

Lady Macbeth as “a poor player”:
Gender Stereotypes in Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show Lady Macbeth's remarkable dramatic energy in all her performances whether conforming to or deviating from gender stereotypes. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate that Macbeth utilises the player metaphor. It is Macbeth who compares "[l]ife" with "a poor player" (*MC* 5.5.23); however, I hold that the role of "a poor player" can also be attributed to the Lady herself.

The Lady who seeks to deviate from the gender stereotypes performs as an admirable player in *Macbeth* by undertaking several roles. Her dramatic energy actually leads to Macbeth's vision of life as theatre which is presented in the play. We trace how Lady Macbeth seeks to deviate dramatically from gender stereotypes, which leads to a reappraisal of the transitory quality of the player's art and human life.

In section 1, we investigate how the Lady can be regarded from the perspective of the early modern audience. The representation of Lady Macbeth in her soliloquy follows in the tradition of her dramatic precursor, Medea, in a contemporary translation by John Studley, who avows to "unsex" herself while struggling with conscience. The words of the witch Medea who supplicates supernatural substances are mirrored by how the Lady wishes to be unsexed. It follows that the Lady dramatically performs the role of a fourth witch/Medea in her soliloquies from the perspective of the early modern audience.

In section 2, we consider Lady Macbeth as a performer who undertakes various roles in the presence of others. The Lady attempts to deviate from gender stereotypes dramatically in the presence of her husband. It is no exaggeration to say that the Lady performs the part of a brutal woman even though her lethal potential is technically questionable. Furthermore, the Lady is an absolutely skillful player as hostess, Queen, wife or patient. Even though the sleepwalking Lady may not be playing a role consciously, she replays her previous performances involuntarily. The Lady's death leads to Macbeth's vision of life as theatre and the "Tomorrow speech" finally suggests that the Lady will always be "a poor player" which term is not necessarily negative.

To conclude, in *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is an admirable player who embodies "[l]ife" as "a poor player". Her struggles against gender stereotypes are manifested in her performances with recourse to her dramatic precursor,

rhetorical figures and stage conventions; the player Lady utilises gender stereotypes in her consummate performance. The Lady’s dramatic energy as a player links to Macbeth’s “Tomorrow speech” and remains as a presence in her very absence on the stage after she is gone.

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When Lady Macbeth receives the news of the Weird Sisters' prediction about her husband's assuming the throne, she rejects her femininity with great dramatic force, seeming to deviate from gender stereotypes in order to set Macbeth on the throne. The purpose of this paper is to show the Lady's remarkable dramatic energy in all her performances whether conforming to or deviating from gender stereotypes.

In this thesis, we will apply some ideas from gender studies in order to consider how the Lady negotiates gender stereotypes. We will take as our starting point various studies on gender in Shakespeare's works conducted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; Bruce R. Smith focuses on masculinity, which tends to be just a social construction as is femininity, and Janet Adelman considers masculinity and femininity as archetypal forces in *Macbeth*. In regard to Lady Macbeth, many scholars believe that the Lady deviates from gender stereotypes throughout the play. For instance, Jeffery R. Wilson observes as follows: "A good reading of Lady Macbeth suggests...that females might make themselves less traditionally feminine in order to commit crime" (458). Most of the arguments are correct in stating that Lady Macbeth denies her femininity; nevertheless, the point we should attend to more carefully is that the Lady's deviation is not simple but ambiguous.

The Lady's seeking to deviate from gender stereotypes is related to her dramatic energy. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate that Macbeth utilises the player metaphor. For example, David A. Katz considers Shakespearean interiority on the basis of "Theatrum Mundi" using *Macbeth* as an example, and Kristin M.S. Bezio focuses on Macbeth as the player king. Needless to say, it is

Macbeth who compares “[l]ife” with “a poor player” (*MC* 5.5.23); however, I hold that the role of “a poor player” can also be attributed to the Lady herself. Alison Findlay suggests as follows:

[Lady Macbeth] shifts anonymously from a variety of different subject positions as hostess, mistress or lady of the house, Queen of the Scottish court and, finally, patient...Lady Macbeth is described as ‘fiend-like’ (5.9.35) and allies herself with the de-feminized witches or weird sisters by invoking spirits to ‘unsex’ her and fill her ‘from the crown to the toe topful / Of direst cruelty’ (1.5.40-43). (239)

