she displays both feminine and masculine qualities. Her disdain for the maternal nature in Macbeth shows her dissatisfaction with the femininity she possesses. Though she is a woman, she curbs her femininity by showing her disapproval of “milk o’ th’ human kindness” (1.5. 4). As we see dual personalities here, we could deduce her character as androgynous.

She vows to “pour her spirits to him” (1.5. 15) with the “valor of her tongue” (1.5. 16). Here, she seeks to peck at Macbeth’s “human kindness” with the might of her tongue which is immediately suggestive of the fact that her presumed masculine strength is more verbal. Guided by this premise, we can come up with the debate that her androgynous nature is verbal. It is strongly visible when she calls upon the “spirits that tend of mortal thoughts” (1.5. 30-31) and “murd’ring ministers” (1.5. 38) to “unsex” her and “take her milk for gall” (1.5. 39).

Lady Macbeth:...Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty...

Come to my woman’s breasts

And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers,

Wherever your sightless substances

You wait on natures mischiefs. (1.5. 30-33 & 37-40)

Here, Lady Macbeth’s deliberate de-feminisation fulfils her verbal androgyny. Notably, she pleads for her milk to be turned into “gall”, so that she may be filled with cruelty and poison. The “milk” takes centre stage here once again. Her trading of milk for poison symbolically suggests that she verbally attempts to get rid of her identity as a female. As Rackin (2005) proposes, according to the modern implications, the woman’s breasts act as a demarcation of the psychological polarity between men and women, which is in turn “based on sexual differences that are embodied, natural, biologically grounded, and visually self-evident” (p. 122). Then, by trading her milk for gall, she temporarily mutes her femininity and awakens masculinity. However, Love (2011), describes this condition as *sithomosexuality*. She argues that “Lady Macbeth is not securely represented as masculine. Her queerness is bound up with her position as the king’s wife and, more significantly, as mother” (p. 205). Lady Macbeth is neither strictly masculine nor feminine. She is, in fact, both, evidenced by “unsexing” herself. This gender ambiguity propels the theorisation that Lady Macbeth is androgynous.

3.3 Androgyny as the Cause of Lady Macbeth's Disempowerment in the Play

The analysis of Lady Macbeth henceforth continues, in this regard, with the presupposition that she is androgynous, however, never extending beyond her words. As Jung (1964) defines men have an unconscious feminine side and the women have an unconscious masculine side. In this case, Lady Macbeth wakes her masculine unconscious through her words all the while trying to subvert Macbeth's feminine unconscious. She constantly warns Macbeth to pull himself together. When Macbeth arrives home, she commands him to "Look like the innocent flower/ But be the serpent under't" (1.5. 56-57). She forces him to play on a dual personality, just like herself. It is a testimony to her androgynous nature. As she had vowed previously, she is pouring her spirits to him. Gilbert (2016) identifies that pouring spirits into someone's ear is an act which is symbolically masculine. Hence, the moment she unsexes herself she ceases to be a conventional woman. Bodily, she inhabits the woman in her and verbally she inhabits the man.

Kemp (2010) further emphasises that "as a diabolical creature Lady Macbeth has aligned herself with the three Weird Sisters, whose violation of sexual norms ('you should be women says Banquo, 'And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/ That you are so') proclaims their witchcraft." Lady Macbeth being similar to the witches is clearly a sign of being androgynous.

Interestingly, her masculine ambition seems to further entail her femininity. When she prepares Macbeth for the murder of Duncan, she suggests that they should drug the servants who are posted as guards in Duncan's chamber. To this Macbeth replies, "Bring forth men-children only,/For thy undaunted mettle should compose/ Nothing but males" (1.7. 72-74). He acknowledges Lady Macbeth's shrewish cleverness,

however, the words echo her maternity. She could provide male children but she could never become one herself, biologically. The only way she could assume it through her words. The reason why she cannot fully adopt the masculine psyche is because her feminine consciousness is still both awake and dormant. That conflict is evident when she finds Duncan sleeping, resembling her father.

Lady Macbeth:...Hark! I laid the daggers ready;

He could not miss 'em.

Had he not resembled My father as he slept, I had done 't. (2.2. 11-13)

This proves that she cannot come to terms with her masculine part entirely because she had mostly assumed it verbally. However, she still overpowers her husband in the murder scene. She controls Macbeth and dictates the scene, strongly enunciating her masculine femininity.

