

REDEFINING HEROISM: AN ANALYSIS OF LADY MACBETH'S CHARACTER IN *MACBETH*

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Abstract

*This research highlights the importance of Lady Macbeth as a hero, examining the historical and cultural oversight that privileged male heroism and marginalized notable female characters. As the catalyst for the tragic events of the play, Lady Macbeth is often overlooked in critical discourse that centers on her husband's quest for power. Drawing on Maria Tatar's *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*, the study challenges traditional gender biases that diminish the contributions of female characters in literature. The objectives are to demonstrate Lady Macbeth's heroic qualities, explore reasons for her exclusion from heroic recognition, and analyze her impact on the play's action. Using a qualitative methodology, this research analyzes primary and secondary sources, including Tatar's work and several scholarly articles. The study advocates for recognizing and appreciating female characters' roles, contributing to a broader understanding of heroism beyond gender constraints.*

Keywords: *Heroism, The Heroine with 1001 Faces, Hero, Heroine, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

William Shakespeare is the world's best-known dramatist who has inspired generations through his writings. He is the versatile playwright known for his creation of tragic, comic and tragicomedy play. His plays remain in wide popularity for their timeless relevance, complex plot and universal themes. He wrote many comic and tragic plays, but some of them became so popular that people loved these plays for the way Shakespeare portrayed them. One of his most famous plays is *Macbeth* which has been loved by its audience for centuries because of its themes of power and ambition and tragic downfall of Macbeth's unlimited desires to achieve power. Many scholars love this play very much and consider it as one of his best tragedies. However, whenever one wants to discuss or write something about this drama, one concentrates over the character of Macbeth and his heroism deed. Even the main character of this drama, Lady Macbeth, is usually neglected and underrepresented though she played her part more effectively in the play as compared to Macbeth himself.

People do not recognize the heroic qualities of Lady Macbeth's character, and even if they talk about her, they refer to her as a seductive force for Macbeth's downfall. Lady

Macbeth played her role more prominently than Macbeth and her character is more important as compared to the Macbeth's character. But the whole discussion about this play revolves around the character of Macbeth and his perceived acts of heroism. Historical and cultural biases have made it difficult to establish a recognition and comparison of female heroes in relation to male heroes based on importance and mutual treatment. Not only so in the past but also nowadays, when people speak of the *Macbeth* play, they usually focus on the steps of Macbeth's journey and tragic end to all his ambitions toward power. It may reflect the era when Shakespeare put down this play, an age when males dominated so much more in this world. Because society was dominated by males, in the audience's minds Lady Macbeth is often a lesser body.

Even some critics consider Lady Macbeth as a fourth witch in the play for the Macbeth, who exploited her husband towards his downfall, while her own actions and struggles haven't received equal worth and importance. Such biased treatments among male and female heroes still prevail in today's modern society. In this modern time, we are giving unfair and biased treatment towards the female heroes as compared to male heroes. However, we should not compare a piece of art based on gender, and should break the prejudices against the female heroes. The act of heroism should not be judged based on gender or from the perspective of male dominated society. However, it should be judged based on the different challenges and experiences which each character faces. It is this approach toward a piece of art that will help us understand better their roles and, more deeply give us the feelings of joy and enjoyment from their stories.

In the world of literature, there are different kinds of stories and fairy tales related to men and women. And many writers and critics study those stories and fairy tales to tell us how it represents us men differently from women. One of those writers is Maria Tatar, who wrote a book by the name *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*. In this book, she tells us about the world of literature. She has elaborated very well that the women characters in literature and also in real life are not treated equally and as important as compared to men characters. In both the sexes play important and integral roles in a piece of literature at times, the female characters are given leading positions compared to their male counterparts, however their character still gets drowned as in the case of Lady Macbeth of the play *Macbeth*, by virtue of a male dominated society and improper perception about heroism. The author, Maria Tatar, says in the book that the characters are women, less strong or interesting although they can be as good as men. Tatar's book argues that we need to pay more attention to women characters in stories and even in real life. Tatar states that women characters, though having strengths, complications, and contributions to the stories, should be more cherished and observed, irrespective of the gender discrimination.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research will try to analyze how the female character plays a more dominant role than the male protagonist. From Shakespeare's period to the present day, this act of heroism has been given to male characters only and they were appreciated for their roles while female characters were regarded as unsuited for the role of hero. Lady Macbeth's character is subdued, though she is playing a very important role like a hero in the play. Therefore, the study attempts to explore if Lady Macbeth is both the hero as well as heroine of the play.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Why is Macbeth considered a hero as compared to Lady Macbeth?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the marginalization and underrepresentation of Lady Macbeth?
3. How does Lady Macbeth's character shift the narrative of the play through her ambitious nature, actions, and dialogues?

1.4 Objectives

- To describe Lady Macbeth as a hero better than Macbeth.
- To highlight factors which contribute to the marginalization and underrepresentation of Lady Macbeth.
- To examine Lady Macbeth's actions and dialogues and her influence on the narrative of the play.