As Findlay acutely points out, the roles of Lady Macbeth frequently change from scene to scene. Interestingly, the more Lady Macbeth tries to be “unsexed”, the more her femininity is revealed as a social construct in the patriarchal society by the male characters and even herself. On the other hand, it is likely that the Lady who seems to both deviate from and conform to the gender stereotypes performs as an admirable player in *Macbeth*, undertaking several roles, such as hostess, Queen, wife or patient. Although it is Macbeth who compares “[l]ife” with “a poor player” (*MC* 5.5.23), it is the Lady who is the most excellent player in *Macbeth*; her dramatic energy actually leads to her husband’s vision of life as theatre. In this paper, I will focus on two points: first, we will begin with situating Lady Macbeth in the tradition of her dramatic precursor. Secondly, we will consider Lady Macbeth as a performer who undertakes various roles in the presence of others. Through an analysis of several utterances, we will trace how Lady Macbeth seeks to deviate dramatically from gender stereotypes, which leads Macbeth to a reappraisal of the transitory quality of the player’s art and human life.

1. The Lady in the tradition of Medea from the perspective of the contemporary audience

Let us begin with the representation of Lady Macbeth in the tradition of Medea: the aim of this section is to consider how the Lady seems to play her precursor's role in her soliloquy from the perspective of the early modern audience. Just after she heard the news of the prediction about her husband's successful promotion, the Lady expresses her wish to be unsexed by utilising rhetorical figures in order to kill Duncan. Through an analysis of the Lady's soliloquies, we will certainly find that she seemingly performs the role of "the fourth witch"/Medea in the light of the early modern audience. In the first place, we will focus on how the Lady soliloquises her real thought according to dramatic convention. In the second place, we will consider how the representation of the Lady overlaps with that of her dramatic precursor.

To begin with, we will focus on how the Lady soliloquises her real thought and aligns herself with the figure of witches. Before we begin our analysis, we must draw attention to the dramatic convention of the soliloquy and its relations with the dramatic theory of "Theatrum Mundi", or "Theatre of the World." Regarding this theory and its contribution to "Shakespearean interiority", Katz suggests as follows: "Simply stated, when Shakespeare's characters demonstrate self-reflection, they often express psychological development or thought through this commonplace" (733). As Katz notes, Shakespeare's characters pour out their true feelings in their soliloquies on the basis of "Theatrum Mundi." In the Lady's soliloquy, we naturally regard her words as a reflection of her interiority.

Let us return to our main subject: after a messenger informs Lady Macbeth that Duncan will visit her house at night, in her soliloquy, the

Lady effectively utilises rhetorical figures which remind the audience of Shakespeare’s witches including the Weird Sisters. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate that the Lady is “the fourth witch”; we are concerned with her witch-like wish to be “unsex[ed]” (*MC* 1.5.41) in rhetorical figures. There are three rhetorical figures that we should pay attention to: supplication, onomatopoesis and repetition. First, the Lady supplicates supernatural substances, “spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts” (*MC* 1.5.40-41) or “murdering ministers” (*MC* 1.5.48), like a witch in her soliloquy. Clark and Mason explain that spirits “[suggest] that kind of spirit Shakespeare embodies in benevolent form in Ariel (*Tem*) who can ‘come with a thought’ (4.1.164) to Prospero” (156n40-41). In *The Tempest*, Ariel is a spirit of good will in service to Prospero who practices witchcraft. In contrast to Prospero who can evoke a white spirit, Lady Macbeth attempts to raise a black spirit. Secondly, Shakespeare’s onomatopoesis highlights the Lady’s ambiguous gender, aligning her with the witches. The word “unsex” which is Shakespeare’s onomatopoesis is defined as “To deprive or divest (a person) of the characteristics, attributes, or qualities traditionally or popularly associated with his or her sex” (“unsex, V.” Def. 1.). As an indication of the method of “unsexing”, she orders the spirit to “take [her] milk for gall” (*MC* 1.5.48). “Gall” has a similar function to “yellow bile [that] makes a man bold, valiant, warlike, rash, ambitious, quarrelsome” (Smith 18). She tries to possess ambition which was regarded as a masculine asset while keeping her woman’s breasts. There is no doubt about her momentum of deviating from the typical image of women at this point of time. According to her use of Shakespeare’s onomatopoesis, her determination seems firm to carry out the killing of a king, and she can be approximated to the Weird

