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Dissecting the Unconscious: A Psychoanalytical Exploration of Lady Macbeth's Gender Defiance and Dysphoria through Defence Mechanisms

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Abstract

This paper conducts a psychoanalytical exploration of Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, focusing on her psychological complexities and dilemmas through the lens of Freudian defence mechanisms. While traditional Freudian analyses often restrict Lady Macbeth's portrayal to the tripartite model of the psyche (id, ego and superego), this study aims to expand the scope by examining her excessive reliance on five key defence mechanisms: identification, projection, displacement, repression and regression. Drawing upon both Sigmund and Anna Freud's contributions to psychoanalytical theory, the paper investigates how these mechanisms align with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, positioning Lady Macbeth as a controversial yet prominent figure of gender defiance and dysphoria. The analysis also demonstrates how her inner conflicts and performative masculinity destabilize conventional gender binaries, challenging both patriarchal expectations and contemporary interpretations of madness. Moreover, it offers a critical re-evaluation of Lady Macbeth as a character shaped by the dynamic interplay of psychological defensiveness and gender performativity, aiming to both vindicate and critique her actions within the broader socio-cultural framework of Shakespearean tragedy.

Keywords: Defence Mechanisms, Gender Dysphoria, Gender Performativity, Psychoanalysis, Shakespearean Tragedy

Introduction

Shakespearean tragedies are timeless, not explicitly for “grandeur of thought” but due to their intricate portrayal of human nature in its rawest form. One of their greatest accomplishments is the incorporation of the physiological psychology prevalent during the Elizabethan times, highlighting the intimate connection between the body and the mind. (La Belle 382) *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, or simply *Macbeth*, makes use of this third realm of physiological psychology to provide a detailed account of every character present in it.

The play was likely written between 1599-1606, during the reign of King James VI of Scotland (later became James I of England), a renowned patron of Shakespeare’s acting company “The King’s Men.” It is one of the most intense tragedies that closely reflects the playwright’s engagement with themes of monarchy, political prowess and sovereign authority. Set primarily in Scotland, the play follows the overly ambitious Scottish general Macbeth as he descends into moral corruption and frenzy, driven by unchecked political power and intrigue. Thus, by blending supernatural elements such as witchcraft and prophecy into the plot, Shakespeare delves into the devastating physical and psychological burden of ambition through the figures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The legendary encounter with the three witches, the Weird Sisters, sets the tragic events in motion, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth conspire to murder King Duncan and seize the throne, igniting a chain of betrayal, guilt and catastrophic overthrow.

In this paper, our area of interest will be explored through the depiction of the infamous Lady Macbeth- a character so layered, a major initiator of the plot, despite her limited appearance in the play. She is the dual representative of submission and resistance, femininity and masculinity in the larger socio-cultural context, thereby displaying gender dysphoria. We shall primarily examine the psychoanalytical perspective, justifying the correlation between Lady Macbeth’s conscious and unconscious states of mind through her overwhelming dependence on the five Freudian defence mechanisms throughout the play, namely identification, projection, displacement, repression and regression. While these stages may be significantly overlapping, the ascent from one stage into the successive ones (in terms of the mentioned order) exhibits her descent into mental instability, or as some may call it, madness. Further, this study will attempt to both vindicate and hold her accountable, as necessary, by analysing and interpreting the causes and effects of these mechanisms, based on the foundation of Butler’s theory of gender performativity.

Methodology

This study primarily revolves around the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis to investigate the actions and attributes of Lady Macbeth, particularly attending to the nature, origins and impacts of defence mechanisms. Complementing this approach is a feminist viewpoint, drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which reveals gender as a rather illusory and fluid social construct shaped by performative acts. Together with these theories, the idea of gender defiance, essentially through the lens of gender dysphoria, is taken into consideration to not only critically evaluate but also defend Lady Macbeth's actions as and when deemed necessary.

Literature Review

Much of the existing scholarship has explored the character of Lady Macbeth through a psychoanalytical lens, highlighting her cognitive and social dissonance. Norman Holland in *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (1966) applies Freudian psychoanalysis to interpret Lady Macbeth's actions as motivated by repressed guilt and displaced aggression. John Bayley in *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (1981) navigates through psychological realism, taking into consideration the dynamics of her denial, repression and deteriorating identity. William Empson in *Essays on Shakespeare* (1986) investigates the ambiguity and discrepancy in her character. Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998) deals with her psychological complexity but with a less formal approach than others. Carol Thomas Neely in *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (2004) offers an intersectional reading of psychoanalysis and gender to interpret Lady Macbeth's madness, connecting it to early modern conceptions of hysteria and female subjectivity.

