

"Feel it as a man..."
HUMANITY AND ETHICAL CONFLICTS RELATED TO
GENDER ROLES IN *MACBETH*

by
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A THESIS

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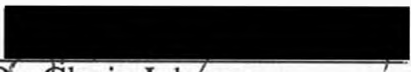
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Shakespeare's *Macbeth* presents examples of how attention to gender stereotypes prove to be detrimental to the Macbeths, and in turn to their society. The Elizabethan view of Nature does not endorse such extremes of action as those in which the Macbeths take part. By ignoring their natural, human roles in favor of artificial ones, the Macbeths rationalize their unethical acts. Dichotomies between masculinity and femininity, action and emotion, physicality and spirituality, and public and private spheres abound in *Macbeth*; all serve to elucidate that which detracts from the human. One can be humane only after he has identified himself closely with a respect for personal integrity and humanity; attention to gender expectations makes such self-definition difficult. On a spiritual level, polarities of humanity caused by extremes of masculinity and femininity divide the human community. The tragedy of *Macbeth* comes about because of the protagonists' failure to value human goals and because they pursue their worldly goals through the denial of an ungendered humanity.

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Preface

I began this project with some confusion and trepidation concerning authorial intent. How can anyone say what Shakespeare was saying? Well, no one can. Shakespeare does not give answers in his works; their richness and timelessness lie in the fact that they are ambiguous and paradoxical. Though we cannot absolutely define Shakespeare's intent, we can approach a work through a thematic reading of it and thereby glean meaning from the ambiguities inherent in the text. The allure of Shakespeare lies in that he raises questions which are subject to a variety of interpretations; this we know.

So, at the same time that I acknowledge that my answers can be no more right than the next critic's, I assert that they are valid. I believe in the reader-response approach to criticism; the value of any work is to be recognized in the potential range of its interpretations by different readers. When recognizing this, one might say there is a quantitative measure of a work's value; if the work provides only one avenue for interpretation there is really no need to examine it, or opportunity for literary discourse about it. Individuals bring different life experiences to their reading of a work; these experiences are sure to affect their interpretations, as well as the effect the work has on them as individuals and its ability to teach them about themselves. So, though I would not suggest that my interpretation is the only one, it is, however, (obviously) the most obvious to me. This paper represents how *this* reader responds to *Macbeth*.

Finally secure in my theory of literary criticism, I attacked *Macbeth*. I was pleased with my formulations. Then I came to the criticism; how could so many of

them have my ideas if we were all individuals doing our own readings? I was impressed with their eloquence and despaired of doing as well. Was my work worth anything by comparison and in light of what had already been said? So many critics said the same things differently; some communicated their ideas to *me* more effectively than others. Perhaps my writing will reach another. I also realized that of the critics I cited, I agree with none completely (except Kimbrough), yet all of them express many of my same mini-epiphanies in their essays. This simply reinforces my reader-response approach; we reached our conclusions independently, and we could not all be wrong. There *are* truths for individuals to be found in literature. Criticizing it is not a futile exercise, because together we identify truths; critics, using a reader-response approach, will come severally to common ground if there is any validity at all in that reading of the work.

Perhaps some reader will respond to this essay, but if none does, all is not lost. When I began this study, I would have thought that *Macbeth* has very little to do with me. I would have been wrong. I have learned an immeasurable amount about myself in interpreting *Macbeth* and writing this thesis. In analyzing this work I found out what I think. Catching a glimpse of my interior has been like solving a mystery, an adventure which I plan to continue and which I am fortunate not to have missed.

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Introduction

Tragedy as a genre presents a study in problems of humanity - potential greatness gone awry. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is true to tragic form in this way, but the play provokes thought about more than just the downfall of Macbeth himself. *Macbeth* tells us about disfunctions of human society while at the same time presenting an ideal of humanity. The human struggle in which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are engaged, and their subsequent demise, represent their failed attempts to reconcile their humanity with their definitions of themselves. We all have goals and ambitions for our futures, but those goals must be tempered by respect for our fellow humans and by what we feel to be right; the Macbeths are lost because they are unable to accommodate their material, worldly goals with their spiritual needs to be human.

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth fail to define themselves with any respect to personal integrity. The instinct to do so is there, but the temptation to ignore that instinct in favor of more artificially social, less spiritually venerated goals seduces them. Social ideals of gender stereotypes and material success are not only artificial constructs, they are inimical to the social goals of creating and maintaining an ethically harmonious society. Much of the impetus for the Macbeths' crimes is attributable to their respect for masculinity; in the masculine world, a man's strength is measured in direct proportion to the extent to which he can divorce his actions from his emotions. That is to say that the attainment of their material goals required the Macbeths to be cold-hearted; it dehumanized them. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth succeed in subordinating their feelings for the advancement of

their goals, and they erroneously expect that such subordination will come without personal cost to them, if only they can continue on their inhuman course, valuing action before emotion. It is natural, and most human, for one to synthesize the physical actions associated with masculinity and the spiritual emotions associated with femininity into an integrated whole. *Macbeth* presents not only the warped values of the Macbeths, but also a more holistic approach to self-definition, embodied by Macduff and, to a lesser extent, by Malcolm and Duncan.

The existence of a dichotomy between camps of good and evil is apparent in *Macbeth*; the dynamics of that dichotomy, however, are not so easily identified. *Macbeth* points to polarities of humanity which have been effected, at least in part, by inordinate and thus unnatural attention to gender stereotypes. The evidence in the text for this thesis is abundant and is provided mostly by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. But the flip-side of the thesis is that there is an essential humanity which lies beneath stereotypes; the stereotypes work to pervert the essence, to break it apart and polarize it to the detriment of the human community. Macduff, Malcolm and Duncan are characters who, by example, buoy the human community by rejecting gender stereotypes as fully as possible while still functioning as men in their society.

CHAPTER I

Humanity in Nature

Shakespeare presents nature and a natural order in *Macbeth* which exist in support of humanity. We see this in direct references to what is "natural," as well as in the physical upheavals of nature which attend disruptions of natural order with regard to humanity. One theme of natural order in *Macbeth* is that of procreation. Early in the play Banquo observes "the temple-haunting martlet" that nests on Macbeth's castle: "No jutting, frieze, / Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but the bird / Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle." (I.vi.4) The martlets find Macbeth's abode to be a place very worthy of the occurrence of their natural reproduction; it is fruitful for the birds, but why not for the Macbeths? Banquo's description shows that nature would provide fertility to the Macbeths if they were in tune with it; their childlessness in such a bountiful setting is thus even more indicative of their lack of harmony with nature.

The Macbeths' focus is not the natural focus of men and women; ideally, most couples' goals concern their own humanity and the contribution they could make to the human community. The Macbeths' goals involve political and social power obtainable by stealing Duncan's (and Malcolm's) crown; the "golden round" itself is, for the Macbeths, nothing more than a reward for a crime against fellow humans, like blood money. By contrast Macduff, the most wholly human character in the play, has children who are "most precious" to him. (IV.iii.223) Coppélia Kahn notes that

fatherhood is based not on deeds of blood but on the mystery of procreation: the harmony of male with female powers, in step with the steady rhythms of natural order....The men in the play are fruitful: Duncan, Banquo, Macduff, and Siward all

have sons, for and through whom they act to perpetuate the natural and the social order. But the childless Macbeth's only "firstlings" are murders. The confusion of sexual identity pervading the play is offset by this contrast between the sterility of bloody deeds and the fruition of fatherhood. (175)

That which is the essence of humanity is also essential to the maintenance of natural order, that is, the nurturing of other human beings and of the bonds between humans in the human community; the natural roles of humans, regardless of their gender, embody actions which are in the best interests of humanity.

The antithesis of the natural and human is embodied in the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*. Banquo notes that they are "so withered, and so wild in their attire,/ That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth," and that they "should be women,/ And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/ That you are so." (I.iii.40;45) In short, the witches are definitely something less than naturally human; most critics judge, by virtue of the witches' beards, that they should be categorized as hermaphrodites at best. But their other-worldliness serves to suggest that they are not even a melding of masculine and feminine, but that they are a synthesis of perversions of both polarities, monsters, aliens who have no part in humanity. Their actions support this opinion.