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Sisters whose gender is so ambiguous for Banquo in Act 1 scene 3. Thirdly, it will be clear that the Lady's rhetorical figure of repetition also reminds the audience of the Weird Sisters. Clark and Mason observe very truly as follows: "Like the Witches, the Lady makes a triple invocation" (156n40, 47, 50). What the passage makes clear at once is that the Lady's repetition of "Come" in lines 40, 47 and 50 relates to the Three Witches. The word "repetition" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "Rhetoric [which is t]he use of repeated words or phrases; the effect of this" ("repetition, n." Def. 1.b.). When the Weird Sisters appear in front of Macbeth and Banquo, the witches, three in number, greet Macbeth one after another with the address, "All hail Macbeth" (*MC* 1.3.48), with great impact on Macbeth; the Lady's later repetition of "Come" three times mirrors that of the Three Witches. In this way, the Lady aligns herself as closely to a witch as possible through her dramatic rhetoric.

Let us proceed to consider how the representation of the Lady overlaps with that of her dramatic precursor, Medea, who is also, interestingly, regarded as a witch. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate that Seneca's *Medea* is one of the sources of *Macbeth*, especially in terms of the figure of Lady Macbeth. In Shakespearean times, Seneca's work was one of the teaching materials which children learned Latin in grammar school by. Regarding the contemporary audience's familiarity with Medea, Jonathan Bate suggests as follows:

In processing the gruesome picture of a mother dashing out her baby's brains, rhetorically minded audience members of Shakespeare's original audience would have looked to the classical past for analogies. The obvious one would have been

Medea[.] (46)

As Bate points out, the early modern audience who were familiar with Seneca’s works would have associated the Lady with Medea who kills her children indeed. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that John Studley translated Seneca’s *Medea* into English in 1566; Shakespeare may have read Studley’s translation in writing *Macbeth*. Let us compare Lady Macbeth to Medea through the intermediary of Studley.

It is noteworthy that the Lady’s wish to be unsexed like a witch is based on a traditional dramatic precursor, Medea. In regard to this topic, Bate declares as follows:

For further evidence that the memory of Seneca’s *Medea* was knocking around in Shakespeare’s brain while he was creating the character of Lady Macbeth, one only has to ask: which dark goddess presides over the “unsexing” of both women their rejection of traditional female values? The answer is Hecate. (46)

We see, hinted in this extract from Bate, how both Lady Macbeth and Medea supplicate supernatural substances, notably Hecate to be unsexed. Precisely speaking, Lady Macbeth does not mention Hecate by name. Nor are Hecate’s lines in *Macbeth* presumably written by Shakespeare; however, it is not to be denied that the form of the Lady’s entreaty comes from Seneca’s *Medea* as translated by Studley. Medea actually works her sorcery with the help of supernatural substances including Hecate; there are a number of words uttered by Medea that relate to Hecate. Two examples will be sufficient to show similarities between the Lady and Medea by the intermediary of Hecate. First, Studley translates Medea’s pleading for Hecate in the beginning of the play as follows: “O threefolde shapen Hecate that sendest forth thy light, / Unto thy silent Sacrifice that offered is by night” (1.11-12). Through

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these lines, Medea supplicates Hecate to help her sacrifice her children; her supplicating lines are similar to those in the Lady's "unsex me here" speech on her first appearance. Medea utilises the name of Hecate in order to prepare the sacrifice as a witch. Secondly, Studley's Medea mentions the name of Hecate during the ceremony for sacrifice as follows: "Breath on these venoms Hecate with deadly myght inspyre, / Preserue the touching poulder of my secret couert fyre" (4.235-36). It is obvious that Medea pleads for the services of Hecate with the word "venoms", that is to say, poison which is a tool of witches. In *Macbeth*, the Lady sometimes utilises words regarding poison. For instance, in the Lady's soliloquy, she declares she will "pour [her] spirits in [Macbeth's] ear" (*MC* 1.5.26); Clark and Mason notes that "The introduction of substances into the ear is often associated with poison in plays of this period" (155n26). It is not to be denied that the words of Lady Macbeth overlap with Medea's reference to poison as a tool. We may say that the words of the witch Medea are mirrored in the Lady's wishes to be unsexed.

