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In the Shape of a Woman: Behavioral Compliance to Gendered Expectations in the Early Modern Era and the Implications for Human Identity in Shakespeare's Macbeth

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IN THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN: Behavioral Compliance to Gendered
Expectations in the Early Modern Era and the Implications for Human Identity in
Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT
IN THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN
(Under the direction of Dr. Karen Raber)

The purpose of this essay is to examine the role that gender plays in the construction of the human within Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. While gender was a vital component of the immaterial essence that distinguished humans from animals, early moderns believed that true internal gender conformity could not exist if it was not accompanied by external expressions of it.

Characters in each of these plays fixate on the external proofs of their own gendered identities, and in doing so, they inadvertently reveal that those traits which distinguish humanity are only cultural constructions and learned behavior that can only externally relate to an individual's rational inorganic soul. In chapter 1, I focus on how, in order to re-obtain the masculinity he believes he does not possess, Macbeth defiles his own humanity so that he can take what he believes to be the requisite actions in order to do so. In chapter 2, I analyze how when Mistress Page and Mistress Ford try to remove a threat to their appearance of chastity, they unknowingly lay bare their claims to both chastity and humanity.

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PREFACE

I have always been fascinated with the question of identity—the way that one’s outward appearance expresses as well as shapes the identity of the wearer, but I had never before considered what it meant to identify as a human.

Throughout the many plays I considered writing my thesis about, *Macbeth* kept coming back to me and I found myself intrigued again and again with this question that I had never asked myself before. Initially, I was interested in the way that when both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth operated outside of the behavioral norms for their sex (Lady Macbeth with taking the masculine role and Macbeth with taking the submissive feminine role), committing animalistic deeds seemed to cause these roles to be reversed as Lady Macbeth was restored to a feeble femininity and Macbeth to a bestial masculinity.

At the time, I tried to investigate whether or not there was a natural force that, once defied, forced individuals to revert to their natural stations in life. I began to consider whether or not this ‘natural force’ that demanded one’s submission to gendered expectations was imposed because of the *belief* that humanity was distinct from animals, which in turn made me wonder that if we realized that we *were* indeed animals and that the category of humanity was obsolete, would those gendered expectations for us also disappear?

However, upon closer examination of secondary sources from the early modern era, I began to notice that it was not the possession of humanity that *demanded* compliance to gendered behavioral expectations, but that it was that behavioral compliance that *evinced* the inward presence of a preexisting, preeminent humanity. For early moderns, humanity did not demand a certain course of action, but it instead consisted of it; therefore, to be a masculine male figure was to give proof of one's possession of an inorganic humanity.

Early moderns were preoccupied with maintaining the human-animal divide and thus they paid scrupulous attention to external proofs of human distinction. However, in their efforts to *showcase* what they believed were inherent differences between man and beast, they often unknowingly *fabricated* difference. Because they believed that the external manifestation of a trait truly indicated the internal possession of it, it became easy to believe that one might transform their own identity by willing themselves to act in a certain manner.

Therefore, it is the externalized human identity that confers legitimate human status to the rational inorganic soul of an individual. The idea of the externalized identity as a proof of true humanity becomes problematic for Macbeth in that he believes he must subvert the moral conscience that holds him back from acting in a masculine manner. Throughout the play, Macbeth continuously destroys what semblance of true humanity he has until, finally, all he has left is the hollow external representation of that which he has fought to obtain.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Chain of Being

While it has been the subject of criticism since its proposal, the Great Chain of Being was a conception of the universe widely accepted across early modern Europe that ordered every type of living creature from greatest to least. Creatures that occupied higher positions on the Chain were spiritual beings who had dominion over those that possessed sentience alone. As occupants of both the physical as well as the spiritual plane, humans had the unique ability to choose which realm to inhabit at a certain point in time. Subject to the spiritual realm but bound to a physical body, mankind needed to constantly reconcile the conflictions between his physical desires and his higher moral intellect. If a man allowed himself to be controlled by both the desires of his flesh and his spirit equally, he would maintain his original position on the Great Chain of Being as the transitional link between both worlds; however, if he gave himself over to his carnal desires, he would be relegated to the position of an animal on the Chain while still occupying a human body.

While mankind was able to operate both above and below the natural station of his species, the category of humanity itself acted as a microcosm of the Chain and contained its own gradations of intelligence. Not only was it man's duty to retain his status on the Chain as human, but he was also expected to keep his preordained position on the *spectrum* of humanity "and not seek to transcend it—which, nevertheless, he was

characteristically prone to do.”¹ Within the spectrum of humanity, individuals were listed according to social class and gender so that the king held the highest position. While their position on the Chain was likewise determined by which social class they belonged to, women held an inferior position to their male counterparts so that to be female was to be closer in animal nature than men are.²

While the order of beings was fixed, beings could, by their actions, cause the identity of the being to shift so that it would move to another space on the Chain. In her article *How a Man Differs from a Dog* Erica Fudge suggests that in the early modern period “the description of many vices -- heavy drinking, gluttony, lust and so on - were represented as having the power to transform humans into beasts.”³ For early moderns, this species crossover was not merely a metaphorical transformation from human to animal but rather a literal one whereby a human’s internal identity is fundamentally altered. This crossover happens at the most minute level since “The lowest member of the higher genus is always found to border upon (*contingere*) the highest member of the lower genus.”⁴

Sumptuary codes enacted in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries helped to maintain this social hierarchy by imposing restrictions on the clothes that individuals of a certain class could wear. Not only were these codes legally mandated, but they were also

¹ Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being*, 197.

² Quilligan, Maureen. *Exit Pursued by a Bear*, 510.

³ Fudge, Erica. *How a Man Differs from a Dog*.

⁴ Aquinas, Thomas. Referenced in *The Great Chain of Being*, 79.

propagated through pamphlets written for the lower classes that were intended to instill “orthodox ideology into those citizens who would be most oppressed by it.”⁵ These pamphlets encouraged individuals to content themselves with their specific place in humanity’s hierarchy so as to discourage them from acting against that order. The masses were given two rationales for submitting themselves to the legislated sumptuary codes: the idea that an excess of clothing would further impoverish the nation as well as the belief that “apparel should be utilized to preserve the differences in rank.”⁶

However, despite the motives for and the logical fallacies of sumptuary codes, they prove helpful to modern readership in that they reveal why the notion of the externalized identity preoccupied early modern thought. Clothes in the Renaissance were thought to be able to “permeate the wearer, fashioning him or her within. This notion undoes the opposition of the inside and outside, surface and depth. Clothes, like sorrow, inscribe themselves upon a person who comes into being through that inscription.”⁷ This is why a prince did not become a king when his father died, he became a king the moment he was crowned at his coronation—it was the wearing of the crown, not merely the death of his father, that made him into a king.

The ability of clothes to “transnature” human identity was deeply unsettling to many as it gave individuals the potential to illegitimately go beyond their assigned position on the Great Chain of Being, so they sought a way to prevent illicit

⁵ Jaster, Margaret Rose. *Of Bonnets and Breeches*, 207.

⁶ Jaster, Margaret Rose. *Of Bonnets and Breeches*, 206.

⁷ Ann Rosalind and Peter Stallybrass. *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 2.

transformations. Sumptuary codes did “not object to ‘the apparrell, when ’tis worthily worn, but the unworthie person who wears it’ he who ‘will use any sinister meanes to clime to preferment.’”⁸ The codes also sought to preserve this order by managing other aspects of the externalized identity outside of clothes, including an individuals’ diet and their drunkenness.⁹

While the externalized identity was prized for its ability to distinguish different classes of individuals from one another, it served the even greater purpose of distinguishing humanity from the animals. It consisted of the physical adornment of the body as well as the external embodiment of gender roles, which were both thought to be external manifestations of internal identity. Because the rational soul of humanity was intangible since it was not housed in any one part of the body that could be seen or touched, early moderns heavily relied on these external signifiers to legitimize the distinction they held between humans and animals.

The ultimate failure of sumptuary codes throughout the history of England speaks to the failure of the Great Chain of Being as a construction of the universe. The Chain claims merely to describe the natural order of all beings, but if this order were indeed natural, it would regulate itself which would obviate the need for enforcing certain conventions intended to preserve the social hierarchy. Rather than describing the natural order of beings, the Chain, and therefore sumptuary codes as well, *prescribe* this ‘natural’

⁸ Margaret Rose Jaster. *Of Bonnets and Breeches*, 206.

⁹ Margaret Rose Jaster. *Of Bonnets and Breeches*, 209.

order through artificial means. It is for this same reason that demanding external proofs of humanity's distinguishing characteristics calls into question whether or not there are *any* innate differences between humans and animals. Gender roles, like garments of clothing, become detached and therefore one can only externally relate to their own gendered identity.

In the following two chapters, I will examine how characters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* seek to uphold their humanity by externally embodying the gender roles that serve as proofs of that humanity. At the heart of this thesis lies the question of identity. Identifying as human causes these characters to feel the crushing pressure of assigned gender roles in order to fulfill the demands of their humanity, and yet it is this preoccupation with the externalized identity that causes these characters to unknowingly defile their own humanity.

