

Unsex Me Here, Come You Spirits": The Psychological Symbiosis of Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the psychological interaction between Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters or witches in the play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and examines them not as individuals but as a unified embodiment of an ambitious, transgressive and disordered psyche. Using a literary-psychological approach, the research has assumed that the witches serve as an externalization of the suppressed, repressed ambitions and moral struggles of Macbeth and, in a less apparent way, of Lady Macbeth. Whereas Macbeth acts in direct communication with the supernatural, the psychology of Lady Macbeth appropriates the symbolic role of the witches and thus she becomes the human source of demonic persuasion. As the paper will contend, the later mental breakdown of Lady Macbeth, her somnambulism and suicidal actions are a result of the unresolvable nature of the conflict between the agency that she is acting and believes is hardened and her suppressed feminine conscience, a conflict that is initially sparked and reflected by the ambiguous nature of the witches in their oracles. By this examination, the paper sheds light on the main focus of the play, that of the external supernatural powers involved in the interaction with the interior psychological process of corruption of ambition into tyranny and, eventually, destruction of the self.

Keywords: *Lady Macbeth, Weird Sisters, Psychology, Ambition, Guilt, Conscience, Externalization, Somnambulism, Shakespeare, Macbeth.*

Introduction

The tragedy *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (c. 1606) is a classic work in the history of the disastrous crash of ambitions, ethics and the supernatural. The two most powerful elements of literature in the core of this tragedy are the supposedly external, supernatural Weird Sisters and the most internal, psychological rotting of Lady Macbeth. These aspects are commonly analyzed individually, the witches as something that should happen, or should not, and Lady Macbeth as a case of naked ambition and the following regret. A deeper interpretation however indicates the presence of a deep psychological symbiosis. I believe that in this paper I am correct in arguing that the witches and Lady Macbeth can only be viewed as complimentary parts of the same psychological topography, which is mostly the topography of Macbeth, but also the topography of something larger, an anatomy of ambition. The witches become the symbol of the rejection of repressed, forbidden thoughts, and Lady Macbeth is his frightening human desire to do it. Her trajectory, of chilling resolve to abysmal mental ruin, is a story of the psychological effects of a full-blown commitment to this supernatural soliciting. This paper

seeks to analytically break down this connection by theorizing that the psychology of Lady Macbeth is the human laboratory that the abstract prophesies of the witches are molded into tangible and ultimately self-destructive action.

Review of Literature

The academic analysis of the play Macbeth is immense and the readings of the witches and Lady Macbeth have changed over the years.

The Witches: Early Criticism The early criticism was based on theological contexts of the Jacobean period, and tended to see the witches as literal embodiments of Satan, physical demons who executed the will of God or were a test (Curry, 1937). The critics of the mid-twentieth century started to think about their symbolic or psychological functions. Caroline Spurgeon (1935) has observed its extensive impediment of clothes and darkness that the witches introduce in the play, which implies that they are chaos themselves. To many, such as Jan Kott (1964), they are the absurdity of amoral mechanics in a world that does not have sense. Such critics have been especially feminist and psychoanalyticists as Janet Adelman (1987). Adelman sees the witches as the nightmares about female power and maternal evil of Macbeth (and the play, in general), associating them with the scary withholding maternal body.

Lady Macbeth: Lady Macbeth has been seen by many different ways, being called a fiend-like queen (in the words of Malcolm), a portrait of pathological ambition, and a woman of a victim of patriarchal oppression. A.C. Bradley (1904) made his attention on her most compelling will and its break afterwards, making a diagnosis of her case as a moral insanity which succumbs to the agony of a repressed conscience. This was complicated later by feminist readings such as that by Coppelia Kahn (1981) who held that Lady Macbeth was forced to unnaturally subjugate her femininity and motherhood to be a powerful figure in a male military domain (unsex me here). Her insanity is the repressed coming back to her, in this perspective, the repressed feminine conscience she tried to kill. Psychological symbolism of her sleeping scene has been critically examined by critics like Marjorie Garber (2004), who believes that the scene represents a theatrical reenactment of a traumatized subconscious reenactment of the traumatic event.

