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'Unnatural Deeds do Breed Unnatural Troubles'[1]: A Study of Lady Macbeth's Cruelty

Muhammad Safiur Rahman & Mohammad Tajuddin

Assistant Professors, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), 85 / A, Chatteswari Road, Chawkbazar, Chittagong – 4203, Bangladesh Email: safiur7@yahoo.com & smtajuiiuc@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study of evil is one of the recurrent themes in the plays of Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, the playwright presents different dimensions of evil. The aim of this paper is to locate and examine the origin of evil in Lady Macbeth – whether evil is in her nature or not. Macbeth addresses her as 'dearest partner of greatness', whereas Macduff describes her as 'fiend-like queen'. The paper analyses her activities as an attempt to determine whether she is as evil as it is generally thought of, or there is a gap between what she expresses and what she represses. Examining from the point of view of psychoanalytical criticism, we see that the evil, especially the cruelty, she demonstrates is not her natural characteristic trait; rather she assumes it. Actually, she says and does some evil things which are quite incompatible to her original nature. What she does, at any rate, is crime, but not the crime of a 'criminal by nature'; rather it is the foolish fondness of a loving and devoted wife who sacrifices everything for the sake of her husband so that he can achieve his much desired goal. The paper holds the final view that Lady Macbeth is a victim of illusion- illusion created by her excessive love and devotion for her husband.

Macbeth (1606-1607) is seemingly the last one of Shakespeare's major tragedies. Although it is 'the shortest of the tragedies' (Muir, p xiii), here the playwright presents the 'most profound and mature vision of evil' (Knight, p 160). In fact, in his tragedies, Shakespeare presents different dimensions of evil in human affairs. Jean E Howard calls *Macbeth* 'culmination of a series of tragedies on evil' (p 1255). She, again, describes the play as 'an intensely human study of the psychological effects of evil on a particular man and, to a lesser extent, on his wife.' (p 1255). Harold Bloom says, "Macbeth . . . is so profoundly dependent on Lady Macbeth. Until she goes mad, she seems as much Macbeth's mother as his wife" (p 522). Wilson Knight says, "To interpret the figure of Lady Macbeth in terms of 'ambition' and 'will' is, indeed, a futile commentary. The scope and sweep of her evil passion is tremendous, irresistible, ultimate. She is an embodiment – for one mighty hour- of evil absolute and extreme" (p 173). A. C. Bradley says:

> …in the first half (of the play) Lady Macbeth not only appears more than in the second but exerts the ultimate deciding influence on the action. And in the opening Act at least, Lady Macbeth is the most commanding and perhaps the most awe-inspiring figure that Shakespeare drew. Sharing, as we have seen, certain traits with her husband, she is at once clearly distinguished from him by an inflexibility of will, which appears to hold imagination, feeling, and conscience completely in check. To her the prophecy of the things that will be becomes instantaneously the determination that they shall be. (p 322)

In fact, among the female characters of Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth is considered as one of the most complex ones. Her character is full of variety of qualities- both good and evil. She can, indeed, be studied as more heinous than the witches. Dr. Johnson says, "Lady Macbeth is merely detested" (qtd in Bradley, p 332). Howard says, "She has failed to foresee the long-range consequences of her sinful ambition and so becomes a temptress to her husband" (p1257). Again, she can also be studied as one of the most sublime tragic heroines of Shakespeare. Bradley says:

> She helps him, but never asks his help. She leans on nothing but herself. And from the beginning to the end …her will never fails her. Its grasp upon her nature may destroy her, but it is never relaxed. We are sure that she never betrayed her husband or herself by a word or even a look, save in sleep. However appalling she may be, she is sublime." (p 324)

Serajul Islam Chowdhury says:

[1] *Macbeth* Act 5, scene 1, Line 71

> Lady Macbeth bears burdens upon herself – more than one. One burden is about ill-reputation, another one is about over ambition. It is easy to call her a witch. She herself provides the ground for this. Her husband killed the King and usurped the throne. It would not have ever been possible for him had Lady Macbeth not backed him. She, by encouraging and showing the way to do so, has become the notorious example of a destructive wife. (p 36)

Indeed, Lady Macbeth plays a very active and decisive role in the first two acts of the play. But in the last part of the play we discover a different Lady Macbeth. Bradley again says:

> Yet if the Lady Macbeth of these scenes were really utterly inhuman, or a 'fiend-like queen', as Malcolm calls her, the Lady Macbeth of the sleep-walking scene would be an impossibility. The one woman could never become the other. And in fact, if we look below the surface, there is evidence enough in the earlier scenes of preparation for the later." (p 324)

From the comments of the critics mentioned above, it is evident that the character of Lady Macbeth can be analyzed from different perspectives. Some critics consider her to be more a loving wife; again some others consider her as more than a witch. Now the question is which one represents her real nature more convincingly? The 'dearest partner of greatness' as Macbeth addresses her or 'the fiend-like queen' as Malcolm calls her? To determine the point whether the cruelty she utters and encourages are compatible to her real nature, or she assumes them to cope with the situation she suddenly faces, we will examine her activities from the psychoanalytical point of view. Peter Barry observes:

> … when some wish, fear or memory, or desire is difficult to face we may try to cope with it by repressing it, that is, eliminating it from the conscious mind. But this does not make it go away: it remains alive in the unconscious, like radioactive matter buried beneath the ocean, and constantly seeks a way back into the conscious mind, always succeeding eventually. As Freud famously said, 'There is always a return of the repressed.' (p 100)

Here, my endeavor is to examine the activities of Lady Macbeth in the play in order to find out the impulses that led her to act in this particular way, at the same time, to see how much they influence her thought and behavior.

