

SEPARATION, VIOLENCE AND THE DEVIL: MISOGYNY IN *MACBETH*

BY

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## Abstract

King James I of England and VI of Scotland influenced the writing of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The king was an open homosexual who disliked women. Similar to many men of his time, James distrusted women's power and sexuality and he argued for the reality of witches. In *Macbeth*, men must separate themselves from women in order to be successful and they must use violence to prove their masculinity. References to Christianity, the devil, and Lilith underlie the belief that women will cause men to sin and consequently suffer for doing so. Although Shakespeare condemns women and witches in *Macbeth*, he is much more sympathetic to women in some of his other plays. Thus, Shakespeare's actual views on women remain unclear.

As his wife is found dead, Macbeth, in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, says, “The time has been, my senses would have cooled / To hear a night-shriek” (5.5.10-11).<sup>1</sup> Macbeth’s life has been turned upside down by the influences of women. He has fallen from a worthy general to a traitor king whom other brave men seek to destroy. Women destroying men is an ancient story, but one that is made more modern in the trials and tribulations of accused witches. Indeed, witches were a topic of contention and fear during Shakespeare’s day. Although the Renaissance, lasting roughly from the fourteenth century through the early seventeenth century, is fondly remembered as a time of advancements in scientific knowledge, humanism and artistic genius, and positively compared to the bleak Middle Ages, not all of European society benefitted from this era of “rebirth.”<sup>2</sup> As they had been in times past, accused witches were used as political, religious and social scapegoats to unify English society in times of discontinuity during the Renaissance. Despite being hailed as a revered figure in the Western history, William Shakespeare was not above partaking in and profiting from the witch craze.

Although Shakespeare’s personal views on women and witches are not clear, the emphasis on separating men from women, on committing violence in order to be considered a man, and on depicting the catastrophes that occur to men when women are given influence over them in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* reflects the misogynistic fears of Shakespeare’s contemporary society at large and, more specifically, the fears of King James I of England during the Jacobean era.

The witch issue was one that spread over European countries and time periods. Shortly before Martin Luther posted his 95 theses in 1517, Catholic Dominican monks, under the

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Edited by Sylvan Barnet. New York: Signet

<sup>2</sup> Some of my observations are drawn from class lecture (Frederick Kiefer, class lecture, ENGL 431B: Shakespeare, University of Arizona, Modern Languages Building, Spring 2017).

direction of the Pope, wrote the *Malleus Malficarum* [*Hammer of Witches*], which was a “manual for inquisitors of such heresies in the Rhineland and Northern Germany that would enable the Church to identify those possessed by demonic powers, to force their confessions in a quasi-legal fashion, and provide torturous punishments to rid the country side of them.”<sup>3</sup> During the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I, Protestants often used witch-hunts as a weapon against Catholics, who were always a hot topic of concern for Protestant leaders. Northern European countries who practiced Protestantism tended to accuse people of being witches more often than Catholic nations, but both denominations did so.<sup>4</sup> Witches even appear in Northern European art. German artist Hans Baldung Grien’s 1544 woodcut, called *Bewitched Groom*, features an odd combination of an unconscious man, an angry female horse and a stereotypically ugly witch peeping through the man’s window (Figure 1). Grien studied under Albrecht Dürer, a favorite of the Northern Renaissance, who depicted witches fairly frequently in his own art.<sup>5</sup>

Protestants were perhaps more likely to accuse people of witchcraft because they held very strong beliefs on how men and women should act within their families and communities to uphold a strict faith in God, and the failure to do so was seen as moral corruption. Protestantism promoted strict gender roles, and the breaking of these roles could result with an accusation of witchcraft.<sup>6</sup> Not all Protestants were convinced of the existence of witches, however. By 1580, “more often than not, it was the puritan wing of the Anglican Church that appeared most eager to

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<sup>3</sup> James Snyder, “Part 3: Renaissance and Reformation in the Sixteenth Century,” *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, The Graphic Arts from 1350-1575 Second Edition*, rev. by Larry Silver & Henry Luttikhuisen (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2005), 365.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198717720.003.0002.

<sup>5</sup> Snyder, “Part 3: Renaissance,” 366.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Godbeer, “‘Your Wife Will Be Your Biggest Accuser,’: Reinforcing Codes of Manhood At New England Witch Trials,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15, no.3 (2017): 474-504. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

promote the prosecution of witches while conformable colleagues adopted an increasingly skeptical position.” Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* was an important literary work that did not outright deny the existence of witches but did question the veracity of certain claims revolving them. Published in 1584, Scot focused on the fact that many witch trials and sightings of demonic behavior were conveniently in areas with many Puritans. The strictness of Puritan teachings made for a broad interpretation of witches and demonic activity. Scot’s decision to criticize the Puritan community may have been a political move to align himself with less extreme Protestants, but modern day society understands the Puritans to have been a harshly strict and cold people who are condemned in more recent works like *The Crucible* and *A Scarlet Letter*.<sup>7</sup>

Certain misconceptions revolve around the history of the witch, misconceptions that Diane Purkiss tries to debunk in her book, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. Purkiss claims that the popular belief that accused witches were typically free spirited, sexually liberated healers whose “medical knowledge threatened the doctor” caused them to be tortured into confession and then burned at the stake is incorrect. In fact most of the women actually accused of witchcraft were old, poor, and without male family members or spouses to defend them. Purkiss asserts that “in some countries, torture was not used at all, and in England, witches were hanged rather than burned.” Women were just as likely to accuse a relative or neighbor of being a witch as men were. This is not to say that the witch issue was not an issue of gender, as women were more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men, but both men and women were able to have prejudices. “The surviving records suggest that witchcraft prosecutions and executions peaked in the 1580s and 1590s,” which was during the

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<sup>7</sup> Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting and Politics*.

reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth I was sovereign of England during the first half of Shakespeare's successful career and she herself was sometimes associated with witches. The English generally liked the queen, but certain "Catholic propagandists were keen to present her leagued with Satan. There was an opportunity in the fact that her mother, Ann Boleyn, had been accused of witchcraft."<sup>8</sup> However, Elizabeth's successor was the monarch who remains most firmly entangled with the history of witches in Renaissance England.

A discussion of the witches and gender roles in *Macbeth* cannot be had without a basic understanding of King James VI of Scotland and I of England, who ruled England when the play was written in around 1606. James was born on June 19, 1566. He was the son of Mary Queen of Scots, not to be confused with Queen Mary I of England who was the half sister of Elizabeth I. James's mother was a cousin of the rival sisters, Elizabeth I and Mary I. As an already orphaned infant, little James became King James VI of Scotland.<sup>9</sup> As an adult, James became king of England in March of 1603 after the death of Elizabeth I.<sup>10</sup> James I is connected to Shakespeare not only as a sovereign but also as a patron of Shakespeare's theatre company. Earlier in 1599, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage, owners of the newly reconstructed Globe Theatre, took in five additional business partners who would share ownership of fifty percent of the theatre. The Burbage brothers, sons of James Burbage who opened The Theatre in 1576, retained ownership of the other fifty percent. This theatre group was called The Lord Chamberlain's Men. Once King James took over patronage of the theatre, the group became known more simply as The King's Men.

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<sup>8</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 7-8, 91, 94, 185, 186.