Lady Macbeth and Studley's Medea are also sufficiently similar in terms of their struggle between wickedness and conscience. In regard to the point that Studley emphasises Medea's wickedness, Inga-Stina Ewbank states as follows:

[I]n terms of tragic emotion the play centres on an obsessed woman perverting her woman's nature in order to do the most unnatural of all deeds, kill her own children--though pity, in the shape of her babes, stands literally before her....Studley constantly 'places' her by the word 'wicked'; without any foundation at all in the original he will sometimes make her speak of her 'wicked will'; and in the struggle between her

womanly pity and her desire to kill her children in revenge, he translates Seneca’s lines...into a morality struggle between vice and virtue[.] (86)

As Ewbank notes, especially in Studley’s translation, the morality struggle between vice and virtue becomes evident. We noted earlier that Medea displays her wickedness with the help of Hecate. Studley continually utilises the word “wicked” which makes Medea out to be a wicked witch. I would like to emphasise that Medea’s “wicked will” also paradoxically highlights the workings of her conscience. She finally succeeds in murdering her children in the presence of their father confidently but struggles with her conscience until just before the sacrifice. Medea’s struggle between conscience and wickedness stands out on the basis of her public image of being a witch in the Elizabethan Era. It is interesting to note that the morality struggle is also observed in *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth declares that she does not hesitate to commit a crime before Duncan’s murder; however, she gradually suffers from a guilty conscience after the night of the murder. Although the two women reach different conclusions, their respective struggles between wickedness and conscience reflect human nature. Thus, the representation of Medea is also mirrored by that of the Lady in terms of conscience. It could be said that the Lady takes over Medea’s twofold roles, displaying wickedness and struggling with conscience.

We arrive at the conclusion that the representation of the Lady in her soliloquy follows in the tradition of her dramatic precursor who avows to “unsex” herself as a witch while struggling with conscience. It follows that the Lady dramatically acts an unsexed woman as if she herself were a fourth witch/Medea in her soliloquies from the perspective of the early modern audience.

2. The Lady's various roles as "a poor player" (*MC 5.5.23*)

Let us turn to the representation of Lady Macbeth who undertakes various roles in the presence of others: this section is intended as an investigation of how the Lady's performances lead to a vision of life as theatre which is presented in the play. As we have seen, throughout her soliloquies, the Lady tries to deviate from gender stereotypes in the tradition of her dramatic precursor; we can also see her deviation by her acting stereotypes in the presence of others. In this section, in the first place, we will focus on the representation of the Lady who attempts to deviate from gender stereotypes in the presence of her husband. In the second place, we will consider how the Lady is an absolutely skillful player.

Let us begin with the representation of the Lady who attempts to deviate from gender stereotypes dramatically in the presence of her husband. In Act 1 scene 7, on the night of the murder, Lady Macbeth seems to succeed in her deviation from stereotypes of ideal women as follows:

LADY. I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked the nipple from his boneless gums,
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
 As you have done to this. (*MC 1.7.54-59*)

It is obvious that we could recognise the far-from-maternal determination of Lady Macbeth. The Lady metaphorically abandons her babe to show her husband that she possesses the daring to commit a heinous crime.

We must draw attention to two points: first, she utilises the allusion to rejecting her child who expects mother's milk in order to negate her

maternity. The verb “milk” means “to obtain milk from (a mammal) by sucking” (“milk, v.” Def. 1.c.) in this situation. Lady Macbeth suggests the babe seems so active that he or she gets nutrition voluntarily. According to the Lady, the babe regards “the mother” as if she were just a milk cow, whereas she has no intention of bringing it up. It may be relevant to observe that, in those days, “[Scottish noblewomen] gave [their own children] sucke themselves” (Bullough 506), contrary to early modern British practice. Also, the fact that “motherhood was socially and historically constructed... [and] a job” (Mendelson and Crawford 148) proves that she is attempting to deny what would have been considered a stereotypical job in those days. Her far-from-maternal behaviour is not real; however, it is rooted in the historical contexts which give persuasiveness to those metaphors and prevent them from becoming just a fiction. Also, as we have already seen, it is important to note that the Lady follows her theatrical precursor, a mother who commits infanticide, Medea. In Seneca’s *Medea*, as I have mentioned in section 1, the protagonist actually murders her sons in the presence of their father. In these lines, the Lady performs the part of a woman who deviates from the stereotypes of the ideal mother effectively in front of Macbeth with the help of a dramatic precursor. The Lady’s far-from-maternal determination appears dramatically and disappears instantly; in this way, she plays a role of a woman who rejects her baby in the presence of Macbeth.

