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Cristina León Alfar
University of Washington

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"Blood Will Have Blood": Power, Performance, and Lady Macbeth's Gender Trouble

Cristina León Alfar

Cristina León Alfar teaches in the Department of English at the University of Washington, where she earned her Ph.D. She is currently at work on a book entitled "Shakespeare and the 'Evil' Women of Early Modern Tragedy."

1.

My title refers to a moment in act 3, scene 4 of *Macbeth* after Banquo's ghost has disrupted the quiet of Macbeth's conscience. Left alone with Lady Macbeth, who has hastened their guests' departures, Macbeth murmurs, "It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood" (121). These lines provide the context for my reading of the play, in which the bloody competition for preferment and power implicated in absolute systems of monarchy is doomed to a cycle of failure and repetition. "To be thus is nothing, / But to be safely thus" (3.1.47-8), Macbeth discovers, so that Duncan's blood is only the first that must be shed in Macbeth's chase after an ever-illusory state security. Thus, blood calls to itself; the violence upon which his precarious authority stands breeds more violence. Comforted by his wife, however, Macbeth abandons his hysteria and confirms the dialects of this logic: "Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse / Is the initiate fear that wants hard use: / We are yet but young in deed" (3.4.141-3). Macbeth's ability to shake off his terror and his doubt to refocus his attention on the bloody business of kingship ever before him is enabled, I will argue, by Lady Macbeth, who gives him the image of himself he seeks. Thus Shakespeare's tragedy interrogates the tyranny of absolute monarchical practices that the playwright divorces from naturalized gender constructions by placing Lady Macbeth at the center of the play's violence. While she is often read as rupturing her designated gender function, I argue that

she provides a parodic inversion of the ideal wife and allows Shakespeare to put pressure on masculinist and violent structures of relations that depend on women's abject confirmation for their unremitting self-perpetuation.

Lady Macbeth's "evil" is, in this regard, an ideologically inscribed notion that is often linked in our literary tradition to strong female characters who seek power, who reject filial loyalty as prior to self-loyalty, and who pursue desire in all its forms — romantic, adulterate, authoritarian, and even violent. Evil, then, is a gender-linked concept that reifies constructions of action as definitive of masculinity. I want to suggest that Shakespeare's tragedy presents a complex vision of gender and power, which, rather than reinscribing binary oppositions of male/female, active/passive, and good/evil, exposes structures of violence and tyranny as dependent on naturalized definitions of femininity and masculinity. *Macbeth* explores a system of power relations that requires both men's glorification of violence and women's renunciation of desire for a phantasmatic stability.¹ That women in power seem to behave like men suggests that binary oppositions are cultural fabrications. Thus Shakespeare uncovers the gender trouble² behind the prescriptions that constitute femininity as compliance, masculinity as violence, and violence as power.

Lady Macbeth's place in critical history is one of almost peerless malevolence.³ Scholars argue that she violates the dictates of gender by conjuring the spirits to "unsex" her. When she encourages Macbeth's violence by questioning his manhood, she is perceived not just as shrewish but as the play's source for the definition of masculinity as violence.⁴ In her defense of Lady Macbeth,⁵ Joan Larsen Klein writes,

In spite of the view of some critics that Lady Macbeth is the evil force behind Macbeth's unwilling villainy, she seems to epitomize the sixteenth-century belief that women are passive, men active. . . . Lady Macbeth's threats of violence, for all their force and cruelty, are empty fantasies. (244)

Klein suggests that Lady Macbeth's femininity absolves her of evil, fusing female action with evil and passivity with a naturalized femininity. Despite the poststructuralist and feminist practice of questioning monolithic, essentialist readings of subjectivity, critics find it all too easy to resort to more traditional, even moralized, analyses, so that they ignore cultural imperatives constructing gender norms and vilifying deviation.⁶ My analysis of Lady Macbeth begins, in this regard, not by measuring her behavior according to naturalized prescriptions of appropriate and inappropriate feminine conduct but by probing the cultural injunctions — invoked by the play's politics of gender and violence — governing her conduct.⁷

The violence underwriting the structures of power in place prior to Lady Macbeth's encouragement of Macbeth's violence, in this regard, cannot simply be cast off when a woman contemplates power. Shakespeare succeeds in highlighting the brutality of absolute monarchy by placing power in the hands of a woman who approaches it not according to "womanly" virtues of mercy and reconciliation but according to politically expedient and pragmatic notions of suspicion, deception, and death. I urge a reading of Lady Macbeth at least

resembling the complexity of scholarly views of Lear, Edmund, Edgar, Duncan, Macbeth, and Macduff, who are often read sympathetically despite the violent and ruthless competition for preferment and power in which they take part. Such a reading is possible despite Alan Sinfield's contention that Lady Macbeth "is not a character," and it can be made within the very paradigm of character analysis that he advocates (*Faultlines* 78, 61-6). Rather than violating and then collapsing back into a natural (and prior) passive feminine conduct, Lady Macbeth performs gender according to the fluctuating politics of power and violence staged by *Macbeth*. Just as the violent cultural context of the play provides competing discourses for Macbeth, it enables and, in part, encourages a shifting set of responses from Lady Macbeth that are simultaneously "masculine" brutality and "feminine" obedience. If she does indeed transgress her gender to become manly, therefore, it is because she must do so to reflect — as conduct manuals demand — the bloody desire of her husband. That tracts on women's conduct cannot be said, literally, to demand anything of the kind is less important than the submission they do demand, which can be misunderstood, misrecognized as a constant and unquestioning feminine compliance with the desires of the masculine.⁸

In this light, Lady Macbeth's encouragement of her husband's regicide can be read as Shakespeare's parodic depiction of wifely duty. Set within a structure of power dependent on violence for stability, Lady Macbeth's behavior adheres to rather than transgresses her gender role. *Macbeth* comprises a radical staging of female gender, then, that contextualizes women's desire in hostile patrilineal⁹ structures and points to a cultural manufacturing of femininity as passive, tender, and merciful. Because Lady Macbeth reproduces the bloody competition for preferment and power ostensibly inherent to masculinity, *Macbeth* demonstrates the artificiality of gender divisions; and because Shakespeare underscores the brutality of patrilineal power regardless of the gender of its perpetrator or the "legitimacy" of a given monarch, the moral distinctions traditionally informing critical reception of state power and violence become uncertain. The differentiation between that which is socially sanctioned and that which is abject, in Kristeva's terms,¹⁰ is uncovered in its ideological fragility. The abject is located not within a feminine chaos but rather in the masculinist competition for property and domination that builds on a ruthless denial of female desire. *Macbeth*, in this light, uncovers the complex dynamics of gender and power through representation of a ruthless female character who reproduces the violent practices of a masculinist order. That we often fail to sympathize with Lady Macbeth says more about our own moralized expectations of femininity and masculinity, I argue, than it does about Shakespeare's own sense of gender.¹¹

2.

