

LA MUJER DETRÁS DE MACBETH

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RESUMEN

Existe un dicho famoso que expresa “detrás de cada gran hombre hay una gran mujer”. Se cree que esta frase tiene su origen en los movimientos feministas de los años 60 y 70. Sin embargo, es posible llevarla a los tiempos del Renacimiento. Allí, la sociedad isabelina discriminaba a las mujeres por considerarlas el sexo débil no apto para tomar decisiones debido a su naturaleza femenina mientras que los hombres eran el sexo que representaba el coraje y la fortaleza. Si bien el sexo dominante era el masculino, existían algunas mujeres que influían enormemente en sus maridos. Lady Macbeth es un ejemplo de este tipo de mujeres. En la obra *Macbeth* podemos ver cómo Lady Macbeth asume un rol que trasciende su género. El propósito del presente trabajo reside en analizar las diferencias de género y el dominio del patriarcado en *Macbeth* y probar a través de pasajes efrásticos cómo al principio de la obra Macbeth presenta una falta de cualidades que definen su masculinidad mientras que Lady Macbeth las posee. Con el desarrollo de la obra el rol masculino de Macbeth y femenino de Lady Macbeth se restablecen. Se sigue la línea teórica de Webb.

Palabras clave: género- pasajes efrásticos- patriarcado- sociedad isabelina

ABSTRACT

THE WOMAN BEHIND MACBETH

As the old saying goes, “behind every great man there is a great woman”. This phrase is believed to have its origin in the Women’s Movement of the 1960s/70s. However, it can be traced back to the Renaissance. At that time, the Elizabethan society discriminated women since they were the weak sex unable to make choices due to their feminine traits while men were the dominating sex because of their courage and physical strength. There were some women, nevertheless, who exercised great influence on their male counterparts. Lady Macbeth is an example of this type of women. In *Macbeth*, there can be seen how Lady Macbeth’s role transcends her feminine condition. This paper analyses differences in gender roles and patriarchy in *Macbeth* in order to prove by means of ekphrastic passages how at the beginning of the play Macbeth lacks the traits that define manhood while Lady Macbeth displays them. As the plot develops, the male and female roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively are reestablished. The theoretical line of Webb is considered.

The Woman behind Macbeth

As the old saying goes, “behind every great man there is a great woman”. This phrase is believed to have its origin in the Women’s Movement of the 1960s/70s. However, it can be traced back to the Renaissance. At that time, the Elizabethan society discriminated women since they were the weak sex unable to make choices due to their feminine traits while men were the dominating sex because of their courage and physical strength. There were some women, nevertheless, who exercised great influence on their male counterparts. Lady Macbeth is an example of this type of women. In *Macbeth*, there can be seen how Lady Macbeth’s role transcends her feminine condition.

Some critics have given their opinions about the main characters in *Macbeth* regarding patriarchy and gender roles. Nicole Rogers (¶ 1,7) states that it is gender what determines

the role people are going to play in society; “Macbeth’s world is a masculine one in which the compassionate and life-giving elements of the feminine cannot exist ...; it seems everyone, man or woman, must deny any connection to the feminine sphere in order to survive.” Cristina Alfar (2003: 16) writes that “Several scholars claim that the transgressions of gender ... these women [Goneril, Regan, Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra] perform and the reactions of male characters against them serve as evidence for Shakespeare’s own misogyny for his own anxieties about female generations and power...”. In her opinion, “Lady Macbeth’s perceived transgression of the roles of hostess, wife and mother in her support of Macbeth’s desire for power constitutes her evil They become evil by behaving in masculine ways, transgressing orthodox notions of gender and power.” (25) In addition, for Carolyn Asp (1981: 153) “Lady Macbeth consciously attempts to reject her feminine sensibility and adopt a male mentality because she perceives that her society equates feminine qualities with weakness.” According to Shirley Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (1996: 109), “the killing of Duncan makes of Macbeth an emblem not of masculine authority, but of female vulnerability.” They also believe that “Macbeth imagines Lady Macbeth the mother to infants sharing her hardness, born in effect without vulnerability; in effect, he imagines her as male and then reconstitutes himself as the invulnerable male child of such a mother.” (Garner and Sprengnether 1996: 115)

This paper will be based on gender roles and patriarchy and will prove by means of ekphrastic passages the fact that after the witches’ prophecies, Macbeth lacks the traits that define men while Lady Macbeth displays them. As the plot moves on, the roles of Macbeth as being a man and Lady Macbeth as being a woman are reestablished. The theoretical line of Webb is considered.