We have now regarded Lady Macbeth as a woman inhabiting the consciousness of a man and a woman. If not her actions her words prove her so. Woolf (1929) proposes that in each human presides one male and one woman, and that the androgynous mind is vibrantly open and inventively wholesome. As Lady Macbeth fulfils the module of an androgynous woman, she certainly proves to be analytical, shrewd, and intelligent. Then, we are plagued by the question as to why she does not succeed in the end. If the androgynous mind is meant to bridge the gap between what is feminine and what is masculine and create a balance then why does it affect negatively on Lady Macbeth? Where does she fail?

The answers to these questions seem to lie more or less with her verbal androgyny. She threatens with her words rather than actions. Whether she is planning to apply the two servants with Duncan's blood to signal the suspects (2.2. 56-57) or whether she is

threatening to rip a child's brain while it was drinking milk (1.7. 58), the cruelty with which she speaks lies only in her words. This is why she is incapable of killing Duncan while he sleeps. Her conscience is compressed with feminine guilt instead of masculine ambition. This notion can be possibly inferred as disempowerment. The verbal androgyny which she displays does not help to improve her condition in the play. Even though she assumes masculine qualities, it perpetually clashes with her feminine identity, disabling her development within the play. Despite being a puissant figure in the play, she succumbs to madness and commits suicide.

Another possible reason why her androgynous behaviour is at question is because of the dubious premises on which she constitutes the male and the female identity. Infused by the contemporary ideology, Lady Macbeth constructs her own definitions of femininity and masculinity. Asp (1981) states that Lady Macbeth's deliberate rejection of femininity is a result of her thinking that her society would equate feminine qualities with weakness. She probes at that in Act 1, Scene V when she unsexes herself. Her soliloquy shows that masculinity is built on the crags of cruelty and her desire to be purged of her femininity is positioning her as a stereotypically different woman. At the same time, it also grounds the idea that women, by nature, are averse to cruelty and ambition whereas men crave them. Moreover, Asp (1981) affirms that Lady Macbeth relies "on wine to make her bold and give her fire, qualities normally associated with the masculine temperament" (p. 161). Lady Macbeth associates manliness with an unnatural brutality. When Macbeth defies this cruelty in the beginning, he appears emasculated to Lady Macbeth. Then, if Macbeth's masculinity is distorted, so is Lady Macbeth's femininity because she fails to identify that she is assuming something unnatural to her. Her perceptions of womanhood and manhood are illusory and to adopt something illusory in a delusional

hysteria of ambition is to fall into a state of dilemma when the hoped results are unaccomplished. Richmond (1973) stands by the conception that Lady Macbeth "asserts rigorously her choice and determination through emotionally evocative imagery" and that her "assertion of strength is this actually a deficiency" (pp. 21-22). Richmond further asserts that "Lady Macbeth fails because she distorts her essential femininity by excessive zeal in the world of men's affairs which her own point of view has distorted" (p. 22). Hence, Lady Macbeth's unsexing is based on her emotional understanding of what is manhood and what is womanhood. As she subverts the natural femininity and distorts the natural masculinity, her androgynous nature disempowers her.

Furthermore, her inability to reconcile with her feminine self after assuming masculinity puts her into a psychological conflict which appears in the play in the form of guilt. This notion counts as another possible reason why her androgynous nature disempowers her. Her androgynous self constantly battles with her natural female self. When Macbeth recounts the murder of Duncan and how shocked he was to hear the servants say "Amen", Lady Macbeth's conflict subtly surfaces.

Macbeth: But wherefore could not I
pronounce "Amen"?

I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat

Lady Macbeth: These deeds must not be
thought

After these ways, it will make us mad. (2.2.
31-35)

Here, Lady Macbeth uncannily premonitions her fate. Her feminine guilt shudders her masculine ambition, momentarily collapsing the balance and offering the viewers a fraction of her femininity. Moreover, the sleepwalking scene indicates the

psychological imbalance of Lady Macbeth. She is smitten by guilt and the displacement she feels by assuming the masculine nature. Her foster masculine ambition fails in the end and her attempts at verbal androgyny becomes her ultimate downfall. The Doctor's words, "unnatural deeds/ do breed unnatural troubles" (5.1. 66-70) symbolically emphasise the idea that she has attempted something beyond her natural self and now it is affecting her. Richmond (1973) also points out by comparing Rosalind in *As You Like It* (c.1599) with Lady Macbeth that Rosalind triumphs because, "she, having played both masculine and feminine roles, deliberately chooses to be a woman. In contrast, Lady Macbeth loses all her ways, by intervening inappropriately and by deliberately refusing the worthy role which is natural to her" (p. 22). In fact, Lady Macbeth's androgyny disempowers because she suspends her natural masculine femininity and pulls off an unnatural masculinity.