Research Gaps

Though the character of Lady Macbeth has been a subject of extensive research in terms of the Freudian psychoanalytical approach, existing scholarship often remains confined to the tripartite model of the psyche- id, ego and superego. This study seeks to address this

limitation by shifting the focus towards Lady Macbeth's excessive reliance on defence mechanisms as a central aspect of her psychological and social functioning. However, this does not suggest that defence mechanisms have been entirely overlooked in previous scholarship. Instead, this study builds upon existing interpretations while advancing the discourse by engaging with lesser explored mechanisms and introducing a few newer ideological frameworks in relation to Lady Macbeth. Furthermore, it bridges a gap in present-day literature by integrating both Sigmund and Anna Freud's contributions to psychoanalytic theory in conjunction with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, offering a more nuanced interdisciplinary approach to the character.

What Are Freudian Defence Mechanisms?

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, introduced the idea of defence mechanisms in the late 19th century, focusing on how the subconscious mind defends an individual against internal conflicts between the id, ego and superego. However, it was his daughter, Anna Freud, who further expanded and clarified these concepts in the 20th century, identifying 10 key defence mechanisms. (42-50) She describes these defence mechanisms as unconscious strategies used by the ego to protect the self against anxiety and stress arising from the tension between the impulsive id and the moralistic superego. (McLeod 2) They may remain consistent through different stages of life, or revert to earlier stages under stress or evolve as we mature. These may be demonstrated through internalization or externalization, potentially leading to behavioural issues that complicate treatment.

Identification

Identification is the defence mechanism undertaken by an individual to incorporate certain characteristics, traits or attributes from another person who holds a position of power, like an aggressor. Therefore, this individual undergoes a transformation in identity, either completely or partially, based on the model set by the latter. This phenomenon seems apparent in the character of Lady Macbeth. Let us dive deeper into this matter.

Deliberate Defeminization: An Internalized Form of Gendered Oppression

Lady Macbeth has often been harshly criticized for her supposed manipulation of Macbeth, leading to his eventual downfall. However, such a biased approach overlooks the rationale behind her actions. Her being regarded as the fourth witch further heightens the misogyny towards unfeminine women. The idea behind having conventionally masculine traits in women equates to the lack of femininity, relating to either gender-abiding appearances or behaviours. Banquo's bewilderment at the gender ambiguity posed by the Weird Sisters resonates with Lady Macbeth's deliberate defeminization at both physical and emotional levels. Although Lady Macbeth is considered the epitome of cruelty, her repressed guilt consumes her from within, thereby resulting in the sleepwalking scene.

There are contrasting notions on whether resorting to sorcery by invoking the dark spirits was deliberate or just an output of internalized gender oppression. Patriarchal society expects a woman to be her husband's supporter and enabler, even if it requires extreme sacrifice on her end. Lady Macbeth is indisputably an unconventional character whose deliberate defeminization may be perceived as a sacrificial ritual to ensure her husband's ascent to the throne. However, more than a "sacrificial" ritual, it seems to be one that eliminates an individual's weaknesses. Femininity is traditionally associated with the idea of nurturing and superfluous emotions. If anything at all, she considers her femininity a form of disability that puts her at a position of disadvantage. Therefore, she tries subverting this idea by eliminating her female identity as an inadequacy and trading it for the so-called superior masculine attributes.

Nevertheless, it makes us wonder about the need to get rid of her femininity; could she not have plotted by simply being herself all along? Given how naturally such unholy references come to her mind, how does that make her any different from what she aspires to be: a defeminized wife as a substitute for filling in her husband's ambitions?

"Nothing Is but What Is Not": Shakespeare's Intended Identification of Lady Macbeth with the Witches

To substantiate the preceding argument, we must draw upon Judith Butler's feminist theory on gender performativity in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, wherein she contends:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted

acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (180)

During the reign of James I, women who raised their voices or perhaps shared the same ambitious nature as Macbeth were considered a threat to the set patriarchal conventions. (Tomarken 81) Hence, they were labelled as demonically possessed, followed by their persecution, leading to several instances of mass witch-hunting (James I's *Demonology* is a testament to this). Anne Boleyn's execution by Henry VIII on false accounts of adultery, incest and treason furthermore reiterates our argument. However, the play challenges such rigid gender constructs all along. "Nothing is but what is not" (Shakespeare 1.3.142) and "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.10) are two such immensely acclaimed quotations reflecting the theme of appearance versus reality, thus blurring the lines between the natural and unnatural as two binary opposites. In the first act, the witches and Lady Macbeth appear in alternating scenes, illuminating Shakespeare's intentional representation of Lady Macbeth as a witch of sorts. Her identification with the aggressor happens at two levels- one, as discussed earlier, with the oppressive masculine forces, and second, with the unholy forces. While the three witches are required to create a ruckus in a particular scene, Lady Macbeth has a domineering screen presence to do so single-handedly.