Many critics have noted the play's association of manliness with violence and power. However, these scholars do not extend their analysis of *Macbeth*'s portrayals of masculinity to Lady Macbeth's gender role, despite the fact that both

the play's valorization of masculine brutality and Lady Macbeth's performance of femininity are produced by the same socio-symbolic system.¹² To begin filling this void, I argue that the play's monarchical structure, sustained by brutal competitions for preferment and power, compels Lady Macbeth's support of Macbeth's regicide, so that Lady Macbeth can be read as performing gender according to Lacan's conception of male/female roles, which are governed by the phallus.¹³ Rather than embodying evil within the play, Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to seize the power requisite to a ruthless patrilineal order. I want to make clear that Lady Macbeth's role as the phallus is not a biological imperative but, as I have argued elsewhere in regard to feminine masochism (see "Staging"), the product of cultural injunctions that, as Kahn has brilliantly shown (*Man's Estate* 1-20), not only define men's honor and women's value according to women's virtue but require women's obedience to their fathers' and husbands' every desire in order to maintain that virtue. Lacan's theorization of phallic gender prescriptions, then, describes in psychoanalytic terms internalized cultural mandates on gender performance — cultural mandates that limit female action and desire to male agency.¹⁴

My interpretation of Lady Macbeth situates her phallic position within a historically specific cultural production of early modern monarchical power and gender configurations. Macbeth desires the power to usurp the throne, and, subject to his desire, Lady Macbeth is compelled to reflect its fulfillment. While the nature of her guarantee and of Macbeth's ability to embody such power/violence is illusory, the law drives both of them to perform gender according to phallic principles. Because the patrilineal structure of power in *Macbeth* is already based on a brutal and violent hierarchy of relations, Lady Macbeth's encouragement of her husband to commit regicide conforms to the brutality of the play's structure of authority and domination. *Macbeth*, in this sense, problematizes a patrilineal system of relations based on violence for its stability and perpetuation. This political backdrop to the tragedy suggests that Lady Macbeth's actions find their brutal source in both the monarchical and gender structures of power already in place rather than in a primordial and naturalized maxim for feminine good and evil.

I take my argument from the Lacanian conception of female and male subjectivities, which are governed spectrally, as a phantasmatic "being" of and "having" the phallus, a structure that determines relations between the sexes. The phallus, as Elizabeth Grosz explains, "is both the signifier of the differences between the sexes and the signifier which effaces lack and thus difference. It is the term with respect to which the two sexes are defined as different, and the term which functions to bring them together, the term of their union" (117).¹⁵ This difference, which Grosz explores in detail, is embedded in the construction of female sexuality as lack, "that is, as *lacking* the phallus in order for men to be regarded as having it" (119). The phallus, therefore, becomes the symbolic site of difference between men and women, that which distinguishes them from one another in culture and "brings them together" in a union predicated on the fulfillment of masculine desire. Thus, Grosz argues, Lacan's choice of the phallus as the point of difference between men and women in the symbolic order reproduces male and female inequality (122). The phallus comes to represent male power and naturalizes men's control over the home, the market-

place, and the government. Women lack not just the penis but power. Men, in possession of the phallus (the penis for which the phallus stands in symbolization), become the subjects of desire, the agents of power, those whose desire must be guaranteed. It is through the masculine need for fulfillment that the woman becomes the phallus, "is" it in the sense that she becomes the mimetic reflection, the ventriloquized guarantor, of man's desire. Male dominance and female obedience and passivity become naturalized through this symbolic bifurcation. Though Lacan asserts, then, in "The Meaning of the Phallus," that the relations governed by the phallus have nothing whatever to do with the social or the cultural but only with the "other scene" of the unconscious (79), we can see that they are indeed descriptive of socio-political relations between the sexes in a heterosexual matrix.¹⁶ In this sense Lady Macbeth confirms — as both witness and support — the masculinist violence and power her husband values, performs as warrior, and desires in his fantasy of kingship.

My reading of Lady Macbeth as the phallus is indebted to Judith Butler, who emphasizes women's function within the binary and extends and critiques Lacan's theorization. She argues that gender is a performance, a reading that she bases on Lacan's assertion that "it is in order to be the phallus . . . that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved" (84). In response to this passage, Butler writes:

The term [masquerade] is significant because it suggests contradictory meanings: On the one hand, if the "being," the ontological specification of the Phallus, is masquerade, then it would appear to reduce all being to a form of appearing, the appearance of being, with the consequence that all gender ontology is reducible to the play of appearances. On the other hand, masquerade suggests that there is a "being" or ontological specification of femininity *prior to* the masquerade, a feminine desire or demand that is masked and capable of disclosure, that, indeed, might promise an eventual disruption and displacement of the phallogocentric signifying economy. (47)

Two important points become manifest. First, gender is a performance constituted by oppositional phallic relations. Second, the performance of femininity compels women's renunciation of desire in favor of the desire of the Other. That renunciation presupposes a repressed desire, a desire that must be repressed in order to support the desire of the Other, so that the Other will have power (the phallus). That female desire is denied in order for male desire to be fulfilled suggests that female desire, outside phallic precepts, threatens male desire. To neutralize that threat, female gender is constructed into a reflection of the desire of the Other. The dialectics of this matrix point to the phallus's socio-political underpinnings, which, I would suggest, are reflected throughout early modern culture but perhaps most profoundly in the manuals on women's conduct.

Despite the new emphasis on companionate marriage that emerges in the period, liberal humanist Juan Luis Vives invokes a tradition in which (sexually) rebellious daughters are murdered by fathers, brothers, and other women:¹⁷

Hippomenes, a great man of Athens, when he knew his daughter desoiled of one, he shut her up in a stable with a wild horse, kept meatless. . . . In Spain . . . two brethren that thought their sister had been a maid, when they saw her great with child, they dissembled their anger so long as she was with child. But as soon as she was delivered . . . they thrust swords into her belly and slew her. . . . [T]hree maidens with a long towel strangled a maid that was one of their companions, when they took her in the abominable deed. (105-6)

Vives' text, through its advocacy of education for women, sets up a curriculum that teaches women to mimic a masculinist moral order. He conjures female "evil" to exorcise it and constructs a virtuous female subject compelled to reflect the desire of the masculine other. In this regard, then, as Butler contends, women confront "a strategy of survival within compulsive systems [that makes] gender a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (139). Lacan's paradigm, therefore, in which women "are" the phallus so that men "have" the phallus, is juridically controlled. And it is this cultural and symbolic system that I suggest is staged in *Macbeth*.

What this means, then, for a reading of Lady Macbeth is that she has been scapegoated in Shakespearean criticism as the source of violence in the play. For if she functions as the guarantor of Macbeth's bloody desire, she cannot be said in any way to assert her own desire or ambition. Lady Macbeth must encourage her husband's desire to be king, for she is required by the symbolic order to act as his Other, as the object who, through her lack, supplies his potency. My argument abandons the moralized reading of Lady Macbeth for a psychoanalytic one¹⁸ to interrogate what I see to be a lingering tendency in the literary criticism of female characters to ignore the fractured and multiple nature of subjectivity and to posit instead a totalizing account of it. Such readings fail to consider the circumscribed nature of Lady Macbeth's (among other female characters') desire, which, as tracts produce it, must be the fulfillment of masculine power. These analyses also assume an individualized agency unsupported both by antifeminist tracts on women's nature and by laws such as those documented in T. E.'s *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights*. Lady Macbeth must reflect, on pain of public humiliation, her husband's desires, so that her responsibility for the play's violence is complicated by the phallic prescriptions determining her gender function in *Macbeth*'s masculinist culture of violence.

Lady Macbeth's relationship to the witches, in this light, is more tenuous than critics have often assumed.¹⁹ Their representation as spectral apparitions sets them apart from Lady Macbeth, whose role in the tragedy is circumscribed fundamentally by the material conditions governing gender, economic, and hierarchical relations.²⁰ The witches' gender instability, uncanny powers, and malevolence toward men embody typical early modern anxieties about female agency. Yet it is not at all clear that the witches are human, female or male, but only that they hold power over mortal men. Such uncertainty, compounded by the threat such power holds, sets them apart from the material conditions regulating Lady Macbeth's performance of gender. Thus the "feminine evil" they represent is phantasmatic because their powers are specifically fantastic, other-

worldly. "Real" evil, it would seem, can only be represented by supernatural rather than human beings. Thus their characterization highlights such evil as belonging to mystical and spectralized realms of existence, to a conjuration of spirits. While Lady Macbeth mimics their language, her actions cannot be read in the same light as those of the witches because she must function within the cultural and ideological limitations of her society. The witches, on the other hand, do not function within those limits.

Lady Macduff, however, is subject to the same societal restrictions as Lady Macbeth. Both women are deserted by husbands driven by masculinist honor to participate in the play's violence. Lady Macduff, like Lady Macbeth, must remain at home as tyranny rages and await her husband's return. Whether through passivity or through active encouragement, then, both women must be read as parties to a structure of power dependent on violence for stability. While Lady Macduff critiques her culture's brutality when she is informed of the danger she and her children face, she is as powerless against it as is Lady Macbeth:

Whither should I fly?