Consequently, Lady Macbeth's loyalty to Macbeth is overlooked due to her projection of masculinity. Rackin (2005) writes that Lady Macbeth, though she is accounted for regicide, was impelled by her ambition for husband's destiny to become king. Her husband's advancement as the King is her advancement as the Queen. Her motive for de-feminising herself is justifiable given the idea of her wifely duties. She is eager to lie on behalf of Macbeth's hysteria at the dinner table in Act 3, Scene IV. However, the malice she exerts, even though it is more verbal than physical, blinds the viewers to her innate feminine grace.

Shakespeare ensures that the viewers may feel an instantaneous disdain for Lady Macbeth. Her projection as a woman is highly unnatural as the play resonates the idea that to subvert the natural self in order to promote a false self can lead to bitter consequences. Nonetheless, if we are to detach Shakespeare from the play as the writer, Lady Macbeth foregrounds herself as the navigator of her fate. She decides which gender attributes suit

her best. Her free will chooses masculine virtues and snubs femininity. However, in the end, she loses control over her fate, Shakespeare then intervenes and gives her an end which satisfies the Jacobean audience. In the hindsight, it is presumable that androgyny is negatively affecting Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth's ending becomes dubious and fogged. Shakespeare reduces her to a mad woman sleepwalking and quickly relieves the play of her with the message that "the queen, my lord, is dead" (5.4. 17). Her death is not staged and her cause of death is not stated. It is only at the end that Malcolm that expunges the curiosity of the audience by saying that Lady Macbeth is "thought, by self and violent hands took off her life" (5.8. 71-72). Her alleged suicide makes her even more hideous as self-slaughter is considered a sin in the Christian ideology. These existing beliefs perfunctorily establish her as an evil embodiment of a woman.

In addition, she is referred to as "fiend-like queen" by Malcom (5.8. 70). Fiend being a synonym for the Devil paints Lady Macbeth as a demoness. To define a woman as a "fiend", a masculine term in every sense, rips Lady Macbeth of her femininity once again (the first being the one where she "unsex" herself). The definition embodies the binary of masculinity and femininity. The idea that she is a queen resembling the devil hints at her androgyny. As a woman she inhabits two personalities, one of a faithful wife and the other of an evil and ambitious woman, which correspond to her femininity and masculinity respectively.

Throughout the play, Lady Macbeth appears to be a twisted version of Eve propelling Macbeth into biting into his darkest desires. As Macbeth chronicles the "fall" of Macbeth, scholars have drawn parallels between the Biblical fall of man and Macbeth's fall in the play. Biblically, Eve is tempted into eating the forbidden fruit which she in turn persuades Adam to eat. Lady Macbeth likewise fuels the

witches' prophecy by influencing Macbeth's thoughts, thus involuntarily assisting his downfall. In the binary of good vs evil, Lady Macbeth assists the evil. The evil in the play seems to thwart the good. This proves that the binaries in the play are constantly at odds with each other.

3.4 Lady Macbeth's Verbal Castration

As Rackin (1987) has observed before, "the androgyne could also be an object of ridicule or an image of monstrous deformity, of social and physical abnormality. Both these images of the androgyne appear in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, expressing radically different conceptions of human life and society and of dramatic imitation as well" (p. 29). According to this definition, Lady Macbeth's androgyny becomes the image of monstrous deformity as she is deemed to be evil throughout the play.

Moreover, Lady Macbeth with her "unsexing" symbolically castrates herself. Her incantation in Act 1, Scene V, calls the "thick night" to "pall" her so that even her "keen knife see not the wound it makes" (1.5. 42). Her words align with the idea of her verbal castrating of her femininity in order to become a man. In a verbal sense, she severs her womanhood and assumes masculinity. La Belle (1980) notes that when Lady Macbeth calls upon the "spirits" to "Make thick my blood;/Stop up the access and passage to remorse," (1.5. 42-43) she is asking her "periodic flow to stop, the genital tract to be blocked" (p. 382).

Throughout the soliloquy, Lady Macbeth's words form a haunting echo of defeminisation. Above all, the entire scene coincides with evilness, unsettlingly resembling the chant of the witches who are slaughtering livestock and wreaking chaos. Kemp (2010) has noted that "Lady Macbeth's character is implicitly linked with the witches in the play...she mirrors the witches in her attempt to take on a psychological

masculinity and her perversion of the wifely duties of hospitality. She conjures spirits to "unsex" her, to transform her feminine self into manly savagery" (p. 94). She is akin to witches in her androgyny. While the witches have beards that signal their androgynous nature, Lady Macbeth does not own any physical demarcation indicating her androgyny. It is her verbal unsexing that signals her androgyny. Given this likeness to the witches, Lady Macbeth functions as the fourth "weird sister" in the play. As the androgynous witches are regarded as malignant creatures provoking fear and terror, Lady Macbeth's perturbation of her femininity and her apparent masculine cruelty makes her the "image of monstrous deformity".