Intertextual Identification: Lady Macbeth versus Rosalind

Both Lady Macbeth and Rosalind sexually transgress, but while the former is perceived as the devil incarnate, the latter is hailed as a likeable woman. Lady Macbeth's transgression undergoes a permanent change, involving rituals invoking the dark spirit. Rosalind, on the other hand, like many of Shakespeare's heroines in his romantic comedies, is subjected to cross-dressing to have a say in a male-dominated society, which otherwise would be completely disregarded. However, Rosalind gradually restores the order by returning to her birth-assigned name, thereby making her sexual transgression only temporary. Thus, Richmond believes, "The triumph of Rosalind in *As You Like It* is that she, having played both masculine and feminine roles, deliberately chooses to be a woman." (22)

Lady Macbeth thus serves as a fascinating embodiment of identification with the aggressor—although revolutionary in her own way, her transgression or subversion is a result of the mindset shaped by the misogynistic, patriarchal society.

Projection

Often referred to as "displacement outward" by Anna Freud, projection is a defence mechanism where an individual attributes their own undesirable thoughts, feelings or impulses to someone else. By doing so, they are able to protect their self-esteem by externalizing these negative or unacceptable desires or traits in others. We shall now examine how projection works in the case of Lady Macbeth.

The Failure of Lady Macbeth's Deliberate Defeminization

This section will analyse the reasons attributed to Lady Macbeth's projecting behaviour. As previously discussed, Lady Macbeth goes through the rigorous cycle of unsexing herself, culminating in the purgation of superfluous emotions or simply the standard compassion that makes us human. The main idea behind her deliberate defeminization is to get rid of the feminine emotions that coincide with her unredeemable flaw of being a woman. It is not essentially the banishment but rather the substitution of those "inferior" feminine emotions with hyper-masculine instincts of ambition. However, whether or not Lady Macbeth has successfully undergone such an enormous transition is contestable.

Her inability to murder Duncan herself, since he reminds her of her late father, shows that she might not have completely exorcised her emotions after all. Ironically, this happens right after her ritualistic invocation of the dark spirits. Could that mean all of it was a hoax, with Lady Macbeth being a mere fraudulent rhetorician? Regardless, she is unable to separate her femininity from her true self. Her character development highlights her transformation from masculine ambitions to the gradual realisation of her restrictions as a female. She does not live in denial like Macbeth. Being a product of the patriarchal society that she inhabits, Lady Macbeth knows its reality to the very core, which manifests in her desire for defeminization. Unfortunately, she subverts the social conventions of gender just to follow the path paved by the same conventional society in the end. Hence, she is willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband and is determined to prevent him, the to-be majestic king, from experiencing gender fluidity of any sort. She constantly reminds him of his social role

as a “man,” which is not solely to possess masculine attributes but hyper-masculine mannerisms of aggression, corruption and destruction. She tries her best to push Macbeth to follow the Machiavellian patterns of kinship for him to achieve his individualistic aspirations.

Projecting Gender Dysphoria

Some critics believe that, having been born a female, no amount of physical or metaphorical unsexing can deny Lady Macbeth’s identity as the inferior of the two sexes. Her ambitious instincts align with those of Macbeth, even though they are predominantly motivated to elevate him to an undefeated pedestal. This may seem like a selfless act performed by a sacrificing wife, yet she also resorts to projection as a defence mechanism to calm down her psychological turmoil. Consequently, her projecting behaviour operates on two levels.

First, she projects her gender dysphoria onto Macbeth, whom she believes has an abundance of the “milk of human kindness” (Shakespeare 1.5.17), so much so that he winces at the mere thought of carrying out the murder of Duncan. Every time Macbeth shows reluctance to proceed with the murder plan, Lady Macbeth tries to instigate him into taking action by consistently bringing his manhood into question. Ramsey believes, “the play is unique for the persistence and subtlety with which Shakespeare dramatizes the paradoxes of self-conscious ‘manhood.’” (286) In this way, she is mocking the concept of Original Sin equivalent of being born a female by projecting her frustration onto the husband, who displays the bare minimum human qualities as castrative tendencies, unworthy of being associated with masculinity of any kind. The lamentable fact is that to be a ruler, society labels feminine attributes like compassion, concern and empathy as worthless, probably indicating why Duncan was brutally betrayed. Paradoxically, the selective empathy witnessed in these men is of quite a self-serving nature, whose aggressive side was fairly apparent too, for instance, as seen through Macbeth killing thousands on the battlefield.