2. Literature Review

The drama *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare, is an art that has riveted the minds of the audience over the ages. Various critics and writers have gone into a number of the aspects of the characters of this play and the themes of society and covered quite a few themes covered in the play, such as ambition, guilt, masculinity and femininity, and its characters. This particular theme of *Macbeth* revolves around character building and the significance of the character of Lady Macbeth, the ambitious and influential wife of Macbeth. Different researches cover different aspects of the character Lady Macbeth. Some of them are discussing her ambitious nature while some are discussing her influence on Macbeth while considering her as an evil character in the play, even referring to her as the fourth witch.

In his article *Macbeth: The Prisoner of Gender* by Robert Kimbrough (1983) discusses how strict and defined gender norms create devastating consequences in *Macbeth*. As Kimbrough explains, Shakespeare challenges the patriarchal segregation between male and female when such characters as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fall victim to the standardized notion of gender by society. The play echoes in the walls of confinement and chaos that polarized definitions of gender create and instead encourages an integrated sense of the human race outside the boundaries of these constraints of gender. By the use of characters who experience emotions and thought processes that transcend their ordained gender roles, along with the use of theatrical device cross-dressing, he underlines his plea for liberation from restrictive gender norms.

Sofiya Shahiwala (2022) de-constructively interprets the work *Power Beyond Sex: A Foucauldian Reading of Lady Macbeth*, where she focuses upon the character of Lady Macbeth and illustrates how Macbeth perceives her both as being a driving force to his actions and a figure who has gotten entangled with her own downfall. The study, therefore, runs contrary to the previous analysis that tries to explain her action at the back of miscarriages among others, to instead focus on what would be termed as Michel Foucault's Normalizing Power and the influence of gender distinctions in the said actions.

Based on the given information, the study indicates the influence of societal structures in patriarchal settings and power dynamics influencing this character into committing such crimes. In a seemingly effort to deconstruct her character far from the patriarchal

establishment's norms of male dominance or power behind the phallus, this paper aims to show how this lady, Lady Macbeth, committed such crimes. The analysis would hence do justice to the portrayal of Lady Macbeth through the perspective that she is a product of unconscious social forces instead of male authority alone.

The article by Mafruha Ferdous (2017), *The value of Masculinity in William Shakespeare's Macbeth*, discusses the issue of gender, focusing on the aspect of masculinity in *Macbeth*. The strength of masculinity is an essential theme; its importance is underscored especially in the pursuit for power exhibited since the very beginning of the play. Masculine traits are portrayed by central characters such as Lady Macbeth and the three witches, which has an impact on the protagonist Macbeth while disrupting the usual pattern and implications of the gender norms. This gives an ambivalent look to the concept of masculinity; the female characters of the play have been portrayed as powerful, whereas some of these female characters have qualities that are more stereotypically male. The concentration on gender roles and, above all, the description of masculinity through women, together with the traditional male, makes a central theme in the drama as it questions the nature of power and ambition within both genders.

Fuad Nabhan (2020) in his article *Lady Macbeth between Ambition and Femininity in William Shakespeare's Macbeth* analyzes the character of Lady Macbeth, while focusing on the interplay between her ambition and femininity. This paper examines how, instigated by the prophecy of the weird sisters, the Lady Macbeth spurs her husband to commit the murder of King Duncan and then becomes Queen of Scotland. The play contrasts the ambition of Lady Macbeth with that of her husband, endeavoring to find out who is the more morally corrupt. This goes on to the "Sleepwalking" scene in the fifth act, whereby Lady Macbeth's overwhelming guilt leads on to her apparent suicide. The study postulates that Lady Macbeth's ambition is unique as it differs from the usual female aspirations and instead sees power through other's actions, whereas personal desires pertain to beauty or status.

Power above Gender: How Lady Macbeth Shapes Perceptions of Political Power by S L Fifield and Jacqueline Cowan (2020), explores the complex dynamics of gender and power challenging the view held in traditional early modern England. Because the time was the time of the monarchy, a monarchical government was seen in terms of a body politic with the king at the head; so Elizabeth I's rule was a strongly contentious one as an unusual female head sat atop a male body politic. Society, as fed by personalities like John Knox, believed that women were naturally inferior and set them several rungs below the lower boundaries of reproduction and domestic household roles. Lady Macbeth subverts these norms in that she aims to "unsex" herself, rejecting her nurturing nature as she manipulates her husband toward political influence. This desire speaks to the notion of her being a reflection of the power inherent within the witches, as the latter are genderless and possess strength of their own. Writing about Lady Macbeth as the "fourth witch," Dutta and Bhaduri correctly state how Lady Macbeth is aligned with the witches' prophecies, carrying out and performing the act of enacting the fulfillments of these very prophecies. True political power transcends gender, if only somewhere in the ability and deeds of an individual such as that depicted by the actions and ambition of Lady Macbeth despite her arrogance. According to the research, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and subsequent decline represented the cost of her strong association with the supernatural forces and

deviation from societal norms.