Psychoanalytic criticism, as Peter Barry introduces, is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders 'by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind'." (p 96) Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) is known as the father of psychoanalysis (Barry, p 96). Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines psychoanalysis as "any of a number of the theories of the human personality, which attempt to examine a person's unconscious mind to discover the hidden causes of their mental problems. (p 1145).

Again, The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language defines psychoanalysis as "The doctrine that mental life and all forms of behavior may be interpreted in terms of reciprocally acting forces largely governed by the dynamic interplay of conflicting drives and processes originating in the unconscious." (p 1018). On the other hand, The American Heritage dic.tion.ar.y of the English Language defines psychoanalysis as "The method of psychiatric therapy originated by Sigmund Freud in which free association, dream interpretation, and analysis of resistance and transference are used to explore repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties, and internal conflicts" (p 1462). Now, as psychoanalysis employs different methods of treating somebody who is not mentally sound by examining his / her past experiences and feelings in order to try to explain their present problems, we here will try to explain the abnormal behavior of Lady Macbeth in her sleep-walking scene by examining her experiences and feelings as they are found in earlier scenes.

At the first appearance - when we first see Lady Macbeth in Act I, scene v - she gets two very overwhelming messages in quick succession – one from the letter of Macbeth, and the other from a messenger; both of them influenced her tremendously. From the letter of her husband, she comes to know about Macbeth's interaction with the witches who have made some prophecies regarding Macbeth's future. Indeed, the letter moves her heavily. It stirs her total self. She was so strongly moved by the letter that just after reading it, she became overexcited and started hailing the absent Macbeth as if he were present there: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised"(I.v.15-16). This utterance clearly shows her profound confidence and determination that her husband will definitely be the king. But how can it be possible? There is no way in the system of the country for Macbeth's becoming king. Then, how will he be the king? Instead of questioning it, Lady Macbeth has already started contemplating on her planned course of action in this regard. Surprisingly, she does not find any outer obstacles to Macbeth's success. Only impediment she finds is Macbeth's good nature. She knows that her husband is full of ambition. She, indeed, shares his ambition. We can

easily guess it from the phrase with which Macbeth addresses her in the letter: “My dearest partner of greatness” (I.v.11). But in her evaluation Macbeth does not possess the illness and cruelty required to fulfill his ambition:

Yet I do fear thy nature;
It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. .(I.v.16 - 18)

Lady Macbeth knows well that Macbeth is ambitious of becoming the king; but the only problem is he does not have the evil in his character which is required to make him king:

Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, (I.v.18 - 20)

Here she properly analyses the nature of Macbeth and rightly understands his problem and, as a loving wife, is ready to do the required thing to help her wavering husband achieve the higher position. Now she desperately tries to find a way out for her husband. Here also Lady Macbeth thinks that the remedy to this shortcoming of Macbeth lies at her disposal. Addressing her absent husband, she invites him to come to her quickly so that she can prepare him adequately by pouring her cruelty on him, and by chastising him with the valor of her tongue:

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
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal. (I. v. 25-30)

This is the first self-statement of her illness and cruelty we have. Here we have to consider a few things. First one is the necessity of illness and cruelty. Lady Macbeth feels that to achieve kingship, Macbeth requires to take some ill measure, because in the prevailing system of the country there is no ‘holy’ or legal way for Macbeth to be king. According to the law of primogeniture, kingship would go to the eldest son of Duncan. She knows that the only way for Macbeth to become king is to murder the King and occupy the throne. She also knows that Macbeth is characteristically incapable of ‘playing false’ or doing anything illegal. So he requires some help from outside. Who would help him in this difficult situation? Out of her love for her husband, Lady Macbeth comes forward spontaneously. She would pour her ‘spirit’ in his ear and chastise him with the ‘valor’ of her tongue to remove all impediments from the way of Macbeth’s achieving success – the kingship. Serajul Islam Chowdhury says:

> Lady Macbeth is very devoted to her husband, and also very dependent to him. Again, she nurtures him as a mother nurtures her child. She knows about Macbeth’s ambition, at the same time, she is quite aware of the compassionate nature of her husband. She knows very well that if kindness and pity interfere and obstruct Macbeth cannot kill Duncan; cannot be the king. That is why she takes the leadership and assumes the demonic cruelty to keep her husband away from pity and kindness. Actually, the cruelty is not there in her own nature; she assumes it to tackle the situation. (p 38)