In the first half of my thesis, I will prove that Macbeth bestializes himself in order to reaffirm himself as a masculine subject. Macbeth's ambition alone proves itself to be an insufficient substitute for the masculinity he lacks, so he resolves to clothe himself in a bestial nature to rid him of his conscience in order that he will be able to commit the act he believes will restore him to his rightful place on the Chain of Being. However, in prioritizing the physical expression of his masculinity so that he might re-establish his gendered humanity, he begins to lose access to that immaterial nature altogether

The second half of my thesis is similar in premise to the first but is concerned with the text of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* but is concerned with how even when proper gender embodiment is not empowered by the bestial, its externalized nature puts into

question the legitimacy of gender roles as a distinguishing factor between animals and humankind.

Chapter 1: MACBETH

The Externalized Identity

Maureen Quilligan points out that nursing was so frowned upon in European upper classes that there was “a statistically significant difference in infant mortality rates between the lower classes who suckled their own young and thus brought many more children into adulthood than the upper classes, who did not.”¹⁰ Women were discouraged from nursing their children at the time because of the way that it put them in a similar position to animals. Participating in what was essentially considered an animal activity was detrimental not only for the nursing mother but also to the nursed child consuming its mother’s milk. The nursing mother was debased to the position of an animal by the act of nursing, and the babe was likewise debased because it was receiving the sullied milk of a debased mother.

Within the early modern era, a mother’s milk was believed to be capable of influencing a child’s character so much so that it would guarantee “the ‘nature’ of [the nursed] child.”¹¹ In her article *Nursing Animals and Cross-Species Intimacy* Peggy

¹⁰ Quilligan, Maureen. *Exit Pursued by a Bear*, 511.

¹¹ McCracken, Peggy. *Nursing Animals and Cross-Species Intimacy*, 43.

McCracken references several medieval legends wherein human babies are nursed by animals, saying she believes these stories suggest that this type of nursing leads to a mixing of human and bestial within the child, and that the child's new animal nature was inherited through the mother's milk. She expands her argument by referencing Bernardino of Siena, who warns that this animal nature can be conferred even through human wet nurses who have a base animal nature: "The child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him. If the one who cares for him has evil customs or is of base condition, he will receive the impress of those customs because of having sucked her pouted blood."¹² This is why when Lady Macbeth cites her fear that her husband's nature is "too full o' the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way" she is accusing him of being too intimately associated not only with the feminine but also with the bestial through the milk he has been nursed with [1.5.17].

Lady Macbeth is not only responsible for crafting our understanding of who Macbeth is and the role that he plays in his life but she also transforms the way that he views himself and his relations with the outside world. Characterizations of Macbeth that she repeatedly employs bestialize as well as feminize him. Because Macbeth's self-perception is heavily dependent upon Lady Macbeth's characterizations of him, she is able to create a world for him in which he is distanced from his sense of masculinity and humanity.

The primary way that she distances him from these things is by externalizing defining aspects of his identity so that he is stripped of all that he is and is reliant on the

¹² McCracken, Peggy. *Nursing Animals and Cross-Species Intimacy*, 43.

outside world to provide what he lacks within himself. By excising Macbeth's innate characteristics and projecting them as prosthetic appendages that artificially disguise a body's natural defect, Lady Macbeth replicates within him the human plight of possessing feeble skin that is insufficient to protect the body from the elements.

In order to understand the significance of Lady Macbeth mirroring the weakness of skin within Macbeth's internal person, we must examine the conversations surrounding human skin in the early modern era. The frailty of human skin was certainly a topic of interest in the early modern period because of the implications it was believed to hold for the status of mankind among the animals. Because animals are born with natural coats of fur on their backs, they have no need, and likewise no desire, to clothe themselves. However, since humans have such feeble skin, they must cover their bodies with external objects like the skins of other types of living creatures or organic materials in order to protect themselves. For George Wither, "humans lack 'nat'rall *Armour*", they are frail, unlike animals which are born with thick or protective skins."¹³ While humanity's practice of slaying animals in order to use their bodies as objects initially presents them as the superior species, this act also shows humanity's weakness since it is wholly dependent on external sources to make up for the deficiencies of its natural bodies. For early moderns, the frailty of human skin served as a daily reminder of their dependence on what were considered to be inferior species.

¹³ Fudge, Erica. *How a Man Differs from a Dog*.

One of the aspects of Macbeth's internal being that Lady Macbeth resents and presents as an extrinsic appendage is his ambition. After Macbeth informs her that he will no longer plan to go through with the murder, Lady Macbeth retorts:

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely?" [1.7.36-38]

Within this metaphor, Lady Macbeth creates a world in which ambition, i.e. 'hope', becomes separate from and external to Macbeth. By transferring some of Macbeth's agency to this newly externalized ambition, Lady Macbeth disempowers him. Though Macbeth possesses the agency to 'dress' himself in ambition, it is the garment of ambition that he wears that is actually able to take action. The animating force behind Macbeth's commitment to go through with the murder as well as his later refusal to live up to that commitment both come from the garment of ambition he has clothed himself in.

The significance that Lady Macbeth imbues into this externalized ambition is that because Macbeth does not actually own his ambition, he is subject to its whims and is unable to control its behavior. In the same way that a prosthetic limb cannot be maneuvered by its wearer quite as deftly as a natural limb can be, Macbeth does not have much of an ability to control his ambition because it is not truly his. This is why his ambition can, while drunk, commit him to actions that it can no longer act upon later once it has become sober. If Macbeth had ownership, and therefore control, of his

ambition, his behavior would be more consistent and he would be able to act on things he had previously committed himself to. While humankind ‘borrows’ the superior furs of animals that it cannot produce for itself so that it may be protected, Macbeth borrows an ambition he does not possess so that he may take action, but this borrowed ambition can never be as effective as a possessed ambition.

The first effect of externalizing Macbeth’s ambition in this way is that it serves to emasculate him by putting him in the position of the subservient wife. Not only does Lady Macbeth tell him that he does not possess masculine ambition, but she actually begins to supplant his role as the figure of authority in their home. Before Macbeth has even agreed to go through with the murder, she instructs him on how he must act around all of their guests:

To beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue. Look like th’ innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under ’t. [1.5.63-66]

Lady Macbeth continues to position herself in a way that displaces his sense of agency by directing his course of actions, telling him that he “shall put / This night’s great business into my dispatch... Leave all the rest to me,” [1.5.67-68, 73].

The second effect of Lady Macbeth externalizing Macbeth’s ambition is that it actually begins to disassociate him from his humanity. One of the reasons that this disassociation begins to happen is that in becoming feminized, Macbeth has come closer to the status of the animal. Within early modern thought, “women were certainly human,

but their humanity was perceived to be more fragile, and as such somehow closer to— although always different from—animals.”¹⁴ Since what differentiated humankind from animals was humanity’s ability to employ reason, to become emasculated—and to therefore have less control of one’s reasoning capabilities—was to lose some touch of one’s humanity.

While Macbeth’s loss of humanity is implied through his emasculation, the ultimate reason why his now-externalized identity leads to his descent into the animal realm is because of the way that Lady Macbeth portrays his ambition as a garment. Though it is *humanity’s* plight of the weakness of skin that Lady Macbeth replicates within him, mirroring this deficiency within him serves to bestialize him because of the way that it diminishes the inorganic in favor of the organic. In order to understand how the externalization of a quality such as ambition could bestialize an individual, we must consult early modern scholarship concerning the differences between man and animal. Fudge explains what differentiates the two from one another, saying, “Animals are stuck with the body, the organic, while humans can transcend their bodily frame and have access to the immaterial, the spiritual realm.”¹⁵ One of the elements of Macbeth’s composition that elevates him above earth-bound animals into the spiritual realm is his ambition; therefore, when Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth that within himself he does not have ambition and thus must look outside of himself to find a source of it he can ‘dress’

¹⁴ Fudge, Erica, *Brutal Reasoning*. 41

¹⁵ Fudge, Erica. *How a Man Differs from a Dog*.

himself with, his spiritual plane is somewhat diminished and his being resides more in the body than in the spirit.

Humanity Redefined

Fudge explains that for early moderns, the body “was not a central source of difference [between humans and animals], and even when the human physique was invoked to reiterate distinction this physical difference was always merely a sign of the other, more significant, mental division.”¹⁶ According to the Aristotelian model, this mental division between humans and animals existed because animals only had access to the vegetative and the sensitive while humans possessed both of those in addition to the rational. This inorganic soul that distinguished humanity from the organic souls of animals was of consequence in that it granted its possessor the ability to use reason and to think rationally. Early moderns perceived a “clear link between virtue and reason; being good and being rational”; therefore, though this inorganic soul was intrinsic to humans, the ability to utilize the reason it supplied would be taken away if its possessor lacked or otherwise failed to employ virtue.¹⁷ Virtue here becomes essential to maintaining one’s humanity in that it is what enables the inorganic rational soul to exercise reason, and without reason, the human loses its humanity.

¹⁶ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*

¹⁷ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 35.