I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world — where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly. Why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defense,
To say I have done no harm? (4.2.73-9)

Lady Macduff's impotence in the face of danger points to Goldberg's claim that "masculinity in the play is directed as an assaultive attempt to secure power, to maintain success and succession, at the expense of women" (259). While Lady Macduff's critique implies her conception of some other socio-political system of relations, changing the play's structure of gender and power fails in the face of the patriarchal law that that structure reflects. Neither the "evil" of the witches nor the "goodness" of Lady Macduff, then, need mar my complication of critical visions of Lady Macbeth. The former underscore the phantasms of feminine "evil," and the latter's inability to act against her unavoidable, albeit passive, confirmation of a masculinist philosophy of violence conforms to the same phallic prescriptions governing Lady Macbeth.

I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that Shakespeare in any way supports the violence of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth but that in his examination of a patrilineal order dependent on women's renunciation of desire, he parodies early modern conceptions of "appropriate" femininity. The period is marked by a proliferation of tracts defining ideal femininity, and while pamphleteers vary in method, they all agree that female virtue demands a sexual and moral submission to fathers and husbands. As Constance Jordan has argued, women's participation in the economic exchange that stabilizes such power implies a coercion (44). In *Macbeth*, however, patrilineal standards of "appropriate" femininity are turned upside down. If "being" the phallus demands women's unquestioning obedience in a culture dependent on the violent acqui-

sition and protection of power, then the possibilities of a Lady Macbeth who unquestioningly assists her husband to commit regicide can be imagined. In this light, Lady Macbeth is not an anomaly of female evil too gross to be imagined but a woman whose actions conform to a masculinist culture of violence.

3.

The political structure of *Macbeth*, as headed by Duncan, traditionally has been accepted by critics as a legitimate and therefore inviolable government. Significantly, however, several scholars have begun to question that point of view, among them Alan Sinfield, who interrogates the assumptions valorizing “violence [as] good . . . when it is in the service of the prevailing dispositions of power; when it disrupts them, it is evil” (“History” 63).²¹ Sinfield’s reading of *Macbeth* asks what the difference is between absolutism and tyranny, “between Macbeth’s rule and contemporary European monarchs?” (65). The answer is, finally, none. He argues against the necessity of a Jamesian reading of the play that “attempt[s] to render coherent and persuasive the ideology of the Absolutist State” (66), and suggests instead that Buchanan’s *History of Scotland* may constitute part of *Macbeth*’s ideological design. Sinfield contends that, by identifying Mary Queen of Scots as both legitimate ruler and tyrant and her deponents as both usurpers and lawful inheritors, Buchanan offers an alternative to the critical assumption that *Macbeth* was written with James’s *Basilikon Doron* in mind (64-8). While Sinfield admits the play can be read as supporting Macbeth’s opponents, he points out that

Macbeth kills two people at the start of the play: a rebel and a king, and these are apparently utterly different acts of violence. That is the [Jamesian] ideology of Absolutism. Macduff also, killing Macbeth, is killing both a rebel and a king, but now the two are apparently the same person. The ultimate intractability of this kind of contradiction disturbs the Jamesian reading of the play. (67)

Sinfield’s analysis is apt, effectively disrupting the long-standing reading of the Macbeths’ inherent evil. Legitimate and illegitimate power are exposed as ideological fictions, as putative guarantees of stability to those in power. That James may have liked the play and allowed its continued performance suggests that Shakespeare succeeded in staging the complexities at stake in absolutist government: Duncan’s murder, followed by Macbeth’s inevitable downfall, followed by Malcolm’s ascension, can support a Jamesian reading that depends on seeing Macbeth as “a complete usurping tyrant in order that he shall set off the lawful good king, [and therefore] not . . . be a ruler at all in order that he may properly be deposed and killed.” But these events can also be read as promoting the need to depose all tyrants — legitimate or illegitimate. As Kinney observes, the play ends in unsettling echoes of Macbeth’s rise to power (155). And missing from Malcolm’s scene of victory, he also points out, is Donalbain, “who, Holinshed tells us, will return at a later date to kill King Malcolm[,] in

turn to take the throne himself." The spectral nature of legitimate and illegitimate rule, then, haunts Shakespeare's tragedy and suggests that the violence of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is subject to a more complex set of circumstances than moral denunciations of them allow.

Macbeth begins with the weird sisters' chant that "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.11), so that conventional distinctions between good and evil are immediately under question. Macbeth echoes them in his observation, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38), but his speech following confirmation from Rosse that he is indeed Thane of Cawdor explicitly raises questions about the relative moral divisions implicated in the honors promised him by the weird sisters:

Two truths are told,
 As happy prologues to the swelling act
 Of the Imperial theme. . . .
 This supernatural soliciting
 Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature? (127-37)

We see in the weird sisters' chant, in Macbeth's observation about the weather, and in his attempt to unravel the good and evil proposed by the images in his mind the testing of absolute moral distinctions. Rather than a pure exchange of moral categories, the distinctions between foul and fair begin to blur. In Macbeth's conception of the patrilineal order, Duncan's rewarding of his military prowess with the title Thane of Cawdor acknowledges his value as a warrior. The title also expands his power. That the witches anticipate this news accurately suggests to him that their identification of him as king is also accurate. To be king is to hold the highest, most valued and most powerful office, and, he notes, such success cannot bode ill. Yet the news also conjures in his mind the act of regicide that must be committed in order to be king. Such imaginings cannot be good; yet these visions result from the good fortune revealed to him by both the witches and Rosse. Good and evil merge rather than remain polar and absolute opposites, so that traditional distinctions are rendered insecure and phantasmatic. In this regard, Shakespeare establishes a set of circumstances that elides evaluation through traditional moral divisions.

Similarly, I want to suggest that the basis for the play's equation between violence and masculinity is staged in act 1, scene 2 when Duncan learns that his war against usurpers has been victorious.²² The sergeant describes the battle between "[t]he merciless Macdonwald / (Worthy to be a rebel)" (9-10) and

brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,

Which smok'd with bloody execution,
 . . .

Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,
 And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (16-18, 22-3)

In his account, the sergeant identifies both the traitor's and the defender's acts of violence as admirable. Duncan's response to Macbeth's brutality is: "O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!" (24). Violence becomes gentlemanly behavior when legitimized by the king. Macbeth's bloody valor enhances his honor and reputation, which are further increased when the sergeant adds a description of the renewed assault on Macbeth and Banquo, who fought against those new forces "As cannons overcharg'd with double cracks, so they / Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe. / Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds" (37-9). As James L. Calderwood observes, "Lady Macbeth may complain that [Macbeth] is too full of the milk of human kindness 'to catch the nearest way,' but that is not the Macbeth we see on the heath enraptured by thoughts of murder" (72). He is also not the Macbeth described by the sergeant. He appears violent enough to commit murder, perhaps especially when his own acquisition of power is at stake.