The witches begin by sowing the seeds of fragmentation of Scotland's human community when they hail Macbeth and bait him with their prophecies of his material success. But the witches are not to blame for Macbeth's crimes; neither they, nor their agents, ever suggest that he murder anyone. They tell him only what will be; Macbeth creates the reality. The fact, however, remains that the witches exist for the purpose of confounding natural order, the greatest evidence for which lies embodied in the symbolic significance of the ingredients of their cauldron. Their spell-casting stew contains "sow's blood that hath eaten/ Her nine farrow" (IV.i.64) and the "finger of birth-strangled babe/ Ditch delivered by a drab." (IV.i.31) These ingredients represent unfit mothers; i.e., a pig with a cannibalistic

appetite and a whore, who without the benefit of a spouse to complete the union, unnaturally murders her baby after having given birth to it in a place unfit for humans. There is no doubt that the Weird Sisters have no respect for the sanctity of human life or the order of human society; they are happiest when the world is topsy-turvy, so that "fair is foul and foul is fair." (I.i.10)

In addition to the images of the witches' grisly brew, Shakespeare presents other babies in *Macbeth*, symbols representative of natural order and its inversion. The Bloody Child that is the Second Apparition to appear to Macbeth (IV.i.77) brings to mind not only the birth-strangled babe, but the simile of pity as "a naked newborn babe/ Striding the blast." (I.vii.21) As humans, we are naturally inclined to nurture our young; any harm done to them is repulsive to anyone who is not an inhuman deviant of society. Macbeth not only has no children of his own, he is responsible for the death of Macduff's children. The fact that Macbeth is not himself a father makes him more capable of infanticide; since he is not linked with natural order in that way, he has no human experience which would foster any compassion toward children. His childlessness is a symptom of his inhumanity; he is not a part of any descending natural order, and his flagrant disregard for human life is comparable to that of the witches, suggesting to us that Macbeth is as inhuman as they.

The abuse of children in *Macbeth* is a symbol of a disturbance of nature, but children also represent natural order when it comes to uninterrupted lineage and succession of the crown. This link to nature is represented by the "Third Apparition: a Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand." who appears to Macbeth. (IV.i.87) This child, wearing a symbol of royalty and carrying a symbol of ancestry, the family tree, shows that it is natural order which will prevail over political machinations. The fact that Fleance, a future rightful heir to the throne, escapes Macbeth's far-reaching murderous hands is a testament to the futility of Macbeth's attempts to alter the

natural course of events. Natural order manifests itself in the rightful, direct and uninterrupted succession of the crown; it is Malcolm who should be king. When Macbeth tells Donalbain of Duncan's death, he says that "the spring, the head, the fountain of your blood/ Is stopped; the very source of it is stopped;" (II.iii.115) Shakespeare uses metaphors derived from nature to describe the flows of bloodlines, thus showing that human order mirrors natural order.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare also implies that the virtues of true humanity are inherited. When Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty by misleading him with self-incriminations, Macduff is incredulous; he longs for "wholesome days again," calling Malcolm "the truest issue" of the throne. It is incredible to Macduff that one as supposedly evil as Malcolm could have come from such a pure source as Duncan. Macduff tells him: "Thy royal father/ Was a most sainted king: the queen that bore thee,/ Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,/ Died every day she lived." (IV.iii.105) In fact, Macduff's instincts about Malcolm are correct; Malcolm *is* as good as his parents, which bears the idea that good spiritual humanity has a physical root in natural order.¹

By the same token, violations against humanity are reflected in physical upheavals of nature. Immediately after he murders Duncan, Macbeth laments that "Now o'er the one-half world/ Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse/ The curtained sleep." (II.i.49) In this instance "Nature" is humanity, humanity that was embodied in Duncan and is destroyed by Macbeth. Later, when Macbeth defends his killing of the grooms, he describes Duncan as a hero: "His silver skin laced with his golden blood,/ And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature/ For ruin's

1. John Danby, in *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, identifies an "orthodox and benignant" view of Nature prominent in Elizabethan times. This view held that Nature is primarily benevolent and "is an ordered and beautiful arrangement, to which we must adjust ourselves." (20) Danby notes that in *King Lear* the orthodox view is held by "those in the play who seem already to be slightly old-fashioned, but who are nevertheless unquestionably the most human." (21) The same could be said of Macduff in *Macbeth*.

wasteful entrance." (II.iii.113) In this case, Macbeth himself is "ruin," come to disrupt natural political order in Scotland.

An upheaval of nature which reflects the disruption of political order attends Duncan's death. Lennox, unaware of the king's murder, notes on that same night that "lamentings heard i' the air, strange screams of death,/ And prophesying with accents terrible/ Of dire combustion and confused events / New hatched to th' woeful time" were heard. (II.iii.58) Ross too believes that the disquiet felt was "the heavens, as troubled with man's act." (II.iv.5) Just as Macbeth has destroyed the hierarchic chain of command with regard to social order, so in nature normal order is usurped.² The Old Man finds it "unnatural,/ Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last/ A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,/ Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed;" this unusual role reversal in nature was a foreshadowing of Macbeth turning on Duncan. (II.iv.10) The fact that Duncan's horses turned on each other and ate each other is, by the same token, symbolically significant; their cannibalism is akin to that which, in effect, Macbeth exercised on Duncan.

If Macbeth were totally unaware of the seriousness of his crimes, that is, if he were a moral idiot, we might be more inclined to forgive him after offering him an insanity defense; but Macbeth knows exactly what he is doing. Macbeth not only abhors his own crime for what it is, he admires Duncan's heroic humanity:

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 murder shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels...(I.vii.12)

2. In "*Macbeth at My Lai*" Marilyn French also discusses the upheaval of natural order, but she sees it as a reflection of "Lady Macbeth's renunciation of her [feminine] role" which, with Duncan's murder creates "a world in which the feminine principle has been eradicated." (61)

Macbeth's persistence in the murder scheme even after he has fully contemplated the import of the crime shows a conscious willingness on his part to put his material goals before any aspect of his humanity or the natural order of which it is a part.

In killing Duncan, Macbeth has ventured so far from what is natural, good and right that nature turns its back on him; Macbeth has abnegated his rights to humane living by killing Duncan. Not even the sea has enough water to cleanse the blood from Macbeth's hands; he believes that "No; this my hand will rather/ The multitudinous seas incarnadine,/ Making the green one red." (II.ii.60) In other words, Macbeth will pollute nature before it can cleanse him; his sin transcends anything that nature can remedy, and he is fully aware of his transgression.

Nature condemns Macbeth by refusing to renew him after he kills Duncan. In *Macbeth* sleep is related to a natural state of humanity. Sleep is the reward for wholesome living, it restores those who are deserving of it. Just before Duncan's murder Banquo is troubled, and though he is exhausted he cannot sleep. He therefore asks that "merciful powers,/ Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature/ Gives way to in repose!" (II.i.7) The references to sleep in *Macbeth* imply that human nature is good; when taken away from the evils of the conscious world, we regain human composure. Duncan is a representative of ideal and heroic humanity, an ideal that Macbeth has violated. Thus in killing Duncan, "Macbeth does murder sleep." (II.ii.35) It is significant that Macbeth murders Duncan and the grooms while they sleep; that is, while they are in their most innocent, most human, most defenseless state of nature; this is yet another example of Macbeth's lack of respect for humanity. After Duncan is dead, "Macbeth shall sleep no more" because he has chosen to divorce himself from natural harmony. (II.ii.42)

Lady Macbeth too is punished by nature with respect to sleep. First, she realizes that had Duncan "not resembled/ My father as he slept" she would have been able to kill him. (II.ii.12) This statement connects Lady Macbeth to both

nature and humanity; she recognizes the hallowed state of sleep, and she respects the idea of family enough that Duncan is able to evoke that image which is disturbing to her. Deep inside, Lady Macbeth has a core of human feeling which she is unable to deny. That is why, at the end of the play, restful sleep eludes her and her insanity manifests itself as she sleeps. In *her* most defenseless state she is also ultimately human, and her humanity has been so disturbed by her conscious actions that, as a consequence, she crumbles. Lady Macbeth cannot sleep peacefully because her humanity was irrevocably altered by the crime she committed as an accomplice to Macbeth. Sleep cannot restore the well of humanity when that well has dried up; sleep cures ordinary human troubles only when there is a source which can be renewed.