<sup>9</sup> G.P.V. Akrigg, *Letters of James VI & I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Jane Rickard, *Writing the Monarch in Jacobean England: Jonson, Donne, Shakespeare, and the Works of King James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 27.

*The Tragedy of Macbeth*, which was first performed around July 1606, was written with King James I in mind. Indeed, the play was probably first performed in 1606 at Hampton Court while James was entertaining the King of Denmark, and not at the Globe Theatre, though it was likely performed there later.<sup>11</sup> The play is set in Scotland, where James was born. Shakespeare also included the ancestral origins of James I in the character of Banquo, who is believed to be an ancestor of James. This ancestral lineage is called the Stuart Myth.<sup>12</sup> This relationship is alluded to twice in the play. The Third Witch tells Banquo, “Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none” (1.3.67). Although Banquo is murdered, his son, Fleance, escapes the murderers and does not return to the story. The viewer can assume Fleance will go on to have children of his own. The relation between Banquo and James is reinforced when Macbeth revisits the witches. The stage directions of the dumb show read, *A show of eight Kings and Banquo, last [King] with a glass in his hand* (4.1). The “glass” mentioned is a hand mirror, a tool reserved for only the very wealthy during the Renaissance and usually made in Venice. The mirror is meant to show the reflection of King James himself, who sits in the audience, insinuating that the row of kings reveals the entire family lineage between Banquo and James. Furthermore, the Porter scene acts as another reference to the king. The Porter humorously talks to himself after a knocking is heard. He says, “O, come in, equivocator” (2.3.11-12). The word “equivocator” refers to the practice of Catholic priests refusing to outright admit being Catholic, but not denying their religion either. The porter is also referring to a 1605 Catholic plot, led by a man named Guy Fawkes, to blow up the houses of Parliament. The incident, which occurred shortly after James took the English throne, became known as the Gunpowder Plot.

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Shamas, “*We Three*”: *The Mythology of Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Shamas, “*We Three*,” 23.

Because Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* with James in mind, the king likely played a huge role in how women are negatively depicted in the play. Although scholars argue about why James I was not nearly as popular as Elizabeth I had been before him, one likely reason is that James I was a homosexual. The topic of his homosexuality is one that many historians from different eras have shied away from, but the topic has garnered more attention in recent years as ideas about gender and sexuality have progressed.<sup>13</sup> Evidence exists that James much preferred the company of men over that of women throughout his lifetime, and he does not seem to have bonded with any women throughout his life. As already mentioned, James's mother was absent during his childhood. Multiple different men, including his grandfather, served as regent until James was old enough to rule himself, since he was a baby when he was crowned king of Scotland. One regent, the Earl of Mar, had a "stern wife [who] showed the boy only a part of the affection that he might have received from his mother." James's fearsome childhood tutor, George Buchanan, hated women and likely shared his feelings with his young pupil. Although he does not seem to have had many close relationships with anyone in his childhood years, James did find comfort and possibly romance in Seigneur D'Aubigny when he was a teenager.<sup>14</sup> As King of England, James I was known to favor young, attractive men above all others in his court. He took a special interest in the Duke of Buckingham among a few others.<sup>15</sup> James was not shy about his sexuality. Indeed, he "lodged his favorites in his bedchamber" and "he embraced, hung

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<sup>13</sup> Michael B. Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 2, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy4.library.arizona.edu/content/pdf/10.1057%2F9780230514898.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Akrigg, *Letters of James VI & I*, 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 74.



about the necks of and kissed his favorites in public.”<sup>16</sup> James I’s attraction to men was not a well-kept secret, but rather a public fact that Shakespeare must have been aware of.

James I’s openness about homosexuality at first implies that he must have been progressive and ahead of the times. Unfortunately, this was not the case. James did not trust women, constantly worried about female empowerment, and had an obsession with witches. In fact, he added to the witch-hunt insanity by “argu[ing] for the reality of witches’ compacts with the devil, and believed that he had himself been the target of witches’ machinations.”<sup>17</sup> James expressed an aversion towards witches long before he became Shakespeare’s king. While still king of Scotland, “James was persuaded that these witches were responsible for causing a storm that sank one of the ships in his wedding fleet and that they were trying to kill him through black magic.”<sup>18</sup> The women thought to have caused this incident were tortured in a trial in 1591, which James was present for.<sup>19</sup> James became convinced that witches were conspiring to kill him, and thus began a witch hunting fervor in Scotland that resulted in the deaths of one thousand supposed witches, most of whom were women.<sup>20</sup>

In 1594, James I published his *Daemonologie*, which argues that witches are a real threat and discusses how to handle them.<sup>21</sup> The *Daemonologie* is written as a conversation between two characters: Epistemon, like James, firmly believes that witches pose a great threat to society while Philomathes questions the threat of witches. When asked why more women are witches than men, Epistemon replies, “that sex is far frailer than man is, so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was over well proved to be true by the serpent’s deceiving of

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<sup>16</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 199.

<sup>20</sup> Shamas, “*We Three*,” 19.

<sup>21</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 20.

Eve at the beginning [...].”<sup>22</sup> According to James, women can be thanked for the fall of mankind and still have not learned their lesson. Despite his obvious distrust of women, James did marry Anne of Denmark in 1589, most likely to assuage criticism about requiring a male heir, and the early years of the marriage were happy enough.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the marriage proved quite fruitful. James and Anne had multiple children who survived to adulthood, unlike Queen Elizabeth who was left without a real heir. Their son, Charles, would succeed James after his death in 1625.<sup>24</sup> Despite their success with pregnancies, James and his wife did not remain happy. In fact, Anne was not a huge supporter of her husband and she clashed with many of his ideas and values. Anne dabbled in Catholicism, opposed James I’s peaceful foreign policy, tried to wrest control of the children away from James, especially Prince Henry who was the original heir to the throne, and she greatly resented the attention James showed to his male lovers instead of her.<sup>25</sup> “Recent historians have shown that Queen Anne reacted to ‘the homosexual and patriarchal ethos’ of her husband’s court by establishing a vibrant court of her own that served as a locus for resistance.”<sup>26</sup> James I chose to surround himself with men instead of women and does seem to have been able to trust or to relate to even his own wife, which did not bode well for already negative societal views on women.

Despite his extreme hatred for witches, James was not always quick to assume that witchcraft was at the root of a problem. He questioned the 1605 case of Anne Gunter, whose family falsely claimed a dark spirit possessed her.<sup>27</sup> Fortunately, witch-hunt fervor had already

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<sup>22</sup> King James VI of Scotland/ James I of England, *Daemonologie: In Modern English*, trans. by Tomas Orozco (San Bernardino, 2017), 60.

<sup>23</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Young, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Young, 82-83.

<sup>26</sup> Young, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 201.

faded after the death of Queen Elizabeth and continued to fade after James died.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, James I proved a formidable force in the ideas surrounding witches. Issues related to female empowerment during the Jacobean era likely added to fears about witches. For instance, during his reign, James I, like many others, became increasingly concerned about women attempting to shed their traditional feminine roles and assume more traditionally masculine roles.<sup>29</sup> Phyllis Rackin illustrates one of the ways women tried to do so. She writes, “During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, clothing had been increasingly differentiated to emphasize and produce embodied sexual difference. [...] In late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth century England, some women adopted the fashion of masculine attire, and although moralists strenuously condemned the practice, it was never made illegal.”<sup>30</sup> James and others wanted to maintain the status quo, and this can be seen in plays written during the time.