Her verbal androgyny allows her to take up a masculine nature which enacts violence. In this case, her androgyny is not regarded as transgressive, but rather hideous. Her character does not develop into a moral model, instead she feels displaced within her assumed masculine traits. She loses her psychic balance and ultimately, she takes her own life. By the time she suicides, Shakespeare had made sure that viewers feel no remorse for her. In fact, she loses all her significance after her insomniac sleepwalking. Her question, "the thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?" (5.3. 30) reverberates her dislocation within the play. Therefore, Shakespeare, in giving her a less significant ending, makes her character didactic. According to the Renaissance standards, for a woman to strip her identity and assume a different one is unnatural and heretic. A possible interpretation of Lady Macbeth's character serves as a lesson to women.

To conclude, it is evident that Lady Macbeth, like the play itself, inhabits two spheres of masculinity and femininity. However, instead of balancing the two spheres she ends up disrupting them both. She fails to be a successful androgynous depiction because she only attempts to embrace masculinity,

and that too verbally. It is quite clear that she agonises over her sexual orientation and she feels displaced as she struggles to choose the gender attributes that suit her needs. Therefore, it is evident that androgyny functions as the cause of disempowerment of Lady Macbeth. There is a recognisable negative impact of her androgynous nature that disables her as a character within the play.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

So far, we have perceived how the masculine femininity orientates around Lady Macbeth. Androgyny has appeared to be disrupting the gender hierarchy in the play while displacing her resulting in their disempowerment. Moreover, she tends to destabilise her contemporary gendered norms. The Renaissance oppressive gender paradigms have trapped her into spheres of femininity and masculinity to which she does not necessarily belong. Examining thus far, abiding by the theories and concepts proposed, I seek to substantiate that androgyny becomes the cause of disempowerment of Lady Macbeth. Butler (1999) notes that, "the performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice" (p. xiv). In this case, Lady Macbeth's subversion of her feminine sexuality becomes futile.

Morgan (1982) notes that scholars incline to believe that androgyny is promising and that it makes a human being "complete" and "whole" (Morgan, 1982, p. 46). However, she argues that "what it delivers is a mirage", especially in terms of definition. She argues that "the very idea of androgyny is not a workable one, that it is conceptually tangled and incoherent at a destructively deep level" (p. 246). This statement rings true when it comes to Lady Macbeth. As Secor (1974) writes, to be androgynous is "the capacity of a single person of either sex to embody the full range of human character traits, despite cultural attempts to render some exclusively feminine and some exclusively masculine" (p.

139). But when it comes to Lady Macbeth, her androgyny is tied with the social conceptions of the era, which more or less account for the failure of their androgynous identity.

Lady Macbeth calls upon the "thick night" to "pall" her act of "unsexing" to subvert her femininity, still she does not succeed at her attempted perversion of femininity, nor does she benefit from her assumed masculine qualities. Therefore, the disempowerment of her androgynous nature is distinct through her projection. Furthermore, Macbeth projects feminine grace and masculine ambition. She plays the role of the "honoured hostess" while planning to murder Duncan. Interestingly, her masculinity and her femininity preside together in the scene. However, this coexistence is not healthy for her development. Her feminine grace and masculine ambition collide with one another and result in her displacement.

Lady Macbeth's androgyny is verbal as she embraces masculinity through her words. She does not engage with physical violence on stage, but rather verbally vows to do so. It signifies that her verbal acquisition of masculine characteristics does not offer her the satisfied end. She does not succeed but succumbs to madness and guilt, eventually committing suicide. The fact that her death is not staged but only reported, emphatically brings out that her character is reduced of greatness. It suggests that the unnatural process of her assuming of masculine-femininity has disabled her towards the end.

Androgyny, hence, dissuades Lady Macbeth from the traditional gendered roles, but her placing within the play is not improved. She is regarded as "monstrous" and feels the weight of patriarchy in the form of the negative effects they face within the play. Therefore, instead of empowering, androgyny has disempowered her.

Throughout the research, I have argued against the popular notion which scholars like Heilbrun (1974) has supported, that is,

androgyny is productive and liberates individuals from assigned gender roles. Instead, I have argued that it tends to disempower women in Shakespearean plays, given the constant displacement they feel within the plays. The problem with androgyny, as I presume in this study, is that being both masculine and feminine at the same time contests against the normative gender roles. As individuals are more or less driven by the socially constructed norms, the androgyny does not coincide with the characters' personal growth, resulting in a disempowerment.

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