Secondly, let us focus on the phrase “dash[ing] the brains out” which is a ghastly description which Shakespeare uses in several plays; in *Macbeth*, the Lady metaphorically performs the part of mother who commits infanticide with the dramatic phrase. For instance, in *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes suspects that his wife has an affair and declares

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he will murder the illegitimate child who is his own child in reality as follows: “The bastard brains with these my proper hands / Shall I dash out” (*WT* 2.3.167-68). Through these lines, the child Perdita’s brains are metaphorically dashed out as the unnamed child in *Macbeth* is. Also, we see the same description in *Romeo and Juliet*. Just before Juliet drinks the liquid which makes her asphyxiated, she is afraid she will “dash out [her] desperate brains” (*RJ* 4.3.55) when she wakes up at the grave. In these plays, “dashing the brains out” is regarded as the action of a mentally disturbed person. In *Macbeth*, it is clear that Lady Macbeth attempts to work herself up into an “unsexed” condition. In fact, nobody “dashes the brains out” in the Shakespearean plays; however, it is an effective phrase to indicate the speakers’ extreme mental state. How the Lady represents the image of mother and child goes against social norms. Those metaphors give us a heartless and far-from-maternal impression of Lady Macbeth. It is no exaggeration to say that the Lady performs the part of a brutal woman even though her lethal potential is technically questionable.

This brings us to the second point: the Lady is an absolutely skillful player. She performs several roles in the presence of others at different situations. There are three examples which prove the Lady’s dramatic energy: first, Lady Macbeth plays a role of gallant hostess in the presence of Duncan and the others. Just after the husband and wife discuss the killing of a king, Lady Macbeth succeeds in inviting Duncan to her home as a “fair and noble hostess” (*MC* 1.6.24). She welcomes Duncan as follows:

LADY. All our service,
 In every point twice done, and then done double,
 Were poor and single business[.] (*MC* 1.6.14-16)

According to these lines, Lady Macbeth seems to admire Duncan passionately. She shows the king hospitality as his “servant” (*MC* 1.6.25); nonetheless, she beguiles him in fact. This is what Clark and Mason have to say on the matter: “Although this is a public language of conventional politeness, in the context more private languages are recalled: ‘service’ and ‘business’ are reminders of the euphemisms exchanged between the [Macbeths]” (59). What the passage makes clear at once is that Lady Macbeth speaks with a forked tongue in front of Duncan. It is important to note that the terms “service” and “business” include the meaning of Duncan’s murder behind his back in a theatrical manner. Viewed from this kind of behaviour in public, Lady Macbeth is capable of behaving like an ideal woman and seems to blend in with the others in the patriarchal society by her acting skill. Moreover, the Lady performs the part of a hostess in the presence of the other male characters by using her entity as woman to her advantage. We shall look at an important instance of this below. After Duncan is found dead, although the Lady intentionally asks the men what has happened in their house, Macduff does not tell her the manner as follows:

MACDUFF. ‘Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:

The representation in a woman’s ear

Would murder as it fell. (*MC* 2.3.85-87)

What is immediately apparent in this quotation is that Macduff does not inform Lady Macbeth about Duncan’s death because the Lady tricks Macduff into thinking that she is a stereotyped frail woman. In addition, the Lady makes a gesture as if she were a “feminine” woman who is vulnerable to the news by crying out, “Help me hence, ho” (*MC* 2.3.119). It is not to be denied that she seems a stereotyped woman who is helpless against violence. Regarding her cry, Clark and Mason explain

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that interpretations are divided on whether the stage direction for Lady's action is "Faints" or "Seeming to faint" (195n119); I construe her direction as "Seeming to faint" on the grounds of her technical performances throughout the play. She performs a typical image of a feeble wife, acting as if she were a woman who is vulnerable to the shocking news of Duncan's death. Hearing her voice, Macduff asks someone to "Look to the Lady" (*MC* 2.3.120). We noted earlier that he regards women as too frail to bear listening to the horrible story; it seems reasonable to suppose that the Lady intentionally plays the role of a frail woman whom the male characters in *Macbeth* form a picture of. Although it seems to go against her intention to reject femininity for Lady Macbeth to be confined in the stereotype of a frail woman, the point I wish to emphasise is that she actually puts on an act and pretends to be an ideal woman in public for herself. In this way, Lady Macbeth makes use of her position as a woman or a wife and pretends to be a gracious hostess who has nothing to do with the murder.