Analyzing the complex character of Lady Macbeth in Saman Ali Mohammed's article *Unsex me here: Lady Macbeth as a Disruptive Force in Macbeth* (2016) illustrates how this play character embodies a disruption in the traditional gender and societal expectations. Saman argues that the girl's aspiration and quest for power—from her wanting to be unsexed and to strip off all feminine qualities—first positions Lady Macbeth in a position of transgression against her time's definition of gender roles. She manipulates Macbeth into killing the king, thus influencing not just the central action of the play but also causing much disturbance in the natural and social order. Such manipulation and subsequent psychological disintegration into madness and death, then, reinforce the deadly consequences of her renunciation of female behavior. This view of Lady Macbeth through a feminist perspective presents a complexly psychic but vindicated critique of patriarchal restraints, yet endorses her as a symbol of the destructive power of unchecked ambition. Analysis by Saman does give a complex role to Lady Macbeth, along with the central disruptive force in this context of the play *Macbeth*, and whose actions dramatize the tragedy unfolding in this play. The portrayal thereby also resists the conventional literary convention of women; the gender dynamics rich in explorations would tumble into fantastic effects of challenging societal norms.

Hamalna Nizam (2015), in his paper *Politics of Gender and Power: Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth in Polanski's Film Adaptation* gives an analysis of Lady Macbeth's quest for power and also tries to locate the reason of her neurotic behavior in the politics of patriarchal society that tries to subdue her. In that adaptation, she moves forward in defying the conventional roles of gender as the characteristics of ambition, authority, and aggression were labeled under the masculine domain. It explores her psychological complexity, which raises the idea that the pressures of a patriarchal society lead to her eventual mental breakdown. A comparison between Shakespeare's original version and Polanski's version thus finds Hamalna suggesting that Polanski characterises Lady Macbeth as more feminine and fragile, focusing on her guilt and inner turmoil instead of being a merciless-power seeker. Further, the paper implies that Polanski's darker and more violent version was a relation to his own personal tragedy in the form of his wife Sharon Tate's murder. Overall, this analysis shows the gender, power, and psychological conflict interplay both in the play and in the film, thus enabling the character of Lady Macbeth to challenge and, ultimately, be constrained within the gender norms of her time.

Probably the most interesting work is Mary Balestraci's (2015) *Shakespeare's Wonderful Woman: A Victorian Defense of Lady Macbeth*, an analysis of Madeleine Leigh-Noel Elliott's *Lady Macbeth: A Study*. The book is basically a Victorian feminist interpretation of Lady Macbeth against conventional male-dominated criticisms of the character. Indeed, while the acts of Lady Macbeth are certainly morally reprehensible, Elliott suggests, they arise from a misdirection of what are fundamentally feminine qualities, qualities suppressed and distorted by the strict gender roles imposed upon her. According to Elliott, it is not inherent evil that creates the Lady Macbeth's tragic path but rather denial of an opportunity to say all that is good in a socially acceptable manner.

While the defenders of Shakespeare and the status quo blame Lady Macbeth for her crimes, her defenders foreground her loyalty, hardiness, and strength. All these qualities could have

been more profitable had they been exploited outside a violent atmosphere. This view rearranges Lady Macbeth from the perspective of being a monstrous creature to one of being that female who rises against societal norms to meet tragic ends.

Min Huang in his work *A Battle Against One's Soul: An Analysis of Lady Macbeth's Function as the other Self to Macbeth* (2022) addresses the rather complicated relationship between the two characters, stating that she extends or stands as a counter to his character. The externalization of the inner turmoil and darkest of desires is taken on through Lady Macbeth, playing a key role in examining how she influences Macbeth's actions and decisions toward becoming something that he is not inherently: the ruthless determination lacking from Macbeth's initial character as he moves toward regicide and then moral decay. Huang further explicates how Lady Macbeth's burden of mutual guilt eventually symbolizes Macbeth's psychological turmoil and alienation. As Macbeth's desensitization to tyranny and madness intensifies, the further down Lady Macbeth goes into madness, created by guilt, mirrors and magnifies his own devastating disintegration, finally revealing the fearsome power of left unchecked ambition and how guilt corrodes the human soul. It underlines and enriches in understanding the position of Lady Macbeth, not only as a character but as an almost pivotal force which determines the shape of Macbeth's downfall, thereby integrating her into the role of the play's exploration of power, guilt, and identity.

The article, *Shakespeare's Violent Women: A Feminist Analysis of Lady Macbeth* by Camila Reyes and Amy Kenny (2020), does a critical investigation of Lady Macbeth as the complex and transgressive actor who is not willing to attribute to herself the conventional gender clichés set in place against her because she epitomizes qualities like ambition, ruthlessness, and preparedness for violence, qualities attributed to men. Through the analysis, it becomes clear how Lady Macbeth is striving for power and influence by making her husband commit regicide and, therefore, concurring with the patriarchal structures that she is under. Her subsequent descent into madness as a result becomes a reminder of the psychological cost of transgression of societal norms. It also

analyzes how throughout the ages, the character of Lady Macbeth has been understood, which, under the lens of feminism, may both be a victim of and an instigator within the patriarchal constraints of her culture. Ultimately, Lady Macbeth appears as a potent character in the analysis Shakespeare does with regards to gender, power, and violence, and this makes her an important figure to discuss within feminist literary study.