While Macbeth does finally, albeit temporarily, come to the conclusion that he will not go through with the murder, it must be mentioned that he certainly was tempted by the thought of it even before he had spoken with Lady Macbeth:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not. [1.3.140-143]

This temptation is not just a fleeting thought in Macbeth, but is one that he considers repeatedly before interacting with Lady Macbeth. However, this is not problematic within the framework of early modern thought regarding moral civilized humanity because temptation alone was not considered to be a breach of morality. Morality was not a matter of avoiding temptation altogether, but was rather a matter of engaging “reason in a struggle with the body and win. And the struggle is crucial.”¹⁸

Before murdering Duncan, Macbeth had evinced an understanding of what characteristics typified a human being as opposed to an animal that was in accordance with how early moderns viewed the species. He had believed that morality was a necessary as well as natural trait of humans and that was a means of informing rational thought. Both morality and reason functioned together within his thought processes to direct him towards a reasonable conclusion.

The reasons Macbeth cites for his hesitation to murder Duncan indicates this understanding that to commit such acts of treachery would be to defy the authority of the

¹⁸ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 31.

moral standard that is supposed to govern civilized mankind, and it is this same morality that allows him to come to this conclusion:

He's here in double trust:

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,

Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,

Who should against his murderer shut the door,

Not bear the knife myself. [1.7.12-16]

Here Macbeth has incorporated a standard of morality into his estimation of what actions are and are not representative of rational human behavior. It is because masculinity is indicative of a preexisting, preeminent humanity that Macbeth concludes that morality is an equally vital element to the gendered human as it is to humankind at large.

While correctly embodying one's assigned gender role was a proof of the possession of rational humanity, it was that humanity that was of the greatest importance: gender was the signifier while humanity was that which gender signified. In this schema, proper conformity to gender norms was not what *determined* whether or not one was human, but it was the natural result of possessing true humanity. Therefore, if one perceived that they did not fit into the mold of gendered expectations for their behavior, they would strive to obtain more of a sense of rational humanity, which would ultimately lead to a natural compliance with those gender expectations. When presented with his failures to live up to the ideal of manhood, Macbeth ultimately decides to lean more into his humanity as a means of eventually restoring that manhood.

After using this type of rational thought to engage in a struggle to gain mastery over his “black and deep desires,” Macbeth temporarily triumphs over these temptations of his flesh and is able to definitively tell Lady Macbeth that they will

proceed no further in this business.

[Duncan] hath honored me of late, and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,

Which would be worn now in their newest gloss, [1.4.51; 1.7.32-35].

Despite Lady Macbeth's protestations following his refusal to indulge her requests, Macbeth is able to use rational thought empowered by virtue to refute the logic of her claim that committing this murder will reestablish him as a masculine being. In act 1 scene 7 when Lady Macbeth derides him by painting him as a “coward in [his] own esteem,” Macbeth rejects her characterization, saying: “I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none” [1.7.47-48]. He employs the word ‘man’ here in two distinct ways: his use of the word ‘man’ in the first half of his sentence refers to the masculine ideal that males should strive towards, while he uses it in the second half to refer to the standard of humanity that each individual should aspire towards. For Macbeth, manhood and humanity cannot function independently; therefore, he cannot be an effective male figure if he is not first a rational, moral human being. In this moment, he believes that if his actions go beyond that which a rational human would take and rather begin to represent the deeds of a bestialized human, he cannot truly be masculine because gendered humanity cannot exist if one does not initially possess that rational, moral humanity.

Because she believes that Macbeth's sense of morality that he believes must exist in the sexed, rational human will prevent him from taking the requisite actions that would result in her social elevation to a higher rank, Lady Macbeth purposes to fundamentally alter his understanding of the relationship between masculinity and humanity. It is in this moment that Lady Macbeth begins to enact what she had previously committed herself to do in scene 5 when she had said:

Hie thee hither,
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
 And chastise with the valor of my tongue
 All that *impedes thee* from the golden round (crown)
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
 To have thee crowned withal. [1.5.25-30]

Lady Macbeth begins to remove that which impedes Macbeth from committing murder in two distinct ways, the first of which is by inverting the relationship that Macbeth perceives between gendered humanity and rational humanity: she aims to displace the signified (rational humanity) with the signifier (gender conformity) so that it is Macbeth's masculinity that is of the greatest importance in that it is the possession of humanity that indicates the presence of preeminent masculinity: "What beast was't, then, / That made you break this enterprise to me?" [1.7.48-49]. Because of the way she has altered Macbeth's understanding of the relationship between masculinity and humanity, here she is able to assault his masculinity by calling into question his humanity.

Within this world that Lady Macbeth has created for Macbeth, rather than merely *indicating* a preexisting lack of humanity, his failure to uphold the standard of masculinity in his own life is the force that actually *bestializes* him. Lady Macbeth is creating a world for him in which when one prioritizes the achievement of gender conformity above all else, their humanity is naturally reaffirmed as a result, but when one prioritizes their *humanity* above their own conformity to gender norms, they end up not only unable to conform to gendered expectations for them but they also lose their humanity as a result since possessing humanity is a matter of embodying those gendered expectations.

The second way in which Lady Macbeth removes that which impedes Macbeth from committing the murder is by minimizing the importance of morality, implying that within this new schema of the relationship between gender and humanity, morality is no longer a necessary component. Lady Macbeth is able to employ a model of this relationship that operates independently from morality, since Macbeth regains his masculinity (and thereby affirms his humanity) by agreeing to a murder that clearly violates any sense of morality.

The Colonized Body

In the early modern era, European writers rationalized the concept of colonization by implementing a slightly altered definition of what constituted a human being.

Engrained in the culture was the importance of “colonial rule over the ‘uncivilized’ and reasonable rule over the body.”¹⁹ Since women were not believed to have quite the same capacity for self-control as men were, like uncharted territories across the seas, it was believed that they must necessarily be placed in the control of a masculine figure. While women were linked with unexplored lands, natives were linked with animals in their relations to other humans. It was the moral imperative of the Christian man to assume control of the terrain that he might return “to [God] that which had gone astray and had become wild (unmanned).”²⁰ Taking over the land once run by natives was justified through an ideology that emphasized how only a true human could possess land since “Possession signifies control, and control is willed, and therefore available only to a human.”²¹ In the same way that individuals can subvert the nature of their inorganic soul and become bestialized, so also can a body of land become wild.

Lady Macbeth creates a world for Macbeth wherein he has lost control of his own body, a world in which his rational soul has allowed his body to become wild and overrun by its own desires so that he is powerless to enforce his own will over it. Since an “animal (like most women) does not have the right to own property” but can rather only be someone else’s property, and since Macbeth has lost his sense of possession of his own body, he becomes bestialized as well as feminized, and begins to feel that he must reclaim his body by colonizing it in a sense. Lady Macbeth deliberately chooses to place

¹⁹ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 52.

²⁰ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 54.

²¹ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 54.

him in this position in order to prompt him to action—she has made him both the colonizer and the native, both the autonomous male and the dependent female—so that he lacks agency within himself but is at the same time able to access it through an alternative means.

Macbeth had previously believed that embodying the persona of masculinity merely *denoted* the internal possession of it; therefore, one could not *act* in a masculine manner if one did not first possess the prerequisite internal trait of masculinity. However, it is at this point in the text that Lady Macbeth alters his understanding of the relationship between one's internal possession and one's external expression of a certain characteristic:

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
 And to be more than what you were, you would
 Be so much more the man. [1.7.48-52]

Here, Lady Macbeth directly implies that committing actions that are associated with a certain internal attribute will actually alter the nature of one's true identity; therefore, when Macbeth was willing to act in what Lady Macbeth considered to be a masculine fashion, she claims that he actually was masculine. Furthermore, Lady Macbeth maintains that inaction can have the same transformative effect on one's internal identity as action can since Macbeth is again dispossessed of his masculinity when he fails to act on that which he had committed himself to. It is not the act of becoming king that she claims will restore Macbeth's masculinity, but the act of colonizing his body so that he can command it to act in a masculine manner. Thus convinced, Macbeth begins to

believe that by adopting the external persona of masculinity in his actions, his internal identity will be altered so that he actually becomes a masculine figure rather than just appearing to be one.

Later on in the play, Macbeth reveals how he has adopted this worldview for himself by implying that while he operates within the physical space of a male body, he realizes that that male body alone is not enough to quantify him as a man. When Macbeth taunts the murderers for being fainthearted at the thought of committing the murders, one of the men replies saying, “We are men, my liege. Macbeth responds:

Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men,
 As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
 Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept
 All by the name of dogs. The valued file
 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
 The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
 According to the gift which bounteous nature
 Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive
 Particular addition from the bill
 That writes them all alike; and so of men.
 Now, if you have a station in the file,
 Not i' the worst rank of manhood, say't, [3.1.94-111].