Duncan rewards Macbeth for his violence with the title of Thane of Cawdor. He also praises the sergeant for the honor of both his words and wounds. Moreover, victory in battle for the Scots does not mean an end to the violence, for Duncan orders the death of the current Thane of Cawdor as a traitor to his kingdom. Macbeth's reward is, then, a result of more bloodshed. The rebel Cawdor's violence, however, because it threatens those in power, is illegitimate, evil, and punishable by death. The execution of Cawdor is therefore legitimate, necessary to stabilize Duncan's throne. The differences between legitimate and illegitimate violence, it seems, are ideological fictions. Violence underwrites both legitimate power and illegitimate usurpation. Rather than seeing Duncan, then, as "the single source from which all good can be imagined to flow, the source of benign and empowering nurturance, the opposite of that imaged in the witches' poisonous cauldron and Lady Macbeth's gall-filled breasts" (Adelman 132), we must also see him as part of the masculinist violence within the play. The violence of Duncan's war against the rebels, followed by Macbeth's murder of him and Macduff's murder of Macbeth, demonstrates that structures of power dependent on violence for survival breed the violence brought against them. The patrilineal order's very survival depends on "masculine" violence, which is rewarded highly and praised as nobility and goodness. I want to extend Sinfield's analysis, therefore, to a reading of Lady Macbeth and her putative "evil," both because his work (along with that of Calderwood, Goldberg, Kinney, Mullaney, and O'Rourke) complicates visions of the play as pitting transcendent good against transcendent evil, and because, as Sinfield's reading of Lady Macbeth as "not a character" indicates, a space for privileging the experience of female characters in masculinist cultures of power and violence needs carving out. Otherwise, violence and evil are all too easily displaced onto female characters who are caught up in already established systems of brutality that they are compelled to guarantee.

4.

If, then, *Macbeth* blurs the distinctions between good and evil monarchical power, it should not be too great a leap to suggest that Lady Macbeth's evil might also be equally uncertain. When Lady Macbeth learns of her husband's encounter with the three weird sisters and asks the spirits "That tend on mortal thoughts" to "unsex [her] here, / And fill [her] from the crown to toe topful / Of direst cruelty!" (1.5.41-3), she is not creating the equation between cruelty and masculinity but asking for the masculine brutality necessary, according to the configurations of the play, to encourage violence.²³ Having internalized cultural injunctions to be the ready reflection of Macbeth's desire, she seeks the capacity for violence that he seems to request from her in his letter. Beyond the valor he already possesses, attaining the power promised him by the weird sisters necessitates a revision in both their conceptions of legitimate violence. Neely's observation that Lady Macbeth asks "only for a perversion of her own emotions and bodily functions" (328) is crucial; that Lady Macbeth requires help to pervert her emotions suggests that she is not innately wicked. Instead, her plea signals the shift that her role as the phantasmatic guarantor of her husband's capacity for murder requires her to make. In this regard, then, she calls on spirits for masculine aggression because that is what she lacks. And it is for what she is not that, as Lacan tells us, she expects to be loved.

While Macbeth's letter says nothing about regicide, his position in the line of succession places him behind both Duncan's sons, which he notes "is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap, / For in my way it lies" (1.4.48-50). In order to ventriloquize her husband's desire for power, Lady Macbeth conjures the spirits of mortality to

Come, you spirits
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
 And fill me from crown to toe topful
 Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
 Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 Th' effect and [it]! Come to my woman's breasts,
 And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
 Wherever in your sightless substances
 You wait on nature's mischief! 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!" (1.5.40-54)

Lady Macbeth's speech provides both a transgressive and parodic alternative to that of Juliet, who conjures the night to "Come" and "Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks, / With thy black mantle" (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.2.10, 14-15). Shakespeare counters Juliet's romantic idealization with Lady Mac-

beth's parodic performance of the ideal wife. Night's cloak, for Juliet, privatizes rites of love; for Lady Macbeth, night's cloak privatizes rites of blood. Her speech can be seen in light of Emily C. Bartels' analysis of *platea* figures, the revengers and villains in Shakespearean drama, whose soliloquies demonstrate that

the idea of agency, of the subject's ability to act as and on the self, is at once most vital and most vexed. . . . Their stories show us that, in Shakespeare at least, agency and autonomy do not go hand in hand, that self-determination takes place through and not despite popular forms and pressures, and that the self's dependence on those forms and pressures is a site of both possibility and crisis. (175)

Bartels' argument emphasizes the fractured nature of agency for characters such as Lady Macbeth, who perform not only according to a theatrical pattern but in line with a gender paradigm. Because her function is predicated on renunciation of her own desire, Lady Macbeth *unquestioningly* seeks to confirm her husband's ambition, notwithstanding her inability ever to do so. With the promises of the weird sisters made word on the page before her and the knowledge of Macbeth's "burnt . . . desire" (1.5.4) for the power promised him, Lady Macbeth recognizes the requirements of her role. The act she plots to commit (and which Macbeth conceives of on his own) is not evidence of an inherent evil but of her subjection to the patrilineal order's definitions of gender and power. Thus the laws governing women position Lady Macbeth between culturally derived pressures and constraints compelling her to encourage Macbeth's bloody ambitions.

Lady Macbeth's summoning, then, of the spirits to "Make thick [her] blood, / Stop up the th' access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake [her] fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th' effect and [it]!" (43-7) is a call for the spectral power a woman may have to "chastise with the valor of [her] tongue" (27). Her speech is not motivated by an individualized agency because it serves to support the power and desire of another. Action for her, therefore, is always a fantasy with no substance. The conjuration of spirits she attempts underscores the fantastic aspects of her role. Lady Macbeth does not so much transgress her gender as she prepares for a performance. Like an actor offstage who stretches, takes rhythmic breaths, and murmurs a prayer to St. Genesius, Lady Macbeth seeks the phantasmatic state of mind and body enabling a masquerade. Because the power Macbeth desires lacks mercy, sympathy, and tenderness, she asks the spirits to thicken her blood — to masculinize her — not because she wants to *be* a man but because her role requires her to mime Macbeth's necessarily ruthless, and equally masculine, ambitions.

In this regard, she cruelly taunts Macbeth as he hesitates to commit regicide not because she seeks to emasculate him but because, on the contrary, her role compels her to remind him of his culture's expectations for masculinity.²⁴ When Macbeth snaps at her in exasperation, "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares [do] more is none" (1.7.46-7), she reminds her husband of his honor, of the honor, in fact, of his word:

I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
 And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
 Have done to this. (54-9)

While Adelman contends that "Lady Macbeth's image of murderously disrupted nurturance . . . functions to subject Macbeth's will to female forces" (134), I would point out that the forces she conjures are those already underwriting the play's structures of power. When Garber asserts that Macbeth "becomes . . . the man-child his wife will bring to birth — and dash to shards" (154), she attributes the play's masculine brutality to Lady Macbeth. But Lady Macbeth's image symbolizes no more malevolent a force than Duncan's praise of Macbeth's execution of Macdonwald as "gentlemanly" and of his praise of both the sergeant's wounds and words as smacking of honor.²⁵ Her juxtaposition of the love she felt for the son she nursed with a willingness to kill him is not evidence of a lack of maternal feeling but of the monstrosity of her husband's forswearing of his word. His oath to her, by this logic, is as sacred as that maternal bond, and his forsaking of that oath is comparable, in her estimation, to the murdering of a son. For a man to swear and then forswear is as monstrous as for a woman to kill the son and heir she nurtures.

Her success, then, is derived not from making Macbeth "imagine himself as an infant vulnerable to her" (Adelman 137) nor from her ability to make him "intimidated by her valor and stung by her taunts at his virility" (Kahn, *Man's Estate* 181) but rather from her grasp of both male and female roles. She invokes the masculinist honor with which her husband identifies as a soldier at the same time that she taps the constructed masculine impulse in him toward violence. His response confirms that impulse as also masculine: "Bring forth men-children only!" he urges her, "For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.72-4). Macbeth recognizes in her not only the fearlessness of a man but the maker of men. Re-masculinized by her words, he again resolves to commit murder. His renewed conviction is not spurred entirely by his wife, then, making her the evil instigator of murder, regicide.²⁶ Rather, Macbeth recognizes her injunctions to be his own understanding of bloody valor as not only valuable, admirable, and honorable but masculine, just as Duncan found Macbeth's violence gentlemanly. The absolute distinctions, then, between a moralized, legitimate form of government stabilized through violence and an immoral, illegitimate usurpation through violence collapse.

5.