The novel *Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles in Macbeth* (2024) by Olivia Eubanks attempts to portray how Macbeth subverts and defies the gender norms of the Elizabethan era through characters who transform and enter the rhetoric of gender roles. To achieve this, Shakespeare creates such characters as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, in whom both masculine and feminine traits reside, defying the gender rigid binary. The witches who start the plot of the play are female yet possess distinctively masculine features; thus, they contradict the notion of gender so readily given. Initially a bold warrior, Macbeth is later depicted with feminine characteristic: doubt and wavering especially towards Lady Macbeth, with whom he first exchanges words as she mocks him for manliness and pushes him toward murder. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth rejects her femininity when she calls for herself to be "unsexed" in order to pursue the power ruthlessly tied up with masculinity. Her desire to rid herself of female qualities exemplifies the play's

exploration into the conflict of gender expectations versus personal ambition. Shakespeare uses these characters in the play frequently, blurring and challenging the lines of what is male and female, forcing the mind of the audience to think about different understandings of roles between men and women and perhaps even more, to conceive the idea of a more fluid gender.

Keeping in views the viewers of various writers and researchers, it comes forward that majority of them have discussed Macbeth from the viewpoints of feminism, emphasizing her role within the context of gender dynamics and societal expectations of women. Such analyses mostly illustrate the way in which the Lady Macbeth at times opposes and at times sways with standard norms of genders. Thus, often people depict her as a complex figure of moral or a cautionary tale. In the present research, the researcher tries to analyze the play from a heroism perspective. Though these feminist views would be quite enlightening about her character, my research differs in the fact that I have focused on the very concept of heroism rather than talking about Lady Macbeth merely as a woman. In some ways, it would be an attempt at reframing the lady as the central heroic figure in *Macbeth*. An analysis of her deeds and conducts, moral contradictions, and the eventual fall victim revives the fact, in this study, that the protagonist Lady Macbeth embodies all the characteristics of a tragic hero, whose significant presence is necessary to the Macbeth's narrative structure. This view will make not only a new, varied interpretation of the role of Lady Macbeth but also bridge our understanding of the topic- heroism-about female heroines in literature.

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research utilizes qualitative methodology to the description and meaning of the character of Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's most renowned tragedy *Macbeth* with an emphasis on the examination of her role as a heroine and recognizing her character for the part that she played in the drama. And the outline that this research uses was from Maria Tatar's book about the recognition of women and empowerment, by name *A Heroine with 1001 Faces*.

3.2 Design of the Study

Research design entails an analysis of the qualitative sources both primary and secondary. The primary sources incorporate the original text from where the play *Macbeth* is written by William Shakespeare. Secondary sources involve Maria Tatar's book *A Heroine with 1001 Faces*. Some books, articles, interviews, and critical thinking about the play and its themes, characters, specifically about the character of Lady Macbeth.

3.3 Data Collection

The present research utilizes both primary and secondary data for the present research. For primary data, the researcher has analyzed the text of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Again, to collect the secondary data, the researcher does study *A Heroine with 1001 Faces* and some articles, journals, views, and the works of various writers and critics related to the present research problem.

3.4 Data Analysis

The present research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. In the present research, the researcher applies the qualitative method of data analysis and collects only that data which supports the present statement. Here, the focus of the researcher lies on the heroism of Lady Macbeth. The present researcher refers to and analyzes data within the ambit of female heroism. Moreover, the main concentration of the researcher lies on that why female heroes are not valued and recognized in a society.

3.5 Theoretical framework

This research is held on the conceptual framework developed by Maria Tatar in *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*. Tatar's work is itself a remarkable piece of work that has challenged the traditional concept of heroism. It presents a critical lens critiquing the systemic underrepresentation and marginalization of female characters in literature. The researcher tries to use it as a lens that may be later exploited as a theoretical framework by other researchers. It's a non-fictional work that can be used as a research lens. My research will try to establish Maria Tatar as a theorist. I have written in the significance of my study that my research will open new vistas for the coming researchers in the same field.

Analysis and Discussion

In *Macbeth*, the character of Lady Macbeth stands as one of the most complex and multifaceted characters, often portrayed as manipulative, ambitious, and ruthless. Yet, through a closer examination of her actions and motivations, she emerges as a heroine who defies traditional gender roles and challenges the conventional notion of heroism. Much of the literary tradition associates heroism with masculinity, courage on the battlefield, and noble pursuits. While Lady Macbeth's heroism lies in her ability to wield power through ambition, intellect, and emotional endurance.

Lady Macbeth's Challenge to Traditional Heroism

One of the most dominant characters in the play's narrative shift is Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Almost since her first introduction, she defies the conventional norms of her society, posing qualities commonly thought of with masculinity—strong assertiveness, dominance, and ambition. It is this relentless pursuit of power that drives the play's central event.

One of the major moments when we observe the Lady Macbeth's ambition for power is after reading the letter from Macbeth. She plans to murder Duncan right away, while also perceives the character and nature of the Macbeth.