CHAPTER II

The Masculine and The Feminine vs. The Human

In essence, Lady Macbeth is so out of tune with any ideal of humanity that she not only fails to acknowledge that her own human side is relevant to her life, she attempts to eradicate all humanity around her because of her inordinate respect for material goals. Lady Macbeth has ambitions for herself and Macbeth that are not in keeping with an ideal of femininity which dictates that a woman's goals be in keeping with self-effacement, subordination to and nurturing of those around her.^{3 4} Macbeth tells her to "bring forth men-children only" (I.vii.72) because there is no trace of humane feeling in her which should be passed on to a female child. (Macbeth's statement also implies that those qualities are not required in men-children.)

Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth's sense of self, his masculinity, as a means to induce him to commit his crime against Duncan. After Macbeth has considered the crime and informed Lady Macbeth that "we will proceed no further in this business," (I.vii.31) Lady Macbeth attacks him with a chauvinistic vehemence seen nowhere else in the play. Macbeth is so affected by her insults because the entirety of his being is invested in his self-image as a masculine, soldier-hero, rather than a human being who values a capacity for emotion. Lady Macbeth lets Macbeth know of her displeasure by exclaiming, "From this time/ Such I account thy love." (I.vii.38)

3. D.W. Harding, in "Women's Fantasy of Manhood: A Shakespearian Theme," remarks that "it still remains true in our culture that men are allowed or encouraged to be more openly aggressive than women and seem to have more scope for direct action in their own interests." (247)

4. In "Lady Macbeth: 'Infirm of purpose'," Joan Larsen Klein reads that Lady Macbeth "conceives of herself almost exclusively as a wife, a helpmate. Thus she epitomizes at the same time that she perverts Renaissance view of the woman's role." (243)

Many critics assert that this slight is given as a purely sexual one, alluding to some lack of virility on Macbeth's part. But this comment is sexual only insofar as virility is linked to masculinity, which is in turn defined by violence as far as Lady Macbeth is concerned.⁵ So the sexual allusion is for the purpose of characterizing masculinity in a stereotypical way. Lady Macbeth equates Macbeth's inability to murder Duncan with an inability to love her, but not necessarily in a sexual manner; for Lady Macbeth, the ultimate show of masculine love comes through murder.⁶

When Macbeth replies that he "dare do all that may become a man/ Who dares do more is none," (I.vii.46) he shows us that he still has a sense of how true humanity is defined, and that he still has a desire to be a part of it. But Lady Macbeth confuses him and shames him into wanting his material goals more than his humanity. She is able to shake him so easily because Macbeth's sense of self is tied completely to a stereotypical ideal of manhood.⁷ Thus it cuts him to the quick when she retorts, "When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man." (I.vii.49)⁸ In other words, Lady Macbeth considers that the essence of man is to kill; that is how one becomes a man, and, once he is one, he becomes a greater man by killing again and again.⁹ He shows love for those he serves by killing; therefore, the more he kills the more it is perceived that he loves. Lady Macbeth's strange perversion of humanity

5. Michael Taylor puts the relationship succinctly in "Ideals of Manhood in *Macbeth*:" "The valued man is the courageous man: the courageous man is he who will commit murder; the valued man is he who will commit murder. Such a syllogism could easily come from Lady Macbeth." (342)

6. Klein also reads that Lady Macbeth "measures what she takes to be his love for her by his willingness to murder," and when Macbeth worries about the mechanics of the crime, Klein notices that "in a grim perversion of married companionship, Lady Macbeth responds by assuming the feminine role of comforter and helper." (243-244)

7. Bernard McElroy of *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* thinks Macbeth "dares to kill his king not so much to become king himself as to become the man who dared to do it." (220)

8. In "The Perversion of Manliness in *Macbeth*," Jarold Ramsey observed that "Macbeth's career may be described in terms of a terrible progressive disjunction between the manly and the humane." (286)

9. Carolyn Asp remarks in "Sexual Stereotyping in *Macbeth*" that "in Macbeth's mind manhood is not a constant, fixed quality but one which must continually be proved by manly deeds." (154)

portrays murder as a means to show love; no wonder the Macbeths have no children.

In a twist on that same perversion of human definition, Lady Macbeth equates Macbeth's attempt to avoid murdering Duncan with a betrayal of his love for her. She says

What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?....
....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 my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (I.vii.48)

This passage is usually interpreted as proof positive of Lady Macbeth's cruelty, but on closer examination we see that it actually represents a latent femininity in Lady Macbeth; she knows "how tender 'tis," which proves that she has human feeling. Lady Macbeth simply uses the metaphor to show Macbeth how she perceives his betrayal; to her, it is as heinous as if she were to have so little feeling for her baby.¹⁰ Our horror at the use of her metaphor, therefore, should not be at the metaphor itself but at our recognition that for Lady Macbeth, not killing for the sake of a loved one is as bad as violently killing a loved one directly.

Lady Macbeth's attitude reflects that of many of the men in the play; she is not the only one who would have violence before humane action. In the masculine world of the soldier-hero a lord serves his king by killing for him. Duncan rewards Macbeth's violence on the battlefield with titles; Macbeth is considered most loyal by virtue of his war quarry, because he took the traitor Macdonwald and "unseamed him from the nave to th' chops." (I.ii.22) Macbeth hides behind this convention

10. D.W. Harding notes that "Lady Macbeth's femininity is an essential feature of the theme, and any first impression that she has cast it off cannot survive more than a casual reading of the play. It was Coleridge who pointed out the femininity implied by the fact that when she upbraids Macbeth with shrinking from what he has sworn to do she chooses the murder of her suckling babe as the most dreadful thing she can contemplate." (246)

when he kills the grooms, defending his action by saying that he did it out of love for Duncan: "Who could refrain,/ That had a heart to love and in that heart/ Courage to make's love known?" (II.iii.117) Macbeth, unlike his society, fails to distinguish valorous killing done in war for a social cause from cold-blooded murder for personal gain.¹¹

The same theme arises once again when Macbeth enlists the Murderers to do away with Banquo and Fleance. If men are to be classed as such, they must be willing to commit murder in order to rectify violently the wrongs allegedly done them. If anyone stands in the way of one's ambition he or she should be killed; a man has the right and duty to do so - that right having been ordained by the social definition of his sex. Banquo's murderers pass "in the catalogue" for men, but Macbeth makes their participation in his scheme certain with the challenge, "Now if you have a station in the file,/ Not i' th' worst rank of manhood, say't." (III.i.93-102) Macbeth tells them that their murder of Banquo "grapples you to the heart and love of us," meaning that his love will be won through their murder of his enemy. (III.i.106) In this masculine world, humanity is perverted, inverted, so that love is shown and gained through acts of violence rather than through acts of caring as it would be in a natural, balanced and humane setting.

At the core of this disfunction is a society that defines men on terms so narrow that they are allowed no room for human feeling. In the world of *Macbeth*, the fighting of an enemy is a rite of passage into manhood. Ross softens what he believes will be the blow of the news of Young Siward's death by remarking that "he only lived but till he was a man;/ The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed/ In the unshrinking station where he fought,/ But like a man he died" (V.viii.40) But Siward does not mourn his son's death a bit, because Young Siward was brave, he

11. French discusses the view that Macbeth's "crime is not in being a murderer; he is praised and rewarded for being a murderer. His crime is a failure to make the distinctions his culture accepts among the objects of slaughter." (58)

took his death blow to his front, squarely facing his enemy, and that is all that counts to Siward. "He's worth no more" sorrow to Siward simply because he died a death befitting a man - what more could a father want? Certainly no time for grief, since emotion is superfluous to the soldier-hero. It is significant that this scene comes at the end of the play, after the death of Macbeth and just before Malcolm announces that the new order will be installed presently. In essence, the subjugation of Macbeth's destructive rule has changed nothing in terms of the way Scottish society perceives manliness;¹² Siward's reaction to his son's death shows that valorous action is, even after all that has transpired in *Macbeth*, still more important than the feeling and expression of compassionate human emotion.¹³

If compassionate emotion is immaterial to the masculine man, then action is everything; his material goals are to come first. Macbeth proclaims that "for mine own good/ All causes shall give way." (III.v.136)¹⁴ Macbeth decides to care nothing for humanity and to disregard its forces, and at the same time he is unrealistic in his inability to accept the fact that he has personal limitations; fulfillment of his ambitions is a priority, whatever the means.¹⁵ Denial of limitations means, above all, denial of emotions and of fear, the two things that could conceivably slow him down. When confronted with Banquo's ghost Macbeth declares, "What man dare, I

12. Bernard McElroy notices that in Macbeth "the forces of conventional good triumph completely, but their triumph is strangely hollow, almost devoid of any power to mitigate the reality of evil or reconcile humanity to its condition." (215) McElroy's observation goes hand-in-hand with the repetition of the soldier-hero example venerated through Young Siward, one which was applied to Macbeth at the play's beginning.