The Connection: Lady Macbeth and the witches have a certain psychological connection which has been identified but not necessarily made systematic. The work of Adelman plays a central role in this by making them both to be versions of the so-called devouring mother that

threatens the masculine identity of Macbeth. Other researchers, such as D. W. Harding (1969), have proposed that Lady Macbeth assumes the role of the witches as being the tempter of them after they had their first meeting. The paper develops on these observations and presents an argument based on them that the prophecy of the witches is a dynamic, functional process in which the witch's prophecy triggers a psychological process which is then followed up and internalized by Lady Macbeth to disastrous effect.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, literary-psychological methodology, grounded in close textual analysis of Shakespeare's Macbeth. The approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on:

Dramatic Text Analysis: A close reading of key scenes—the witches' prophecies (Act 1, Scenes 1 & 3), Lady Macbeth's soliloquies and persuasion of Macbeth (Act 1, Scene 5 & 7), the murder of Duncan (Act 2), and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (Act 5, Scene 1).

Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism: Utilizing concepts such as repression, the return of the repression, projection, and externalization to understand character motivation and symbolic action. The model is not diagnostic but interpretive, using psychological frameworks as a lens to understand dramatic constructs.

Feminist Literary Theory: Examining the construction of gender, the performance of masculinity and femininity, and the psychological cost of transgressing prescribed gender roles within the patriarchal world of the play.

This methodological fusion allows for an exploration of how Shakespeare dramatizes internal psychological states through external characters and actions, specifically focusing on the functional continuum between the supernatural and the psychological.

Problem

Although, the personalities of the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth are thoroughly discussed, the specifics of the psychological and dramatic interdependence of the two figures are still an uncharted area of interest among scholars. The question that this study faces is the following: How does Shakespeare use the character of Lady Macbeth to personify, perform and ultimately suffer the psychological consequences of the moral and existential turmoil that the Weird Sisters implicitly set in motion? The paper challenges the process of how an external,

supernatural provocation is metamorphosed into an internal, mental struggle and a subsequent act that eventually results in an ultimate psychic breakdown.

Hypothesis

Lady Macbeth is supposedly the psychological vessel and agent of the symbolic power of the witches; her mind absorbs an apolitical, goal-focused weird force, thus compelling her to ensure that she suppresses conscience in the attempt to achieve the prophecy. The resultant psycho-breakdown is the resurgence of the repressed conscience which is the ultimate result of the division that a human mind cannot maintain indefinitely, as espoused by the witches. In turn, her plot development brings to life the psychological destiny of a person, who becomes a complete believer in the worldview of witches.

Variable

Independent Variable: The catalytic effect of the prophecy of the Weird Sisters and the symbolic value of the prophecy, namely, ambition without morality, the conflict of fate and free will and the subsequent chaos.

Dependent Variable: The psychological condition and process of the character of Lady Macbeth, in this case, the linguistic patterns, actions, and the inevitable breakdown of the mind.

Sample

The sample of this study which is a close-reading-based one will be the dramatic text of the play itself, that is, all the scenes and all the lines which involve:

These are the Weird Sisters (Appearances in Acts 1, 3, and 4).

* Lady Macbeth (Key appearances: [1] in the first and second acts, down to her death off-stage in the fifth).

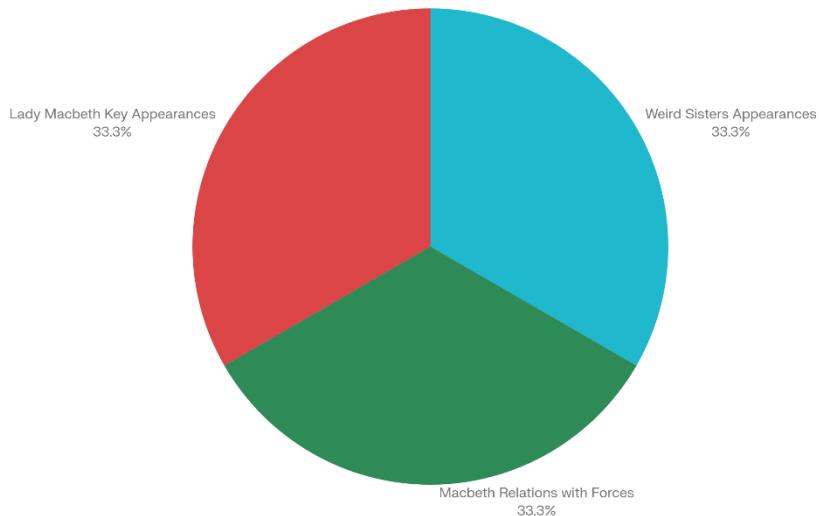
* The relations between Macbeth and these two forces.

The discussion deals with the original language of Shakespeare as given in a standard scholarly edition (e.g., The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series).