"yet do I fear thy nature; it is too full of the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great; art not without ambition; but without the illness should attend it." (*Macbeth*. A1. S5. 16-20)

This says a lot concerning not only her ambition but also what she thinks about Macbeth's character. When she reads the letter written by Macbeth concerning the prediction of the witches, her first reaction is that Macbeth, being ambitious as he is, lacks enough ruthlessness to grab power. Her words concerning Macbeth indicate that Macbeth is too gentle and fair to take the easy way out in order to reach the throne, to kill King Duncan. She fears that although he has the ambition in order to obtain the throne, but he

lacks the sickness or moral corruption needed in order to do so. This examines the woman's ambition and her willingness to move beyond mortality and womanhood in order to achieve her desires. This ambition is not only that Macbeth will prosper but also that she will. Her boldness and optimistic view of circumstance and man himself show that she, like Macbeth, wants them to attain power. To this end, however, she is definitely more willing to accept the shadows than Macbeth, as evidenced through her willingness to kill. She identifies herself as braver than Macbeth and more decisive to force him toward the act she believes he cannot perform alone.

“Hie thee hither, that I pour my spirits in thine ear, and chastise with the valour of my tongue all that impedes thee from the golden round, which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem to have thee crowned withal.” (A1. S5. 25-30)

In this case, Lady Macbeth is obvious and depicts one who wants to control Macbeth to ensure he sits on the throne just as the prophets had foretold. This way, Lady Macbeth seems more resolved, ambitious, and bolder than her husband. She thinks that the Macbeth is ambitious but declines to do evil things so as to top up. Her words depict a much clearer insight into the restrictions of Macbeth's character especially in aspects like hesitation and morality. It is Lady Macbeth who feels she has to fill in for the gaps in his resolve, using her bravery to compensate for what she considers his weakness. She does not only want to counsel him but to work out his thoughts and actions actively by pouring her own unbent resolution into his mind. Her spirits beget her strength, ambitions, and resolution-percepts that, she believes, Macbeth lacks. Where Macbeth hesitates, Lady Macbeth acts bravely but with a calculating mind. Her actions are not just supporting ploys on behalf of the ambition of her husband. Rather, she has her own will and energy for the establishment of power; thus, she is far braver than Macbeth because she does not fear the moral repercussions that paralyze him.

Lady Macbeth's ambition is one of her defining characteristics and is crucial in driving the plot forward. Unlike Macbeth who is initially hesitant to pursue the throne, Lady Macbeth is decisive and unflinchingly focused on their shared goal of power. Her famous line in Act 1, Scene 5, where she calls upon spirits to “unsex” her, illustrates her rejection of the traits typically associated with femininity:

“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!” (A1. S5. 38-42)

In this soliloquy, Lady Macbeth rejects the traits traditionally associated with femininity, such as compassion and tenderness. She demands in “unsex me here” that the ambition she has been granted in their full depth, might transcend the limits of what is considered womanly. Therefore, by calling upon the “spirits that tend on mortal thoughts” and asking them to “unsex” her, Lady Macbeth is capable of speaking about the quality she wished to lose. The qualities which are traditionally associated with femininity, such as compassion, gentleness, and nurture; in their place, she desired ruthlessness and cruelty in order to acquire power. She wants to be filled from top to bottom full of direst cruelty, showing her readiness to abandon her moral scruples and transform herself into a figure capable of committing brutal acts in pursuit of her goals. It demonstrates her rejection of traditional femininity and the roles imposed on her by society. She refuses to be confined by the same limitations that Pat Barker describes, where women are excluded from the stirring tales of courage and adventure. Pat Barker in her novel *The Silence of the Girls*,

reflects on the marginalization of women, noting how, as a young girl she initially believed that the heroic tales of courage and adventure opened doors to her future. However, as she grew older, she realized that these stories belonged to her brothers, not to her. In Barker's terms, while the world of heroism might have closed in on many women, Lady Macbeth fights to keep the door open, actively seeking to write her own story rather than being relegated to the margins. (Pat Barker 2019. *The Silence of the Girls* P.119)

"look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under." (A1. S5. 65-66)

Lady Macbeth's drive is not limited to ambition but is also rooted in a clear vision of greatness. She is not content with mere survival or passive support of Macbeth's military accomplishments; rather she sees the crown as an attainable goal and is willing to pay any price for it. This dialogue of Lady Macbeth's reveals her strategic thinking and her belief that moral constraints are secondary to the achievement of power. Her ability to strategize and envision a future where she and Macbeth rule as a king and queen showcases her as a visionary, a trait often associated with heroic figures in literature.

"Only look up clear; to alter favor ever is to fear; leave all the rest to me." (A1. S5. 72-73)

Lady Macbeth's unwavering resolve is evident in these words which she commands to Macbeth. This line encapsulates her determination and mental strength, as she instructs Macbeth to maintain composure and leave the planning of Duncan's murder entirely in her hands. Here, we see her control over the situation, as she assumes the role of the mastermind behind the plot. Her clam and calculating nature contrasts sharply with Macbeth's growing uncertainty, highlighting her bravery and resolve in contrast to Macbeth's hesitation. By taking the charge, Lady Macbeth not only guides Macbeth but also positions herself as the true driver of action in the play, an indication of her ambition and strength. Her role in the play is beyond as a supportive wife. Her instructions to Macbeth show that she is not a passive figure, but a force that propels the events of the play. Macbeth is often celebrated as the tragic hero of *Macbeth*. This line shows that Lady Macbeth's heroism lies in her ability to take action, plan, and control, further proving her significance as a central figure in shaping the narrative. She demonstrates a unique form of heroism that is rooted in her ambition and intelligence, challenging traditional gender roles and the idea that women must remain passive in the background.

"Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valor as thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, and live a coward in thine own esteem; letting I dare no wait upon I would like the poor cat I' the adage?" (A1. S7. 39-45)

In this scene Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband into committing murder by questioning his courage and manhood. Here, Lady Macbeth uses her intellect to influence Macbeth, questioning his bravery and urging him to act on his ambition. Her words are designed to provoke Macbeth, appealing to his sense of pride and masculinity. She knows that by questioning his courage, she can manipulate him into acting on his ambition. This manipulation is a form of power, while Macbeth struggles with the moral implications of murder; Lady Macbeth remains steadfast in her resolve. Her ability to control Macbeth's actions through emotional manipulation reveals her strategic heroism. She does not use physical strength, but she uses her psychological power. Her ability to direct the narrative of the play, shaping Macbeth's actions, shows a type of leadership and strategic thinking

that is often overlooked in traditional definitions of heroism.

In the discussion of Samuel Johnson with his biographer Boswell, he famously remarks that a woman's preaching is like a dog walking on its hind legs, implying that women's influence in public or political life is unnatural, Lady Macbeth turns this notion on its head. She proves that women's influence, even if conducted behind the scenes, can be as powerful, if not more, than men's actions on the battlefield. Lady Macbeth's ability to manipulate Macbeth redefines the conventional boundaries of heroism and power.

“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.” (A1. S7.49-51)

Lady Macbeth's influence on the narrative is not just limited to her actions, but also her ability to manipulate Macbeth's willpower. This manipulation shows her dominance in the relationship and her willingness to push Macbeth beyond his own moral limitations. Her strategic mind and ability to control the situation display a form of intellectual heroism, as she shifts the course of the play through her influence over Macbeth's decisions. Here, Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth by challenging his masculinity, implying that his worth as a man is tied to his ability to act decisively, even violently. Lady Macbeth completely overturned the Joseph Campbell's arguments in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that women are the paragons of beauty, the reply to all desires, and confined to roles of mother, sister, or bride for a male hero. In this dialogue she is not fulfilling the traditional role of a supportive, passive wife. Instead, she exerts control over Macbeth's will, pushing him beyond his moral limitations and questioning his masculinity in the process. Rather than being the passive paragon of beauty, Lady Macbeth actively shapes the fate of her husband and their future by stepping into a traditionally male-dominated role. Her manipulation shows her stepping beyond the boundaries of gender roles, taking on a more male position of power, which complicates Campbell's traditional view of women's roles in heroic narratives. (Joseph Campbell 1949. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Ch.2 P.117)

“I would, while it was smiling in my face, have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brain out” (A1. S7. 57-59)

Lady Macbeth's heroism is especially significant because it breaks away from the restrictive gender norms of her time. She openly rejects the expectations of womanhood in a society where women were expected to be gentle and subservient. In these lines Lady Macbeth emphasizes her willingness to shed her femininity and motherhood to achieve her goals. By rejecting these traditional roles, Lady Macbeth positions herself as an autonomous figure of power, that her heroism is defined by her own identity and ambition. She rejects the nurturing, maternal aspects of femininity, which Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers aligns with traditional heroism for women that women could become true heroes by giving birth. Instead, she uses an image of extreme violence toward an infant to highlight her ruthless commitment to ambition. This declaration reveals her desire to abandon any association with motherhood or nurturing; the qualities traditionally celebrated as heroic for women, and embrace a more masculine, destructive form of power. “Bring forth men-children only; for thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males.” (A1. S7. 73- 74)

Macbeth's admiration for Lady Macbeth's strength is evident in these words. Macbeth acknowledges the fierce, unwavering nature of his wife, suggesting that her

courage and resilience are qualities more suited to the birth of male inheritors, who are traditionally seen as the embodiment of strength and heroism. This statement highlights Macbeth's perception of Lady Macbeth as possessing qualities that transcend conventional gender roles, suggesting that her bravery and resolve are too powerful for the limitation's society places on women. This also highlights the argument that Lady Macbeth's heroism is often overlooked due to traditional views on gender. Macbeth himself recognizes her strength as exceptional, even by the standards of his time, yet this praise comes within the confines of a gendered compliment. Rather than fully acknowledging Lady Macbeth's qualities as heroic in their own right, Macbeth attributes them to traits typically associated with masculinity. This serves as another example of how Lady Macbeth's contributions are undervalued or misrepresented, even though she displays a form of heroism rooted in ambition, strength, and the determination to shape her own destiny.