Committing regicide, however, is simpler for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in theory than in fact. While drugging the grooms and placing the daggers in Macbeth's reach exhilarates Lady Macbeth, she admits "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't" (2.2.12-13). She is stopped from mur-

dering Duncan herself because he represents for her the image of her father, the law of the Father, in fact, which precludes her from action and compels her to aid Macbeth's action. Macbeth, however, expresses horror at having committed the deed. When his wife urges him to return to the scene and leave the daggers next to the grooms, he cries, "I'll go no more. / I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on't again I dare not" (47-9). And while Lady Macbeth herself returns the daggers and smears the grooms with blood, the act of regicide, counter to the law of the Father, has undone both of them. First, Lady Macbeth's chastising her husband not to "unbend your noble strength, to think / So brain-sickly of things" (42-3) fails to rouse Macbeth's manhood as before. The valor of her tongue, successful in planning Duncan's murder, now falters. And Macbeth's military violence and power also fail him. He can only reply, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself. / Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst" (70-1). Their roles — *being* and *having* — collapse in the face of their transgression. As Butler contends,

men are said to "have" the Phallus, yet never to "be" it, in the sense that the penis is not equivalent to that Law and can never fully symbolize that Law. Hence, there is a necessary or presuppositional impossibility to any effort to occupy the position of "having" the Phallus, with the consequence that both positions of "having" and "being" are, in Lacan's terms, finally to be understood as comedic failures that are nevertheless compelled to articulate and enact these repeated impossibilities. (46)

By act 2, scene 2 just such a failure in the Macbeths' gender positions has occurred. The play's culture of violence, which enabled Duncan's murder and enabled the polarization of gender roles into "appropriate" acts and behaviors, collapses under the weight of the law of the Father. Macbeth's regicide, even within the constructions of a violent and brutal system of relations, transgresses that law.

Critics have noted the shift in Lady Macbeth's power once Duncan's murder is committed. Both Klein and Williamson argue that Macbeth's separation of himself from his wife as he engages in further political machinations and plots of murder effectively neutralizes Lady Macbeth's conception of herself as his wife and helpmate, sending her into her "feminine" madness. While I would agree that Lady Macbeth is replaced by the witches in Macbeth's confidence, Klein's and Williamson's readings reify the notion of femininity as passivity/madness (and also, therefore, as not-evil, which I have already noted in Klein's case). In their analyses, Lady Macbeth fails to sustain her "masculine" power *because* she goes mad, and she descends into madness *because* Macbeth rejects her as his dearest partner of greatness. While she cannot console or advise her husband, I would emphasize that even in her madness her language remains informed by masculinist structures of power. Though she is not effective in recalling Macbeth to his guests as he challenges Banquo's ghost, she continues to encourage her husband in his course of action even when she is not acquainted with the details of his plans. That by this point in the tragedy she fails to do so confirms that "having" and "being" the phallus require a constant

shifting and fluctuation of gender-assigned acts. Failure, in this sense, inevitably occurs only in anticipation of variation and repetition. What remains constant is Lady Macbeth's role as the *feminine* guarantor of her husband's power. When she asks him "What's to be done?" (3.2.44) in response to his claim that "there shall be done / A deed of dreadful note" (43-4), Macbeth discourages her continued participation in his violence and urges his wife to "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed" (45-6). Clearly, her role as his "dearest partner of greatness" has altered. The reflection of power he now desires requires his wife's passivity.

Being the phallus by act 3, then, shifts to more traditional submissive obedience and inactivity. No longer an active participant in her husband's machinations, Lady Macbeth must await others' acts, like an audience member.²⁷ It is at this point that the destructive nature of her phallic role becomes most acute. Despite her desire to share with her husband an active role, she must defer to his desire. We can see therefore that she is denied any independence as a subject because "being" the phallus requires a negation of *herself*, of her own desire always and already in favor of Macbeth's. In this context, Lady Macbeth's insanity must be read not as an inherent feminine response but as the effect of gender prescriptions. Her descent into madness and subsequent suicide, therefore, are responses to the subjectivity to which she is consigned by her culture and by her husband's rejection of her in favor of the witches. Whether in her function as the active guarantor of Macbeth's brutal potential or as, at this point, an innocent and silent guarantor of his role as king, Lady Macbeth functions within constructions of female ontology requiring her to reflect back to her husband his desires — regardless of her always, already inevitable failure to do so.

That her role as the phallus implies a compulsion to repeat is evident in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, during which she painfully reenacts the moments when she was closest to her husband, the most effective at remasculinizing him and consoling him:

Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt? . . . No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that; you mar all with this starting. . . . Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave. . . . To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed. (5.1.36-9, 43-5, 62-4, 66-8)

In her madness, Lady Macbeth searches for her role as her husband's partner in greatness, for her role as the voice of violence and comfort, piercing logic and reassuring calm. Macbeth's search for power as offered to him by the weird sisters has taken that role away from her. Lady Macbeth's reenactment of the role she played before Macbeth urged her to remain innocent of his actions suggests a frustration with her role as a wife awaiting her husband's return from war and from the witches. Though she expresses guilt both in the repeated attempts to wash the spot of blood from her hand and in her memory of Lady Macduff,

Lady Macbeth relives the moments when she was most actively involved in public life and successful at enhancing her husband's political power. But because "being" the phallus is subject to a set of circumstances under constant fluctuation, Lady Macbeth's desire to sustain an active partnership with Macbeth is not just frustrated but must be denied because it does not reflect his desire. In tracing the trajectory of her descent from sanity to insanity, we can see that in Shakespeare's play feminine madness is a response to "being" only for an Other. Lady Macbeth's insanity and suicide, therefore, interrogate polarized gender structures, revealing them to be destructive of female subjectivity.

Significantly, the same polarization also destroys Macbeth and ends his reign. As Lady Macbeth ends her life in despair of her powerlessness, Macbeth also ends his life steeped in masculinist violence:

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnan wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!" (5.8.27-34)

Macbeth's defiance of the witches' prophecy that Macduff, "from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (15-16), would defeat him illustrates his identification with the masculine role defined within the play. Valor, brutality, and bravery in battle are the values Macbeth takes with him into death. The bloody virtues that Macbeth embodied and Duncan rewarded materially underwrite Macbeth's determination to stand against Macduff. Both husband and wife die searching for that ruthless power in themselves valued by their culture. Both die fixed within diametrically opposed gender roles: Lady Macbeth at home, in private, through what is viewed traditionally by critics as the feminine act of suicide, and Macbeth on the battlefield in defense of his power and name.

6.

Such an ending suggests not so much that evil is overcome by the good of a legitimate monarch in Malcolm but that both the valorization of brutality and violence as masculine and the polarization of gender roles into feminine passivity and masculine action are doomed to self-perpetuation and self-defeat. Like the ending of *King Lear*, which I have argued elsewhere takes no comfort in Edgar's legitimate acquisition of the throne (see "King Lear's 'Immoral' Daughters"), Malcolm's ascension to the crown in *Macbeth* affords no transcendental assurance that goodness reigns again. That Malcolm may be better than the alternative does not suggest that the system itself gains stability or that corruption comes to an end. For if we are to take seriously his declaration to Macduff that within himself are "[a]ll the particulars of vice so grafted / That, when

they shall be open'd, black Macbeth / Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state / Esteem him as a lamb, being compar'd / With my confineless harms" (4.3.51-5), then we must read the ending of *Macbeth* as nihilistically recuperative of the same state-sponsored violence under both Duncan and Macbeth. While many critics argue that Malcolm's claims are disingenuous, designed to test Macduff's loyalty to the Scottish throne and to Malcolm himself, I would argue that the textual evidence for such a test is slippery. While Malcolm indeed expresses doubts about Macduff's loyalties, the ambiguity of his claim that Macduff "Wip'd the black scruples" from his soul and reconciled his thoughts to Macduff's "good truth and honor" (116-7) makes it uncertain whether Malcolm is rejecting suspicion of Macduff or his own tyrannical tendencies.²⁸ I favor the latter reading, so that if he tests Macduff, he tests Macduff's (hopefully unlimited) ability to wink at monarchical depravity.