While Macbeth cites various breeds of dogs, his primary purpose is not to emphasize that different breeds exist but that there are many gradations that exist within the category of

dogs. Macbeth does not emphasize the physical differences that distinguish one type of dog from the other but he chooses to put pressure on the behavioral differences that exist between them. While the dogs are all classified within the same species, they each occupy a different position on the valued file that lists them from first to last in order of value, and he believes that the same is true of men. Lady Macbeth has succeeded in convincing him that while his body is that of a man's, there are certain actions that one must take in order to establish as well as confirm the identity of the body. Macbeth's understanding is that body and spirit are distinct from one another, and, while they *should* correlate with one another, the fact that they are related to one another is not evidence enough that one's soul is reflected in their physical body.

Because he now believes that actions *create* rather than reflect internal characteristics, he unknowingly begins to externalize the concept of gender identity from his understanding of inherent identity so that gender identity no longer is a part of the organic composition of an individual's soul but is rather an external addition to it. By directing the actions of his body, Macbeth believes that he can alter the state of his spirit—he thinks he can control the internal by controlling the external. But in altering his worldview in this way, he only succeeds in once again laying bare his humanity so that it must rely on the external world to create for itself an identity.

No Spur

While Macbeth now has a means by which he may reclaim the ‘unmanned land’ of his inner being (killing Duncan), without the agency Lady Macbeth has taken from him, he is unable to take the requisite actions by which he might colonize his body and thus colonize his spirit. Because his identity has been externalized and is therefore no longer his control, within himself he has:

“no spur
To prick the sides of [his] intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other—” [1.7.25-28].

By vaulting himself up off of the ground and onto a horse's back, a horseman could demonstrate his mastery over nature by physically elevating himself above it; however, if he were to overextend himself in the process and fall to the ground on the other side, it would reveal his utter inability to control nature, thereby equating him with the thing he sought to dominate.

Within this analogy, Macbeth's inorganic soul (now bereft of many characteristics that have been externalized) is represented by the rider who is attempting to express mastery over the horse, which represents Macbeth's newly externalized inner-qualities. In the same way that the superior, inorganic rational soul of the rider tries to put the organic soul of its horse in a position of subservience to him but is unable to, Macbeth tries but fails to express dominance over those recently externalized aspects of his

character that should otherwise be in submission to the will of his inorganic soul. Within early modern thought, when body and soul are in equilibrium, the body functions to serve at the will of the rational soul and the will of the soul expresses its mastery over the body by overriding its “desire[s] in order to produce the self-controlled and truly human-human.”²² Macbeth is unable to master his externalized immaterial characteristics into submission so that they might serve at the will of his organic soul and ‘spur’ him to murder Duncan, and even when ambition acts in his favor, it fails because it lacks that control that is found in Macbeth’s rational soul.

Bestialized Masculinity, Rational Humanity

Because within himself Macbeth has no ‘spur’ that will afford him the agency to go through with the murder, and because an externalized ambition proves to be a poor substitute for that which he lacks within himself, Macbeth searches for an alternate spur that will provoke him to action. Since he believes that external actions alter internal identity, he believes that in order to bestialize himself while at the same time preserving his rational humanity, he must create a division between his body and his soul. Therefore, upon experiencing no success with trying to enforce the will of his inorganic soul by seeking to invoke the power of its authority to its externalized characteristics,

²² Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 11.

Macbeth decides to appeal to the body alone apart from the soul that is intended to govern it:

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show.

False face must hide what the false heart doth know. [1.7.80]

This is the first time in the play that Macbeth attempts to separate body and soul from one another so that his body may commit acts that defy the morality of his inorganic soul while that soul is, in theory, at the same time able to maintain its rationality. In striving to separate body from soul, Macbeth imbues his body with an illegitimate agency that allows it to act outside of the authority of his soul. In the process of severing the connection between body and soul and granting them equal agency to one another, Macbeth intentionally bestializes his body so that his rational soul can remain intact. In a sense, he clothes his metaphorical body in a bestial nature in order to allow him to act on the instincts of his passions rather than on the judgements of his mind.

Within the slightly altered schema that Macbeth has adopted from his wife, masculinity and humanity work together in that exhibiting humanity works to affirm the preexistence of an individual's masculinity, and likewise, embodying masculinity works to establish that individual's humanity. However, in creating a rift between his body and soul, Macbeth unintentionally replicates that same rift between the previously coexistent masculinity and humanity that he is striving to obtain. Although Lady Macbeth has led him to believe that morality is not a necessary component for maintaining one's

masculinity or one's humanity, by acting against his *moral* compass Macbeth unintentionally begins to lose the capability to conduct himself with reason.

Because of their belief in the inextricable nature of the relationship between reason and virtue, for early moderns “to be virtuous is to be reasonable, is to be human.”²³ Macbeth is attempting to sever the link between the virtue and reason that together typify humanity in the hopes that he may have the reasoning abilities of a human while at the same time not being constrained by its moral expectations. In doing so, he unknowingly sets his humanity (represented by his spirit) and his masculinity (represented by his body) at odds with one another so that now he may possess only one of them at a time. Therefore, by grasping for his masculinity through subverting his morality, Macbeth begins to lose hold of the humanity that he is likewise striving to obtain.

The Beast That Therefore I Am

In separating body and soul from one another, Macbeth believes that he will be empowered to take the necessary actions that would confer unto him a masculine identity; however, he has actually subverted rather than evaded the morality that would otherwise ensure the existence of his rational humanity. As a result, the bestial nature he

²³ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 29.

had hoped to contain within his body alone begins to infiltrate itself into his internal sphere:

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
 The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
 I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
 To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
 A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
 I see thee yet, in form as palpable
 As this which now I draw. [2.1.34-42]

It is clear that Macbeth has effectively separated his body and spirit from functioning in unison since he is able to see something in his mind that he is unable to grasp with his hands, but while the separation is complete, Macbeth is unable to contain his lack of morality solely within the sphere of his body. Now, it is not only his body clothed in bestiality that ushers him forth to commit the murder, but it is also the dagger of his mind that “marshall’st me the way that I was going,” [2.1.43]. The body alone can no longer be held fully responsible for Duncan’s murder, since Macbeth’s mind was part of that which ushered him forth to kill him.

Having thus successfully evaded the morality that would have prevented his body from being able to murder Duncan, Macbeth is horrified to discover how quickly an animalistic nature has implanted itself within his rational spirit after he has murdered Duncan. Before Macbeth had committed the murder, he had welcomed the separation of

body and spirit, of hands that committed deeds that the eyes would not look upon because he had not realized that clothing his body in bestiality would begin to affect his spirit.

Hours before the murder, Macbeth had said:

Stars, hide your fires;

Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. [1.4.50-53]

Yet, when Macbeth looks upon those same hands that have taken the life of his king, he utters in terror, “What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes,” [2.2.63]. Until this point, Macbeth has not realized how temporarily submitting himself to a bestial nature could fundamentally alter his internal nature. Previously believing that the animalistic nature he has adopted would be something exclusively external to him that he could put on and take off as he pleased as he could with a garment, Macbeth is horrified to discover how grossly it has already begun to transform him.

Rather than *covering* his eyes from the actions he was to commit, this bestial nature has so blinded him to the immorality of his actions that his eyes can no longer recognize his hands as his own—the separation of body and spirit has begun to go too far. In the early modern era, the word ‘plucking’ would have conjured up the grotesque image of a live chicken having its feathers being forcibly ‘plucked’ out; therefore, Macbeth’s description depicts the heinous image of his eyes being violently ripped from their sockets, indicating a total separation of body and soul (which is metaphorically represented by the eyes).

Again, Macbeth is faced with another proof of his loss of his humanity that terrifies him:

Still it cried "Sleep no more!" to all the house;

"Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor

Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more." [2.2.45-47]

Within early modern thought, Macbeth's inability to dream is indicative of his loss of humanity because early moderns perceived a crucial difference between the dreams of an animal and the dreams of a human. It was not that they believed that animals were unable to dream at all but rather that they thought that animals could not have 'true dreams'. True dreams were considered to be proof of one's ability to reason because they were considered to be prophetic whereas animal dreams were considered to be reactive. However, the difference between these two types of dreams was not solely attributed to species difference: the focal point of divergence regarded one's internal state more than it did their physical body. It was considered entirely possible for someone in the physical body of a human to be unable to have true dreams because only the "good, vertuous pure, and cleane" human could experience true dreams because only he possessed rationality.²⁴

This separation of body and spirit has become so complete in Macbeth that he cannot summon the word 'amen' to come forth from his mouth:

One cried "God bless us!" and "Amen!" the other,

As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.

List'ning their fear, I could not say "Amen"

²⁴ "Epistle Dedicatory," in Artemidorus. (found in Fudge)

When they did say “God bless us!”...

But wherefore could not I pronounce “Amen”?

I had most need of blessing, and “Amen”

Stuck in my throat. [2.2.30-33, 35-37]

With less control of his own morality, Macbeth likewise has less of an ability to reason, and thus, his spirit has even less of an ability to control the actions of his body than he did before. The garments of bestiality Macbeth has clothed his physical body in begin to take from that body what little agency that he had thought he possessed, and now, even that body that was once empowered to murder Duncan by this bestiality is now enslaved by *its* instincts rather than his own.