Secondly, the Lady undertakes the role of Queen who manages the banquet. In the banquet scene, Lady Macbeth performs an important role of supporting King Macbeth and giving clear instructions to guests as Queen while she desperately disguises the sin of her husband who is frightened by Banquo's ghost. In the beginning of the banquet, the Lady already shows her role as a Queen who is the staunch supporter of King Macbeth, inviting her "royal lord" to "give the cheer" (*MC* 3.4.30-31). Although she does not know of Banquo's murder by her husband, she fulfils the role of Queen while Macbeth is anxious about the failure of Fleance's murder. After Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, the Lady reminds her "worthy lord" that his "noble friends do lack [him]" (*MC* 3.4.81-82). In this scene, the Lady shows her support as Queen to the guests in a

polite manner while she pulls Macbeth back from his vision of the ghost in fact. It is possible that they regard the Lady as displaying a queen-like attitude. Furthermore, when the guests notice something unusual about Macbeth’s attitude, the Lady smoothly explains his panic to the guests as chronic disease as follows:

LADY. Sit, worthy friends; my lord is often thus,
 And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat,
 The fit is momentary; upon a thought
 He will again be well. (*MC* 3.4.50-53)

What the passage makes clear at once is that the Lady instantaneously urges the guests to keep sitting as Queen. Although Lady Macbeth sees her husband’s panic in the presence of others for the first time in the banquet scene, she continues to offer hospitality to the guests with a specious tale; the mention of a fit “from his youth” may be an absolute falsehood but sounds true. After Banquo’s ghost reappears in the presence of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth explains his mental situation “as a thing of custom” (*MC* 3.4.95) one more time and pretends to be apprehensive for the guests as follows: “’tis no other, / Only it spoils the pleasure of the time” (*MC* 3.4.95-96). Throughout these lines, Lady Macbeth does not only make it appear as if Macbeth’s bad condition is just a custom but also pretends to be attentive to the guests in her capacity as a Queen who organises the banquet. The Lady finally tells guests to “Stand not upon the order of [their] going / But go at once” (*MC* 3.4.117-78). As Clark and Mason suggest that “The Lady’s urgency to be rid of her guests as quickly as possible contrasts with the formality at the beginning of the scene” (226n117), the Lady’s hospitable behaviour seems not to be accomplished perfectly; however, she succeeds in preventing guests from seeing her husband’s additional bout of insanity

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at once. From this viewpoint one may say that the Lady shows the guests that she assists King Macbeth and does a magnificent job as Queen while she conceals their murder singlehandedly, without the help of her useless husband.

Thirdly, Lady Macbeth seems to perform the part of patient in the confines of the castle before a smaller audience. The Lady as patient sets aside her previous roles and pours out her true feelings in the presence of the stage audience, the Doctor and the Gentlewoman. Even though the sleeping Lady may not be playing a role consciously, she seems to perform the role of a patient who replays her previous actions or feelings involuntarily.

There are two examples of the Lady's reflecting on her past: first, the sleepwalking Lady is frightened of her bloody sin of Duncan's murder. The following serves as an example: "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (*MC* 5.1.50-51). Before her sleepwalking, the Lady did not show her fear of blood clearly; however, we can realise Lady Macbeth hid her feeling in the presence of her husband in fact. It is interesting that those lines referring to bloody hands are a repetition of Macbeth's lines in Act 2 scene 2 (Sakamoto 22): "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (*MC* 2.2.61-62). Lady Macbeth attempts to lead her husband to eradicate his fear by replying that "My hands are of your colour, but I shame / To wear a heart so white" (*MC* 2.2.65-66); nevertheless, she has practically worn a white heart as Macbeth has done. Before Lady Macbeth speaks in Act 5 scene 1, the gentlewoman who witnesses her performance as stage audience explains the Lady's gesture of washing her hands as follows: "It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands" (*MC* 5.1.28-29). The

sleepwalking Lady replays her wish to wipe away a bloody sin which mentally taxes her by her gesture of washing her hands. It could be said that the repetition of trying to clean bloody hands including the actions reported by the Gentlewoman theatrically proves to the stage audience that the Lady has acted a fearless wife in the presence of Macbeth. In addition, with the adjective “little”, the sleepwalking Lady plays a woman who becomes frailer than her husband and dramatises both her physical and psychological femininity. Needless to say, the image of the “little hand” can be associated with the hands of women of high rank. It is clear that Lady Macbeth’s femininity and guilty conscience never vanish even though she has declared that she has abandoned her sex for the murder. The Lady tries to use luxuries from Arabia to remove “the smell of the blood.” After these lines, the Gentlewoman remarks that she “would not have such a heart in [her] bosom, for the dignity of the whole body” (*MC* 5.1.55-56). The Gentlewoman feels that, despite her mistress’s elevated rank, she does not envy Lady Macbeth who cannot get rid of her guilt even with the help of the perfumes of Arabia. Through the Lady’s lines regarding bloody hands, it is clear that the sleepwalking Lady replays her previous fear of a bloody sin which she did not exhibit in the presence of others.