Regarding plot, Macbeth is an important General of the Scottish King. One day, in the way back from the victory against the Norwegian army, Macbeth and his friend Banquo meet three witches. They foretell Macbeth that he will be thane of Cawdor and then king. They also foretell Banquo that he will be father of many kings. When the first prophecy is fulfilled and Macbeth becomes thane of Cawdor, his desires for the throne arise. Lady Macbeth, his wife, encourages him towards ambition. They murder King Duncan, who is guest at their castle in Inverness, while he is sleeping. The couple blames the king’s guards to whom they also kill. Duncan’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, escape and Macbeth is crowned king. Besides, Macbeth commands to murder Banquo and Macduff’s family. Finally, Lady Macbeth suffers from a mental breakdown and commits suicide and Macbeth dies victim of Macduff’s revenge.

It is important to start by considering ekphrasis. Ruth Webb (2009: p.1-2) mentions in the introduction of her book that ekphrasis is “a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes”. It “makes the listener ‘see’ the subject in their mind’s eye”. In this way, images are built by words in an effort to visualize what is being narrated. Indeed, Shakespeare in his plays exploits this technique literally and emotionally. Consequently, as readers or audience, we are allowed to enter a remote, but visually present gallery of an endless number of characters, places and events.

There are two elements of paramount importance in order to understand the characters’ situation in this play with the support of ekphrasis. One element is the Patriarchal society in which Shakespeare lives and in which the play takes place. Since Patriarchy was thought to be natural and God’s choice, it provides the perspective from which to analyse the play. Patriarchy defines the roles that the characters should have. Those roles consider females to be inferior to males since they are the “weak sex”. Their weakness is not only physical, but also emotional. That is the reason why in the past women were subjected to the care of a man: their father, brother or husband. Generally, the punishment for disobedience was the whipping stool where girls were beaten into submission. Furthermore, Elizabethan women were raised to believe that they were inferior to men. To start with, if they belonged to a wealthy and noble family, they were

sometimes allowed the privilege of an education taught by tutors at home. Besides, they could not attend University. They learnt how to become skilled in all housewifely duties and their education included preparation for marriage. The most important feature if women were married was to be good wives and mothers. In addition, women could not be heirs to their father's titles. All titles passed from father to son or from brother to brother. The only exception was the monarchy -as it was the case of Queen Elizabeth. Moreover, in the case of a wealthy single woman, she could look forward to being mistress of her estates and exceptionally wield the power in the community this would bring (<http://www.elizabethi.org/contents/women>). Consequently, women were raised to be obedient and passive, soft, sensitive, innocent, silent, submissive, affectionate, patient and constant in their work as wives and mothers. They were also doubtful and fearful. Conversely, patriarchy offered more advantages and freedom to men. They were expected to engage in public affairs (as soldiers, politicians, leaders). They were allowed to enter the professions -law, medicine, politics- and make decisions; they led lives which were duty-bound mostly to the state. Besides, a man was considered to be the head of a marriage, and he had the legal right to chastise his wife without being cruel or inflicting body harm. However, it did not mean that the husband was able to command his wife to do anything he pleased. If he did abuse his wife, then he could be prosecuted or prevented from living with her. He was expected to take care of her, make sure she had everything she needed, and most importantly to love her and be a good father to any children they had. There was no divorce and marriage generally lasted as long as the couple both lived. If a couple did want to separate, they needed to obtain an annulment, which, if granted, meant that their marriage had never been lawful –as Henry VIII did (<http://www.william-shakespeare.info>). Consequently, men were raised to be strong, ambitious, wise, risk taking, determined, courageous, rational, emotionally tough, aggressive, self-confident, honorable, trustworthy and independent.