Macduff at first passes such a test. Malcolm's claims to unsatisfiable sexual appetites (60-6), earns from Macduff comfort that "We have willing dames enough" (73). Having won Macduff's willingness to overlook these faults, Malcolm only reverses his claim to tyranny when Macduff can no longer support a monarch so utterly devoid of graces such as "justice, verity, temp'rance, stability, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, / Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude," (92-4), and who promises: "Nay, had I pow'r, I should / Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell, / Uproar the universal peace, confound / All unity on earth" (97-100). When Macduff rejects Malcolm and Scotland upon Malcolm's promises of utter depravity, Malcolm repudiates that evil in himself, crediting the goodness he sees in Macduff and claiming that his "first false speaking / Was this upon [him]self" (130-1). While he seems to claim a sinless life heretofore, I would argue that we are meant to identify with Macduff's pregnant silence and apt response: "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once / 'Tis hard to reconcile" (138-9).²⁹ Yet Macduff was at first willing to support Malcolm regardless of his lasciviousness because he retains legitimate claim to the throne as Duncan's son. When Macduff renounces his support, Malcolm must reverse his claims to depravity, for, after all, Malcolm needs Macduff to support his claim to power militarily, despite his right to it as heir. Macduff is to Malcolm what Macbeth was to Duncan: the great warrior whose battle strength has retained his liege's seat on the throne.

While critics have argued that the play sustains rather than interrogates patrilineal forms of power (see Stallybrass 193-205), I argue *Macbeth* problematizes binary oppositions of king/tyrant, legitimate/illegitimate, good/evil, active/passive, and male/female. Macduff's skepticism in response to Malcolm's reversal suggests that the latter's claim to goodness is suspect, that in fact, a revision of power at the play's end as no longer necessarily violent or tyrannical is in doubt. The ending of *Macbeth* illustrates the potential for tyranny within absolute monarchy, specifically when it defines masculinity as murder and femininity as governed by injunctions to guarantee an inherently unstable system based on patrilineal power.

7.

I have argued that in *Macbeth* gender performance is enabled by an already established culture of violence, both of which are compelled to a cycle of failure and repetition. Lady Macbeth's evil is revealed, in this light, as the product of a system of power relations dependent on both masculine brutality and women's phallic guarantee for its stability and power. I want to take this argument one final step to argue that Shakespeare's play is a parodic staging of "appropriate" femininity advocated by pamphlet writers such as Vives, Rych, Whately, Pricke, and Swetnam, among others. The mandate that women "be" the phallus, that they act to confirm patrilineal power, is certainly the aim of such pamphlet writers. But their injunction works spectrally to conjure and then exorcise the "evil" of female desire, so that any real or original of female nature is lost, unknown. The transgression of patrilineal law that pamphlet writers attempt to exorcise is almost always sexual — adulterous — and Lady Macbeth's transgression is not. Yet her transgression is directly aimed at the throat, if you will, of that law. Not only does she seek to "unsex" herself, she does so in order actively to encourage her husband's regicidal desires.

In this regard, Shakespeare's characterization of Lady Macbeth interrogates the patrilineal naturalization of femininity as good or evil depending on women's support of or threat to masculine desire. He assumes the absolutism of laws governing women's conduct and stages the consequences for women when they are denied a right to desire outside the precepts of a masculinist socio-political gender system. Her "power," then, which is subject to that system, is unmasked as phantasmatic, as a conjuration of ghosts. In her examination of parody, Butler argues that

gender parody . . . does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. (138)

To parody early modern conceptions of ideal and evil femininity, Shakespeare conjures a woman whose loyalty to her husband offends monarchical and moral precepts. The absolutist categories of angel and monster that produce anxiety in and of themselves, therefore, are set against the context of a society that thrives on violence in order to parody, to exaggerate a set of masculinist values that women are required to reflect and guarantee. If, under early modern morality, women must function through a compliant and unquestioning affirmation of the patrilineal order, thereby denying their own desire in favor of the desire of another, then Shakespeare envisions a set of circumstances that his audience must reject. The result is a parodic displacement of patrilineal morality, exposing it as a shifting set of values that supports the prevailing dispositions of an inherently unstable power structure.

Thus Shakespeare problematizes a structure of power relations compelling all of its subjects to survive through an ideology of brutality, regardless of gender, uncovering both the false division of masculine and feminine ideals supported in early modern tracts and the potential tyranny of the patrilineal order. Whether victim or attacker, legitimate ruler or pretender, characters express violent desires, specifically linked to contemporary definitions of masculinity. Unmasked is a politics of gender that demands brutality and discloses patrilineal configurations of governance and power based on the execution of kings as well as traitors. In this regard, the play stages a kind of hyper-doubling that Fineman has argued is the overarching theme of Shakespeare's corpus (428): Duncan's execution of the traitor Cawdor is no less brutal, no less ruthless than Macbeth's battle murder of Macdonwald, than Macbeth's murder of Duncan, and finally than Macduff's murder of Macbeth. Banquo's response to Macbeth's regicide is not outrage, nor does he report his suspicion of Macbeth's guilt to others because "it was said / It should not stand in thy posterity, / But that myself should be the root and father / Of many kings" (3.1.3-6). Violence serves power, and power is sustained by violence. Banquo is willing to wink at regicide when his progeny's acquisition of the throne is in view. Similarly, Macduff's personal loss when Macbeth kills his wife and child, and not the treason of regicide, motivates his alliance with Malcolm, the rightful heir to the throne. Rather than being unique to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, therefore, such self-interest underwrites all the play's political maneuvers. When Duncan's, Macbeth's, and Malcolm's monarchies all depend on violence for stability, the distinctions between tyrant and king collapse. As fictions designed to sustain those in power, legitimate and illegitimate forms of power are exposed as the same: violent, ruthless, brutal. The addition of "masculinist" to that equation and of Lady Macbeth's putative transgression of femininity further complicates a politics of gender.

Thus Shakespeare does not "mobilize the patriarchal fear of unsubordinated woman" (Stallybrass 205) in his characterization of Lady Macbeth if we acknowledge patrilineal injunctions specifying "appropriate" femininity as behavior that compliantly (and impossibly, phantasmatically) confirms masculinist power.³⁰ If a culture is defined and sustained by violence (which is equated with masculinity and rewarded materially), then we cannot expect women who are required to support their men's acquisitions of such power to act only insofar as they are "women" — weak, passive, nurturing. Having begun to ask questions about the ruthlessness of patrilineal forms of power in *King Lear*, Shakespeare drives the point home more forcefully, I would argue, through a female character who on the surface seems more nightmarish than Goneril and Regan, not just because she *appears* willing to commit infanticide but because she encourages her husband to acquire power illegitimately, via regicide. But as I have shown, Lady Macbeth's transgression of "appropriate" (compassionate and merciful) femininity is, instead, conduct in line with the play's masculinist violence. Lady Macbeth, rather than being the evil source of violence within the play, is a product of a masculinist and tyrannical structure of power relations, so that she performs gender according to that structure's (often) violent mandates. "Blood will have blood" (3.4.121), Macbeth observes, echoing, I would argue, Shakespeare's notion of patrilineal structures of power.