Secondly, the Lady instinctively replays her performance as a director for her husband while she is sleepwalking. Here is an example: the Lady tries to make her husband “Wash [his] hands, [and] put on [his] nightgown” (*MC* 5.1.62) in reminiscence. It reminds the audience of the scene in which Lady Macbeth makes her husband “wash this filthy witness from [his] hand” (*MC* 2.2.48) and “Get on [his] nightgown” (*MC* 2.2.71) after he murdered Duncan; there are instances of dramatic repetition as I have mentioned before. In regard to “washing hands”, the

Lady acutely makes Macbeth and herself do so; we have considered this theme before. Regarding the effect of utilising the “nightgown”, Clark and Mason observe that a nightgown is “a dressing-gown, rather than a garment worn in bed; a garment suggesting privacy and informality” (184n71); in *Macbeth*, the “nightgown” is originally a piece of stage property which enables Macbeth to pretend as if nothing untoward was happening. Considering the sense of “nightgown”, the word seems to offer the sleepwalking Lady some security by covering her sin; however, the nightgown is identified as “a traditional Renaissance icon of human mortality” with reference to contemporary emblem books (Clark and Mason 270n5). What the passage makes clear at once is that “nightgown” is an ambiguous wrapping that links to both security and death. Lady Macbeth, as we have seen, makes her husband get on his nightgown in Act 2 scene 2; the “icon of human mortality” has already been used onstage before the Macbeths’ death. Some members of the audience in Shakespearean times must have connected this image of death with Duncan’s murder in Act 2, the Lady’s death by mental causes in Act 5 scene 5 and Macbeth’s death in battle in Act 5 scene 8. The Lady accidentally utilises an icon of death while she attempts to forget it. It must be noted that the sleepwalking Lady utilises the nightgown herself: the Gentlewoman reports that she has observed Lady Macbeth “throw[ing] her nightgown upon her” (*MC* 5.1.5-6) in her role as the stage audience. Through the repetition of the lines, “Get on your nightgown” (*MC* 2.2.71), and “put on your nightgown” (*MC* 5.1.62), her own actions and those of Macbeth are mixed up theatrically in her thought. Originally, the nightgown has an effect on Macbeth’s saving appearances for the Lady; nonetheless, in this scene, the Lady actually throws her nightgown upon her on purpose to conceal the crime and

pretends to unwind though her nightgown seems to represent her own death in the near future. Shakespeare presumably assumed that the Lady actually throws her nightgown upon her before her appearance on stage; the audience visually receive the impression that she attempts to protect herself against her own fear of sin. Through the Lady’s lines, the repetition of “nightgown” fulfils a theatrical role as a stage property for her as she not only performs the role of a director for Macbeth but also pretends as if it were nothing while death is approaching her. In this way, Lady Macbeth instinctively performs the part of a patient who replays her past actions or feelings in the presence of the stage audience.

In the Lady’s sleepwalking scene, we notice that she is a player even when she is unconscious; it cannot be emphasised too strongly that her dramatic energy seems to be passed on to Macbeth even after she dies. Here, we must draw attention to the idea of “a poor player.” Just after receiving a report of the Lady’s death, Macbeth pours out his life’s hollowness as follows:

MACBETH. Out, out, brief candle,
 Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. (*MC* 5.5.22-25)

Through these lines, Macbeth compares life with “a poor player.” Those lines seem to be irrelevant to Lady Macbeth; however, it could be considered that the Lady’s dramatic energy manifested for the last time in the sleepwalking scene provides a trigger to Macbeth’s theatrical lines. Regarding this point is Bate’s following lines:

It is the walking shadow of the hollowed-out Lady Macbeth that leads Macbeth to meditate on life as a “poor player” (which is to say a shadow), strutting and fretting his hour on the stage, full

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of sound and fury (like an old-fashioned Senecan ghost), signifying not revenge but “nothing.” One day we will all be shadows. (251)

What the passage makes clear at once is that the Lady finally becomes “a walking shadow” who is wandering the stage beside Macbeth as if she were still sleepwalking. The “Tomorrow speech” seems to be driven by news of the Lady’s death; Macbeth comments as follows: “She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word” (*MC* 5.5.16-17). It should be noted that Macbeth mentions the Lady’s death just before the lines, “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” (*MC* 5.5.18). Regarding the lines above, opinions differ between whether the word “should” means “certainly would” or “ought.” Although it cannot be discussed here for lack of space, in either case, we may say that the Lady’s death leads to Macbeth’s vision of life as theatre.