The other key element to delve into is gender and its implications. According to the psychologist Will Meek, gender role is generally defined as a set of attitudes, behaviors, and self-presentation methods ascribed to members of a certain biological sex (<http://www.psychologyofmen.org/male-gender-role>). Therefore, as there are certain ways of acting this implies that there are also certain ways in which not to act and attitudes which should not be held since they are not proper according to gender. In this essay, gender will be considered as a cultural construction of a particular time in history which determines certain attitudes and ways of behaving for individuals so as to be accepted as members of a society. In the same way, it cannot be denied the fact that all cultures have gender roles and each society exerts invisible pressure on its members regarding how to act. All cultures have and have always had expectations on women and men's ways of being, dressing, speaking and thinking. Shakespeare plays with these expectations in order to create a masterpiece.

In *Macbeth*, contrary to society, roles are inverted in the marriage. The play begins by portraying an image of Macbeth as being brave after his victory in the battle against the Norwegians,

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)
 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
 Which smok'd with bloody execution,
 Like Valour's minion carv'd out his passage,
 Till he fac'd the slave;
 Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him
 Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th'chops
 And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (I, ii, 16-23)

It is a Captain who is describing to King Duncan Macbeth's bravery in the battle. It is possible to "see" Macbeth courageously fighting and killing in a violent manner an enemy

with the sword “brandish’d steel” thrusting from the enemy’s guts to his neck without hesitation neither at the beginning of using it, nor at the end. Finally, Macbeth exposes his head on the battlefield.

Nonetheless, the ramification of the feminine trait of fear emerges in Macbeth after the witches’ prophecies. He will experiment doubts, hallucinations and guilt. While doubts and hallucinations are revealed before committing the crime, the feeling of guilt appears once the murder has taken place.

First, Macbeth’s fears are presented in the form of doubts about killing king Duncan. In fact, this proves to be emotionally tough and challenging for him,

I am Thane of Cawdor.
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of man,
 That function is smoother’d in surmise. (I, iii, 132-140)

His words assert himself of his manhood, courage and “Thane of Cawdor” condition. Since men were allowed to go to war, the cruelty of killing and being violent were associated to them, not to women. Nevertheless, he doubts about carrying out the horrible action of killing the King. It seems that he lacks the emotional strength that such a cruel task implies. Owing to the imagery used in the ekphrastic passage, we can see and feel as his hairs stand on end and his heart beats in a different manner. These are the physical effects doubts have in him. Nevertheless, Macbeth can be seen ambitious at some points, as he himself acknowledges that,

I have no spur
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only
 Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself
 And falls on th’other. (I,vii, 25-28)

By the ekphrasis the audience can see a reflective and absorbed Macbeth who is torn between two courses of actions: following his newly born ambition or following his duty as an honourable subject of the king,

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. (I,vii,12-16)

Being a General of the king implies behaving as a noble host and protecting his extraordinary visitor. Hence, he doubts about continuing with the killing. These lingering doubts emphasise his feminine side,

Besides, this Duncan
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, (...) that his virtues
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu’d against
 The deep damnation of his taking-off. (I, vii, 17-20)

These doubts about killing or not derives from both the fact that he is about to commit a crime against an honourable and virtuous human being and from the fear of eternal damnation associated to this kind of act. In fact, murdering a king was considered a sacrilege. Here it can be seen with the “eye of the mind” how Duncan’s virtues are

personified as angels. The audience can “see” angels flying around Macbeth asking him for mercy and compassion. Finally, Macbeth seems to have reached a decision when he affirms: “We will proceed no further in this business” (I, vii, 31). Nevertheless, he is still in doubt since his final decision is not preventing the murder, but carrying it out.

Second, Macbeth’s fears result in hallucinations. Due to the fact that the couple is playing to be God, when the murder approaches Macbeth is delirious,

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. (II, i, 33-35)

The ekphrasis makes the audience engage in Macbeth’s vision of the imminent event. Macbeth emphasises that he sees a dagger and that he feels it to be near. However, he cannot touch it yet. This proximity to the dagger in his vision symbolises the proximity to the crime. The vision makes him uncertain about what is real and what is not. He perceives it could be a “false creation” resulting from his real oppressed brain due to fear,

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling, as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat- oppressed brain? (II, i, 36-39)

This vivid description is powerful enough so as to make the listener see what Macbeth is hallucinating and feel his desperation and confusion. He recognizes that his eyes are playing with him and showing elements that are real only in his imagination. He can see the path he follows towards the scene of the murder. In fact, he sees not only the dagger and the path, but also the blood on its product of deaths,

I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going,
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o’th’other senses,
Or else worth all the rest. –I see thee still;
And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. (II, i, 39-46)

He blames his eyes to be fool, since his other senses are not involved in this vision. He can neither hold the dagger, nor listen to its death sounds as he kills the victims.