During Elizabeth’s reign, witches were not a common character in the theatre, probably because Elizabeth herself was a single and powerful woman and it could have been difficult to separate that image of a powerful female witch from the queen. Once James became king, witches began appearing more and more on the theatre stage.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, James may have liked seeing witches turned into theatrical entertainment, as they are in *Macbeth*, because it gave him a sense of power over them, as opposed to the lack of power he likely felt when his ship sank, and

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<sup>28</sup> Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics*.

<sup>29</sup> Katelyn Maire McCarthy, “Transvestism, Witchcraft, and the Early Modern Lilith” (master’s thesis, Lehigh University, 2012), 10. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/docview/1021049633?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 28-29. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy3.library.arizona.edu/lib/uaz/detail.action?docID=422714>.

<sup>31</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 185.

their presence on stage created a sense of “otherness” between him and the witches.<sup>32</sup> Diane Purkiss writes of *Macbeth* specifically, “ Since James is actually alluded to in *Macbeth* in the scene where the witches display Banquo’s heirs, conventional wisdom sees the witches as a compliment to him; or, as we might put it today, as a staging of violent misogyny for the benefit of a patriarchal absolutist paranoid about women’s powers.”<sup>33</sup>

The male characters in *Macbeth* reaffirm James’s distrust in women. Macbeth associates himself with women and ultimately suffers. Despite knowing he should be “doing every thing / Safe toward [Duncan’s] love and honor” (1.4.26-27), he still is persuaded by the witches and his wife to commit regicide. Had he listened to Banquo, his fellow general, or to his own intuition, Macbeth would not have ended his life in tragedy. After Macbeth becomes Thane of Cawdor, Banquo is not as quick to align himself with the witches. He says, “And 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” (1.3.123-26). Later, Macbeth tries to test the waters with Banquo to see if he will help his cause. Banquo responds, “So I lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchised and allegiance clear, / I shall be counseled” (2.1.26-29). Banquo likely has at least a hint of an idea about what Macbeth intends to do, but he does not take part in the crime. Banquo’s correct prediction and his innocence of any wrongdoing are made all the more important by the fact that he is the supposed ancestor of James. On some level, even Macbeth understands that his actions are not quite right. He says, “that we but teach / Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return / To plague the inventor” (1.7.8-10). Macbeth correctly predicts that if he betrays his own king, other men might betray him when he becomes king.

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<sup>32</sup> Purkiss, 200-201.

<sup>33</sup> Purkiss, 206.

Despite opportunities provided by his and Banquo's male intuitions to act righteously, Macbeth still allows the witches and his wife to corrupt him.

Most other male characters in the play are not in close ranks with women as Macbeth is. In fact, many of them have successfully separated themselves from the female sex. Malcolm tells Macduff he is "yet unknown to woman" (4.3.125-26). He has not had intercourse with a woman. Earlier in the scene, Malcolm shocked Macduff by saying, "[...] your wives, your daughters, / Your matrons and your maids could not fill up / The cistern of my lust, and my desire [...]" (4.3.61-63). Malcolm's sexual inexperience would have been seen as a positive virtue to a Renaissance audience because of a "long tradition of medieval and Renaissance thought that defined a man's sexual passion for a woman as dangerous and degrading."<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Malcolm's assertion that he is still a virgin can also make him appear more masculine. Indeed, sexually promiscuous men were considered less manly than men who were able to suppress their sexual desire during the Renaissance.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Malcolm's forces are mostly comprised of "many unrough youths that even now / Protest their first of manhood" (5.2.10-11). The battle against Macbeth, and ultimately against evil, will turn these boys into men. Most importantly, Macduff says to the disillusioned Macbeth, "Macduff was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped" (5.8.15-16). Macduff is the product of a caesarean section as opposed to a normal vaginal birth. In his introduction to a medical treatise from the sixteenth century, Thomas Baskett writes, "During the 1500's, caesarean section was carried out almost exclusively after the mother's death in an attempt, usually in vain, to salvage the fetus."<sup>36</sup> Macduff's mother almost

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<sup>34</sup> Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> Rackin, 105.

<sup>36</sup> François Rousset, *Caesarian Birth: The work of François Rousset – A New Treatise on Hysterotomotokie or Caesarian Childbirth*, ed. Thomas Baskett, trans. Ronald Cyr (London: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2010), 2.

definitely would not have survived the surgery, forever separating him from one of the most important female influences of his life. These men all find success at the end of the play. Malcolm will be the next king of Scotland, the young soldiers win the battle, and Macduff revenges his family by killing Macbeth. Separating one's self from women and being a man appears the only way to be successful in the world of *Macbeth*.

The apparitions who come out of the witches' cauldron further prove that men can and should separate themselves from women. The second apparition says, "Laugh to scorn / The pow'r of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.79-81). The third apparition is a baby "that rises like the issue of a king" (4.1.87). The second apparition offers "a fantasy of man finally divided from the troubling and troubled mother/wife" and the third apparition provides "a genealogy produced apparently exclusively from the male figure of Banquo." Macbeth's inability to understand that men can be separated from women and that he has listened to the wrong voices prevents Macbeth from finding success as the other male characters do and James would have respected this idea.<sup>37</sup>

The world of *Macbeth* is filled with violence and bloodshed, which further aims to define what it means to be a man. The issue of violence and manliness is also associated with the Jacobean Era. Indeed, English Protestants were beginning to worry that England was not masculine enough under the reign of James I, not so much because of his homosexuality, but because James was a pacifist and he would not enter into wars with other nations. Wars were considered the epitome of manliness and failure to make war left many feeling that their sovereign was not allowing England to be represented as a proper "manly" nation. James seemed especially weak militarily because Elizabeth I, a woman, was credited with the defeat of the

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<sup>37</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 213.

Spanish Armada, which turned England into a leading world power. Indeed, members of James I's court began arguing for war and more military might, especially against Spain, because not going to war made England seem too "womanly."<sup>38</sup>

Similar to these Jacobean fears of not waging violent wars, men in *Macbeth* have to be violent or murder others to prove they are real men. At the opening battle scene, King Duncan asks, "What bloody man is that?" (1.2.1). Almost every male character has been covered in blood at least once by the play's end, but this is seen as a virtue. For instance, Macbeth is called "brave Macbeth" for his "bloody execution" during battle (1.2.16,18). Macbeth says to his wife, "Bring forth men-children only; for thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males" (1.7.72-74). Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's murderous ways would not allow for a baby girl to survive her womb. However, Macbeth is not always hailed as a man. Lady Macbeth constantly challenges Macbeth's manhood when he does not want to act violently. She becomes angry when Macbeth attempts to halt the murder of Duncan and she says, "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" (1.7.49-51). Lady Macbeth compares Macbeth to a child when he is too afraid to retrieve the dagger from Duncan's room. She says, "'Tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil" (2.2.53-54). She again asks, "Are you a man?" when Macbeth psychologically struggles with the fact that he murdered his friend, Banquo, and sees his ghost at the dinner (3.4.59). At the same dinner, Lady Macbeth says, "O, these flaws and starts, / Imposters to true fear, would well become / A woman's story at a winter's fire, / Authorized by her grandam" (3.4.64-67). Macbeth criticizes his masculinity just like his wife does. After seeing the ghost, Macbeth says, "If trembling I inhabit then, protest me the baby of a girl" (3.4.106-7). Upon finding out that

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<sup>38</sup> Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 72.