Considering the Lady as leading her husband to a vision of life as theatre, we reach the other possibility: Lady Macbeth is also “a poor player.” For the sake of proving this theory, we should consider the question: is “a poor player” really just a hollow one? There are two points we should consider: first, the word “poor” does not only signify the negative figure of the Lady as a player. It is possible that “‘Poor’ may, but need not, mean ‘bad’” (Clark and Mason 288n23). Interestingly, the word “poor” is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “That [which] provokes sympathy, or compassion; that is to be pitied; unfortunate, wretched, hapless” (“poor, adj.” Def. 5.); it is obvious that “a poor player” may provoke the audience to feel compassion. The word “poor” means “to be pitied” but simultaneously reflects the essentiality of human life with which the audience empathises. Seeing the Lady’s performances in several roles, especially that of a patient, actually, we may sympathise

with her. Secondly, it is obvious that Lady Macbeth undertakes several roles mobilely as a player. Concerning Shakespeare’s characters based on “Theatrum Mundi”, Kosuge Hayato importantly declares that “Theatrum Mundi” provides two different views of life in Shakespeare’s works (105). One is that we are players who are directed by God and finally fade into nothingness. The other is that by playing roles we can acquire some mobility and live unfettered lives. It is not to be denied that the former applies to Macbeth’s idea of life. On the other hand, considering the Lady as a player, I would suggest that her performing roles show her mobility, although in historical drama women ordinarily do not have a strong presence. The Lady’s dramatic energy as a player remains in a disembodied form on the stage precisely because Lady Macbeth disappears after her breathtaking performance as a sleepwalker. In regard to this point, let us now attempt to extend the observation by referring to Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Jaques pours out his anxiety regarding this world with the metaphorical theory as follows: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (AYL 2.7.142-143). Through these lines, we may say that Jaques compares all the men and women with players who only act their parts on the stage. It is said that both Jaques’ lines and Macbeth’s “Tomorrow speech” are based on the idea of “Theatrum Mundi.” Bate considers Jaques’ expression “merely players” as follows: “In Shakespearean usage, *merely* doesn’t only mean *only*: it also means *absolutely, entirely, and without qualification*” (250). As Bate suggests, it is not to be denied that Jaques compares “all the men and women” with “merely players” or players without qualification. It is noteworthy that the image of “merely players” in *As You Like It* is aligned with that of the “poor player” in *Macbeth*. We could see the Lady’s mobile playing

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which make the audience feel compassion, as I have mentioned before, or entertained by her dramatic technique. One can safely state that the idea of “Theatrum Mundi” shows not only the Lady’s hollowness of life but also her mobility as a performer. It may safely be assumed that the Lady’s dramatic energy links to Macbeth’s “Tomorrow speech” and his speech finally proves that not only himself but also the Lady will always be “a poor player”, which is not a necessarily negative term.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the Lady performs various roles in the presence of others; her dramatic energy influences Macbeth’s vision of life. In the presence of Duncan and the other men, Lady Macbeth acts the part of hostess or Queen with consummate skill in order to hide the Macbeths’ sin. Furthermore, in the presence of the stage audience, Lady Macbeth alternately plays several roles with some repetitions. Those lines of Lady Macbeth absolutely prove that she always gives a performance in the presence of others that manifests her dramatic energy. The Lady’s theatrical performances are naturally linked with Macbeth’s “Tomorrow speech” which is based on a traditional dramatic idea and prove that whether she seems to conform to or deviate from gender stereotypes, Lady Macbeth skillfully performs different roles as a player.

It should be concluded, from what has been said above, that we could find that Lady Macbeth is an admirable player who embodies “[l]ife” as “a poor player.” While the Lady plays several roles, she sometimes seems to deviate from the gender stereotypes and sometimes seems to conform to them. On the other hand, her struggles against gender stereotypes are manifested in her performances with recourse to her dramatic precursor, rhetorical figures and stage conventions; the player

Lady utilises gender stereotypes in her performance. Even when the sleepwalking Lady is unconscious, she seems to perform the part of a patient who replays her role as a director for her husband or her fear of a bloody sin; it is clear that acting several parts leads to constructing the interiority of the Lady. The Lady’s dramatic energy as a player links to Macbeth’s “Tomorrow speech” and remains as a presence in her very absence on the stage after she is gone.

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