Distribution of textual sample in Macbeth close-reading study

Macbeth Textual Sample Distribution

Equal focus on supernatural and human forces



Test Used

Since the study of literature is qualitative and interpretive, no empirical statistical test has been used. Instead, the very procedure of analysis serves as the test: the logical use of the developed methodological system psychoanalytic and feminist criticism on the chosen textual fragment to support or to narrow down the hypothesis. The strength of the argument is measured in its coherence, in the explanatory capacity that it gives the evidence of the play, and in its consistency with overall thematic interests of the play.

Results

The hypothesis is strongly supported by the textual analysis, which presents a clear path in which the psychological progression of Lady Macbeth goes in tandem with the values represented by the witches, and then is destroyed by them.

The Witches as Externalized Thought: The witches appear in the play as types of symbols distorted by fog and filthy air, their speech is full of paradoxical ambiguity- fair is foul, foul is fair. They are the epitome of moral inversion, desire in latency. The prophetic utterance handed over to Macbeth, is not as a deterministic pronouncement but is a psychological trigger, surface-induced release of his hitherto repressed desires, his black and deep ones.

Lady Macbeth as the Human Tempter: When Lady Macbeth reads the letter written by Macbeth, she instantly understands the meaning of what the witches said as a catapult to the

personal promotion. Her invocation of acclaim, Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, is indeed seminal; she does not address the witches as such, but rather addresses them as spirits, which are congruent with them. She is an active attempt to follow in their footsteps of being ruthless, of surpassing gender limits, so that she becomes the domestic channel through which the witches belong to the world of the extreme. She works with accuracy in Act 1, Scene 7 when she asks Macbeth questions about his masculinity and invokes a tangible, homicidal plan on the basis of the intangible, supernatural implication.

The Division of Labor in Evil: At first Lady Macbeth is hard, as the witches symbolize. She not only chastises Macbeth of his dagger-hallucination, but also of his horror after slaying Duncan--these actions must not be thought / After these ways--and within no time, gets the daggers on the field again. She coordinates the short-term, worldly-wise consequences of the murder with chilling effectiveness and this is something Macbeth, a victim of an imaginative horror, is unable to marshal. Her portrayal of the witches seems to have been internalized by her.

The Return of the Repressed: Somnambulism as Undoing: The scene of sleepwalking (Act 5, Scene 1) is the disaster of this internalization. Her unconscious mind also acts unconsciously to do her unconscious work in a state of somnambulistic vulnerability the compulsive washing of the imaginary bloodstains- Out, damned spot!- which is the direct opposite of her conscious denial of guilt. Newly repressed feminine conscience, associated with maternal image, the smell of the blood still, and horror of her crime, Yet who would have thought the old man to have so much blood in him? all reoccur with unstoppable force. Here the split between the ambition and the morale, which the witch's prophecy created, breaks her psyche. The weird pressure required her humanity to be repressed; finally, her humanity required her to be expressed via madness.

Opposition to Macbeth: The course of Macbeth is opposite. He also develops horror on the witch's suggestion to a more profound acceptance of their nihilism as a worldview- existence is but a walking shadow... -and increasingly he seeks them out until he is dependent on their apparitions and falls into a tyranny of despotism. Lady Macbeth, who was seemingly more decisive than she was previously shown, gets later devoured internally by the same moral sense she was trying to ruin. This juxtaposition brings into fore the fact that her psychology was the battlefield on which the supernatural element of the external world clashed with the internal state of the human being, the latter being completely defeated.

Conclusion

The symbolic milieu of Weird Sisters is inextricably mixed up with the psychological path of Lady Macbeth. She is not simply manipulated by them, but also a physical embodiment of their metaphysical auger, making a cold-blooded preference of chaos into a terrifying fact. Her first power, the ability to make herself unsexed and to pour an unremittingly witch-like will, is the root cause of her ultimate illness. Her psychoclinical erosion which is most vividly illustrated in the dissection of her sleep-walking experience is the Shakespearean acute commentary on consciousness, a conscience, especially one permeated with culturally encoded gendered identity, cannot be permanently repressed. It reappears, and in so doing, annihilates the very palimpsest which was trying to cover it up.

Therefore, the psychological ontogeny of Lady Macbeth is the most traumatic empirical issue of the play, as it shows that the path to the so-called weird inevitably leads to not only political but the complete loss of self. The witches in conjunction with her make up a stage of complete tragic apparatus: one proclaims the charm of a moral vacuum, and the other, the psychic price, which is unbearable after residing in such a vacuum.

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