Macduff can kill him, Macbeth says, “Accursed be that tongue that tells me so, / For it hath cowed my better part of man!” (5.8.17-18). The editor’s footnote for this line explains that the “better part of man” is his “manly spirit.” Macbeth experiences real fear once he realizes he can be killed. Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth himself imply that Macbeth must be able to act violently and not show fear in the face of violence in order to be a real man.

Macbeth is not the only male character who views the uses of violence and murder as the best way to prove one is masculine enough. Macbeth pressures the murderers into killing Banquo who has “held [them] / So under fortune” (3.1.77-78). The First Murderer responds to this with, “We are men, my liege,” and then agrees to carry out the murder (3.1.91). Lady Macduff says, “But I remember now / I am in this earthly world, where to do no harm / Is often laudable [...] Why then, alas, / Do I put up that womanly defence, / To say I have done no harm?” (4.2.72-77). Lady Macduff seems to understand that women are not meant to commit violent acts, which are often seen as positive. Almost directly after this line, men murder Lady Macduff and her children. In response to their murders, Macduff says, “I could play the woman with mine eyes” (4.3.230). He could weep over the deaths of his wife and children, which seems like a natural response, but the best way to “feel it as a man” is not to weep. Instead of weeping, Macduff says, “Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself; / Within my sword’s length set him” (4.3.221,233-34). Instead of acting like a weeping woman, Macduff immediately says he will requite murder with murder, which he equates with the manly way to handle grief. Macduff is not the only one who considers this the manly response to having one’s entire family slaughtered. Malcolm tells Macduff, “Be this the whetstone of your sword. Let grief / Convert to anger; blunt not the heart, enrage it” (4.3.228-29). Similarly, as a response to Macduff’s assertion



that he will kill Macbeth, Malcolm says, “This time goes manly” (4.3.235). Malcolm uses the murder of Macduff’s family to better his own murderous cause.

Another strange reaction to the death of a family member can be seen at the end of the play. Siward is told, “Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier’s debt: / He only lived but til 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” (5.8.39-43). Young Siward killed other men before his death, and thus in the world of the play, he successfully reached manhood. After learning of this, Siward, who appears unbothered by his son’s death, says, “Why then, God’s soldier be he!” (5.8.46). A father, who should be saddened to learn that his young son has died, is happy that he proved himself to be a man before death. This emphasis on violence implies that the world of *Macbeth* men must be able to act violently even in the face of fear or grief, otherwise they are not real men.

The ability to murder as a completely masculine trait is reinforced by how Lady Macbeth handles her crimes. The murder of Duncan is Lady Macbeth’s idea in the first place, but she believes she cannot commit murder as a woman. She says, “Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty! [...] Come to my woman’s breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers” (1.5.48-49). She no longer wants her body to be used for nurturing a baby, but instead to be used for violence. Lady Macbeth’s desire to be less feminine in order to commit the murders is well founded, because later she cannot live with the guilt and she hysterically sleepwalks. As she sleepwalks, she cries, “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” (5.1.38). Lady Macbeth believes that the blood of Duncan, Banquo, Lady Macduff and her children is on her hands. This guilt has destroyed Lady Macbeth psychologically.

Macbeth, on the other hand, easily continues with his tyrannical killing spree and proves he can murder. He says, “I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.5.137-139). He has to keep killing in order to reach a secure position as king, but with each kill, peace still does not come. After many ominous signs, Macbeth finally realizes that the witches tricked him and caused his downfall, Macbeth says to Macduff:

I will not yield,  
 To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet,  
 And to be baited with the rabble’s curse.  
 Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,  
 And thou opposed, being of no woman born,  
 Yet I will try the last. Before my body  
 I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;  
 And damned be him that first cries ‘Hold,  
 enough!’

(5.8.27-34)

Macbeth realizes that he is no longer safe from death. The young soldiers carry branches from the wood to his castle and Macduff’s birth defies logic. Yet, the viewer will know from the play’s opening battle that Macbeth is a good soldier and probably knows his way around a sword. He will not allow Macduff to capture him easily and he does not express guilt or apologize for his crimes, which in an odd way, reveals that he is able to successfully use violence and commit murder. Murder as a show of masculinity asserts that the world of *Macbeth* is one of hyper masculinity. At least in this aspect, Macbeth’s manhood is well established.

However, another aspect of the play reveals how Macbeth has allowed his wife to strip him of part of his masculinity. Macbeth does not uphold his end of the Protestant gender roles that are meant to keep the Protestant community in good standing with God. Indeed, seventeenth-century Protestant men had the God-given responsibility of keeping their wives and children from breaking the laws of God, just as women had the responsibility of being saintly and obedient wives and mothers.<sup>39</sup> Macbeth clearly fails to keep his wife in line with Protestant teachings. She is not an obedient wife, as she criticizes Macbeth for his inaction, tells him what to do, and acts violently. She is also not a good mother as she expresses the ease to which she could murder her own baby. Macbeth fails to be a man when it comes to keeping his household upright. Similarly, Katelyn Maire McCarthy asserts that Lady Macbeth further emasculates her husband:

Here, Lady Macbeth asserts her desire for Macbeth to fulfill the witches' prediction, but she worries that he will not be ruthless enough to realize this goal. She describes him as being "too full o' the milk of human kindness," which interestingly feminizes him. Further, she commits herself to the cause and explains that she will "pour [her] spirits in [Macbeth's] ear and chastise with the valor of [her] tongue." Her use of the word "spirits" begins to connect her to the realm of witchcraft, and her promise to "chastise" her now feminized husband most likely would have raised concerns within its early modern audience [...]. After feminizing her husband through referencing his "milk o' the human kindness," she then references her own "women's breasts" and asks that her

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<sup>39</sup> Godbeer, "Your Wife Will Be Your Accuser."

“milk” be taken for “gall.” This language, as well as her desire to be “unsexed,” effectively confuses the gender hierarchy within this marital dynamic.<sup>40</sup>

A Renaissance audience would be bothered by the fact that Lady Macbeth emasculates her husband both through this kind of language and through her disobedience to him. Indeed, it seems that in trying to act more like a man, Macbeth is inherently failing at the task because he does not instruct his wife on how to be a better Christian and because he commits murder on her orders, and not as a liberated male.

Another way in which women are shown to be weaker than men, and Macbeth is shown to be weaker than his male counterparts, is in their susceptibility to becoming an arm of the devil. Early in the play, the world of *Macbeth* is established as a Christian one. After the opening battle, the Captain mentions Golgotha, or “place of a skull,” where Christ was crucified in the New Testament.<sup>41</sup> After Ross informs Macbeth of his new title, Banquo says, “What, can the devil speak true?” (1.3.107). This equates the witches with the devil. A Christian world makes the witches, and Macbeth’s adherence to the devilish prophesies, all the more serious. Dawn A. Saliba asserts that the word “witch” has had different definitions during different periods of history. She writes of the Protestant Jacobean era that the word “very specifically referred to a woman or man who had made a heretical pact with the devil to turn souls away from Jesus Christ.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, James writes in his *Daemonologie* that witches are “slaves to the devil.”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Shakespeare frequently references Macbeth’s closeness with the devil and hell after his first meeting with the witches plants the seed of treachery in his mind. In the scene

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<sup>40</sup> McCarthy, “Transvestism,” 35-36.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 27:33, Revised Standard Version.