A question by Maria Tatar, whether it is possible that heroism resides in the patience and fidelity of traditionally villainized women on the home front or in any other way, reflects reconsideration of heroism-beyond traditional male-centered narratives of valor in war or conquest. Tatar suggests heroism can reside also in the quieter, less visible roles inhabited by women throughout history, where patience, endurance and emotional strength are called upon to bolster order and stability. (Maria Tatar 2021. *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*. P.35) Lady Macbeth-even though she is so often regarded as ambitious and ruthless-embodies this kind of heroism as well, but not in a traditional way. Lady Macbeth manifests a type of heroism, not through acts of battle but through her resolve, determination, and commitment to fulfilling their ambitions as well as her husband's. While Macbeth is paralyzed by guilt over committing the murder of Duncan, in Act 2, Scene 2, Lady Macbeth demonstrates calm and composed intentionality. She condemns Macbeth saying, "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight" (A2, S2. 22), and gets the upper hand, clearing all traces so that their scheme can be finished. Her strength lies in emotional stamina and control of herself during momentous situations. Although traditionally neither patient nor matronly of domestic virtue, it is from her devotion to their common cause and her statesmanlike facility for dealing with the consequences of Macbeth's rash acts that Lady Macbeth draws her heroism. Thus, on the expiration of this definition, Lady Macbeth falls well within Tatar's expended view of what it means to be heroic. It is a thing of emotional valor, in which the physical might is also there-but it is not just about some physical bravery, but about holding things together when everything threatens to fall apart. Her ability to bear the weight of their ambitions, and the fidelity towards that plan, reflects the kind of inner strength and heroism Tatar recognizes in women.

Unlike the classical ideas of heroism in which men compete to reach glory and immortality, the true heroism, according to Maria Tatar, is that of fearless women dedicated to survival both physically and mentally. (Maria Tatar 2021. P 42). The character of Lady Macbeth represents this concept of heroism. She did not fight but intervened at the stage of influencing the results of the murder of Duncan. When Macbeth, overcome by guilt and fear after the killing of Duncan, lapses into despair, Lady Macbeth stands firm and realistic, saying "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight." (A2. S2. 22). This calm and practical response continues to support their ambitions, while keeping the plan alive even when Macbeth fails. So instead of glorying in personal triumph, the heroine Lady Macbeth concentrated on wringing tight control over the

situation and moving on cost whatever in moral and emotional damage. Indeed, in that sense, Lady Macbeth is a true heroine in the very way Tatar speaks of when she remarks that the strength to endure and survive amidst chaos is exactly what true heroism consists of.

“Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures...” (A2, S2. 53-54)

This was the most courageous act by Lady Macbeth, to take the charge from the Macbeth’s hands and control it by her own self. This shows the Lady Macbeth’s decisive and courageous nature. It tells us that she is the hero of her own ambitions and identity rather than for her husband. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth is paralyzed with guilt and fear, unable to control his thoughts and worries. Macbeth’s words “I will go no more” clearly shows his character as cowardice that he is not even able to control his own self. Lady Macbeth accuses him for being unable to finish the deed he started. By demanding the daggers, she shows her character and willingness to finish the deed. It reinforces the idea that Lady Macbeth is not the force behind the Macbeth’s ambitions, but that she is the driven by her own sense of purpose and strength.

Many people believe that the woman is the more sensible and rational gender, who can take over the responsibility of commanding or correcting male mistakes made under pressure. But this assessment is also proved to be untrue from the perspective of Bertrand Russell, who believes such generalizations about women are often flawed and based on limited perspectives, whether such generalizations are positive or negative. Women are not the same as men; they have specific ambitions, desires, and motivations that cannot be portrayed in some easy stereotypes. This idea is limited by the character of Lady Macbeth in which she helped Macbeth overcome hesitation after he committed murder against King Duncan because when Macbeth was overcome with guilt and fears, he did not return to Duncan's chamber to place the daggers on the guards. She quickly takes charge, reprimanding him for the weakness: “Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures: this the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil.” (A2, S2. 53- 55). In this, she assumes the voice of reason and the rational mind which must clear the mess Macbeth left with his emotional collapse. It is she who ensures that their plan is

totally executed, without a speck of doubt and always bold. Yet, Lady Macbeth's actions give way to the belief that women have settled to be passive or help. Lady Macbeth's characteristics prove that her strength and heroism do not follow from being the intelligent figure but from her willingness to transcend the expectations of her being a woman and having control over her and Macbeth's fate. (Bertrand Russell 1950. *Unpopular Essays* P.99)

Lady Macbeth’s heroism is also present in her emotional resilience in the immediate aftermath of Duncan’s murder. While Macbeth is tormented by guilt, seeing visions of daggers and hearing voices that curse him, Lady Macbeth remains composed and focused:

“will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood, clean from my hand?” (A2. S2. 61-62)

When Macbeth was lamenting his own deed of murdering the King Duncan, Lady

Macbeth responds to him with the pragmatic observation, “a little water clears us of this deed” (2.2. 64). Her resilience to this moment shows her ability to navigate chaos, which is another quality associated with heroism. While Macbeth is overwhelmed, Lady Macbeth retains control, ensuring the success of their plot, a feat that demonstrates mental fortitude in the face of fear and guilt. Lady Macbeth’s heroism can also be interpreted as a reflection of the broader human ambition and the darker side of striving for greatness. Her desire for power is emblematic of the eternal human struggle for success and recognition. Her willingness to defy morality, societal expectations, and even her own nature speaks to the heroic and tragic lengths to which individuals will go in the pursuit of power. This frames Lady Macbeth’s actions not just as personal ambition, but as representative of human ambition more generally, one that transcends gender and time.