Macbeth had previously used his powers of reasoning to come to the conclusion that becoming bestialized would allow him a greater amount of freewill because it would remove from him the constraints of morality, but he neglected to consider the fact that clothing himself in a bestial nature would cause him to lose that freewill altogether. The animal does not have access to freewill in any sense because it does not have the ability to “make choices; instead, it merely exists in a predisposed way, whereas a human uses reason, makes judgements, and acts on the basis of those judgements.”²⁵ While the human is loosely subject to its own morality, the animal is in every sense governed by its instincts because it has no grasp on the concept of freewill.

²⁵ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 29.

Borrowed Robes

Early moderns spent a good deal of time considering one of the implications of wearing animal skins: the way that it transformed the identity of the wearer. In *Renaissance Animal Things*, Erica Fudge references William Prynne's writing in 1633 of his refusal to wear and condemnation of animal skins when he says, "What is this but to obliterate that most glorious Image which God himselfe hath stamped on us, to strip us of all our excellency, and to prove worse than bruits?" Prynne's objection to the wearing of animal skins is that he believes that the wearer's identity is so altered by obscuring the image of the divine that he becomes worse than the 'brute' from which he got his animal skins. But while wearing the skins of an animal provides the wearer with an altered identity, this new identity is always subject to change due to the impermanent nature of clothes. Once these garments had deteriorated or had been replaced by clothes that altered the wearer in a different way, that identity that they had given the wearer disappears altogether.

Macbeth has been in some sense successful in re-obtaining his masculinity by committing what he believed to be masculine actions, but he has obtained an altered masculinity—a bestial masculinity that he may only bear externally, and like physical garments that become worn with use and must then be replaced, it is a masculinity that he must repeatedly reclothe himself in. While Macbeth was able to blind himself from his morality and his fears by clothing himself in a bestial nature, like physical clothes, the transformative effect of this bestial nature proves to be temporary as he once again

becomes subject to the trepidations of a guilty conscience. The unaffected disposition with which Macbeth had carried himself walking towards Duncan's chambers just hours ago abandons him altogether as he responds to Lennox's extended casual remarks with clipped, disjointed sentences. Macbeth's morality begins to drive his actions once again: when Lennox asks him if "the King [goes] hence today?", Macbeth replies that "He does;" but at morality's instruction and guilt's reproof, he is forced to qualify his statement, saying, "he did appoint so" [2.3.53].

Blindsided by a morality he thought he had evaded, Macbeth is divided within himself and is unable to form a logical response when asked why he killed Duncan's servants:

Who can be wise, amazed temp'rate and furious,
 Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.
 Th' expedition of my violent love
 Outran the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,
 His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
 And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature
 For ruin's wasteful entrance; there the murderers,
 Steeped in the colors of their trade, their daggers
 Unmannerly breached with gore. Who could refrain
 That had a heart to love, and in that heart
 Courage to make 's love known? [2.3.110-120]

Macbeth is trying to induce the candid language of one who is driven by passion to avenge wrongdoing but who, by acting in haste, has actually missed the mark, but his efforts to reproduce this type of language are unsuccessful. In intertwining both the ordinary and the fantastical in his metaphors, Macbeth's speech appears to be forced and irrational, which begins to cast doubt upon his innocence.

Because it is an early morning and everyone is wearing thin nightclothes that do little to protect them from the frigid air they are standing in outside, Banquo suggests that everyone depart,

And when we have our naked frailties hid,
That suffer in exposure, let us meet
And question this most bloody piece of work
To know it further." [2.3.128-131]

But while Banquo prompts them to disperse so that they may clothe their physical bodies, Macbeth modifies Banquo's inducement, saying, "Let's briefly put on manly readiness / And meet i' the hall together" [2.3.135-136]. While Banquo references the weak condition of the body in a way that humbles his hearers by reminding them of their collective physical human frailty, Macbeth extends this human weakness even further, implicating both body and soul in the plight of humanity so that once they disperse, they must not merely don themselves in men's clothing, but they must also to clothe their spirits in a masculine, resolute purpose. But although Macbeth is verbally addressing the group as a whole, it seems as though he is only speaking for himself when he refers to clothing oneself in manly resolution since Lady Macbeth has succeeded in convincing

him that possessing masculine agency should be the natural consequence of being born male and that he alone deviates from this norm. Macbeth here has recognized that he is once again in need of clothing himself in something that will make him appear to be a man.

Despite the horror he experienced immediately after murdering Duncan and his servants when he had observed for the first time how his own humanity had so quickly begun to deteriorate, when he concludes that they (but primarily he) must depart to clothe themselves in manly readiness, he is reaffirming his former belief in the primacy of masculinity as he is again concluding that one must possess masculinity in order to overcome the weaknesses of humanity. Perhaps it is because the return of Macbeth's morality had prefaced—or rather, had elicited—his own loss of composure that he begins to desire this bestialized masculinity once again. Therefore, upon his departure from the crowd we can assume that Macbeth for the first time *re*-clothes himself in a bestialized “manly readiness”.

Macbeth returns to the play in act 3 and is able to conduct himself with such a composure in his interactions with Banquo as to suggest the unsettling extent to which he has so hardened himself to his conscience. In what would become his final interactions with Banquo, Macbeth is able to feign goodwill towards Banquo, saying “I wish your horses swift and sure of foot; / And so I do commend you to their backs,” even as he has already arranged for him to be murdered that same night. The disjointure in his speech following the discovery of Duncan's murder that was the result of a discontinuity between his moral spirit and his guilty body is now resolved and he is able to present

what appears to be a commanding, morally-absolved exterior that is empowered by the garment of a bestial nature.

While the bestiality that he had hoped to contain within his physical body alone has begun to seep into his rational soul, it has not yet saturated his soul to the extent that he no longer has access to the use of reason, and it is this reason that allows him to present himself to the onlooking world as a rational, masculine figure. He even encourages Lady Macbeth to likewise present herself in a similar manner:

Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
 Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue—
 Unsafe the while, that we
 Must lave our honors in these flattering streams
 And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
 Disguising what they are. [3.2.33-38]

At this point, Macbeth has enough of a grasp on reason that he is able to understand that the artifice he presents to the onlooking world will not hold if his wife cannot do the same.

The Threatened Beast

Despite his garments of bestiality, Macbeth is still subject to fear, but this fear is critically different in nature to the fear that had previously possessed him, and it begins to

more closely resemble the fear that animals are subject to. The source of an animal's conflicts can never be found internally since they are driven by instinct and do not have to reconcile desire with rationale in order to make a decision. The party that animals engage in conflict with is always external to them, and the struggle that ensues is always a matter of negotiating one's survival and wellbeing with that outside party—this is what instinct demands of them.

From the moment he began to believe that the external expression of a characteristic conferred internal identity, Macbeth thought that reclaiming his masculinity was a matter of embodying a gendered persona. Until he became king, the threat posed to Macbeth's masculinity was found within himself alone—it was his own inability to express dominance over his physical body to prompt it to action that prevented him from regaining his status as a male figure. Since humanity was placed somewhere in-between the spiritual and the animal, however, this type of inward struggle was not unusual since a human is “a self divided against itself, a constant struggle of mind against body, reason against desire”.²⁶ However, a critical shift in Macbeth's understanding of this schema takes place after he becomes king. The animalistic nature that has empowered him to action has caused him to lose touch with reason and Macbeth begins to act on instinct alone rather than on reason. Macbeth gives precedence to the physical above the spiritual, and the crown begins to stand in for the masculinity he believes he has finally obtained.

²⁶ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 13.

Macbeth begins his first soliloquy following his coronation by stating that “To be thus is nothing; / But to be safely thus” [3.1.49-50]. Now, the primary source of that which threatens Macbeth lies outside of himself; no longer is he engaged in an internal struggle of trying to gain mastery over his body but he now wrestles with an outside party that threatens his physical existence. From this point on in the play, Macbeth counts physical survival above all else because it is here that sustaining his position as king begins to stand in for the role that his bestialized actions did in affirming his masculinity. Here his masculinity becomes even more disassociated with his inorganic soul and it metaphorically attaches itself to his outward body like a garment.

Obtaining the throne was the means by which he has reconstructed his identity as a masculine figure, and because Banquo threatens to take this from him by putting his physical existence in jeopardy, Macbeth believes that “under him (Banquo), / My genius is rebuked;” [3.1.57]. This ‘genius’ that has provided Macbeth with a means of restoring his manhood by taking masculine actions cannot continue to live so long as Banquo does because it is no longer immaterial. Because of this new connection that he makes between his position as king (which will ensure his physical survival) and his masculinity, everything he has done thus far to secure that masculinity comes to no avail if he is unable to safeguard his life. Thus, securing his masculinity is no longer a matter of embodying a masculine persona, it is now about protecting his body from the threat of death.