<sup>42</sup> Dawn A. Saliba, “King James and the Theatre of Witches: Subversion Upon the Jacobean Stage” (doctoral thesis, Binghamton University, 2013), 2.

<sup>43</sup> King James VI of Scotland/ James I of England, *Daemonologie*, 22.

immediately following Duncan's murder, the Porter enters after a knock is heard and his speech is laden with devil imagery. He asks, "Who's there, / in the other devil's name?" (2.3.7-8). He also references the "everlasting bonfire" that any good Christian should actively try to avoid (2.3.20). The porter says, "If a man were porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the key!" (2.3.1-3.). The porter to hell would have to unlock the door to hell very often, because a lot of people end up there. The Porter continues, "Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub?" (2.3.3-4.). Beelzebub is "the prince of demons" in Christian teaching.<sup>44</sup> This imagery of the devil and hell used by the porter implies that by listening to his wife and the female witches and murdering Duncan, Macbeth has opened the gates of hell and allowed the devil to reign through him.

The references to the devil and to hell do not end there. When Macduff bursts in shouting that the king has been killed, he says, "Up, up, and see / The great doom's image" (2.3.79-80). Macduff asserts that Duncan's death is a sign that Judgment Day, the day when all souls will either go to heaven or to hell and the day the world will end, has arrived. Malcolm says to Macduff, "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell" (4.3.22). The brightest angel refers to Satan, who was once God's favorite but committed the sin of pride and was doomed to hell. This story is not unlike Macbeth's own as both the devil and Macbeth were favored by their rulers but tried to overthrow them and ultimately suffer for doing so. Macbeth replies to Lady Macbeth's questioning whether or not he is a man, "Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that which might appall the devil" (3.4.60-61).

Other characters directly compare Macbeth with the devil. Macduff says to Malcolm, "Not in the legions / Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned / In evils to top Macbeth" (4.3.55-57). In the same scene, Malcolm says, "Devilish Macbeth by many of these trains hath

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<sup>44</sup> Luke 11:15 (Revised Standard Version).

sought to win me into his power” (4.3.117-119). Macbeth has not only been tempted but is now seen as trying to tempt others away from God. After Young Siward realizes he stands before Macbeth, he says, “The devil himself could not pronounce a title / More hateful to mine ear” (5.7.8-9). Macduff says, “Despair thy charm, / And let the angel who thou still hast served / Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped” (5.8.13-16). This is another reference to the devil, once an angel, falling from heaven, as Macbeth has fallen from his reputation as a loyal soldier. Macduff also calls Macbeth a “hell-hound,” as though he is a low servant of the devil (5.6.3). By allowing himself to be influenced by women, the witches and Lady Macbeth, Macbeth has become an instrument of the devil. The presence of the witches in the play and the frequent references to the devil and hell remind the audience of the fragile state between living a Godly life and living a life of sin, a state that James I and many protestants fretted over constantly.

Macbeth is compared to the devil because the witches and his wife have tempted him, much like the snake in the Garden of Eden tempted Adam. He has turned his back on God in favor of more devilish influences. The image of the Garden of Eden may not be far from the world of *Macbeth*. In fact, Shakespeare includes references to a serpent lurking when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth conspire together. Lady Macbeth tells her husband to “look like th’ innocent / flower, / But be the serpent under ‘t” (1.5.66-67). Later, Macbeth says, “We have scorched the snake, not killed it: / She’ll close and be herself, while our poor malice / Remains in danger of her former tooth” (3.2.13-15). Interestingly, Macbeth refers to the snake with a female pronoun, despite talking about the threat of Banquo, a male character. Depicting the serpent in the garden as a woman was very common in theatre and art during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.<sup>45</sup> No

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<sup>45</sup> McCarthy, “Transvestism,” 4.

textual evidence exists in the Old Testament to support the idea that the serpent might have been female—the serpent is actually referred to as a “he” in Genesis—but this has not stopped the assumption that the devil may have come to earth as a woman.<sup>46</sup> Often times, these female depictions underlie the misogynistic belief that the snake did not have to tempt Adam alone, but that Eve helped the snake convince Adam to eat the fruit.

The idea of Eve convincing Adam to eat the fruit implies another major issue that women are often seen at fault for: the issue of sexuality. Certain Renaissance works of art depict this issue better than any written description can. Michelangelo’s fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel included a Garden of Eden scene (Figure 2). Unlike most scenes from the Middle Ages, where Adam and Eve stand upright by the sides of the tree, Michelangelo depicts Eve kneeling in front of Adam in a way very suggestive of sex. Indeed, her face is right in front of his genitals, which have become much more pronounced than in the chapel’s other scenes. Another blatant example of Eve seducing Adam is Jacopo della Quercia’s relief sculpture of the Garden of Eden story (Figure 3). The female snake penetrates the tree and Eve caresses her tail, implying intercourse. Adam looks angrily at Eve as she goes to grab the apple, but the overtones of sexuality, his own hand is near his genitals, remind the viewer that Adam will be tempted to eat the apple too.<sup>47</sup> In his art history textbook, James Snyder writes, “According to Cornelius Agrippa, a leading authority on witchcraft and the magic arts, it was the excitement that Eve purposefully aroused in Adam, seducing his body and ego with carnal desire, and not knowledge

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<sup>46</sup> Genesis 1:3 (Revised Standard Version).

<sup>47</sup> Pia Cuneo, “The Sistine Chapel,” (class lecture, ARH 413C: Renaissance art in Italy: 16<sup>th</sup> Century, University of Arizona, Art Building Rm. 312, February 23, 2017).

in general, that was the true cause of original sin and the Fall.”<sup>48</sup> Images like these remind viewers that women can control men, oftentimes to their doom, with their sinful sexualities.

Italian artworks are a bit of an extrapolation from *Macbeth*; however, both these artworks and the play can be interpreted similarly. In fact, Roman Polanski’s 1971 film production of *Macbeth* relies on the idea that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth’s sexual chemistry is why Macbeth does as she asks. In the film, Lady Macbeth is played by Francesca Annis, who is young, thin and beautiful with long strawberry blond hair. Despite the bleak tone and bloody violence of the movie, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth show affection towards one another. Macbeth, upon returning home from battle, carries his wife to their bedroom while they both laugh. Both are happy to be reunited. When Macbeth expresses fear over what will happen if Banquo is allowed to live, Lady Macbeth physically comforts him. The sexuality of Lady Macbeth is reinforced when she sleepwalks completely naked. Given the harsh attitudes towards female sexuality during the Jacobean era, interpreting Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s relationship to be one of sexual manipulation is not a far stretch, even though the play does not have any explicit mentions of sexuality between them. Like Eve, Lady Macbeth could have used her sexuality to turn Macbeth away from God.