Now the question is whether Lady Macbeth really possesses the illness and cruelty she outwardly professes to possess, or this is simply the frantic expression of her in the moment of overexcitement. Again, before she recovers herself from that state of excitement - before she absorbs the effect that the letter has created on her, the second message- that of Duncan’s visit to her castle- comes to her. The second message synchronizes with the course of action she has determined to help her husband. The message of Duncan’s imminent visit to her castle is a sudden development for which she was not mentally prepared. She exclaims to the messenger: “Thou’rt mad to say it! / Is not thy master with him, who, were’t so, / Would have informed for preparation?” (I. v. 31-33). The reason for this surprise is not only for her lack of preparation. It is more than that. She apprehends that this visit would make Duncan available to her to murder which she has already started to contemplate. So the news is too good for her to believe. Here she clearly utters her thought, “The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements” (I. v. 38-40). She decides that the ‘entrance of Duncan’ to her castle would be ‘fatal entrance’. This decision puts her into a real test of her own nature.

Earlier she commented on the inadequacy of Macbeth’s nature. Now, as she finds herself near to the performance, searching her own nature, she realizes her own inadequacy in required illness and cruelty. That is

why she starts to pray to the spirits to 'unsex' her – to change her nature radically; to make her what she is not by nature, but what she has to be at the moment:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! (I. v. 40-43)

As the thing she is praying for is not compatible to her nature, she becomes afraid that remorse may intervene. So she further prays:

Make thick my blood;
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctions visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it! (I. v. 43-47)

Still she finds the nature of a woman prevailing in her. So she continues to pray:

Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! (I. v. 47-50)

On this invocation to the 'murdering ministers', Wilson Knight comments:

> She is not merely a woman of strong will: she is a woman possessed – possessed of evil passion. No 'will-power' on earth would account for her invocation:… This speech, addressed to the 'murdering ministers' who 'in their sightless substances wait on nature's mischief' is demonic in intensity and passion. It is inhuman – as though the woman were controlled by an evil something which masters her, mind and soul. It is mysterious, fearsome, yet fascinating: like all else here, it is a nightmare thing of evil. (p 173)

Again, realizing the gravity of the crime she needs to do to help her husband, she now prays for 'thick night' and hellish smoke so that no one can see - not even the heaven - and can ask her to 'stop':

Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry "Hold, hold". (I. v. 50-54)

All these passages from the play indicate the degree of her desperation to help her husband so that he does not miss the opportunity to be the king. From her understanding of the nature of her husband, it appears to her that without her leading role he may not be able to achieve his goal. Bradley says:

> She knows her husband's weakness, how he scruples 'to catch the nearest way' to the object he desires; and she sets herself without a trace of doubt or conflict to counteract this weakness. To her there is no separation between will and deed; and, as the deed falls in part to her, she is sure it will be done… (p 322)

At this moment, Macbeth enters, and she salutes him saying: "Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor! / Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter!" (I.v.55-6). Interestingly, earlier the three witches saluted Macbeth almost with similar expressions:

FIRST WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
SECOND WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
THIRD WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter! (I. iii. 48-50)

Three witches greeted Macbeth with three predictions separately, one after another. What they did separately, now Lady Macbeth does it in a single breath. As if she is the summation of the three withes. Here she is overexcited. Bradley observes:

> On the moment of Macbeth's rejoining her, after braving infinite dangers and winning infinite praise, without a syllable on these subjects or a word of affection, she goes strait to her purpose and permits

> him to speak of nothing else. She takes the superior position and assumes the direction of affairs,- appears to assume it even more that she really can. (p 323)

Immediately, she says to her husband that his letter has 'transported' her: "Thy letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant" (I. v. 56-58). This transformation is not only from 'present' to 'future'. We feel that this transformation occurs in her total nature- from natural kindness of a woman to direst cruelty; from milk to gall. Now, the question is what was her nature like before this transformation? If the letter of Macbeth transformed her, then is not it Macbeth who tempted her? We can consider a hypothetical situation - had Macbeth not communicated the predictions of the witches to her, she would not have been transformed.

Immediately, when her husband says to her: "My dearest love,/ Duncan comes here tonight" (I.v.57), she does not react as she did when the messenger first informed her about Duncan's coming. This time she is far advanced in her plan. Now Duncan's coming is not important for her; rather, the important thing is when Duncan is going from here. Because she wants to calculate how much time she would get for executing her plan of murdering the king. "And when goes hence?" (I.v.58). Macbeth answers: "tomorrow, as he purposes" (I.v.59). She firmly decides: "Oh, never / Shall sun that tomorrow see!" (I.v.60-61). These are not the words of the real Lady Macbeth; rather, it is the transformed Lady Macbeth who speaks here. With great determination, she takes the command of the killing project at her hand: "He that's coming / Must be provided for; and you shall put / This night's great business into my dispatch," (I.v.67-69). Here we find Macbeth hesitant and he tries to take some time to decide: "We will speak further"(I.v.71). But once again Lady Macbeth, in a very commanding tone, advises Macbeth: "Only look up clear. / To alter favor ever is to fear. / Leave all the rest to me" (I.v.72-4).