Third, Macbeth’s fears take the form of guilt after the murder has been committed. In fact, he considers the murder a sin and fears the consequence of it: eternal damnation. In other words, his guilt springs from the fact that he is unable to conciliate what is real -the murder- from what is possible -eternal damnation. Fear and guilt paralises him. This is the reason why he denies his wife’s request of placing the dagger he used in the killing next to the dead guards and putting some blood on it expressing: “I’ll go no more./ I am afraid to think what I have done/ Look on’t again I dare not” (II, ii, 50-53). Thus, Macbeth is seen as the weak sex since he exhibits an absence of mental courage to overcome the act he has just done. Furthermore, he would like the knocks of the door to wake Duncan up: “To know my deed, ‘twere best not know myself. / Wake Duncan with thy knocking!” (II, ii, 74-75). Indeed, he tries to hide his hands because they are the visible sign of complicity: “What hands are here? Ha! –they pluck out mine eyes!” (II, ii, 59) His mind is playing with him and he cannot prevent these guilty thoughts from recurring.

On the other hand, Lady Macbeth experiments masculine traits. She is determined to make her husband king. She is ambitious, self-confident and has the emotional strength to call evil spirits to take her feminine nature away.

Lady Macbeth has the determination that her husband lacks. She resolves to be the words -tongue- and the brain behind Macbeth to achieve their shared ends. While telling her plans to him, Lady Macbeth demands: “But screw your courage to the sticking place, / And we'll not fail” (I, vii, 60-61). Her determination is in fact a reflection of her strong personality which she employs to brief her husband on her actions and thoughts. At all times she is careful about details. For instance, after the murder she urges Macbeth to wash his hands in order to avoid suspicion: “Go, get some water/ And wash this filthy witness from your hand” (II, ii, 46-47). Apart from commands, she gives him confidence to calm him down assuring that “A little water clears us of this deed; / How easy is it then!” (II, ii, 66-67). What is more, she realises that he is carrying the daggers and exclaims: “Infirm of purpose! / Give me the daggers” (II, ii, 54-55) when Macbeth completely afraid refuses to place them in the scene of the crime. Fortunately, she is there to fill this gap. Besides, when she hears a knocking at the door, she instructs Macbeth in detail what to do due to his conspicuous feminine weakness, displaying the resourcefulness and serenity her husband lacks. Thus, she commands to go to their chambers: “I hear a knocking/ At the south entry. / Retire we to our chamber” (II, ii, 64-65). In addition, she scolds him because she feels he is not completely focused and tells him: “Your constancy hath left you unattended” (II, ii, 68). She continues delivering commands so as not to fail in what she has planned due to Macbeth’s fear and guilt: “Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us,/ And show us to be watchers. Be not lost/ So poorly in your thoughts.” (II, ii, 69-71) Different from Macbeth, it is Lady Macbeth’s determination and concentration on the final objective that makes them successful in the enterprise.

Lady Macbeth is ambitious for the crown as well as fearless and self-confident to manipulate her husband into the killing. In other words, it is the feminine character of the play who is determined to kill, but is unable to act because of the implicit norms ruling the Elizabethan society. Her ambition is implicitly revealed when she expresses: “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be/ What thou art promised” (I, v, 11-12). She wants her husband to be king so as she could be queen, but they manipulate the natural succession of events. She feeds Macbeth’s ambition by telling him the titles he already has and the other he could possess. As a result, her determination, ambition and self-confidence will lead her husband to a fiendish plan which shows the interchange of roles in the couple. However, she explicitly acknowledges his weak nature,

Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be
great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. (I, v. 11-16)