Not only does Banquo’s presence threaten the ongoing *means* by which Macbeth is able to maintain his now-reaffirmed masculinity, it also threatens to further assault any

notion of Macbeth possessing masculinity at all by putting into question the viability of his efforts to sustain it:

They hailed him father to a line of kings.
 Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
 And put a barren scepter in my grip,
 Thence to be wrenched with a unlineal hand,
 No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
 For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
 Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
 Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common enemy of man,
 To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! [3.1.61-71]

The sole purpose behind most every behavioral instinct that governs the actions of animals lies the will to survive because, above all else, instinct prioritizes self-preservation. But self-preservation does not just mean that one single animal must continue to exist, but that it must reproduce to allow its genes to be passed down to future generations because self-preservation also means self-replication. If Macbeth is unable father a child like the prophesy says, then he will have been unsuccessful in his efforts to enforce self-preservation, which in turn would compromise his masculinity since now he believes that his physical survival is what ensures his masculinity.

Furthermore, Banquo's presence challenges his masculinity directly by calling attention to his ongoing inability to fulfill a physical expectation associated with his sex. In Shakespeare's England, "fathering children was important to male social standing and the fulfillment of their patriarchal roles" because the "infertile or impotent man could not become a father, could fail to sexually satisfy and control his wife, and could be cuckolded."²⁷ If the prophesy is fulfilled and Banquo's offspring inherit Macbeth's throne, he will have been symbolically cuckolded of the crown which would serve as a proof of his failure to have ever regained his masculinity at all. Macbeth can no longer relate to his masculinity by his actions alone; he relates to it now by maintaining his physical survival. However, when that survival is threatened, he begins to lose his masculinity and must reclothe himself by taking measures to preserve his life.

While the fear that Lady Macbeth said emasculated him took from him his agency and prevented him from acting on his desires, his new fear actually *prompts* him to act instinctually to eliminate that which threatens him. Previously, Macbeth was afraid to act on the ambition that existed within himself, but now he acts to remove the outside party that is the source of his new fear—to destroy the thing that threatens to take from him all that he is and all that he has worked towards establishing.

Macbeth states that "There is none but [Banquo] / Whose being I do fear;" therefore, he believes that if only he can conquer Banquo he will have finally achieved

²⁷ Evans, Jennifer. *They are called Imperfect Men*.

the pinnacle of manhood—an existence with a total lack of fear [3.1.55-56]. But this new type of fear that he is trying to overcome is much more potent than the emotionless instincts of an animal. As he awaits the return of the murderers, Macbeth reveals to his wife the extent to which this newfound fear keeps him in constant agony:

better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. [3.2.21-24]

He believes that destroying Banquo will allow him a lasting triumph over the fears that have somehow persisted despite all his attempts at establishing his masculinity.

Macbeth seeks to obtain more permanent ‘skins’ of masculinity and decides that in order to do so he must eradicate what semblance of morality he has left in his spirit. While he had previously sought merely to *circumvent* his moral consciousness by dividing his body and soul into two separate entities, Macbeth begins to consciously allow the scope of his bestiality to continue to expand and infiltrate itself into his spiritual realm:

Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! [3.2.49-53]

He no longer wishes to sidestep his morality but would rather that nature “cancel and tear [it] to pieces”. In making a conscious decision to utterly destroy his rational humanity in favor of maintaining his organic existence, he “give[s] a moral status to the descent.²⁸ He beacons a ‘seeling’ to come close his eyes—portraying this night as a “falconer sewing up the eyes of day lest it should struggle against the deed that is to be done.”²⁹ He asks that this night destroy that ‘bond’ or rule of nature that commands him as a human not to break the moral law that commands him not to murder King Duncan. Macbeth evinces his belief that it is his human nature that prevents him from upholding his masculinity, and it is here that he *deliberately* divorces his identity as a human from his identity as a male.

The Descent

Macbeth is initially able to conduct himself with equanimity as his guests take their seats at his banquet, but upon learning of Fleance’s escape, he is once again subject to an all-encompassing fear, saying,

Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casting air.

²⁸ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 61.

²⁹ Bevington, David. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 1238.

But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears. [3.4.21-25]

His manner before his guests drastically changes as he forgets his role as host, and upon returning to the dinner table, Macbeth is gripped by an unreal image of a bloody Banquo. He begins to lose publicly his composure so much so that Lady Macbeth pulls him aside and to ask, “Are you a man?” as well as “What, quite unmanned in folly?” [3.4.59, 74].

When the ghost disappears for the first time, he regains his composure almost immediately and is able to apologize for his “strange infirmity”, but upon the ghost’s reappearance and the sudden return of his fears, Macbeth feels that he must avouch his masculinity:

What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or th’ Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. [3.4.101-104]

Again, once the ghost departs for the second time, he feels that he must defend his honor and thus says, “I am a man again.” [3.4.109]

The reason why Macbeth is so undone in the presence of the ghost is because he is trying to make sense of this situation in terms of the physical world alone. Whereas humans “can find the divine in the material, animals see and know only what is before their eyes. For an animal, the material world remains material.”³⁰ The presence of the

³⁰ Fudge, Erica. *Brutal Reasoning*, 22.

ghost frightens Macbeth because he cannot distinguish between what is material and what is immaterial. They begin to stand in for one another so that when Macbeth sees Banquo, he is actually real and alive, and thus poses a threat to Macbeth's life and his masculinity.

Macbeth attributes his fear to the legitimate threat against his physical safety, but he neglects to consider that much of the danger he faces exists within himself. Since he has begun to see things only in terms of what is tangible, he believes that if only he can overcome that which poses a physical threat to him, his mind will no longer be subject to this all-encompassing fear that confines him. To combat the physical threat posed against him, he begins to rely even more on instinct, striving to act quickly so that reason will not prevent him from taking action: "Strange things I have in head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scanned" [3.4.140-141].

Hoping to gain some new piece of knowledge that he may later clothe himself in to protect him from the attacks of fear, Macbeth meets the witches and demands to know his fate. Macbeth demands to know if it is true that Banquo's heirs will overtake his throne, and the apparition he sees overwhelms him:

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down!

Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs. And thy hair,

Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.

A third is like the former. Filthy hags,

Why do you show me this? A fourth? Start, eyes! [4.1.112-116]

While just one act before he had commanded the 'seeling night' to metaphorically blind him to the immorality of his deeds, he now has no such need for metaphorical blindness

since what is not presently before his eyes cannot have much of an effect on him. Rather, this time, he tells his eyes to bulge from his sockets so that he can be plagued with this fear no more.

Though he is distraught to see the line of Banquo's heirs that will take the throne after him, he safeguards their promises and decides that he will continue to seek to destroy Fleance. After learning of Fleance's escape, he decides that he must commit himself even more to his instincts in order to assail him:

The very firstlings of my heart shall be
 The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
 To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done...
 This deed I'll do before this purpose cool. [4.1.147-149, 154]

As Macbeth's life comes closer to the danger that would ordinarily overcome him with fear, he repeatedly reclothes himself with the witches' promises, saying, " 'Fear not, Macbeth. No man that's born of woman / Shall e'er have power upon thee,' " [5.3.6-7]. He commands his men that he will hear no more announcements of Fleance's advances, saying,

Bring me no more reports. Let them fly all!
 Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane,
 I cannot taint with fear. [5.3.1-3]

When Macbeth is finally convinced that his life is truly in danger, he for a moment cannot re clothe himself with the witches' promises, so he decides to clothe himself in physical armour. He commands Seyton to retrieve his armour and Seyton

responds that he does not need to wear his armour yet, but Macbeth insists, saying, “I’ll put it on.” [5.3.35]. Moments later, he again insists that his attendants clothe him in his armour and bring him his baton of office, and although they began to clothe him, they did not finish, reserving the final pieces of armour to be put on when it becomes closer to the time that he will need it. Macbeth is not satisfied with this, and as he exits the stage, he commands them to

Bring it after me.—

I will not be afraid of death and bane,

Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane. [5.3.60-62]

It is at this point that he has almost no comprehension of that which is not physically present before him. Rather than clothing himself in an intangible masculinity portrayed through his actions, he clothes himself with armour even before he needs it because he has reached the point where the physical is now able to fully stand in for the immaterial. He is unable to differentiate between what is physical and what is spiritual, which is why the unnecessary external covering he clothes himself in are able to restore courage to him. Now not only does the preservation of his physical body represent the preservation of his masculinity, but the physical garments he clothes himself in have the ability to transform him. Masculinity has not only been externalized, but now physical garments become internalized for him so that they can actually change his inward identity.

Until this point, he has been dispossessed by the immaterial so that he cannot recognize what is not physically present before him, but now his spiritual plane has become so deteriorated that he even begins to forget that an immaterial nature still exists within others. When the doctor informs him that Lady Macbeth is still troubled by fancies that exist within her mind alone, he simply replies:

Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

Raze out the written troubles of the brain,

And with some sweet oblivious antidote

Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff

Which weighs upon the heart? [5.3.41-47]

The doctor responds that since the trouble exists within Lady Macbeth's mind, she must be the one to cure herself. Still unsatisfied, Macbeth implores the doctor once again:

If thou couldst, Doctor, cast

The water of my land, find her disease,

And purge it to a sound and pristine health...

What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug

Would scour these English hence? [5.3.52-58]

Because he has no true understanding of that which plagues his people, his wife, and his own mind, he takes no course to war with the corrupting influence of the bestial influence

that has begun to destroy them all. Instead, he looks for solutions within the physical world alone.