13. Robert Kimbrough believes that Siward's "complete rejection of sorrow is so extreme that it makes most in a modern audience uncomfortable, and such a reaction may have been intended by Shakespeare, for his fullest definition of humanity involves the show of both 'manly' courage and 'womanly' sorrow." "Macbeth: The Prisoner of Gender" (178)

14. In *The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies* Matthew Proser states that "manliness" demands action, direct, physical, and executed by the soldier-hero himself" (63)

15. Danby tells of the common knowledge which Macbeth ignored: "The Elizabethan...would best discover the pattern of his inner nature by looking out on the world of his fellows and forefathers. In that world he would see the habitual grooves that successions of similar men had worn, the outlines of the form of their inner nature. He would conclude that the individual must first understand his intrinsic limitation....Restraint, therefore, as well as Reason and Benevolence, are inalienably associated with Nature." (26)

dare." (III.iv.100) Macbeth's mind is apparently now set about "all that may become a man;" after Duncan's murder he embraces the masculine definitives, leaving all humanity behind.¹⁶ He is "quite unmanned in folly" because he cannot meet Banquo's ghost on a physical level, and Macbeth lacks any attributes on a spiritual plane which might enable him to deal with the apparition. Thus as the ghost exits, so Macbeth sighs, "Why, so: being gone,/ I am man again;" that is, left once more to a world where he is secure, where physical action reigns supreme. (III.iv.108)

Shows of courage, or a show of lack of fear, is most important to the masculine man. Lady Macbeth unnerves and manipulates Macbeth more with her accusations of his cowardice than any motivation Macbeth summons on his own. According to Lady Macbeth, virtually no fear is justified; even when Macbeth sees a ghost, her reaction, rather than being concerned and sympathetic, is scornful: "O these flaws and starts,/ Impostors to true fear, would well become/ A woman's story.../...Shame itself!" (III.iv.64) A human courageous enough to be violent has blood of the reddest color; therefore, Lady Macbeth "shames to wear a heart so white," (II.i.68) and later, Macbeth echoes her definition of courage's characteristics when he chastises his servant, saying that "those linen cheeks of thine are counselors to fear." (V.iii.16) We associate "linen cheeks" with the delicacy of a woman, so in *Macbeth*, fear is defined contemptuously as a feminine emotion. Therefore, the most masculine man is he who feels and shows the least fear.

Lady Macbeth is so successful in convincing Macbeth that all of his fears are irrelevant, that he is ripe for the suggestions of the three apparitions that he is invincible. They in fact say no such thing; Macbeth hears what he wants. Hecate has already counted on Macbeth's indiscretion to bring him down; she predicts that "he shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/ His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and

16. Robert Kimbrough notes that "Macbeth has acquiesced to a definition of masculinity which comes from dominant societal norms that equate machismo with manhood." (183)

fear:/ And you all know security/ Is mortals' chiefest enemy." (III.v.30) Macbeth's overconfidence is inappropriate in a mortal; only someone immortal could hope to defy the forces facing Macbeth.¹⁷ He has embraced the masculine stereotype that courage to do violence is the most manly asset, when in fact discretion is the better part of valor. It is important to note that Macbeth is aware of that maxim; he just refuses to acknowledge that it applies to him. Macbeth admires the way in which Banquo melds courage with reason, saying, "'Tis much he dares;/ And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,/ He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor to act in safety." (III.i.51) Despite the fact that Banquo himself loses his life, in the final assessment he wins - Fleance survives to carry on his lineage in royalty. In addition to the discretionary Banquo's limited victory, it is Malcolm and Macduff who flee to England (i.e., they who have a better balance in their approach to fear) who prevail, thereby showing that Macbeth's skewed vision of masculinity is ultimately self-destructive.

By the same token, Macbeth values most those facets of himself which are determined completely by his masculinity; this value system (or lack thereof, as it were) results in making him a man who is no longer human. When Macbeth learns that "Macduff was from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripped," he declares that Macduff has "cowed my better part of man." (V.viii.15) Macbeth considers this "better part" to be his masculine spirit; if he is brought to his knees by fear, then he is useless and so proclaims, "I'll not fight with thee." (V.viii.22) It should be that his "better part" is a capacity for humane compassion rather than an inclination toward false physical bravery. His bravery is artificial, instilled by the Witches, so no

17. Asp points out that "since the effort to be inhuman is essential to the service of Mars, the limited definition of manhood associated with soldierly valor is perfectly suited to Macbeth's project of self-devinization." (157)

natural courage fortified Macbeth to commit his crimes, only false suggestions of invincibility.¹⁸

18. In "How Little the Lady Knew Her Lord: A Note on *Macbeth*," Bill Goode exonerates the Witches from their part in Macbeth's crime by writing that "character, for Shakespeare, is the source of tragedy; humanity, not the metaphysical, is the mainspring of world pain. The witches do not fool Macbeth; he deludes himself." (354)

CHAPTER III

Emotion and Action - Spirituality and Physicality

All of this is not to say that Macbeth is incapable of feeling emotion; it is a question of which emotions command his attention. Caithness and Angus, Scottish nobles who act as relatively detached voices of authority in the play, discuss Macbeth's actions and differing ways of perceiving them: "Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,/ Do call it valiant fury." (V.iii.13) Either Macbeth is insane with disregard for reasonable fear and attention to masculinity *or* he is extremely emotional in his quest to succeed, these emotions being they that guide his actions. In either case, Macbeth is not governed by human reason. By the time that Macbeth is entrenched at Dunsinane, Malcolm recognizes that "none serve with him but constrained things/ Whose hearts are absent too." (V.iv.12) Those who are in tune with humanity have abandoned him and see him as being insane, because he shows no respect for those emotions which are humane; Macbeth recognizes only those emotions which serve to inspire him to voraciousness in his violence and thereby further his masculine, material goals. Emotions which result in compassionate actions foster links between humans; they strengthen the bonds which form the human community. On the other hand, emotions which lead to evil actions and violate others destroy human bonds and illustrate the selfishness of those who are ruled by such emotions.