By means of the visual image of milk associated to human kindness she emphasises her husband’s weakness: fears and lack of determination. This ekphrastic image of purity and natural gift is associated to babies, who do not bear malice. Indeed, women are the biological sex that produces milk to feed the newborns. Therefore, she is telling her husband that his nature is the same as women’ nature since he lacks the hatred and malice, “the illness”, to cope with his ambition. Likewise, Lady Macbeth believes that taking the crown, “the golden round”, will require effort and actions of evil nature on their part. At the same time, Lady Macbeth openly admits that her husband has ambition, but he is afraid: “And that which rather thou dost fear to do” (I, v, 20) to act in consequence if his endeavours are contrary to virtue. In other words, Macbeth wants to be king but without altering the natural order of events -playing false-: “What thou wouldst highly, / That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, / And yet wouldst wrongly win” (I, v, 16-18). Moreover, Lady Macbeth while reading a letter from his husband urges him in her

thoughts to come back soon so as she can discharge her words in his ears and fill him with the confidence and courage he lacks,

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round. (I, v, 17-26)

This descriptive passage can be seen by the audience using their 'mind's eye'. It is possible to visually imagine Lady Macbeth whispering to her husband's ear. She is aware of the fact that she is the general in this battle. Moreover, the audience can also 'see' the characters' gestures during this conversation.

Lady Macbeth resorts to evil spirits to transform the remaining of her feminine nature. She considers her body and her husband's feminine fragility as an obstacle she must overcome to become queen. The expression "unsex me" reveals the strength of her wish. In addition, she calls evil spirits to accomplish this desire and take away the feminine qualities she has been born with, but do not want. They are an impediment to the battle she is determined to fight. She proposes to transform her human kindness associated to mothers into coarseness associated to men in order to achieve her purposes. Being a man she could do what she wants without feeling remorse. In this way, gender limits her actions, thoughts and feelings and she wants to get rid of them,

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! Make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse. (I, v, 38-42)

Ekphrasis is the means by which Shakespeare shows the masculine traits of Lady Macbeth. Although she is determined, ambitious and self-confident, she is asking for more malice and coldness since the womanhood present in her body makes her weak. She wants the "milk" of her "breasts" to be turned into "gall". As a matter of fact, she is brave enough so as to deal with "evil ministers" to completely free her of her body and human traits that enslave her. She asks for an entire conversion from woman to man which is explicit and murderous. Needless to say, the audience becomes eyewitness of a 'live' sexual transformation which is built on the basis of the classical models of gender roles,

That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers. (I, v, 42-48)

Lady Macbeth is emotionally tough. Contrary to her husband, she does not shudder even for a second. Behind Macbeth's doubts and remorse, his wife continues utterly resolute making him astoundingly pronounce these words in virtue of the visible lady's manly courage and strength: "Bring forth men-children only!/ For thy undaunted meetle should compose/ Nothing but males" (I, vii, 73-75). Lady Macbeth is not troubled at all. She is the shoulder where Macbeth cries his agitation. "Consider it not so deeply" (II, ii, 30) she commands, "These deeds must not be thought/ After these ways; so, it will make us mad" (II, ii 34-35) and then she inquires: "Why, worthy Thane,/ You do unbend your noble strength, to think/ So brainsickly of things." (II, ii, 43-44) In her opinion, thinking makes

him ill. Consequently, she is constantly encouraging and supporting her husband's lack of confidence being focused on their endeavours to obtain the crown.

As the plot develops, the main characters' roles are restored in a gradual manner. Macbeth recovers his self-confidence. To start with, Macbeth firmly explains to Banquo's murderers how to proceed. Then, Lady Macbeth inquires: "What's to be done?" and Macbeth responds assertively: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till you applaud the deed." (III, ii, 46-47) Macbeth's words express his self-control when he answers to her wife that she would not like to know his plans at that moment, but she will want to celebrate its triumph later. Beyond this answer, now it is Macbeth who asks for the night to come so he can act. This act he refers to involves more secret murders "bloody and invisible hands" to maintain the crown. Nevertheless, he admits that there is a "bond" that "makes him pale" and prevents him from acting freely as he would want,

Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
Which keeps me pale! (III, ii, 46-50)

The visual images of the crow, the wood, the night's black agents and prays symbolize death. These are the "bad things" which come to replace the "good things" associated to the life and brightness of daylight. This obscurity starts to rise in Macbeth's thoughts showing a gradual transition in his character,

Light thickens,
And the crow makes wings to th' rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still,
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill. (III, ii, 46-56)

In spite of thinking this, Macbeth still fears Banquo's ghost. He gains complete self-control after Banquo's ghost second apparition: "Why, so; being gone, / I am a man again" (III, iv, 105-106). In contrast, Lady Macbeth remains firm and stable during these apparitions and Macbeth delineates the fact that she keeps "the natural ruby of our cheeks, / When mine is bland'd with fear" (III, iv, 114-115).