The above discussion may indicate that Duncan was killed only according to the decision of Lady Macbeth. But, we have to examine here to what extent Lady Macbeth is a determining factor in this regard. When actually did Macbeth take the decision of murdering Duncan? To find the answer to this question, we need to examine the different stages of the development of murdering thought both in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. There is no doubt that without the active help and very strong encouragement of Lady Macbeth it would have not been possible for Macbeth to kill Duncan here. But the thought of murdering Duncan did not first originate in Lady Macbeth; it originated in Macbeth. As soon as he received the prediction of the witches, he is startled. On Macbeth's first response to the forecast of the witches A. C. Bradley comments:

> But when Macbeth heard them he was not an innocent man. Precisely how far his mind was guilty may be a question; but no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of fear at the mere prophecy of a crown, or have conceived thereupon immediately the thought of murder. Either this thought was not new to him, or he had cherished at least some vaguer dishonourable dream, the instantaneous recurrence of which, at the moment of his hearing the prophecy, revealed to him an inward and terrifying guilt. In either case not only was he free to accept or resist the temptation, but the temptation was already within him. (301)

We see nervous gesture in him. He is deep in thought; almost lost in his imagination. Banquo observes: "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that sound so fair?- I'th'name of truth / Are ye fantastical,…" (I.iii.49-51). Macbeth is so 'rapt' that he does not respond to Banquo's question. Here, we cannot clearly know what thought he is actually absorbed in. But, just a little later, when Ross- a messenger from the King Duncan- addresses him as 'Thane of Cawdor', once again we see similar reaction in Macbeth. Again he is 'rapt'. Banquo observes: Look how our partner's rapt. (I. iii. 141). This time we see that he is contemplating the murder of Duncan:

> …why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man… (I.iii.135-41)

Here, not only he is thinking of murdering Duncan, but in this thought he is so advanced that clearly he has started feeling the consequences of it. As if he has already murdered Duncan. A. R. Braunmuller comments: " 'my thought, whose murder' the distorted grammar personifies Macbeth's 'thought' as a being who is

murdered by the self, but also suggests Macbeth's intended human victim, Duncan" (p 117). Now, Macbeth feels that the thought of murdering Duncan shatters his very existence as a human being. Realizing the terrible consequences, he decides not to do anything in this regard. Rather he leaves the matter to Fate: 'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown / me / without my stir' (I.iii.145-7). The problem is that his imagination just does not let his possibility of becoming king go off so easily. The thought of murder remains at the back of his mind. Again, as soon as Duncan declares Malcolm as his heir to the Scottish throne, the thought of murdering Duncan comes strongly back to Macbeth's mind: "The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap, / For in my way it lies" (I. iv. 48-50). Here, he takes a firm decision to murder the King:

> 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. (I. iv. 50-4)

So, when he comes to Lady Macbeth, in the next scene, he has already had a very strong and active 'black and deep desires'. This is absolutely Macbeth's own decision. He determines this fearful 'desire' without the help of any one. On the other hand, the idea of murder comes to Lady Macbeth after she reads Macbeth's letter. Here we do not try to exonerate Lady Macbeth from her share of guilt; rather we try to pinpoint the extent of their respective responsibility in murdering Duncan.

In fact, the prophecy of the witches brings the idea of Duncan's murder in the minds of both Macbeth and Banquo. Noticing Macbeth's immediate reaction to the words of the witches, the idea that Macbeth may think of murdering Duncan comes to the mind of Banquo. Again, being informed from her husband's letter about the predictions of the witches, Lady Macbeth starts thinking of murdering Duncan. So we can say that the prediction of the witches brings the thought related to the murder of Duncan in the mind of these three people. Again, among these three people, the witches appear before two of them - Macbeth and Banquo; they do not appear before Lady Macbeth. She comes to know about them from the letter of her husband. This, also, is an indication that Lady Macbeth does not possess any evil in her nature, rather evil is communicated from the witches to her through Macbeth. On the other hand, had Banquo been totally free from evil, the witches would not have appeared before him; he would not have seen them, or talked to them. However stoical attitude towards the witches Banquo shows initially, it is he who asks them to speak to him:

> …to me you speak not.
> If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
> Speak then to me,… (I. iii. 57-60)

Referring to Wilson, Kenneth Muir points out: "Spirits might not speak unless first addressed" (p 15). Though Banquo experiences an agonizingly moral struggle in him, after hearing their prophecy regarding Macbeth, he also becomes interested to know about his own future from them. It may be very faint, still at the back of his mind there is a belief in the prophetic power of the witches: "If you can look into the seeds of time, / And say which grain will grow, and which will not" (I.iii.37-8). But he is reluctant to admit it consciously: "who neither beg nor fear, / Your favors nor your hate" (I.iii.39-40). Banquo's initial strong disbelief in the words of the witches first falters with the fulfillment of second prophecy. With the fulfillment of the third prophecy, his disbelief tends to turn into strong hope. One important fact we have to take into consideration to understand the difference between the reaction of Banquo, and that of Lady Macbeth is that Banquo has considerably enough time to wait and see whether the predictions of the witches come true or not. But Lady Macbeth does not have time to wait; rather she has an urgency to act instantly.