Whereas Macbeth is associated with the devil and temptation, Duncan, his unsuspecting victim, is associated with the angels. Macbeth says:

Besides, this Duncan  
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
 Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against

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<sup>48</sup> Snyder, “Part 3: Renaissance,” 365.



The deep damnation of his taking off;  
 And pity, like a naked newborn babe,  
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed  
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
 That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur  
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
 And falls on th' other— (1.7.16-28)

Duncan has not done anything to deserve death. Not only will the country be saddened by their kind ruler's death, but the dwellers of heaven will be affected as well. The witches and Lady Macbeth have convinced Macbeth to commit a crime with celestial significance.

Duncan is not the only character in the play loved by God. Whereas Macbeth finds himself unable to pray to God right after he kills Duncan, (he says, "But wherefore could not I pronounce / 'Amen'? / I had the most need of blessing, and 'Amen' / Stuck in my throat" [2.2.29-32]), other characters, who do not listen to women, are still able to look to God for comfort. After Duncan's massacred body is found, Banquo says, "In the great hand of God I stand, and thence / Against the undivulged pretense I fight / Of treasonous malice" (2.3.132-34). Macduff says after finding Duncan dead, "Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed temple" (2.3.69-70). As Lennox and a Lord decide what to do about the tyrannical Macbeth, Lennox says that "some holy angel / Fly to the court of England" to bring Macduff back to Scotland (3.6.45-46). A lord says to Lennox that "with Him above" the time of sorrows will end (3.6.32). Malcolm equates himself with an "innocent lamb" (4.3.16). Malcolm says of

Macbeth's attempts to turn him from God, "God above / Deal between thee and me!" (4.3.120-21). The King of England, who has sheltered the innocent Malcolm from being wrongfully accused of his father's murder, "solicits heaven" and "hath a heavenly gift of prophecy" (4.3.149,157). While Macduff believes that Malcolm is a terrible person, he says, "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" (4.3.108-11). His mother prayed everyday and would have been ready to go to heaven at any time. The doctor says of Lady Macbeth, "More needs she the divine than the physician. / God, God forgive us all!" (5.1.78-79). The doctor feels a sense of guilt just by association with her. Lady Macbeth and the witches are not good Christians and they cause Macbeth to similarly turn from God, while other male figures in the play remain strong in their faith. A Renaissance audience would appreciate the impending danger—caused by women yet again—Macbeth's soul is in.

Not only is Macbeth's soul in peril due to the witches' prophecy, but the other male characters' souls are as well. After Macbeth acts on advice given to him by the "secret, black, and midnight / hags" (4.1.48), Scotland is propelled into an endless night, a sort of hell on earth, that prevents God's intervention. Initially, nighttime is the only time Macbeth and his wife can act on their murderous impulses, which implies that dark forces are especially powerful at night. Duncan is murdered at night, a task in which Lady Macbeth calls, "This night's great business" (1.5.69). On the night of Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth says, "Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, / That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, / Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, / To cry 'Hold! Hold!'" (1.5.51-55). Macbeth similarly says of Banquo's murder and the attempted murder of Fleance, "'t must be done tonight" (3.1.131). Macbeth repeats another similar phrase as his wife did earlier after sending the murderers to kill

Banquo. He says, “Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day, / [...]. / Good things of day begin to droop and drowse; / While night’s black agents to their pray do rouse” (3.2.46-47,53-55). Nighttime seems to be the time when demonic forces are best able to provide Macbeth and Lady Macbeth with the ability to kill because nighttime prevents saintly forces from intervening.

The murder of Duncan seems to put not only Macbeth’s soul but all male characters’ souls in jeopardy. After Macbeth becomes king, Ross says, “by the clock, ‘tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp” (2.3.6-10). The night of Duncan’s murder, Lennox comments, “The night has been unruly. [...] / as they say, / Lamentings heard i’ th’ air, strange screams of / death” (2.3.56-59). Malcolm says, “The night is long that never finds the day.” Perhaps despite all the praying and promises made to God, Macbeth has turned Scotland into a land set apart from God. Macbeth’s and other characters inability to sleep reinforces the idea that all men of Scotland are now damned. Sleeplessness is foreshadowed when the First Witch says of the sailor whose wife refused to share her chestnuts, “Sleep shall neither night nor day / Hang upon his penthouse lid; / He shall live a man forbid: / Weary sev’ nights nine times nine / Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine” (1.3.19-23). Sleeplessness is a punishment used by the witches. Similarly, Macbeth cannot sleep. He says, “Methought I heard a voice cry ‘Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep’—the innocent sleep” (2.2.34-35). Macbeth says, “Ere we will [...] sleep / In the affliction of these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly” (3.2.17-19). Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not the only ones who struggle to sleep. A Lord says he desires Macbeth’s reign to end so that “sleep to our nights” may return (3.6.34). Scotland is kept awake in an endless night.

This lack of sleep could imply that Macbeth and everyone else is unable to reach heaven so long as Macbeth, and through him demonic forces, rule over Scotland. Sleep is compared to death. Lady Macbeth says, “when in swinish sleep / Their drenched natures lies as in a death” (1.7.67-68). Macbeth describes sleep as “The death of each day’s life, sore labor’s bath, / Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course, / Chief nourisher in life’s feast—“ (2.2.37-39). If death is like sleep, then a peaceful sleep is similar to finding peace in heaven. Macbeth and his wife’s plight is contrasted with Duncan’s peace. Macbeth says, “Duncan is in his grave; / Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison, / Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing, / Can touch him further” (3.2.22-26). Duncan, fleeing earth just before evil forces were about to reign, has found peace, whereas everyone else is stuck on a doomed earth. However, at the end of the play, the male characters, who successfully separated themselves from women, defeat Macbeth and restore Scotland to its rightful order. Macduff says, “The time is free” (5.8.55). Malcolm asserts that he will reestablish Scotland as a proper Christian nation. He says, “what needful else / That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace / We will perform in measure, time and place” (5.8.71-73). Allowing women to make decisions turned Scotland into hell on earth, which supports the Jacobean fear of gender roles becoming more equal. Shakespeare only depicts men as expressing the suffering from the events, which reinforces the dangers women pose to men and how only men can fix this feminine chaos.

Another interesting part of the hell on earth is the activity of animals, mostly birds. Lady Macbeth says to Macbeth when he returns to her after murdering Duncan, “It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman, / Which gives the stern’st good-night” (2.2.3-4). The image of a “fatal bellman” reinforces the nighttime as being a time of death. Macbeth says of Banquo’s planned murder, “Ere the bat hath flown / His cloister’d flight, ere to black Hecate’s summons /

The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums / Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done / A deed of dreadful note" (3.2.40-44). This implies that Hecate herself has set into motion the death of Banquo and will commit the act through her animal minions. On the night of Duncan's death, Lennox observes that amid the "strange screams of / death," "the obscure bird, / Clamored the livelong night" and the editor's footnote explains that the "obscure bird" is a "bird of darkness, i.e., the owl." The old man says to Ross, "On Tuesday last / A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed" (2.4.11-13). After the murderers are sent after Banquo, Macbeth says, "Light thickens, and the crow / Makes wing to th' rooky wood" (3.2.50-51). Before Lady Macduff is murdered, she says "for the poor wren, / The most diminutive of birds, will fight, / Her young ones in her nest, against the owl" (4.2.9-11). Macbeth's hired murderers then enter the woman's home and kill her and her children, as she feared. Similarly, after Macduff learns that Macbeth has had his wife and children murdered, he says, "O hell-kite!" (4.3.217). The word "kite" has its origins in Old English and means bird of prey.<sup>49</sup> Macduff continues, "What, all my pretty chickens and their dam / At one fell swoop?" Chickens are not birds of prey but instead often fall victim to other animals. Similarly, as Banquo is murdered he tells his son, "Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!" (3.3.17). While seeing Banquo's ghost, Macbeth says of dead people coming back to life, "our monuments / Shall be the maws of kites" (3.4.72). This highlights carnivorous birds being scavengers and seeking out the dead. Furthermore, the Second Witch throws an "howlet's wing" into the cauldron (4.1.17). The presence of these birds of prey might conjure up the memory of another fatal women in the minds of a Renaissance audience.

