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## Illusion Appearances in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

There is truth to Duncan's line "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," for throughout Shakespeare's play Macbeth, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not what they most often appear to be. Even Macbeth does not know the extent to which Lady Macbeth's "heart is sorely charged" (p.163). To other characters in the play, Lady Macbeth is merely a 'woman'- one who faints at the word 'murder' and cannot withstand the pressures a 'man' can. Macbeth is seen as a butcher, though in actuality he is "a coward in [his] own esteem" (p.41). Macbeth is a man and Lady Macbeth a woman, yet we see that just as "fair is foul, and foul is fair (p.7), Macbeth plays the role of a 'woman', as Lady Macbeth acts as a 'man'.

Lady Macbeth wants to replace every ounce of compassion and kindness with "direst cruelty", hoping that the dismissal of all her gentle virtues will "stop [the] passage to remorse" (p.33). She calls upon the evil spirits to "unsex" her so that she can rid herself of all signs of femininity (p.33). Lady Macbeth commands the "murd'ring ministers" to "make thick [her] blood", hoping that she will be strong enough to show no regret for the murders still to be committed (p.33). She banishes her effeminate qualities- examples of such 'flaws' in character being any mark of weakness, gentility or tenderness. She then asks for them to be replaced with "gall", hatred and cruelty (p.33).

There are discrepancies between what we first hear about Macbeth and what we first observe him to be. Previously, while fighting gallantly in battles for Scotland, Macbeth is regarded as a 'man'- powerful, chivalrous, bold and authoritative. We envision a "brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)" fighting courageously and skillfully "unseaming" the enemy "from [his] navel to [his] chops" (p.9). However our perception of Macbeth, a man for whom "all's too weak" (p.9), soon falter when we see his reaction to the Weïrd sisters. Macbeth is not as strong as we would expect him to be, and even Banquo asks Macbeth "why [he does] start and seem to fear" the witches and their predictions (p.17). Macbeth, like a child, merely stands idly by, as he later admits in a letter to his wife "[He]stood rapt in wonder" (p.31).

Lady Macbeth recognizes her spouse's shortcomings. Macbeth is "not without ambition," but lacks the malevolence needed to achieve his immediate goal (p.31). He "is too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (p.31) while Lady Macbeth almost immediately after saying this calls upon the agents of evil to "take [her] milk for gall." (p.33) The early contrast clearly identifies Macbeth's weaker, kinder nature and his wife's primarily dominant ways.

Lady Macduff criticizes her husband's action of fleeing, "[leaving]his wife, [leaving] his babes, his mansion and his titles [unprotected]" (p.133). He who does this possesses "little wisdom,"

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she says, reinforcing the importance that a man should protect his holdings (p.133). Yet, in more than one situation, it is Lady Macbeth who rescues Macbeth. When Duncan's murdered body is found, Macbeth in his nervousness "[does] kill [Duncan's chamber guards]" then both apologetically and in weak efforts to justify this action, nonsensically rambles on "Repent me of my fury...Who can be wise, amazed, temp'rate, and furious, loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man." (p.69) By pretending to faint, it is Lady Macbeth who cuts short Macbeth's foolish little speech. She takes on a 'man's role' when she saves Macbeth from plunging himself into a deeper state of suspiciousness.

Lady Macbeth chides Macbeth along with ways she knows to be effective. When, an "afraid" Macbeth (p.41) tries to back down from committing Duncan's murder, with pure savageness Lady Macbeth says that she would "dash the brains" of a loving, smiling baby while he "milks [her]", if she had "sworn [just] as [Macbeth] [has sworn] to [commit Duncan's murder]" (p.43). She outright tells Macbeth that even she, a woman, is more manly than he, for while "murder" is not to be "[repeated] in a woman's ear" (p.67) it is she who takes on the responsibility for the deed.

At the point when Macbeth evolves into the man that Lady Macbeth wanted him to be, she becomes the woman that she truly is. In Act 3, Scene 4, Macbeth's transition into 'manhood' as well as Lady Macbeth's transition into 'womanhood' are apparent. Between Macbeth's bouts of hallucinations, Lady Macbeth takes him aside and tries to comfort him. Usually, whereas she would provoke him into defending his manliness, this time she instead reverts back to the more womanly approach of nurturing and soothing her husband. Out of concern, she sincerely asks "Are you a man", figuratively meaning 'are you conscious now?' to which Macbeth stubbornly retorts "Ay, and a bold one" (p.103). By the end of this scene, Lady Macbeth's own guilty conscience and the burden of Macbeth "unmanned in folly" (p.105) seemed to have taken its toll on her "heart so white" (p.59), for the next time we see her, she is proclaimed mentally ill, while "devilish Macbeth" (p.147) has grown into an "abhorred tyrant" (p.183).

Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth denounce certain human qualities that ultimately drive them towards two opposite, unhealthy extremes: What Shakespeare has defined to be stereotypically 'male' and 'female'. "[We must] make our faces vizards to our hearts, disguising what they are" Macbeth advises Lady Macbeth, thinking this is what must be done in order to "gain [their] peace" (p.93). Yet, the suppression of Lady Macbeth's guilt-ridden feelings, as she expresses while she sleepwalks, is ultimately what causes her to have a nervous breakdown and commit suicide. Lady Macbeth is constantly telling Macbeth to "think not" of what they have done. Eventually this causes him to disregard any feeling of remorse that he originally had: He admits that "[they] are yet young in [these evil] deed[s]" (p.109). Macbeth and Lady Macbeth try to hide their guiltiness behind a hardened, protective shell, whereas when Macduff is faced with the challenge of "Disputing [the loss of his family] like a man," he says first that he "must feel it as a

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man" (p.155). If Lady Macbeth and Macbeth would have accepted a balance between 'masculinity' and 'femininity' instead of consciously or unconsciously trying to choose one over the other, then perhaps they would not have lost to human nature and "fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf..." (p. 171)

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