Another important point is that, among these three people, Macbeth wants to gain something for himself; Banquo also wants to gain something for his posterity; but Lady Macbeth does not want any personal gain. Whatever she wants, it is only for her husband. Serajul Islam Chowdhury says:

> What ever faults she has, however cruelty she assumes, this is not her real nature. Her real nature is she is a devoted and obedient wife. She knows the ambitious desire of her husband and whole-heartedly tries to help him achieve it. It was not her desire to be the Queen; rather it was her desire to make him the King. (p 40)

In fact, Lady Macbeth is a victim of devotion. She is profoundly devoted to her husband. To her devotion Macbeth adds ambition. The result is her assuming of unnatural appearance. Howard observed:

> Evidently, he and Lady Macbeth have previously considered murdering Duncan; the witches appear after the thought, not before. Lady Macbeth reminds her wavering husband that he was the first to "break the enterprise" to her, on some previous occasion when "Nor time nor place / Did then adhere, and yet you make both" (I. vii. 49-53). Elizabethans would probably understand that evil spirits such as witches appear when summoned, whether by our conscious or unconscious minds. Macbeth is ripe for their insinuations: a mind free of taint would see no sinister invitation in their prophecy of greatness to come. (p 1258)

Macbeth's psychological conflict is vividly expressed; Banquo's inner conflict though not so clearly manifested, still from his scattered remarks, we feel the presence of such mental conflict in him. On the other hand, in the case of Lady Macbeth, she seems more resolute right from the time of her receiving the information about the witches' prediction. Is she really free from any moral impulses? Or, she deliberately represses the moral conflict in her mind? After reading the letter, indeed, she becomes over enthusiastic about her husband's royal future. Along with her passionate expectation, there is the birth of a very powerful evil thought in her. So her conscience does not find any scope to assert itself. She tries to force them out of her conscious awareness, but they actually remain into the realm of her unconscious mind. "The unconscious has a decisive role in our lives" (Barry P 96).

For our better understanding of the role of Lady Macbeth, we here compare and contrast her role with that of Banquo. She plans the murder of Duncan so that her husband can be the king; on the other hand, Banquo also silently waits for something to be done by Macbeth. Cannot we say that Banquo also wants Macbeth murder Duncan, in the hope of getting his children kings? If Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to murder Duncan, we can say that Banquo also does the same in this way or that way. The difference is Lady Macbeth sacrifices her conscience in this way. But Banquo apparently maintains his innocence, but silently waits to make his children kings through Macbeth's murdering Duncan. He wants to remain free from guilt, but he wants to enjoy the benefit of the murder. But one important point here is that Banquo keeps the incident of the witches secret; he never discloses it to any one. Wilson Knight says:

> This knowledge of evil implicit in his meeting with the three weird Sisters Banquo keeps to himself, and it is a bond of evil between him and Macbeth. It is this that troubles him on the night of the murder, planting a nightmare of unrest in his mind: 'the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose.' He feels the typical Macbeth guilt: 'a heavy summons lies like lead' upon him (II. i. 6). He is enmeshed in Macbeth's horror, and, after the coronation, keeps the guilty secret, and lays to his heart a guilty hope. Banquo is thus involved. (p 172)

So we can say that Banquo is not totally free from evil. But a strong presence of moral impulse is felt in him. Just after the prophecy of the witches, when Macbeth puts unshakable belief in them and is totally lost in his thought, two messengers from the King arrived and greeted him as the 'Thane of Cawdor'(I. iii. 105), with which the witches greeted him earlier. Although this incident surprises Banquo, still he considers the witches as devils: 'What! Can the Devil speak true?' (I. iii. 106). Again, when two prophecies of the witches - Macbeth's becoming the 'Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor'- have come true in front of them, Macbeth, referring to the words of the witches, asks Banquo: "Do you not hope your children shall be kings, / When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me / Promis'd no less to them?" (I.iii. 117-9). Here also, instead of putting trust in the witches, he warns Macbeth about the probable negative consequences of trusting them so strongly:

> That, trusted home,
> Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
> Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
> And often times, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of Darkness tell us truth;
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence.- (I.iii.120-26)

But we see Banquo, a man of such clear moral vision, also puts trust in the words of the witches: after Act I, scene iii, he maintains a complete silence about the witches, as if he is waiting and observing Macbeth's condition. But just a little before the murder, when Macbeth is talking to him, Banquo mentions the witches: "I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters: / To you they have show'd some truth." (II.i.20-1). Kenneth Muir quotes "Cuningham thought these words were a 'veiled incitement to Macbeth'; but they are perfectly compatible with innocence" (p 46) Macbeth answers: "

> I think not of them:

Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve,
We would spend it in some words upon that business,
If you would grant the time. (II.i.23-6)