There is a sense of urgency throughout *Macbeth* which comes from some of the characters' tendency to divorce themselves from compassionate emotions so that it will be easier for them to take action against others. Lady Macbeth is the most notorious of these; she fears that Macbeth's constitution is "too full o' th' milk of

human kindness" (I.v.18) for him to bring their material ambitions to fruition. Macbeth does not disappoint Lady Macbeth in this respect; he takes the Second Apparition's advice to "be bloody, bold and resolute" (IV.i.78) and thereafter vows that "the very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The firstlings of my hand." (IV.i.147) When he subsequently decides to kill Macduff's family, he must buoy his resolve with the self-reassurance that he is not "boasting like a fool;/ This deed I'll do before this purpose cool;" that is, while his violent emotion still has its grip on him. (IV.i.153) Macbeth resolves to ignore any natural inclination he might have toward compassion and to favor only enraged, violent emotions. His resolution at this point in the play echoes Lady Macbeth's prayer in Act I that "no compunctious visitings of nature/ Shake my fell purpose." (I.v.46)¹⁹ In short, time must not be wasted on compassionate emotion, and time must not be allowed to interfere with violent action by impelling one to rethink his position. Thus the urgency and fast moving pace of the play is reinforced by the characters' neglect of compassionate emotion which, if they allowed themselves to feel it, might slow them down and change the course of their determinedly anti-social actions. The brevity of *Macbeth* itself reflects its characters' lack of receptiveness to insights which might steer them down a different path.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not the only ones who are guilty of subverting feelings in favor of actions. Malcolm not only seeks to take advantage of the rage Macduff feels upon learning that his children are dead, he attempts to goad Macduff into action at that very moment, before Macduff's purpose cools. Malcolm urges him to "dispute it like a man" and "let grief convert to anger." But Macduff cries that he "must also feel it as a man;" his precious family is dead, and Macduff, the example of balanced humanity in the play, cannot simply move along in blind

19. Anna Jameson, in *Shakespeare's Heroines* notes that though Lady Macbeth was an accomplice in Duncan's murder, "she is nowhere represented as urging him on to new crimes;" her inculcation of masculinity in Macbeth is so complete that he goes into automatic pilot. (331)

revenge without taking a moment to realize the loss of his family and the source of the impetus for his revenge.²⁰ Though Malcolm recognizes the importance of voicing emotions (he tells Macduff to "give sorrow words") he, at the same time, wishes to "make med'cines of our great revenge." Just feeling sorrow is not enough; the masculine man must in every instance take action. So when Macduff is resolved to avenge himself against Macbeth, Malcolm seems relieved that "this time goes manly;" Macduff, despite feeling his humane emotions is also going to take action.²¹ Macduff recognizes that actually feeling emotions and taking action differs from stereotypical gender responses which are nothing but shows. He says that he "could *play* the woman with mine eyes,/ And braggart with my tongue;" in other words, those reactions are irrelevant shows; what is important is that tears are founded on true emotion and that action be taken before boasting is done. Though one must feel emotion he or she must not be rendered impotent by his or her response to it; to be the best human one must integrate human feeling with human strength.

(IV.iii.209-235)

The masculine side of a man or woman prompts him or her to take action by disregarding his or her spiritual side. For instance, Macbeth is so blinded by his masculinity in this respect that when the Doctor tells him that Lady Macbeth is "not so sick, my lord,/ As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies," Macbeth commands that he simply "cure her of that," as if every ailment, every trouble has a cure or solution which can be implemented on the physical plane. Humanity is nurtured and society's ills are cured not through physical means, but by attention to the inner self and the mutual caring of individuals. The doctor responds that "therein the patient/ Must minister to himself," an answer which Macbeth does not

20. Carolyn Asp likens Macduff's open anguished cry for the loss of his family to that of "a complete human being who can integrate both feminine and masculine responses." (155)

21. Coppélia Kahn in *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* also notes that Macduff "must first assert his feelings as a father, his grief born of paternal love, before he will exercise his valor as a man." (189)

in the least accept. (V.iii.38-46) He made the decision to ignore any remedy which might be of a spiritual source just after Duncan's murder.

Macbeth is completely successful in denying his spiritually human side; that is why he is able to follow through with the cold-blooded killing of the Macduffs.²² Intellectually, he knows that he is wrong, but he is not troubled, as Lady Macbeth is, by compunctious visitings of nature. In the end, Macbeth is killed by Macduff - he fails on the physical plane. He has feared meeting his earthly adversaries, those who would challenge him for his horrid deed and whose even-handed justice he would have avoided.²³ When Macbeth finally comes face to face with Macduff he declares, "Before my body/ I throw my warlike shield," his last physical defense. (V.viii.32) Metaphorically speaking, a warlike shield in all its physicality is all Macbeth has ever chosen to have; in the end it serves as a poor substitute for listening to his conscience and defining himself by its dictates instead of by masculine gender stereotypes.

Macbeth is unconcerned with spiritual consequences; in his soliloquy before Duncan's murder, Macbeth ponders:

If th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and end-all - here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgement here... (I.vii.2)

In other words, he'd risk all consequences in the after-life to which he might be subject, if only he did not have to worry about the immediate and physical

22. Proser on the slaying of the Macduffs: "This murder, so shocking in its purposeless cruelty, is Shakespeare's most telling condemnation of Macbeth. For if the hero conforms more closely than ever to the standard of valor predicated by his wife, he deviates more completely than ever from the civilized standards of humanity and justice." (83)

23. Goode points out that when discussing Duncan's murder before the fact, "Macbeth's imagination... extends to only, 'If we should fail,' as if the enemy were external, as if destruction would not come from within." (350)

consequences of murdering Duncan. Macbeth fears the physical, e.g., Macduff, Malcolm, Banquo and his issue, and the moving of Birnam wood. After Macbeth's second visit to the Witches he makes a conscious decision to capitulate, to disregard his conscience and "crown my thoughts with acts." (IV.i.149) This line suggests that before that time Macbeth's rationality held him back; now he has forgone the benefits of the human abilities to reason and feel, and has given his heart up to blind ambition.²⁴ ²⁵ Though before Duncan's murder his conscience may have spoken to him, he never fears spiritual consequences or that his conscience will interfere with his success. It is only the physical, those things he fears most, which he must face and which subdue him in the end.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are divided in their responses to the spiritual and physical planes. Whereas Macbeth fears and faces the physical, Lady Macbeth never considers any physical consequences of her actions, but instead has trouble reckoning with her spiritual side. That is why, in her incantation, she asks that "my keen knife see not the wound it makes,/ Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,/ To cry 'Hold, hold!'" (I.v.52) She knows that if she were to fail, it would be because her spiritual side confounded her. This in fact is exactly what happens; she cannot kill Duncan because he reminds her of her father, and she is ultimately destroyed not by physical means as is Macbeth, but by her insanity, the manifestation of her soul's response to her actions. Neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth is a match for their respective fears because they lack completeness of

24. Proser also finds that "the cumulative movement toward dire cruelty is also a movement away from rationality, with which conscience is connected." (83)

25. Danby writes of the Elizabethan view of each of God's creatures not as being "part of a machine" but as having a "rightful place in a community. What held it in place and held the community together was Reason. The law it observed was felt more as self-expression than as external restraint. It was a law, in any case, which the creature was most itself when it obeyed. And rebellion against this law was rebellion against one's self, loss of all nature, lapse into chaos." (25) Macbeth abnegates his reason and his world falls apart.

being; they refuse to acknowledge their human limitations, and it is these very limitations they ignore which prove their undoing.

CHAPTER IV

"Dangerous folly....:"

The Feminine in a Masculine World

No one is as ignorant of Lady Macbeth's limitations as she is; we smile when Macduff warns her, "O gentle lady,/ 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:/ The repetition, in a woman's ear, / Would murder as it fell," because *we* know that Lady Macbeth is anything but gentle. (II.iii.85) But Macduff's assessment is more accurate than it appears upon first glance: Lady Macbeth faints shortly thereafter; she shames "to wear a heart so white;" (II.ii.64) and she loses her mind because she is more vulnerable than she acknowledges. In short, and in more than one instance, Lady Macbeth is rightly subject to Macduff's stereotypical expectation of her as a woman, and is in need of his sympathies whether she knows it or not.^{26 27}

Shakespeare presents further his portrayal of feminine stereotypes through the character of Lady Macduff. She is unapologetically delicate to her core; that is, everything which Lady Macbeth would deny herself to be. She nurtures her children, depends upon her husband for protection, and flees in the face of danger, only to be caught and killed. Lady Macduff is too lacking in strength to be considered an ideal of humanity; she possesses all of those qualities which are stereotypically expected of the feminine, but little strength which would balance her nature and ensure her survival.