Though Macbeth triumphs in the fact that he has almost “[forgotten] the taste of fears, his illogical brazen attitude in this situation puts him in a grave danger that his fears would have otherwise protected him from by prompting him to flee [5.5.9]. As the troops come upon the castle, women begin to shriek, to which Macbeth remarks,

The time has been my senses would have cooled
 To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
 Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
 As life were in ’t. I have supped full with horrors;
 Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
 Cannot once start me. [5.5.10-15]

Upon hearing of Lady Macbeth’s death, Macbeth famously compares life to a tale “Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” [5.5.27-28]. Though his speech seems to indicate that he grieves the death of his wife, I contend that a great deal of the sorrow he expresses is actually not grief at all but is instead the despair he faces in living a life devoid of any immaterial significance.

Faced with the truth that Birnam wood truly is marching to Dunsinane, Macbeth now realizes that he might be unable to preserve his physical existence, so he transfers his masculinity a third and final time into the form of his physical garments so that if he must die, he will die as a man. While armour is traditionally worn to preserve one’s physical life, for Macbeth it now functions to maintain his masculinity. He believes that come

what may, he can still maintain it even if he is killed because “At least we’ll die with harness on our back” [5.5.52]. When Macbeth faces Macduff at the end of the play, before he learns that Macduff was not born of woman, he speaks to the security he derives from his armour by telling him to “Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;” [5.8.11]. However, upon learning the truth about Macduff’s birth, he is again subject to fear before he resolves himself to fight, saying: “Yet I will try the last. Before my body / I throw my warlike shield” [5.8.32-33].

While Macbeth dies wearing the armour that represents the masculinity he has sought to obtain throughout the play, it is a masculinity devoid of any significance beyond the physical. Throughout the play, his masculinity has transferred itself from his internal being to his external embodiment through action, and then to the preservation of his life and the throne

Throughout the play Macbeth’s masculinity has existed within several different spaces: in his internal being, his external actions, his preservation of life and kingship, and, finally, his armour. With each transferral between entities that have housed Macbeth’s masculinity, his masculinity has become increasingly distanced from his internal identity. In the end, Macbeth possesses some semblance of the masculinity that he has fought to obtain; however, it is a bare masculinity that he can relate to only externally and that he cannot truly claim to be his own.

Chapter 2: THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

As Catherine Richardson illustrates, *Merry Wives of Windsor* “signals its focused interest in these questions of reputation through an almost obsessive repetition of the language of moral status, shared by the majority of its characters.”³¹ While individuals of both sexes were judged by the measure of their honesty, for women, honesty was quantified primarily in terms of their own chastity.

A woman’s chastity consisted of much more than her sexual fidelity; it also included the way that she conducted herself in the public eye and the way that she clothed herself—it was an externalized chastity. Even the truly chaste female body was not considered honest unless it could produce “external signifiers, and early modern men and women were prepared to read carefully for material proof.”³² At the beginning of the play, both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page have successfully secured their identities as chaste and honest women; however, the love notes Falstaff writes to both of them potentially jeopardizes all that they have worked towards establishing themselves as in the public eye.

³¹ Richardson, Catherine. “‘Honest Clothes’ in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*”, 65.

³² Richardson, Catherine. “‘Honest Clothes’ in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*”, 72.

Because it was believed that internal chastity could only exist if it was accompanied by external signifiers, both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page take great offense at Falstaff's adulterous professions of love towards them. Since Falstaff has wrongly interpreted something in their manner to suggest that they are not quite as honest as they appear, their chastity is called into question which makes Mistress Page

almost ready

to wrangle with mine own honesty. I'll entertain my-

self like one that I am not acquainted withal; for, sure,

unless he know some strain in me that I know not

myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury. [2.1.81-85]

Maintaining or securing one's chastity was very much an intentional effort to "so evidence [one's] nuptial honour and modesty that in their congress decency may accompany their embraces, lest by their avidity and immodesty they be both defective in their honour, and also less acceptable to their tacit husbands."³³ Because of the subjective nature of the definitions of chastity, no matter how insubstantial, any threat to one's appearance of chastity was to be taken seriously.

While Falstaff's lust prompts him to pursue sexual impropriety, the wives note that this internal degradation is not made apparent in the that way he conducts himself:

And yet he would not

swear, praised women's modesty, and gave such

orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness

³³ Barbaro, Francesco. *Directions for love and marriage*, 130-131.

that I would have sworn his disposition would have
gone to the truth of his words. [2.1.54-58]

Although Falstaff incorrectly suspects a divide within them between their internal character, it becomes clear to the wives that he is not who he initially appears to be. Like most other characters in the play, the wives are preoccupied with the idea that internal characteristics must be represented externally, so they conspire together and decide to expose his morally debased internal being by degrading the now clean exterior of his physical body. While the desire for revenge it is certainly one of the reasons why the wives decide to shame Falstaff's body, a great deal of what prompts them to action is their sense of self-preservation. Falstaff's inability to rein in his lustful desires poses an ongoing threat to the perpetuation of each of the wives' externalized chastity, which is why they ultimately choose to help restore Falstaff's humanity.

For early moderns, "Dress could signify both honesty and dishonesty"; it could function to reaffirm one's possession of humanity, but it could also serve to bestialize an individual.³⁴ Clothes served not only to protect the body from harm but also, and perhaps most importantly, they served to distinguish humanity from the beasts. The regular laundering of linen undergarments helped to preserve the distinction between the physical and the spiritual natures of the human. Linens were "indelibly marked by their association with the body' to the extent that 'the second skin of cloth became metaphorically indistinguishable from the body's "natural" covering.'"³⁵ Linens had the

³⁴ Richardson, Catherine. "'Honest Clothes' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*", 72.

³⁵ Richardson, Catherine. "'Honest Clothes' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*", 77.

ability to hide the physical nature of the body—to disguise those bodily functions that humans shared with the animals. But the secondary layer, starched and whitened, represented the part of the human that that was able to transcend the physical realm. Clothes carried a metaphorical significance that the furs on the backs of beasts could not: they had the ability to externally signify that intangible nature that humans possessed within themselves.

When Mistress Ford and Mistress Page convey Falstaff into the buck basket and proceed to cover him with foul linens, they are clothing him with that part of humanity which is meant to be kept out of sight. As Falstaff later retells these events to Ford who is disguised as Master Brook, his colorful description reveals just how disgusted he becomes when exposed to the otherwise hidden fleshly nature of humanity:

By the Lord, a buck basket! Rammed me in
with foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings,
greasy napkins, that, Master Brook, there was the
rankest compound of villainous smell that ever of-
fended nostril. [3.5.82-86]

By covering Falstaff in Mistress Ford's foul linen undergarments, they effectively clothe him in an inner as well as an outer layer of dirty linens so that even what should serve as his whitened exterior now becomes nothing more than another replication of his own physical skins. By clothing him in these garments that reveal the hidden and unsightly physical nature of humanity, they metaphorically reveal how his lack of self-constraint

has begun to remove him from the spiritual realm. Despite this attempt, they are not yet able to purge him of his sullied spiritual nature, so they resolve themselves to try again:

and we will yet

have more tricks with Falstaff. His dissolute disease

will scarce obey this medicine. [3.3.173-175]

However, while the wives count this interaction as nothing more than a jest, they fail to realize how their preoccupation with maintaining as well as defiling certain external proofs of gendered honesty actually begins to assault any claims they might otherwise lay towards their own possession of the humanity that is supported by those external proofs.

Mistress Ford has used her own garments to shame Falstaff by proving that although clothes are meant to hide the physiological functions of the body, by exposing their deceptive nature, she is able to condemn him for hiding his dishonest spirit behind bleached linens. For all her attempts to preserve her chaste appearance, in striving to remove the threat Falstaff poses to it, it is she herself who reveals that even if one is able to produce physical proofs of internal honesty, like the clothes they are represented by, these proofs may also be of an artificial nature.

The next time that Falstaff visits Mistress Ford, Mistress Page comes in the house to warn them that Ford is swiftly approaching and is overtaken by a maddened jealousy hoping to catch Falstaff in his home. The wives convince Falstaff that he has no option for a safe escape except through disguising himself as the fat woman of Brentford.

Falstaff must clothe himself in the old woman's gown, thrummed hat, and her muffler,

but these alone are not enough to complete his transformation. Since the old woman did not leave behind a kerchief, Mistress Ford must find one of her own to give to Falstaff because he cannot disguise his gender without it.

Of all the women's garments that he clothes himself in, it is this plain kerchief that carries the most symbolic weight regarding Falstaff's degradation. Previously in act 3, Falstaff complimented Mistress Ford by saying that her beautiful brow should be clothed in nothing less than an extravagant headdress, but she corrected him, saying, "A plain kerchief, Sir John. My brows become nothing else, nor that well neither" [3.3.52-53]. When in company with anyone outside of the family, an honest woman was expected to cover her head with a kerchief to symbolize the respect she had for her husband's authority. While she has implied to Falstaff that she disregards the authority of her husband by not wearing her kerchief well, in dressing Falstaff in one of her own kerchiefs, she symbolically places him in her 'former' position as the submissive wife.