Then, Banquo says: "At your kind'st leisure." We find a remarkable difference between the man who earlier warns Macbeth against putting trust in the 'The instruments of Darkness', and the man who agrees to spend some words upon the business of the 'three Weird Sisters'. Again Macbeth proposes: "If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, / It shall make honor for you." Muir comments: "become or remain an adherent of my party when it exists, or follow my advice when the time comes. Macbeth is purposely ambiguous. His words can mean that he wants Banquo to support his claim to the crown in the event of Duncan's natural death, or they can be regarded as a bribe" (p 47). Again, at the beginning of Act III, we find Banquo, observing the fulfillment of all three predictions related to Macbeth, puts a very strong trust in the words of the witches:

Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the Weird Women promis'd; and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for't; yet it was said,
It should not stand in thy posterity;
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them
(As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine),
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope? (III. i. 1-10)

Here, we see an unshakeable confidence Banquo develops in the predictions of the witches. First he observes that all three predictions about Macbeth have already come true. He also feels that Macbeth did some foul thing to achieve it: 'Thou play'dst most foully for't;'. But, for him the important point is that no one from Macbeth's future generation would be king: 'It should not stand in thy posterity;'. Then he expresses his profound hope: 'But that myself should be the root and father / Of many kings'. On this passage Kenneth Muir comments:

> In Holinshed, Banquo is Macbeth's accomplice in the murder of Duncan; but as he was James I's ancestor he had to be treated with some respect. For purely dramatic reasons it was obviously desirable to contrast Macbeth and Banquo, and to give Macbeth and his wife no accomplices. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, pp. 384-5, thinks that this speech proves that Banquo has become an accessory to the murder because, out of ambition, ha has kept silent about the witches and thus refrained from exposing Macbeth. (p 72)

The above comparison among these three people shows that not only Lady Macbeth, but two brave army generals are also greatly influenced by the words of the witches. The influence is so overwhelming that all the three people did some things going beyond their nature which none of them would have done naturally. Behind Macbeth's all unnatural deeds there is his love for the throne; Behind Banquo's all unnatural deeds there is his love for his posterity, but behind the unnatural deeds of Lady Macbeth there is only her love for her husband; there is no other thought of personal gain. This point justifies Lady Macbeth's choosing these unnatural activities; she simply shares her husband's sin through fondness for him.

Another important point is that Lady Macbeth could not imagine what consequence her deeds would bring. She does not have the poetic imagination of Macbeth. She thought simply Duncan's murder would make Macbeth king, then all things would remain under their control. But, in contrast to her 'imperceptiveness', Macbeth had a clear moral imagination. Howard observes:

> Macbeth's clarity of moral imagination is contrasted with his wife's imperceptiveness. He is always seeing visions or hearing voices- a dagger in the air, the ghost of Banquo, a voice crying "sleep no more!"- and she is always denying them. "The sleeping and the dead? Are but as pictures," she insists. He knows that "all great Neptune's ocean" cannot wash the blood from his hands; "No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red." To Lady Macbeth, contrastingly, "A little water clears us of this deed./ how easy is it, then!" (2.2.57-72). Macbeth knows that the murder of Duncan is but the beginning: "We have scorched the snake, not killed it." Lady Macbeth would prefer to believe that "What's done is done" (3.2.14-15). (p 1257)

This lack of imagination is also responsible for her cruel activities. Serajul Islam Choudhury comments: "Her fault is not one; rather many. Her principal fault is her lack of imagination. She is not farsighted at all. She does see the consequence …she did not perceive the consequences of the way to which she led her husband. Had she perceived the consequence, she would not have done this; never ever" (p 40).

This is not all about Lady Macbeth; there is another Lady Macbeth inside her. If we do not observe her, all our assessment will be wrong, completely. Serajul Islam Choudhury again observes:

> Lady Macbeth could not imagine how terrible the reaction of Duncan's murder would be- both politically as well as in her personal life. She knows herself less; understands lesser. But in her inner-self there is a very sensitive human being- unknown and less understood by her. She is the real Lady Macbeth. Her cruelty is not innate; it is self-imposed, assumed and achieved. That is why she sees the face of her father in sleeping Duncan. Later … she is a conscience-pricked suffering human being. (p 41)

Indeed, in the course of the play, we can see Lady Macbeth at least at three different stages: first stage is before the murder of Duncan, here she has a very intimate relationship with her husband. Although they are physically far away from each other, emotional communication is very strong. As soon as Macbeth got the prediction about his royal future, he immediately feels an urgency to communicate it to his 'dearest partner of greatness'. At this stage she is very enthusiastic and plays the deciding role. All her cruel utterances and activities occur at this stage. What we see in the first part of the play is not her 'nature'; rather it is her 'will'. Serajul Islam Chowdhury says: "What she utters, all are the utterances of her worldly-wisdom; not the utterances of her conscience" (p 39). As soon as they achieved their goal – as the murder of Duncan is over, Lady Macbeth does not have any thing to do. Her plan does not go beyond this point. Now command is at the hand of Macbeth. In fact, for the first time we have a glimpse of her real nature just at the moment when Macbeth is giving a vivid description of Duncan's dead body:

> 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; (II.iii.113-6)