26. In *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* Juliet Dusinberre also makes the same connection between Macduff's prediction and Lady Macbeth's fate. (284)

27. Jameson finds Lady Macbeth "a terrible impersonation of evil passions and mighty powers, never so far removed from our own nature as to be cast beyond the pale of our sympathies; for the woman herself remains a woman to the last, - still linked with her sex and with humanity." (324)

When Ross entreats Macduff and Malcolm to return to Scotland, he proclaims that "your eye in Scotland/ Would create soldiers, make our women fight,/ To doff their dire distresses." (IV.iii.186) This comment is subject to more than one valid interpretation of its significance, in addition to the obvious one of Malcolm's popularity in comparison to Macbeth's. One is that women are capable of fighting, as is chronicled in Holinshed.²⁸ That is to say that despite stereotypical characterizations of weakness, bold women can contribute to a martial cause; they are not weak at all.²⁹ The other interpretation of this comment with regard to feminine gender expectations is that Ross is expressing the extremity of the need for Malcolm's presence in Scotland by saying that even women, in their timidity and weakness, would fight for the cause "to doff their dire distresses." Lady Macduff was not one of these women; this is not to ridicule her helplessness in the face of assassins, but it must be noted that Shakespeare offers no suggestion of her possessing strength such as Ross describes. Thus there exists a disparity between the physical courage of both Lady Macbeth (who smears the grooms withal Duncan's blood) and Scotland's women to whom Ross refers, and Lady Macduff, who Shakespeare presents as the embodiment of feminine weakness.

Men such as Macbeth, who think and act as if the only existence of significance is on the physical plane, have a distinct advantage over the inordinately weak. Lady Macduff is trapped

in this earthly world, where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly. Why then, alas,

28. The major source for *Macbeth* was Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, (1587) which includes this passage from *The Description of Scotland* by Hector Boece: "In these daies also the women of our countrie were of no lesse corage than the men, for all stout maidens and wives (if they were not with child) marched well in the field as did the men, and as soone as the armie did set forward, they slue the first living creature that they found, in whose bloud they not onelie bathed their swords, but also tasted thereof with their mouthes..." (7:506-507)

29. Carolyn Asp goes so far as to say that Ross's "comment suggests that Shakespeare took liberties with his source in order to create an artistic world in which he could examine male and female stereotypes." (158)

Do I put up that womanly defense,
To say I have done no harm? (IV.ii.73)

Lady Macduff's "womanly defense" is worthless because the only sphere she considers relevant for guiding her actions is spiritual; as Juliet Dusinberre suggests, "a society which values action above everything else offers women no middle position between monstrosity and womanishness." (277) Her defense would appeal only to humane do-gooders, such as Malcolm and Macduff, and they cannot help Lady Macduff in her time of need since they have been temporarily displaced by the earthly Macbeth.³⁰

Lady Macduff's extreme femininity serves as a contrast for Lady Macbeth's lack thereof. We feel alienated from Lady Macbeth because we perceive her tendency to be cruel as an anomaly in consideration of her sex. Lady Macbeth attempts to bury her feelings at all costs, and is thus ridiculed for being untrue to the definition of her sex. Another stereotypical expectation of a woman is that she steer her man down the correct moral path so that the human ties which bind remain intact for the good of his family and the community.³¹ She must help him by acting as his conscience; her assistance to him on this front is necessary because he, (as a stereotypically masculine man) has divorced himself from the vulnerability of feeling which would make him susceptible to pangs of his own conscience.³² Lady Macbeth not only fails miserably as a woman in this respect, she steers Macbeth in the

30. Dusinberre also comments that "women's harmlessness in the political world...was their worst enemy. Shakespeare understood that in politics power hangs on the power to inflict injury." (282)

31. Ruth Kelso in *Docterine for the Lady of the Renaissance* notes that "humility helps the woman to avoid the great vice of pride, greater in women than in men, and to moderate the violence and immodesty of men;" (25) in addition, Kelso says that women "are praised for softening the lot of men, binding families together." (26) Therefore, the women provide an element of humanity which it does not benefit men to pursue, but that men nevertheless wish to enjoy because they are human, after all.

32. Goode believes that Lady Macbeth more than failed to guide Macbeth, "she existed as a foil to articulate his hidden desires, thus allowing him to escape the responsibility." (352)

opposite direction, making him less inclined to hear his heart.^{33 34} With the denial of her femininity, Lady Macbeth misguidedly attempts to help Macbeth to be more powerfully masculine.

Society's gender expectation that women be more humane than men makes Lady Macbeth's course of action seem to be more horrific than Macbeth's. Though Macbeth did the killing, he is not as "fiend-like" as Lady Macbeth; because cruelty and killing are not precluded in the definition of masculinity, Macbeth does not go against those tenets when he commits his crimes. Macbeth betrays humanity through masculine action; Lady Macbeth's crime, on the other hand, is one of betrayal first to her sex, and then also to humanity. So, by many critical assessments, she is the more guilty of the two; our condemnation of Lady Macbeth for being an evil person is enhanced by our perception that she is a failure as a woman.

Despite society's gender expectations, evil has no sex. The Witches are the representatives of evil in the play, and as has been mentioned, their hermaphroditism is not immaterial to their presentation as evil incarnate. Lady Macbeth is fiend-like because of her success in being inhuman. When she calls "come, you spirits...unsex me here,/ And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full/ Of direst cruelty!" (I.v.41) she is not asking to be made a man as some critics mistakenly believe. Her request to be unsexed is tantamount to a request to be made inhuman, without sex, (as are the Witches) because it is even less human to be hermaphroditic than it is to be a macho man. Lady Macbeth's victory over her emotions is ultimately self-destructive. Joan Larsen Klein finds that

33. French also sees that "it is clear that, in Shakespeare's eyes, Macbeth violates moral law: Lady Macbeth violates natural law....Lady Macbeth's crime is so heinous because it violates a social contract that has been erected into a principal of nature: she fails to uphold the feminine principle....It is up to the feminine principle to draw parameters on aggression." (59-60)

34. Klein tells that "only when husbands acted in opposition to divine law, said all the treatises, could their wives disobey them. Then, however, the chief duty of good wives was to try lovingly to bring their errant husbands back into virtuous ways." (240) Interestingly, in the Macbeths' case, it is as if Macbeth disobeys his wife when he suggests they abandon the murder plan; the stereotypical role prescriptions here are turned topsy-turvy.

Lady Macbeth is never unsexed in the only way she wanted to be unsexed - able to act with the cruelty she ignorantly and perversely identified with male strength. But she has lost that true strength to which Shakespeare says elsewhere is based on pity and fostered by love. (250)

CHAPTER V

"'Twere best not know myself...:"

Integrity, Self-Definition, and Humanity

Just as evil has no sex, true humanity is not gendered. It is the polar opposite of evil, and the good of humanity is not attributable to either one sex or the other. Humanity encompasses strengths, vulnerabilities, compassion, reason, emotion, love and honor; all of these things belong to a balanced human being regardless of his or her physical gender. Men and women must make every effort to make sure that the ways in which they recognize the stereotypes of gender do not keep them from being the best humans.

In order for a human to possess these humanly qualities, he or she first must value them and identify with them. In other words, one must have completed a definition of self which includes a code of ethics, integrity, and a value for humane action, before he or she can be an individual who is valuable to society. Macbeth fails on these counts. He chooses to define himself as a masculine politician/warrior, one who is valued for battlefield operations and exploits, one who can kill without hesitation to achieve his goals. Macbeth distinguishes himself from Malcolm and Macduff; he kills whenever it serves his purpose regardless of the degree to which that killing may be socially sanctioned, whereas they are successful warriors *and* they know when to quit, so they are successful humans too. One might say that Macbeth takes his job home with him. In the play's beginning Macbeth, in the nascence of his self-definition, is wavering on the edge of humanity.³⁵ He jumps

35. Danby also sees that "Shakespeare is concerned not only with the evil man's impact on the world,, but also with the manner and process of his entry into evil So we see Macbeth at first almost

into the abyss of inhumanity after he is affected not only by the Witches' suggestions, but by Lady Macbeth's prescriptions for masculinity. Before Macbeth chooses his path he possesses both an inclination toward untempered violence and a lust for power, as well as a small sense of the distinction between right and wrong and an inkling that perhaps he should do right. Macbeth's sense of self is so weak and he is so impressionable that he is easily led astray.