I would urge, therefore, that our contemporary condemnation of women's brutality must be re-visioned, re-viewed — in Donna J. Haraway's terms — lest we reify conceptions of femininity and masculinity as split along traditional binaries of passive/active, peaceful/violent, and good/evil, and thereby enable moralized indictments of women's actions that we excuse in men (see Haraway 188-96). In this sense, we will abandon the myth of neutrality/objectivity to ask ourselves why we label women such as Lady Macbeth evil and what forms of power are served by labeling them evil. Very simply, if we mean, as feminists, to argue that subjectivity is fractured, unstable, made up of splittings and indeterminacies, then we must reengage the female characters who have, until now, embodied precisely the opposite in literary history. Neglecting such an analysis creates a hole in the logic of feminist criticism's practice. It suggests that we cannot pay attention to female characters we cannot fully admire, embrace, and defend while simultaneously, and without question unintentionally, reinscribing the split of subjectivity into gender norms. This is not a practice we take with us into our daily political lives, where, for example, we deplore the need for Hillary Rodham Clinton to prove her femininity, and by association her rightful place among "first ladies," by baking cookies. Clinton's experience in Washington has, in fact, been remarkably fraught with gender troubles reminiscent of those in Shakespearean tragedy. A woman of power, of educational and professional accomplishments, she is either a kind of Lady Macbeth who engineers the suicides of White House staff and then covers up key evidence to exempt her husband from responsibility, or a Goneril whose lust for power not rightfully hers makes her an unnatural and inappropriate advocate for children and national healthcare. While I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare's plays offer a universal representation of the trouble with gender and power, I do want to point out that very close to home we may be able to find models of gender and power that may assist us to rethink our conceptions of Shakespeare's female subjects of tragedy.

Notes

1. Derrida argues that the commodity, as theorized by Marx, is a phantasmatic construction: "For if no use-value can in itself produce this mysticality or this spectral effect of the commodity, and if the secret is at the same time profound and superficial, opaque and transparent, a secret that is all the more secret in that no substantial essence hides behind it, it is because the effect is born of a relation (ferance, difference, reference, and differance), as double relation, one would say as a double social bond" (154). Similarly, male and female genders are phantasmatically structured through having and being the Phallus, a relation of difference that, superficially, organizes male/female relations in *Macbeth*. I use the term, then, both in its Derridean sense and as it is used by Judith Butler: "Every effort to establish identity within the terms of this binary disjunction of 'being' and 'having' returns to an inevitable 'lack' and 'loss' that ground their phantasmatic construction and mark the incommensurability of the Symbolic and the real" (44).

2. I refer here and in my title to Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, which provides the basis for my reading of Lady Macbeth's performance of gender. I discuss Butler's analysis in detail in section 2 of this essay.

3. For three articles that typify this argument see Harding; Davies; and Schiffer. Even feminist critics, to whom I am indebted for having enabled my argument, fail to question readings of Lady Macbeth as evil. Adelman identifies Lady Macbeth as a kind of nightmare mother, "the inheritor of the realm of . . . infantile vulnerability to maternal power, of dismemberment and its developmentally later equivalent, castration" (137). While Kahn asserts that "the women Shakespeare portrays in [*Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*] did not contrive their ideas of manliness out of whole cloth; they took them from a world managed by men" (*Man's Estate* 152), even she observes twice that Macbeth "becomes [Lady Macbeth's] kind of [bloody] man" (173, 182). Though Willis attempts to highlight the ambiguities in the play's invocations of fair and foul, Lady Macbeth remains for her an annihilating mother in pursuit of her own "vaulting ambition" (222). See also Garber, *Coming of Age* 47, 153-5; Jardine 94-5, 97-8; and French, especially 245-8.

4. See Greene, who argues that the equation of masculinity with violence originates in Lady Macbeth. His argument depends on an acceptance of traditional gender configurations, so that Lady Macbeth's desire to "unsex herself" (1.5.41) in order to kill transgresses normalized gender configurations. See also Bushnell 128-9; Callaghan, *Woman and Gender* 62, 124; and Richmond 20-4. Liston (233) points out Duncan's associations of manliness and violence; and Kimbrough notes that Lady Macbeth mimics society's definitions of masculinity and femininity (177, 183). For Garber, "gender undecidability and anxiety about gender identification and gender roles are at the center of *Macbeth* — and of *Macbeth*" (*Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* 97).

5. Dash offers a sympathetic reading of Lady Macbeth based on theatrical and film interpretations of the play and its characters (see especially 155-207). Belsey problematizes absolutist visions of women such as Lady Macbeth, Beatrice-Joanna, Vittoria, Cleopatra, and Joan of Arc as chaotically evil. She writes, "these figures are also in a sense heroic, and to this extent the plays offer their audiences no single, unified position from which to judge the heroines who refuse the place of silent subjection allotted to women" (184). Despite Belsey's instructive argument, moral judgments in regard to Lady Macbeth's evil still dominate her critical history.

6. My analysis of Lady Macbeth is guided by Dolan's definition of post-structuralism and performance criticism: "Poststructuralism simply questions liberal humanist notions that men and women are free individuals capable of mastering the universe and points out the way in which ideology is masked as commonsensical truth. Poststructuralist performance criticism looks at the power structures underlying representation and the means by which subjectivity is shaped and withheld through discourse. These are intensely political projects" (94).

7. Carol Thomas Neely has argued that while cultural materialist and new historicist theorists share with feminist theorists "the view that all discourse is

culturally specific and ideologically pregnant” (“Constructing the Subject” 6), “cult-historicists,” as she nicknames them, continue to marginalize, displace, erase, and allegorize women. My work is greatly indebted to many cultural materialists, foremost among them Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, yet I sympathize with Neely’s critique. My analysis is, therefore, a response (among many) to Neely’s call for culturally specific readings that privilege the history and experiences of women (15). See also Callaghan’s invocation of the feminist slogan “the personal is political” (*Woman and Gender* 35); and de Lauretis, who urges feminists toward a more historically and culturally informed critical practice (158-86). At the same time, I want to acknowledge Loomba’s problematizing of Neely’s argument, which Loomba rightly points out threatens to “devalu[e] other social differences and thereby the ‘experiences’ of ‘other’ women” (22). While I privilege the experience of Lady Macbeth throughout my argument, I do not mean to suggest that her experience of gender performance would be the same as, for example, that of an African female monarch such as Cleopatra.

8. Several scholars, feminists in particular, have turned to the contentious debates about women’s nature in conduct manuals, domestic tracts, and medical treatises to contextualize their studies of women and drama in the early modern period. See Belsey 138-44, 152-60, 178-83, 200-2, 217-21; Comensoli 1-26, 52-3, 66-8; Jankowski 45-9, 62-3, 105-6, 108-9, 169-70; Hutson 17-51; Loughlin 13-52; Newman 3-12, 15-31. Woodbridge traces the formal controversy from 1540 through 1620 (18-113). For feminist analyses of early modern treatises on female nature, see Benson 173, 205-50; Henderson and McManus 3-130; Jones, “Counterattacks” 45-62, as well as her “Nets and Bridles” 39-72; Klein, *Daughters* 65-9, 97-100; and Wayne 15-29 *passim*.

9. Through use of the term patrilineal as opposed to patriarchal, I retain the sense of a male-dominated power structure while emphasizing the economic relations in which women are commodified. Such a structure enables the setting of a woman’s worth according to her obedience and virtue, and enables, I argue, a cultural injunction to be the phallic guarantor of masculine power. The term also establishes the violence of competition among men for property and power that women are, in part, supposed to alleviate through their exchange. That women’s guarantee of peaceful relations is as phantasmatic as their insurance of phallic power only highlights the always already impossible ideal women are compelled to embody. It underscores as well the compromise to any individualized agency or desire on women’s part. For a discussion of women’s role as commodity in the Renaissance, see Jordan.

10. If, as Kristeva argues in *Powers of Horror*, the abject is present in anything transgressing the moralized sanctions of society, but especially in blood, pus, urine, excrement, and sweat — in the excretions of the body — then it is clear that woman, in the depths of her uncontrollable body, represents the limits and limitlessness of the abject. Kristeva’s critique points to the bodily excess, the ungraspable, and therefore fearsome, materiality of the feminine. Lady Macbeth, in this light, as a woman whose “lust” for power coincides with a “transgression” of maternal instincts, represents for contemporary critics all that is abject.

11. Sprengnether observes that critical denunciation of Lady Macbeth results from Shakespeare's ambivalence concerning gender ("Reading" 236).

12. A notable exception to this tendency is Callaghan's argument in "Wicked Women" (363). Callaghan, however, sees power in *Macbeth* as "clearly located among the insatiable forces of feminine misrule" (359), and not, as I argue, within an already existing masculinist structure.