It is not only Macbeth who experiences a transformation in character after the second apparition of Banquo's spirit, but also Lady Macbeth. Her femininity becomes apparent in her feeling of guilt and in her fragility to fight against her mental state in her next appearance on stage after the banquet. Indeed, though she summons evil spirits to completely eradicate her womanhood, she fails in doing so. Thus, even during Duncan's murder Lady Macbeth needs to encourage herself with the wine she uses to get the guards drunk minutes before the murder: "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold/ What hath quench'd them hath given me fire." (II, ii, 1-2) Besides, she is unable to kill the King because he reminds her of her father: "I laid their daggers ready... Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't." (II, ii, 11-13) As a result, this repressed femininity explodes unconsciously in her sleepwalking. It exacerbates and Lady Macbeth is unable to cope with her mind. The wish made to evil spirits to unsex her could only repress, but no eliminate what is feminine in her. The ekphrasis allows the audience/readers to visualize the internal turmoil of Lady Macbeth that comes to the surface as she is in her room accompanied by her nurse and a doctor,

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! –One: two: why then, 'tis time to do 't. –Hell is murky! –
Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier and afeard? –What need we fear who knows it, when none

can call our power to account? –Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (V, i, 31-36)

Lady Macbeth's inability to relinquish the chain of thoughts as they appear in her mind makes her feel guilty and vulnerable to them. These thoughts remind her of the sin she has planned, encouraged and witnessed. She revives the moment previous to the murder, Macbeth's fear, the king's blood and the spots of blood in the couple's hands. The nurse explains the doctor how Lady Macbeth is constantly gesturing as if she is washing her hands. This unconscious mental distress drives her to a conscious act. She commits suicide in an attempt to escape from a reality that is beyond her will.

At the same time, Macbeth becomes determined and confident after ascending to the throne. In virtue of Macduff and Malcolm's rapid advance, he rejects all signs of weakness: "The mind I sway by and the heart I bear, / Shall never sag with doubt, nor shake with fear" (V, iii, 9-10). Furthermore, in front of the doctor Macbeth uses a forthright, brisk and aggressive tone to command him to "throw his physic to the dogs" in case he cannot cure his wife. Moreover, before being given the news of his wife's death, he states that "direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, cannot once start me" (V, v, 14-15). He implicitly confesses that fear was familiar to him in the past, but now he has overcome that mental state. Here the transformation in accordance to his male sex is explicit.

Taking everything into account, conceiving a feminine figure within a broad and noticeable male background entails allotting weakness and inferiority to women. In Shakespearean times, this imbalance between the genres implies an ordinary practice of inequality in society which recognises men almost as omnipotent figures in relation to their female counterparts. Nevertheless, *Macbeth* portrays an inversion of roles which blatantly contravene the implicit cultural rules of the time. It is through ekphrasis that Shakespeare portrays how the couple transgresses the patriarchal system and utilizes the transposition of roles in order to fulfill their aspirations to finally ascend in society according to the accepted gender roles. On the one hand, Macbeth infringes his manhood with a vivid portrait made of fear as his weakness and its repercussions: doubts, hallucinations and guilt. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth deliberately exploits her male essence of determination, ambition, self-confidence and emotional courage and scatters them on everything that represents an obstacle to her plans. In this manner, the inversion of roles and the consequent breach of patriarchy allow to 'see with the mind's eye' a vivid, eloquent and extraordinary play. It is transgression and later restoration of roles the causes that lead Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to their own tragedy. Unfortunately, it is too late for the couple to enjoy the reestablishment of their female and male roles respectively as the Elizabethan tragedy dictates since their own death is the ultimate consequence of their marital enterprise.

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