This description affects her conscience very acutely. Here Lady Macbeth started to feel the reality, and her disillusionment, though not very clear still, began. Earlier when Macbeth came out with the daggers, she rebukes him: "Why did you bring these daggers from the place? / They must lie there. Go, carry them and smear / The sleepy grooms with blood" (II.ii. 52-4). Macbeth refuses to go back: "I'll go no more. / I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on't again I dare not" (II.ii.55-7). Here Lady Macbeth takes the daggers from her husband and goes to Duncan's room to lay them there and smear blood on the faces and hands of the grooms. This time the scene does not affect her that much because she is still under a very strong illusion. But, as her excitement is over, and her disillusionment begins, her real nature cannot tolerate even the description of it. She faints. Serajul Islam Chowdhury thinks that her fainting is real; she is not pretending. Outwardly she is very strong; inwardly she is very weak. However cruel image she assumes, she is very kind hearted in her real nature (p39). Bradley observes:

> I decidedly believe that she is meant really to faint…She knew that she could not kill the king herself; and she never expected to have to carry back the daggers, see the bloody corpse, and smear the faces and hands of the grooms. But Macbeth's agony greatly alarmed her, and was driven to the scene of horror to complete his task; and what an impression it made on her we know from that sentence uttered in her sleep, 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' she had now, further, gone through the ordeal of the discovery. Is it not quite natural that the reaction should come, and that it should come just when Macbeth's description recalls the scene which had had cost her great effort? (p 460)

Her second stage is when she is the Queen of Scotland; at this stage, she is no more that much enthusiastic; rather, she is now a bit disillusioned. When her excitement is over, and she starts to be disillusioned, we find a different Lady Macbeth. Bradley observes:

> "Henceforth she has no initiative: the stem of her being seems to be cut through. Her husband,… comes into the foreground, and she retires. Her will remains, and she does her best to help him; but he rarely needs her help. Her chief anxiety appears to be that he should not betray his misery." (p 330)

Now she and her husband are under the same roof, but they do not have constant communication between them as it was earlier. We see her sending a servant to see whether she can have a few words with Macbeth: "Say to the King I would attend his leisure / For a few words" (III. ii.5-6). Bradley comments: "the glory of her dream has faded. She enters, disillusioned, and weary with want of sleep: she has thrown away everything and gained nothing" (p 330). Lady Macbeth soliloquizes:

Naught's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content,
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (III.ii. 7-10)

Now, Lady does not have any role to play in the activities of Macbeth. Here Macbeth is busy with his plan to murder Banquo. He has already hired murderers for this. But Lady Macbeth does not have slightest knowledge of it. Again, Bradley says: "He plans the murder of Banquo without her knowledge (not in order to spare her, I think, for he never shows love of this quality, but merely because he does not need her now); and even when she is told vaguely of his intention she appears but little interested" (p 330).

We see Lady Macbeth plays her last active role in saving her husband in the banquet scene. She does it purely out of her love for him. Bradley says:

> "In the sudden emergency of the banquet scene she makes a prodigious and magnificent effort; her strength, and with it her ascendancy, returns, and she saves her husband at least from an open disclosure. Bur after this she takes no part whatever in the action." (p 330)

We find Lady Macbeth at the third stage in her sleep-walking scene where she is totally lost. She does not have any communication with her husband who is busy with tackling violent political situation. The letter she writes and reads here clearly indicates the emotional distance between her and her husband. Serajul Islam Chowdhury says:

> "We see the real Lady Macbeth when she is totally alone –away from her husband. When Macbeth is busy to secure his throne, then the burden of the past activities comes heavily on her conscience. Now she loses her mental balance; walks in her sleep; talks to herself; washes her hand again and again and finally commits suicide. (p 39)

Actually what Macbeth experiences as auditory hallucination: "sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep", (II.ii.39-40) this inability to sleep comes true about Lady Macbeth. However masculinity she assumes, she cannot surpass her feminine nature. In this sleep-walking scene (Act V, scene i) we observe some unusual behavior of Lady Macbeth. It is reported to a doctor:

> Doctor: …When was it she last walked?
> Gentlewoman: Since His Majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep. (V.i. 2- 7)

The doctor calls it 'a great perturbation in nature' (V.i.8) and 'slumbery agitation' (V.i.10). Now, her activities in this scene show that she is affected by a mental disease. She does not have the usual characteristics of sleep; rather she shows the symptoms of somnambulism. From the words of the doctor, it is evident that earlier also she experienced such somnambulistic attacks. Here we can see some other of her abnormal behaviors: first, she continuously rubs her hands as if she is washing them to clean the blood of Duncan: 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him' (V.i.37). This act is a reminiscence of her earlier remark after the murder of Duncan- 'A little water clears us of this deed' (II.ii.73). Her second remark refers to the murder of Macduff's wife and children – 'The Thane of Fife had a wife, where is she now?'. Her third utterance refers to the murder of Banquo, 'I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave'. In this scene, we see various other fragmentary reminiscences, such as Macbeth's terror at the banquet in the words, 'You mar all with this starting,' the striking of the clock before the murder of King Duncan, and the reading of the first letter from Macbeth announcing the witches' prophecy. Thus a vivid and condensed panorama of all her crimes passes before her. The episode is made up of all the unnatural ideas and repressed emotions in her mind. The smell and sight of blood which she experiences, is one of those cases in which hallucinations developed out of subconscious fixed ideas which had acquired certain intensity.