Not only must he dress as a submissive woman, but he must also act as one while he wears the disguise. As he is pretending to be the old woman of Brentford, he must allow Ford to beat him without attempting to defend himself as he would normally do; therefore, this sexual deviance he displays in his physical body transfers temporarily into his internal being:

I went to her, Master Brook, as you see, like
a poor old man, but I came from her, Master Brook,
like a poor old woman....

he beat me grievously, in the shape of a woman; for
 in the shape of a man, Master Brook, I fear not Goliath
 with a weaver's beam, [5.1.15-17, 20-22].

Again, by giving precedence to physical proofs, Mistress Ford unintentionally undermines another characteristic that should distinguish humanity from animals. One of the primary things early moderns believed distinguished humanity from the beasts were the gender roles that they filled. While she is able to shame Falstaff by making him submissive to another man, she has symbolically been displaced by him as the feminine figure in her home.

Furthermore, once Falstaff is dressed in the shape of a woman, he not only puts on the external act of femininity but he also becomes *subject* to women's fears that no longer plague him when he is in the shape of a man. External signifiers of gender identity such as clothes and embodiment through action were thought to be the natural result of internal difference, but when Falstaff wears women's clothes momentarily feels what it is like to be a woman. Therefore, if these clothes are not visual markers for internal gender difference but are instead agents which transmute internal identity, then gender roles can no longer be proofs for the distinction between man and beast. If this is true, all that Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are doing to protect the legitimacy of their external embodiment of chastity becomes meaningless.

When the wives tell their husbands and Evans all that they have done to shame as well as to cleanse Falstaff from his intemperate nature, Page and Evans think that surely after all these tricks Falstaff will no longer have lustful desires:

You say he has been thrown in the rivers and
 has been grievously peaten as an old 'oman. Methinks
 there should be terrors in him that he should not
 come. Methinks his flesh is punished; he shall have no
 desires. [4.4.20-23]

However, the wives still believe that one jest more will restore him to honesty once and for all, so they devise their final scheme and plan to meet Falstaff, dressed as Herne the hunter, in Windsor Forest. Mistress Page believes that the pinching fairies can get him to admit the truth, and after which they will “all present ourselves, dis-horn the spirit, / And mock him home to Windsor” [4.4.64-65].

Falstaff appears to be in his most bestial state thus far as he awaits the arrival of Mistress Ford in Windsor Forest. In his soliloquy, he refers to himself as a male deer in the middle of mating season who is so overcome by sexual desire that he feels as if he might sweat off and excrete excess fat like stags were thought to do during mating season. Falstaff addresses Mistress Ford as his doe, and is delighted to find that Mistress Page has accompanied her, and says that the two of them may “Divide me like a bribed buck, each a haunch” [5.5.23].

After the fairies pinch Falstaff and accuse him of having an unchaste heart and corrupt desires, the jest ends at Mistress Page's request. Once Falstaff has taken off his horns, Mistress Page points to them, addressing Page, saying, “See you these, husband? Do not these fair yokes [horns] / Become the forest better than the town?” [5.5.107-108]. The wives have finally succeeded in ‘dis-horning’ Falstaff's spirit; they have

successfully removed that which made Falstaff corrupt and have now returned his bestial nature to where it belongs—in the forest.

But again, Mistress Ford is put in a place where that which distinguishes her as a human becomes less concrete. Though she has dis-horned the bestial nature from Falstaff, she is reminded again of the slippage that exists between the human and the animal. Though these horns that she has given Falstaff are only a prop, they serve as a reminder that she, too, is capable of creating a beast out of a man.

Careful Construction

It appears at the end of *Merry Wives of Windsor* that order has been restored and that the threat that was posed against the wives' honesty has been removed. But while it is true that they have succeeded in removing the cuckold horns at present, in the process of debasing Falstaff's physical body, the wives have unintentionally disclosed how fragile their *own* humanity is and how those distinctions that separate man from beast are external fabrications. In striving to remove an external threat to their chastity, they have revealed how many threats to it exist within themselves.

Furthermore, this newly dis-horned Falstaff leaves the forest for the town, but his return becomes less triumphant because the humanity that he has been restored to is now much more hollow; those things which once were thought to distinguish mankind are now shown to be artificial additions and cultural constructs.

CONCLUSION

Within the first chapter, my argument is not so much about whether or not gender roles are truly an inborn trait of humanity but it is about how in seeking to externalize one of the traits of humanity, an individual might actually lose that which distinguishes them from the animals. While Lady Macbeth prompts Macbeth to *become* masculine, she suggests that in order to do so, he must *act* as a man. In order to transform his inorganic rational soul, he must not try to influence the soul itself but rather he must change *its* identity by taking action. Action then begins to stand in for his masculine identity as he resolves himself to commit the murder. He strives to bestialize his body alone so that he can maintain the morality essential to preserving one's rationality, but in doing so, he effectively grants himself a masculinity that relates to his *physical* body alone since it was his *body* and not his spirit that directed the actions that led to him reclaiming his masculinity. Because he acts of his *body's* volition, his masculinity is distanced from his spirit, and thus his internal identity must more fully rely on something that is an external addition to his spirit.

Macbeth then transfers the source of his masculinity to something that is even more external: the maintenance of his kingship. Since the bestial nature he

had hoped to contain within his body begins to more directly implicate his internal plane as he willingly hardens himself to preserve his kingship, he becomes more subject to instinct than to deliberate action. While that which had hindered him from reclaiming his masculinity before existed *within himself*, this threat now becomes external to him as he strives to protect his kingship from those who intend to destroy him. Both the threat to and the source of his masculinity now exist outside of himself, and what should be defining aspects of his inorganic soul become like prosthetic appendages artificially added to him.

As he continues to willingly defile his internal plane so that he can be more subject to the instinct he believes will protect him, he begins to lose his ability to comprehend the metaphorical—the inorganic—and he now sees only that which is external to him: that which is before his physical eyes. He cannot understand that what poses the greatest threat to him exists within *himself*, and therefore he continues to believe that if only he can destroy these physical threats, he can finally live without fear.

When Macbeth learns that his existence as king is swiftly coming to an end, he transfers the source of his masculinity for a third and final time to those clothes he wears on his back. Despite many protestations that to wear his armour far in advance to the arrival of Macduff's troops was very unnecessary at present, Macbeth demands that his attendants clothe him in his armour, saying that even if he dies at least he will die with armour on his back. While armour should serve

the sole purpose of protecting its wearer, he claims that even if it fails to do so at least he will be wearing it he dies. He does not emphasize the *efficacy* of wearing the armour but instead suggests that the mere act of wearing it will be beneficial to him even in death.

From the beginning of the play until the moment of his death, Macbeth has excised what should have been an internal quality, inherent in all of humanity, and has applied it instead to his external persona so that he might feel in possession of it. As Macbeth dies clothed in the armour that he believes is his masculinity, he once again reminds the reader of his total separation from the immaterial. In striving to establish the one trait of humanity that he believes that he lacks, he severs the connection between body and spirit so that by the end, he has obtained the signifier but has been utterly cut off from the signified. This masculinity that he obtains becomes meaningless because since he can no longer relate to the immaterial, he cannot conceive of what significance that masculinity carries.

In my second chapter regarding the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, I expand upon the argument of the first by proving that in externalizing those traits that are thought to distinguish humankind, one might *reveal* the preexisting insubstantial nature of human difference. I do not seek to claim that there *is* no difference, but that this difference is conditional and is subject to removal.

Throughout the play, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page repeatedly express concern about the preservation of their chastity through their clothes as well as

their actions, but it is the way that they voice this concern that reveals their understanding of the relationship between one's internal and external identities. They speak of preserving their chastity in their actions and physical clothes in the same manner that they might speak of preserving it through their fidelity to their husbands. For these wives, the externalized identity determines as well as reveals the status of one's inorganic essence. Therefore, in order to rid themselves of the threat Falstaff poses to their chastity, they defile and shame his body in order to prompt him to amend his behavior.

However, it is because they determine the quality of one's inorganic soul by judging the appearance of one's externalized identity that in the process of shaming Falstaff into restoring his humanity that they reveal how fragile their own possession of it is. They pose him as a beast throughout the play leading up to the moment that they clothe him in a cuckold's horns, but in doing so they unknowingly expose the slippage that exists between beast and human, and while Falstaff's inner beast is left in the forest at the end of the play, his return to humanity becomes somewhat hollow as he recalls just how quickly he was able to descend to the status of a beast.

While the merry wives leave the play satisfied that they have removed the threat that was posed to their external appearance of chastity that in turn confirms their internal identity as chaste women, they have in the process shown the failure of humanity to prove themselves truly, inherently different from the animals. In

the same way their outward starched and whitened exterior serves to conceal the filthy linens underneath that would expose how their bodily functions are similar to animals, so their external chastity serves to hide humanity's similarities to the animals. Though the townspeople all triumph in that they have restored Falstaff to his humanity by shaming his misbehavior, the success becomes dissatisfying to the reader because he is restored only to the appearance of humanity rather than to the essence of it.

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