Macbeth goes further than neglecting to define himself in accordance with humanity. He chooses *not* to know himself, thereby abandoning his personal integrity to be buffeted by forces around him. Immediately after Duncan's murder Macbeth realizes that "to know my deed 'twere best not to know myself." (II.ii.72) In other words, now that the deed has been committed, Macbeth cannot stand to know himself, and if he had known himself before, the deed would not have been committed at all.³⁶ Lady Macbeth counsels him that "these deeds must not be thought/ After these ways; so, it will make us mad," (and she should know) so by refusing to examine himself Macbeth preserves his sanity and is able to continue on his purposefully destructive path. (II.ii.33)

Because Macbeth shuns any inclinations to become human by looking within and changing what is there, he expects things outside of him to effect his self-definition. Just as Macbeth sees murder as a show of love, so he expects it to stand in the stead of nurturing himself. When Macbeth hears the news that Banquo's murder is done, but Fleance has escaped, he curses, "I had else been perfect,/ Whole as the marble.../ But now I am...bound in/ To saucy doubts and fears." (III.iv.22) Once again, fear of the tangible is the only thing which troubles Macbeth;

equally poised (as anyone might be) between the good and the bad....One notable thing is that in the degeneration of a man we watch the procreation of a machiavel...in terms of misuse of the intellect, misdirection of the will, and denial of natural compassion." (161-162)

36. McElroy defines Macbeth as "a criminal who is deeply aware of his own criminality, is repulsed by it, but is driven by internal and external pressures ever further into crime." (206) By this interpretation, Macbeth does know himself, but proceeds anyway.

he expects that if all of the agents of his fear were to be removed that he would be whole, that somehow *that* would make him a man.

The social conditioning to be "brave" is all-consuming to Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's accusations of cowardice strike him to the core, so that in attempting to realize a manly self-actualization, Macbeth strives to ensure that fear cannot touch him. He achieves this goal only by being blind to reality and so he finally declares, "The mind I sway by and the heart I bear/ Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear." (V.iii.9) Before this time, fear is all that kept him from being whole; in this hollow declaration of self-confidence, Macbeth seems to be saying that now he is a complete man. Macduff is right when he calls Macbeth a coward. There is never true courage which fortifies Macbeth; he possesses only the false suggestion of physical invincibility told by the Witches. But Macbeth himself notices that something is amiss with regard to his courageousness. When the women's cries are raised for Lady Macbeth's death, Macbeth wonders that

I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been, my senses would have cooled
To hear a night-shriek,...

...

...I have supped full with horrors.
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me. (V.v.9)

Macbeth has become so habituated to the circumstances which attend his inhuman actions that, finally, he remains unaffected by even the things which should be most terrible to him; he is so filled with evil thoughts that there is room in him for nothing else.

After rejecting any spiritual avenues for defining himself, Macbeth does everything in his power which is physical in nature in an attempt to find an identity; his will to control his destiny is characteristic of stereotypical manliness. The masculine man cannot just let his life happen to him; he must make it happen. Just

as it is today, a person is more admired if he is successful through actions of his own, rather than through 'dumb luck.' Macbeth is certainly not willing to let Fortune have its way with him; though the Witches profess that he will be king, and he tells himself, "If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,/ Without my stir," he needs to make sure by taking matters into his own hands and killing Duncan. (I.iii.143) Even before he speaks to Lady Macbeth he has conceived of the murder and hopes "that be/ Which the eye fears when it is done to see." (I.iv.52) It does not take long for Macbeth to take the bit in his teeth and run.

Banquo by comparison is more pragmatic and balanced in his attitude toward the Witches. He proceeds with caution and warns Macbeth that "oftentimes, to win us to our harm,/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray's/ In deepest consequence." (I.iii.123) Macbeth is not satisfied with the honest trifle that is his new title as Thane of Cawdor, and he lacks the discretion to allow the cards to fall where they will. With no effort on his part, Banquo's fortune told by the Witches comes true; whereas with borrowed trouble Macbeth has given his "eternal jewel," his soul, to the devil and made "the seeds of Banquo kings!" (III.i.68) So much for the masculine will to take charge of one's life. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare leads us to question the very foundations of our definition of masculinity.

By the play's end Macbeth has succeeded not in defining himself by human terms, but by the inhuman terms of stereotypical masculinity. He has subordinated his emotions and fears to action and thereby attained power; he should now be at the pinnacle of his glory, but Angus, an unbiased voice in the play, knows that Macbeth "does feel his title/ Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe/ Upon a dwarfish thief." (V.iii.20) On the brink of Macbeth's demise, he recognizes that his victories are without meaning, that for him, life "is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of

sound and fury/ Signifying nothing." (V.v.26)³⁷ He is left only with his macho shell, so that "that which should accompany old age,/ As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,/ I must not look to have; but, in their stead,/ Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honor..." (V.iii.24) Menteith knows that Macbeth can see that "all that is within him does condemn/ Itself for being there." (V.ii.24) Macbeth is not ignorant of the existence of human virtues, but he knows that at this point they are beyond his grasp. All he can show for his quest for masculine identification are those things "which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not." (V.iii.28) Macbeth never lacked physical courage, but he never possessed the courage to define himself as one who would rather have and deserve love bestowed by troops of friends, instead of power over troops of soldiers.³⁸

True heroism eluded Macbeth; for all his effort he gained only the irrelevant "mouth-honor" bestowed on one who fulfills his gender expectations. Though Macbeth can see that the joys of companionship and the rewards of compassion are not to be his, he does not see his situation as being the result of his own poor choices; Macbeth follows through with his course of action to the end, his fate sealed by his manly wilfullness. Macbeth declares that "at least we'll die with harness on our back," as if at that point this fact is significant; though he knows that he has not won, Macbeth still does not see that his attention to masculine, physical action is to blame and should be renounced. (V.vi.52)

In accordance with Macbeth's inability to piece together cause and effect with regard to his fate, he shows no remorse for his unethical actions. When he commands Macduff to "get thee back! My soul is too much charged/ With blood of

37. Jarold Ramsey in "The Perversion of Manliness in *Macbeth*" finds that "the more Macbeth is driven to pursue what he and Lady Macbeth call manliness - the more he perverts that code into a rationale for reflexive aggression - the less *humane* he becomes, until at last he forfeits nearly all claims on the race itself, and his vaunted manhood, as he finally realizes, becomes meaningless." (287)

38. Asp recognizes that "as Macbeth accepts a false masculinity that simultaneously fosters the illusion of his godlike power and diminishes his total human development, he is alienated from the very society that inculcates the stereotype." (169)

thine already," Macbeth speaks not in sorrow for crimes committed against Macduff; here he is only egotistically assuming that he will vanquish Macduff just as he slaughtered his family. (V.viii.5) By contrast, at the play's beginning Malcolm notes that the traitor Cawdor before his death "set forth/ A deep repentance: nothing in his life/ Became him like the leaving it." (I.iv.6) Cawdor regretted his trespasses, and so he was ready for death. Macbeth, on the other hand, had all of his most glorious and heroic moments well before death; recognition of his wrongs and subsequent contrition was not his forte.³⁹ The distance between Macbeth's state of being at his death and any imaginable state of grace is as far as is the play's end from its beginning.

Though he is unrepentant, Macbeth acknowledges that the private rewards of living a good life cannot be his. There is a correspondence between his attention to physicality and the fact that all of the recognition he receives is public. Lady Macbeth never acknowledges that he has done as she wished; even in her sleep she cries, "Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier and afeared?" (V.i.40) Macbeth failed to meld his public and private spheres, just as he failed to give proper attention to his humanity in order to further his career. Through Macbeth's failure, Shakespeare shows the futility of foregoing human balance in the hopes of material success; in the end Macbeth is a failure by all accounts.