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<sup>49</sup> "kite, n.," OED Online, March 2018, Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/view/Entry/103752?rskey=MI89DH&result=1&isAdvanced=true>.

Birds of prey, more specifically the owl, are also a symbol of Lilith from Hebrew texts. Lilith, “the night hag” is doomed to remain alone in the desert except for the company of hawks, owls, ravens and other unsavory animals where “the owl nest and lay and hatch her young in her shadow; yea, there shall the kites be gathered.”<sup>50</sup> Lilith is thought to have been the first wife of Adam, but refusing to lay beneath him during sexual intercourse, she was exiled from Eden. Eve was her more docile replacement, though she was also successfully tempted. “In rabbinic literature Lilith is variously depicted as the mother of Adam’s demonic offspring.”<sup>51</sup> “Lilith is portrayed as a child killer, slaying her own children when no others are available to her.” She is related to nighttime as she is considered a night or wind demon and is accordingly associated with birds of prey, including owls, and is often depicted with wings. She is also thought to cause abortions and seduce men.<sup>52</sup>

Katelyn Maire McCarthy says of Lilith, “the violent and murderous child killer—can be located within the fears that drove the persecution of women as witches.”<sup>53</sup> McCarthy argues that there existed “an early modern anxiety concerning the triumph of the social influence of Lilith, the first ‘first’ woman, over the social influence of the submissive Eve.” She continues, “[...] the language and actions of the three witches and of Lady Macbeth reflect certain aspects of aspects of Lilith, most specifically that of the ‘terrible mother’ and child killing monster.”<sup>54</sup> McCarthy is referring to Lady Macbeth’s horrendous claim about her baby. She says, “I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed his brains

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 34:11, 14, 15, (Revised Standard Version).

<sup>51</sup> Wendy Doniger, “Lilith,” *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006), 663.

<sup>52</sup> Rebecca M. Lesses, “Lilith,” *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 8 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Ed. Lindsay Jones, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5458-5460.

<sup>53</sup> McCarthy, “Transvestism,” 29.

<sup>54</sup> McCarthy, 14, 33.

out,” (1.7.56-58). Assuming McCarthy is correct, a Renaissance audience likely would have noticed the references to birds of prey and equated them with the demonic Lilith.

Given the amount of devil imagery associated with the crimes committed and the ways in which Macbeth falls short of his gender role, it would not be surprising if Lady Macbeth and Macbeth were both accused of being witches. Indeed, men who failed to keep their families under control or acted in any way that opposed Protestant teachings might have been “chastised for their behavior [...] but sometimes they were branded more comprehensively as enemies of God—as witches.”<sup>55</sup> However, even if both husband and wife were to be interpreted as having witch-like qualities, Macbeth still has a better chance of being viewed favorably than his wife would have in Renaissance theatre. Diane Purkiss asserts that there is a gender hierarchy even within those who are guilty of practicing magic in plays. Typically, male characters who practice magic, like Merlin or Dr. Faustus, “are also the bearers of knowledge about the nation, and consequently their prophetic and storytelling abilities are reliable.” She says of these male figures:

Such figures overlap with the figure of the cunning woman, creating a range of problems which center on the impossible task of defending the gender of the sorcerer-king against the creeping incursion of figures of effeminisation, luxury, duplicity and other tropes of femininity. The sorcerer must not only avoid becoming a witch; he must also avoid the least trace of femininity. This anxiety is a Jacobean development [...].<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Godbeer, ““Your Wife Will Be Your Biggest Accuser.””

<sup>56</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 184.

This description harkens back to the issue of men needing to separate themselves from women in order to be successful and implies that fictional male characters who practice some sort of magic were viewed as mostly positive compared to their female counterparts.

James I also implies that a gendered hierarchy exists within real people who practice dark magic in his *Daemonologie*. When Philomathes asks what the difference between witches, who have already been established as traditionally female, and necromancers are, Epistemon replies, “they say that the witches are servants only, and slaves to the devil, but the necromancers are his masters and commanders.” Philomathes then establishes that these “masters and commanders” are traditionally male when he asks, “Any men being specially addicted to this service can be his commanders?”<sup>57</sup> Not only can men who practice magic command the devil, but their reasons for taking up magic is more honorable than women’s reasons as well. James explained that curiosity is what attracts necromancers or magicians to magic, but wants for revenge or wants to escape poverty cause women to become witches.<sup>58</sup> Even in acts deemed to be inherently opposed to the teachings of Christianity, men get a break from extreme judgment while women are considered evil.

Shakespeare’s handling of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fits in with the idea of a gendered hierarchy within magic users. Despite Macbeth’s dabbling in demonic conspiracies, Shakespeare still provides Macbeth with a brave and tragic death. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, does not even die on stage. After Seyton informs Macbeth that his wife has died, Macbeth says, “She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word” (5.5.18-19). The trials and tribulations of the play seem to have made Macbeth incapable of mourning his wife, and her death acts only as the opening for an existential speech and is quickly overshadowed by

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<sup>57</sup> King James VI of Scotland/ James I of England, *Daemonologie*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> King James VI of Scotland/James I of England, 20.



the tragic death of Macbeth. Although he commits the same terrible crimes as his wife, the underlying misogyny of the Jacobean era and the idea that females who used magic were inherently evil while men who used magic only “curious,” a Renaissance audience would have likely viewed Macbeth as a victim of ambition and of women’s influences. This is the *Tragedy of Macbeth*, not the *Tragedy of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth*, after all.

The misogyny in *Macbeth* does not bode well for Shakespeare’s views on women and witches. Catering to a demented king also makes Shakespeare seem slightly unsympathetic to the plights of women. Phyllis Rackin argues that *Macbeth* depicts witches as more sinister than witches in other contemporary plays, and other writers did depict them more sympathetically.<sup>59</sup> The few female characters in *Macbeth* have no redeeming qualities. The only female who is not evil is Lady Macduff, but she is not a strong female character either. Her only role in the play is to complain about her husband’s absence, berate her son, and then become another victim of Macbeth.