Later in the scene, Lady Macbeth speaks as follows, disclosing the complex which leads to this apparently meaningless action. "What, will these hands ne'er be clean? ... Here's the smell of the blood still: All

the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Here the symptom develops through Lady Macbeth transferring an unpleasant group of memories or complexes, which have a strong personal and emotional significance, to an indifferent act or symptom. In the words, "Out damned spot - Out I say," the mechanism is that of an unconscious and automatic outburst. It is very doubtful if Lady Macbeth would have used these words if she were in her normal, waking condition. Thus the difference between the personality of Lady Macbeth in her somnambulistic and in the normal mental state, is a proof of the wide gap existing between these two types of consciousness. Peter Barry says:

> "Dreams, just like literature, do not usually make explicit statements. Both tend to communicate obliquely or indirectly, avoiding direct or open statement, and representing meanings through concrete embodiments of time, place, or person….Freud believes that a dream is an escape-hatch or safety-valve through which repressed desires, fears, or memories seek an outlet into the conscious mind." (p 99)

Lady Macbeth may therefore be looked upon as possessing two personalities, which appear and disappear according to the fluctuations of her mental level. In her normal, waking state, repression and an assumed bravery are marked. In the sleeping or somnambulistic state, the repression gives way to free expression and her innate cowardice becomes dominant. In her waking condition, she shows no fear of blood, but shrinks from it when in a state of somnambulism. Her counsel to her husband while awake is that of an emotionless cruelty, while in somnambulism she shows pity and remorse. If one could believe in the womanliness of Lady Macbeth, then her sleeping personality must be interpreted as the true one, because removed from the inhibition and the censorship of voluntary repression. Serajul Islam Chowdhury says:

> Lady Macbeth is a very complex character; more complex than the character of Macbeth. There are many-sidedness – simplicity, intelligence, attractiveness, love, cruelty, softness – in her character. The lonely Lady Macbeth suffering from an acute sense of guilt is not less true than the Lady Macbeth who instigate for murder. (p 41)

Lady Macbeth never tempts; she simply helps her husband achieve something that he wants to achieve. To play this role she assumes some evil as the situation requires it; otherwise she is not naturally depraved. Bradley says:

Her ambition for her husband and herself (there was no distinction to her mind) proved fatal to him, far more so that the prophecies of the witches; but even when she pushed him into murder she believed she was helping him to do what he merely lacked the nerve to attempt; and her part in the crime was so much less open-eyed than his, that, if the impossible and undramatic task of estimating degrees of culpability were forced on us, we should surely have to assign the larger share to Macbeth. (p 332)

There is a remarkable difference between the nature of Lady Macbeth and that of the witches. Macbeth never blames her for misguiding him. But, he is repentant for putting trust in the witches. There is no doubt that, at times, she is more than the witches. What the witches could not do, Lady Macbeth did it easily. The witches simply predicted that Macbeth shall be the next king; they did not show the way of his becoming king. It is Lady Macbeth who showed the way and led her husband playing a vigorous role. Still, there are many strong evidences to consider Lady Macbeth as a loving wife, than the evidences that show her as a cruel woman. Had cruelty and illness been there in her nature, she would not have needed to pray to the spirits and murdering ministers so fervently. Here, like Marlowe's Faustus- a good man who sells his soul to the devils in the hope of materializing his ambition- Lady Macbeth deliberately sells her soul to the devils so that she can help her husband achieve his much desired goal. Moreover, she influences Macbeth only for murdering Duncan. The murder of two guards was not in her plan; she does not know anything directly about the murder of Banquo, and about the murder of Lady Macduff, she does not have remotest knowledge or slightest responsibility. Again, the cruelty of Lady Macbeth is limited only in utterances; she never executes any act of cruelty. She cannot kill Duncan, simply because he resembles her father as he sleeps in darkness. She even cannot tolerate Macbeth's description of Duncan's dead body. The woman who cannot do this can never dash the brain of her child out. This is simply the exaggeration of an overexcited woman. Her cruelty is simply the expression of the moment of overexcitement. When excitement is over, she comes back to her nature. Then we find a different Lady Macbeth. The cruelty she utters is alien to her nature. That is why she cannot absorb them. In the sleep-walking scene, she unconsciously expresses many things which earlier she represses. As the Doctor observes: "Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds / To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets" (V.i.71-3), summarizes the total fact about Lady Macbeth that she did some deeds that are not there in her nature, so the unnatural things, we observe, occur to her.

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End Notes:

i. All quotations of Shakespeare's plays are from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* 5th Edition, Edited by David Bevington. New York: Longman (2003).

ii.All quotations from Serajul Islam Choudhury are in my own translation.

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