13. Callaghan also invokes Lacan's conception of phallic power, which she concludes is useful to an understanding of the ways in which, in tragedy, "[m]an and woman are divided by the sword in a symbolic system which utilizes the phallus as the marker of gender difference and as a crucial mechanism of power" (*Woman* 172). She emphasizes, however, the ways in which phallic power is turned against women and does not make an argument in regard to women's positions as the phallus. Cook also emphasizes the phallus in her analysis of male anxieties about cuckoldry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. She argues, in part, that women's positions as mirrors of masculine desire obviate feminine alternatives to the "binary structures by which patriarchy figures gender" (82). I want to suggest, however, that this negation of feminine alternatives just may be the point not only in *Macbeth*, but perhaps in *Much Ado* as well. For the orthodox notions of appropriate femininity — which I locate in the conduct manuals of the period — fail both Lady Macbeth and Hero. A kind of skepticism, therefore, attends their characterization and the domestic and state power relations governing their performances of gender. Finally, Mary Beth Rose; Kahn ("The Rape"); and Van Watson, like Callaghan, use sword play and imagery as a metaphor for phallic power, which suggests both an interesting movement in early modern drama studies and that Lacan's formation of gender relations is indeed descriptive of power relations between men and women in the period.

14. Freedman points out that while Lacan does indeed describe a social formation in which men have power (over women) and women confirm that power, he does not interrogate the structure he explains. My use of Lacan acknowledges Freedman's argument and attempts to interrogate the cultural formation Lacan describes by emphasizing the renunciation of agency and desire requisite to Lady Macbeth's performance of gender. I recommend Freedman's article in its entirety as both a cogent reading of Lacan and the phallus and as an insightful and persuasive analysis of the politics and complexities at stake in feminist/psychoanalytic inquiries into theater.

15. See also Jacqueline Rose, especially 49–81; and Sprengnether, who both emphasizes the phallic roles as being a perception of the child and cogently highlights how the phallus "represents an illusion of wholeness and self-sufficiency" (*Spectral* 197).

16. On "deconstructing the Phallic mother's image" as a way to "shed light on the historical construction of [women and mothers] as categories" see Ian 8.

17. Vives explicitly advocates public humiliation, ostracism, and death as punishments women will receive for disobedience and loss of virtue, but other tracts are pertinent as well. See Pricke; Rych; Swetnam; and Whately, who advocates female submission to male superiority and wife-beating.

18. There are psychoanalytic readings of Lady Macbeth, most notably Adelman's and Fineman's. I would note, however, that both Adelman's and

Fineman's visions of Lady Macbeth as an "annihilating mother" (Fineman 447) depend on Freudian rather than Lacanian interpretations of her function in the play. The female power Freud feared is precisely that which Lacan suggests men require to imagine a unified masculine self.

19. See Adelman 134-8; Greenblatt 124-5; Schiffer 206-9; and Stallybrass 196-205. For a reading that complicates this view, see Dash 155-207.

20. Here I agree with Eagleton's claim that "[t]he witches experience no such conflict [between body and language] because their very bodies are not static but mutable, melting as breath into the wind, ambivalently material and immaterial" (7). While I might be perceived as substituting Lady Macbeth for the witches in his argument that it is "they who, by releasing ambitious thoughts in Macbeth, expose a reverence for hierarchical social order for what it is, as the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare" (2), my argument is distinct from his on at least three major points. First, as Eagleton asserts, the witches initiate the dissolution of firm definitions and erosion of binary oppositions, but they are not, as Lady Macbeth is, subject to the culture of violence on which they unleash their chaos. Second, I do not claim that Lady Macbeth releases thoughts of ambition in Macbeth but that Macbeth's own ambitions are produced by his culture's valorization of rank and privilege. Third, while I do assert that the play exposes patrilineal forms of power as based on routine oppression and incessant warfare, my argument explicitly interrogates any claims Lady Macbeth or Macbeth might have to Eagleton's version of "bourgeois individual[ism]," so that Lady Macbeth is ruled — constituted — by those values prized in her culture that her husband desires to embody. Her function as the phallus, therefore, precludes her from such individuality and also places her within a material economy of violence to which the witches are not subject.

21. See also Berger 64-78; Biggins 269-70; Calderwood 80; Kinney 148-73 *passim*; and O'Rourke 213-26 *passim*. Goldberg (especially 247-57) also complicates critical tendencies toward reading the play as pro-Jamesian. On the historical/political stakes in *Macbeth* see Hawkins; and Williamson. Willis provides a skillful account of the opposing views on *Macbeth's* place as a pro-Jamesian play (210-13).

22. On Macbeth as "the most complete representative of a society which values and honors a manliness and soldiership that maintain a cohesiveness of the tribe by extreme violence, if necessary," see Asp 154.

23. Rebecca Bushnell argues persuasively that "[w]hile Macbeth's decision to proceed clearly echoes earlier images of the tyrant's uxoriousness, it is also different because in following his wife, Macbeth supposedly upholds masculine values" (128). Though Bushnell asserts that Macbeth fulfills Lady Macbeth's desires (129), her argument is instructive. While Berger argues that the Scots' "subtextual attack on the maternal provider exactly complements the reciprocal violence of Lady Macbeth," he sees her as "moved by mimetic desire to join the manly ranks" (72). Such desire motivates her bloody image of "plucking her nipple from her male child's 'boneless gums' and dashing his brains out" (72). While I too see Lady Macbeth as moved by mimetic desire, I reverse Berger's claim to argue that she wishes to be the mimetic reflection of violence Macbeth

desires to embody. She is not, in my reading, attempting to join male ranks but to ensure her man's masculinist violence. Berger's reading, however, complicates the traditional vision of both Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's evil.

24. See Sinfield's *Faultlines* for his analysis of "the orthodox idea of what a thane should be like" (64).

25. While I cannot agree with Eagleton when he reads Lady Macbeth as "a 'bourgeois' feminist who strives to outdo in domination and virility the very male system which subordinates her" (6), I do believe that he does correctly observe that "it is hard to see why her bloodthirsty talk of dashing out babies' brains is any more 'unnatural' than skewering an enemy soldiers' guts." Clearly my reading takes issue with Eagleton's use of "bloodthirsty," but his point resembles mine when he notes that the opposition between natural and unnatural "will not hold even within Macbeth's own terms, since the 'unnatural' — Macbeth's lust for power — is disclosed by the witches as already lurking within the 'natural'—the routine state of cut-throat rivalry between noblemen."

26. We can see, therefore, that when Schiffer argues that "[i]n taking up his sword against Duncan, Macbeth assassinates his moral self, the true source of whatever manhood, whatever humanity, he once possessed" (210), he both moralizes a "natural" masculinity and ignores the cultural injunction within the play fusing masculinity with murder.

27. Novy sees Lady Macbeth's role at this point in the play as that of an audience member (88).

28. In this regard I would read "scruples" as informed by the ambiguities evident in the OED (1989 ed.) definition: "A thought or circumstance that troubles the mind or conscience; a doubt, uncertainty or hesitation in regard to right and wrong, duty, propriety, etc." (292), which was in use as early as 1526. In this regard, Malcolm may indeed have been struggling with his desire for excess and the "proper" duties of kingship until Macduff's "good truth and honor" prompted him to abandon the temptation to "pour the sweet milk of concord into hell" (4.3.98).

29. On the slippage between tyrant and king in this scene, see Bushnell 142.

30. Similarly, Greenblatt's emphasis on Lady Macbeth and the witches as "implicate[d] . . . in a monstrous threat to the fabric of civilized life" (125) ignores the internal threat to society embodied in a political structure of relations stabilized by masculinized violence. In such a societal formation, the witches become, like Lady Macbeth, merely the mimetic (phantasmatic) reflections of an already established masculinist and ruthless ambition and power.

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