This division between the heart and that which a man must do is prescribed by society's structure, and it is not peculiar to the Macbeths. In order to be successful, one cannot afford to spend time mooning about, appreciating the joys of spiritual and domestic quietude. Macduff is caught in this same paradox, but he, unlike the Macbeths, fights it instead of subscribing to it. Lady Macduff condemns Macduff for leaving her in Scotland, saying, "He loves us not;/ He wants the natural

39. Taylor also sees that "there is a world of experience separating the man who throws away his life *as though* it were unimportant from one who does so convinced that it is." (346) Proser also concurs on this point. (90)

touch..." (IV.ii.9) The natural touch would have kept Macduff by her side, defending his family, his private life. But Macduff's public duty to Scotland takes precedence over his wife and children.⁴⁰ Even though he claims that they are most important to him, when Ross comes to him in England, from Scotland, Macduff's first inquiry is of the state: "Stands Scotland where it did?" (IV.iii.163); only later does he ask, "How does my wife?" (IV.iii.177) To be an honorable soldier-hero and a masculine man by society's standards, Macduff must go to England for the larger, public cause of saving Scotland from Macbeth. The demands of his gender dictate that he deny the inclination of his heart, which without the public pressure would have left him home to protect his family.⁴¹

Though he abandoned his family, Macduff's attention to Scotland and his subsequent actions can be viewed as having an ultimately humanitarian impetus. It was his human reason coupled with emotion that prompted him to defy the evil rule of Macbeth to save his homeland; in addition, it was his human strength that enabled him to follow through with a course of action to fight that evil. Macduff is concerned that "each new morn/ New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows/ Strike heaven on the face;" (IV.iii.5) Macduff's show of strength is very different from Macbeth's because it is balanced by his respect for humanity and emotion. In this sense, Macduff's public and private lives are compatible; they at some point find a common ground. Perhaps the fact that Macduff is not "one of woman born" is symbolically significant with regard to his ability to disregard stereotypes and transcend traditional gender expectations; he may represent an immortal, spiritual

40. Harding does a similar reading of this passage, commenting that Macduff's "dilemma consisted in the choice between living out his wife's fantasy of the dauntless protector, with an impotent gesture of manliness, and playing an effective part in the real world of men." (249)

41. Danby also explores the conflicts between allegiance to public and private worlds: "A man is in himself a society of meanings. It is because of this that he can choose. And it is by choice that he grows. The collision of ideas in the world of group-interests is paralleled by the competition of ideas in the realm of private choice. The great artist like Shakespeare takes both spheres of choice for his own." (17)

essence of humankind, a symbol of which is embodied in his lack of a normal mortal birth.

The character of Malcolm also serves as an example of balanced humanity. He is secure enough in his self-definition that it does not threaten his masculinity to suggest that he and Macduff "seek out some desolate shade, and there/ Weep our sad bosoms empty." (IV.iii.2) Malcolm is able to deny unreasonable gender expectations in order to be true to himself. He is in addition, and by contrast with Macbeth, a true political hero, a king who would not abuse his power for selfish gain. Malcolm and Macduff exhibit the balance of strength and feeling which serves their society best.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The quality of human bonds in a given community is fostered best when the individuals in that community are willing and able to make their public and private lives indistinguishable where humane ethics and resulting action is concerned. The man who is the pillar of society, but abuses his wife at home could not possibly be the best citizen. Likewise, the mother who nurtures her children seemingly flawlessly by day and commits ax-murders by night probably leaves much to be desired as a parent, regardless of appearances. It is ridiculous to assume that one can lead a double life without adversely affecting those around him; it is fair to assume that those who lead such fragmented lives are emotionally disturbed. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are two whose lives were so compartmentalized. They attempted to make themselves whole, not by integrating their realities, but by denying the existence of whole parts of their selves. Instead of attempting to become more balanced, they tipped their human scale to the extreme, thereby becoming inhuman. We pity the Macbeths because they are so confused about life. Robert Kimbrough tells that

although they fail miserably on the stage of this life, Shakespeare constantly keeps before us their potential for human fulfillment. In spite of their isolating, alienating behavior in the play, a bond with the audience is maintained so that we are not merely repulsed; we are moved through pity to understand and to fear the personal and social destructiveness of polarized masculinity and femininity. (177)

The Macbeths wanted to be all strength and no emotion, all callousness and without vulnerabilities, because they thought that the key to their success lay in leaving their most humane qualities behind.

Strength as well as compassion are necessary to humanity. It may very well be that material goals are not to be attained through unselfish action alone, but it is also likely that no human rewards are reaped through unadulterated shows of strength. Macbeth got to be king and Lady Macbeth was queen, but their success was so limited because they gave disproportionate attention to stereotypically masculine ideals. The irony is that they probably would not have succeeded in becoming king and queen had they been more balanced and not killed Duncan, but then if they had been more balanced then perhaps they would have been happy without such material success. Life can be a bitter pill to swallow; people accepting of their humanity know that they cannot have everything.

So the point is made that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are deviants who gave up their places in society. But would the world be fine if we were all so sweet as Lady Macduff? Probably not. We as individuals must be strong in order to combat evils detrimental to society. Lady Macduff is perhaps too stereotypically feminine, unable to fight for what is right. Macduff is the best example of a wholly integrated human in the play, even though it is with difficulty that he defies stereotype to acknowledge emotion while maintaining strength; the trouble he encounters in being the best person possible are attributable to situations beyond his control, namely the evil brought about by those like Macbeth who have no respect for the softer side of human nature.

The health and survival of any human community is dependent on its individuals defining themselves with regard to a rigorous standard of personal integrity; those who do so are able to answer their own hearts and consciences with minimal interference from outside social influences or "noise." The more personal integrity, sense of justice and thus self-respect that either a man or a woman has, the more ideally human that person is. Without an ethical basis for personal

identification, one cannot be defined as humane; he or she would then of necessity be evil, the antithesis of that which is ideally human.

Though a society creates its own gender stereotypes, its best interests are seldom served by them; the actions that these stereotypes prescribe are ultimately dehumanizing.⁴² Attention to stereotypes leads one to give greater priority to his public image than his inner self. Thus a man who attempts to comply with masculine gender expectations must distance himself publicly from "feminine" shows of feeling, and this public action is bound to have an effect on his private attitude. By the same token, a woman who wishes to fulfill feminine expectations is inhibited in many instances from acting with integrity because such feminine definition precludes her from possessing the natural strength necessary to enforce what she believes to be right.⁴³ Thus stereotypes are venerated at the expense of the individual's self-respect, and may lead to unethical acts on his or her part.⁴⁴ The individual's inability to observe ethical codes in these instances comes when conscience is ignored so that social convention can be observed.

In choosing to honor masculine or feminine stereotypes one must first eliminate dimensions of his or her humanity.⁴⁵ The state of ideal humanity lies on a continuum, and is centered between the two gender roles; as one ventures away from that center toward either masculinity or femininity, he or she also departs from

42. With regard to society, Danby notes that "while good custom is to be revered as the expression of men's common nature, perverse and unnatural custom [such as gender expectations] can at all times creep in and become established. The theory of Nature did not necessarily commit one to the *status quo* no matter what. The standards to be observed are not derived from society. Society in fact must conform to what the reasonable man, by God's light, would recognize as natural." (30)

43. Asp comments that "in a society in which femininity is divorced from strength and womanliness is equated with weakness, where the humane virtues are associated with womanliness, the strong woman finds herself hemmed in psychologically, forced to reject her own womanliness, to some extent, if she is to be true to her strength." (159)

44. Taylor presents this idea eloquently: "We divorce manhood from the moral life at the peril of our souls, and, in so doing, render the term meaningless." (348)

45. Robert Kimbrough writes that "Shakespeare sensed that so long as one remains exclusively female or exclusively male, that person will be restricted and confined, denied human growth. Each will be the prisoner of gender, not its keeper." (175)

that which is most human.⁴⁶ Though natural order supports humanity, extremes of masculinity and femininity defy natural order by polarizing the human race. The key to becoming and remaining human is a strict reliance on personal integrity. This integrity must first be self-defined; then it is maintained in one way by the refusal to accept stereotypical gender role definitions as factors which govern one's life. Ethical problems arise when a dichotomy exists between the role one is attempting to fulfill and their human self which they should first respect. Women must reject their traditional gender role if they are to be true to their innate strengths. By the same token, men must disregard ideals of masculinity in order to respect their emotions.

The Macbeths would have done better to have recognized their humanity first, then distinguished themselves as male or female. If this had been done, the tragedy would have been averted. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare presents an example of the consequences of humans who act after distancing themselves from what is human, instead of realizing that what is human is most important and one's actions should be governed by laws of humanity. Gender differences should be honored in physicality, but spiritually, we should be indistinguishable as humans, encompassing the best traits of both masculinity and femininity and rejecting the shortcomings of both gender roles as destructive to the goals of humanity.

46. Juliet Dusinberre offers the same theme in a slightly different, but complimentary manner: "Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses." (308)

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