“My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white.” (A2. S2. 64-65)

This line uttered by Lady Macbeth after the murder of Duncan, when Macbeth did not want to take a step forward for finishing the deed. She is telling to Macbeth that her hands are now the same as of his hands’ color but she is not shameful for it. These words again show her strength, ambition, and characteristics that align with her heroic qualities. It represents her emotional strength and resilience that surpasses her husband’s nature. She is distancing herself from any form of weakness by her words, “to wear a heart so white” particularly the weakness of fear and guilt that Macbeth is experiencing. These words of Lady Macbeth also show us her control and mastery not over the situation, but also on her emotions and even her husband. Lady Macbeth’s actions and words reveal that her heroism is the origin of her personal ambitions and her own nature, and not from the traditional concepts of femininity or the support of her husband.

“Naught’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content” (A3. S2. 6-7)

As Macbeth spirals into tyranny, Lady Macbeth begins to show signs of vulnerability. This line comes after she and Macbeth have achieved their goal of becoming the king and queen, but she reflects on the emptiness that has followed. This line also reveals the emotional cost of that ambition, which adds another layer to her heroism. Lady Macbeth is acknowledging that although they have achieved what they set out to do, it has brought them no peace or happiness. Heroism often involves sacrifice, and here we see that Lady Macbeth has sacrificed her peace of mind and moral integrity in the pursuit of power. This self-awareness of the consequences of her actions demonstrates a form of emotional bravery. She does not shy away from the truth of her situation but confronts it head on, understanding that their success is hollow. She is not simply a villain or a manipulative wife; she is a complex figure who embodies traits of both traditional and modern heroism. Her reflection on the emptiness of her ambition makes her a tragic hero, someone who recognizes the consequences of her actions but remains steadfast in the face of them. This makes her heroism more profound, as it is intertwined with human flaws and emotional depth.

Lady Macbeth’s heroism does not come without consequences. Like many tragic heroes, her ambition leads to her eventual downfall. In Act 5, Scene 1, during her famous sleepwalking scene, Lady Macbeth is haunted by guilt, repeatedly washing her hands and uttering:

“Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” (A5. S1. 37)

This scene reveals the psychological toll that her actions have taken, yet it also solidifies her status as a tragic hero. Her willingness to bear the emotional burden of their crimes, while Macbeth continues his tyrannical rule, underscores her strength. Lady Macbeth, once bold and unflinching in her pursuit of power, has been consumed by guilt, showing that her strength and ambition have ultimately led to her psychological unraveling. However, this madness does not diminish her heroism but rather enhances it. Her actions throughout the play were driven by her own ambition and desire for greatness, not simply out of loyalty to her husband. Lady Macbeth is not a villain devoid of conscience; instead, she is a tragic hero whose own choices have led to her downfall.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lady Macbeth’s character in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* transcends the traditional definitions of femininity and heroism. Throughout the play, her ambition, decisiveness, and willingness to defy societal norms showcase her as a central figure who drives the narrative forward. She challenges societal expectations of women in her time by taking charge of her own fate and the fate of those around her. Her role in orchestrating Duncan’s murder is not merely one of a supporting wife but of an independent agent who actively shapes the course of events.

Lady Macbeth’s ambition is one of her most defining characteristics. From the moment she receives Macbeth’s letter about the witches’ prophecy, she reveals her desire for power, not only for Macbeth but also for herself. She urges Macbeth to set aside his doubts and seize the crown. Her ambitions are not simply aligned with her husband’s but driven by her own desires for power and authority. Lady Macbeth’s journey is a testament to the complexity of heroism in Shakespearean tragedy. While her actions may be morally ambiguous, they exhibit a propound level of bravery and resolve. She is not merely a victim of circumstance or a passive bystander in Macbeth’s story. Rather she is an active participant who shapes her own destiny, even if it leads to her downfall.

Lady Macbeth’s heroism lies in her ability to challenge the constraints placed on her by society, her willingness to act where others hesitate, and her ultimate acceptance of the consequences of those actions. She is far more than a manipulative wife or villainous character. Her ambition, bravery, and tragic end define her as a hero who defies the limitations of her gender and leaves an indelible mark on the play’s narrative. Her character challenges the traditional notion of heroism as solely tied to physical bravery or male-dominated acts. Instead, her heroism is found in her ambition, her capacity to shape events, and her tragic journey from power to madness. While her pursuit of power leads to both success and destruction, she demonstrates an unwavering drive and control over her destiny. Lady Macbeth’s journey showcases the complexity of heroism, where ambition and personal sacrifice are intertwined, making her a tragic hero who leaves a lasting impact on the play’s narrative.

Thus, Lady Macbeth stands as a multifaceted heroine, defined not only by her ruthless ambition but also by the emotional and psychological burdens she carries, making her one of Shakespeare’s most compelling tragic figures. Her heroism is much about her rise to power as it is about the personal costs of her choices, solidifying her place as a central, heroic figure in *Macbeth*.

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