However, *Macbeth* may deal most specifically with witches, but most of Shakespeare’s plays have a reference to some sort of magic, and the references are often benign. For instance, in *The Winter’s Tale*, Paulina magically brings the long dead Hermione back to life in an emotional scene.<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare’s views on witches may not be so clear-cut. Indeed, Diane Purkiss claims that Shakespeare does not really tell his audience how he personally feels about witches and witch trials. She writes, “The all-singing, all-dancing witches bear about as much relation to the concerns of village women as *The Sound of Music* does to women’s worries about childcare in the 1990’s.”<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare’s views on women might not be so easily deciphered

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<sup>59</sup> Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 189.

<sup>61</sup> Purkiss, 207.

either. Unlike *Macbeth*, many of Shakespeare's other plays do not associate women with witchcraft or the devil. In fact, many of his earlier comedies portray female characters as more clever than their male counterparts. Portia and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice* find a loophole in Venetian law to save Antonio, after the male characters accept defeat at the hands of sneaky Shylock. Similarly, Beatrice is the only one who rightfully argues Hero's innocence in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and she is vindicated when Hero is found innocent of adultery. Furthermore, Rosalind makes the poetic but immature Orlando to grow up a bit before accepting his love in *As You Like It*. These plays have a much lighter tone than *Macbeth* and the treatment of female characters is much different than the play written with King James I in mind.

Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra in *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* is probably the most feminist depiction of a woman from any of his plays. Indeed, the depiction of Cleopatra in this play is in many ways completely at odds with the depiction of Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. The title alone implies that the Egyptian queen is just as important as Roman soldier, Antony. The title also implies that, unlike Lady Macbeth's death, which was more likely to have delivered joy to an audience, Cleopatra's life and death likely instilled as much lamenting as that of her male counterpart. Indeed, Shakespeare included a death scene for Cleopatra, unlike Lady Macbeth who dies mysteriously offstage.

However, parallels can be drawn between Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. Both plays feature men who were good and loyal soldiers before being corrupted by women. Both women aspire to be powerful, but both women need men to help them gain that power. Just as Lady Macbeth needs Macbeth to become king to get what she wants, Cleopatra marries both Julius Caesar and Marc Antony because she likely had to in order to maintain some of her power. Assuming that Roman Polanski's interpretation of *Macbeth* and Lady Macbeth's sexual

chemistry is correct, both Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra use their sexuality to gain what they want through men. Both also have some desire to lose their femininity. Cleopatra says before her suicide, “My resolution’s placed, and I have nothing / Of woman in me: now from head to foot / I am marble-constant: now fleeting moon / No planet is of mine” (5.2.238-41). She will no longer be a woman with emotions as she prepares for her death. Both Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra recognize that to be a woman is to be weak, and they must become like men in order to gain power. Most interestingly, both women are associated with witchcraft. Pompey says, “Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!” when he condemns Antony for staying in Egypt with Cleopatra (2.1.22). After Cleopatra betrays Antony to Octavian, he says, “the witch shall die.” (4.12.47). Shakespeare’s views on women cannot be known. He was clearly able to please misogynists like King James by writing about women who fall in line with Satan, but he was also able to depict women as clever, brave and tragic.

*The Tragedy of Macbeth* perhaps raises more questions about views on women and witchcraft than it answers. Men separating themselves from women, men and women acting violently to show their masculinities, and devil imagery all reinforce the belief that women will cause men to fall again and again. However, Shakespeare does allow the genders of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to be confused and he does not always depict women as negative in his other plays. Cleopatra may be the more positive version of Lady Macbeth, though both can be interpreted as witches. Diane Purkiss writes, “Witchcraft is the resort of women because it symbolises the only way they can work politically; by stealth, in secret rather than on the public field of battle or debate.”<sup>62</sup> Historically, women did not have many options and in the Puritan world, women could either be viewed as a saint or a witch. Shakespeare may have understood

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<sup>62</sup> Purkiss, 191.

that, at least as a witch, women had some agency and some ability to break out of the gender norms established and harshly enforced during the Jacobean Era.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



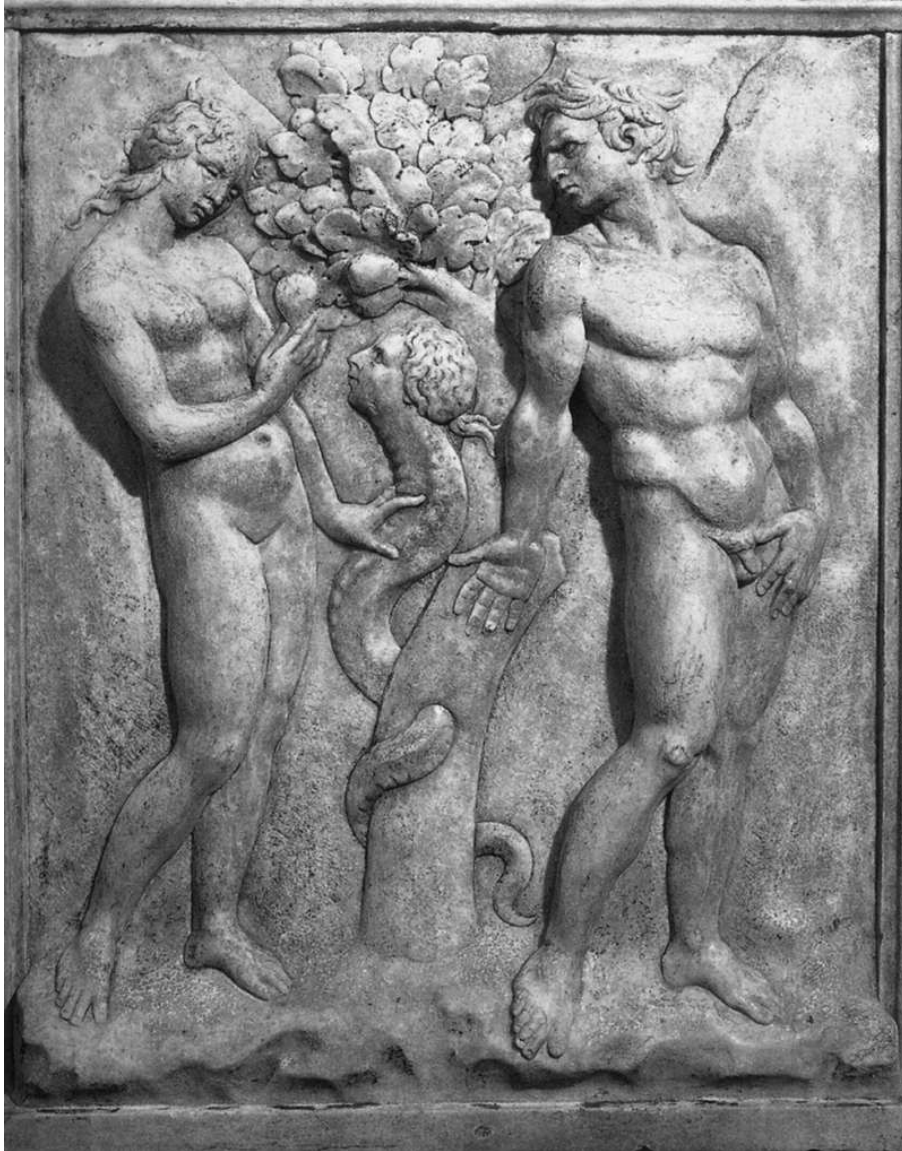


Figure 3

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