Projecting Ambition

Another level of projection plays out with the fulfilment of Lady Macbeth’s calculative ambitions. Language is quite integral in *Macbeth*, with Lady Macbeth making the most out of it to influence her husband and deaden any sort of human sentiment that prohibits him from usurping Duncan’s throne. (Gamit 13) She feels a sense of superiority over Macbeth when she feminizes his normal human affiliations to contemplation and fear before

making a major decision. By being the more psychologically dominant partner of the two, she projects her inferiority complex of being unable to yield the same power, reverence and status as a man onto her seemingly less cruel husband, Macbeth (at that point). Such a projection of disappointment in her female identity onto him reinforces her envy for the male-dominated space, a desire to be much more than a mere caregiver, nurturer and supporter like Lady Macduff. Conversely, tracing this theory to our earlier stated arguments, it may be said that Lady Macbeth seems to be avenging the historical exclusion of competent women from positions of leadership and participation in warfare.

Displacement

Displacement refers to the redirection of an impulse onto a less threatening or powerless target, which can be another person or an object that serves as a symbolic substitute. This mechanism takes place when the id desires to act in a certain way that the superego refuses to. The ego finds an alternative way, in response, to release the id's psychic energy, which gets shifted from a repressed object of desire to a more acceptable one. This is generally associated with negative emotions like aggression, fury and hatred that may explain the feelings of inferiority, guilt and repression in someone.

There might seem to be a rather close association between Lady Macbeth's use of projection and displacement as defence mechanisms; nevertheless, they have different connotations when deeply analyzed. She nudges Macbeth to smear blood on the guards' faces after having carried out the gruesome murder of Duncan. Macbeth is quite shaken by this incident, whilst considering himself the sole conspirator against Duncan, followed by the distinct feeling of remorse creeping over him that he essentially cannot get rid of. His anxieties parallel those experienced later by Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene. She is not unaware of the trials and tribulations her husband is going through, but as discussed before, this is her id phase, wherein guilt has not yet developed. However, there might still be a slight tinge of a repressed form of guilt for the heinous crime that she is an equal, if not greater, contributor to.

Subsequently, Macbeth's guilt takes a more externalized form, while Lady Macbeth's remains rather internalized- a contrasting reversal, considering that in the initial stages of their murderous partnership, she appeared to be the more unshaken of the two. Ironically,

Macbeth's guilt at that point was so profoundly internalized that he became oblivious of leaving evidence of his presence at the murder scene, consumed by overwhelming fear and remorse. This was unlike Lady Macbeth, who tries externalizing the guilt by displacing it onto the guards who would most likely be suspected of Duncan's murder. Hence, her instructing Macbeth to smear the blood on their faces is a definitive act of the displacement of physical murder and mental culpability onto the innocent, socially inferior guards. In this manner, she believes that they can continue living their lives normally without any compunctions. Paradoxically, this displacement asserts its temporality and transience as it stands useless in the long run for the duo. The remorse is just too huge to be displaced by a simple physical act of blood smearing.

Repression

To understand this concept better, we need to take into consideration Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, where he explicitly mentions the psychology that goes behind dream formation. Dreams represent the repressed urges and instincts of an individual that constitute a part of the unconscious that one may have no clue about in their conscious state of mind. (604) This is quite literally the subject matter of the sleepwalking scene in act V. Sigmund Freud's tripartite structural model of the psyche divides the personality into three interconnected components, namely the id, ego and superego. (2010: 51) Being the complex character that she is, Lady Macbeth is the representative of all three above-mentioned components.

The Overbearing Id of Lady Macbeth

Id refers to that component of one's personality that strictly works on the pleasure principle, focusing on the immediate gratification of their instincts. Despite its nature and medium, id disregards the social conventions associated with such obstinate self-fulfilment as its goal. Lady Macbeth primarily operates on this pleasure principle. In the initial acts, her id takes over her ability to consider societal norms. The whole process of witchcraft involving her unsexing through the invocation of the dark spirits and deliberate defeminization by allowing her domineering ambitions proves our argument. Her obsessive desire for menstrual cessation, brutal infanticide, patrilineal occlusion and murder of the "milk of human kindness" are consequences of the given trajectory. (Gamit 13) Despite knowing the

aftermath of such a transgressive act of treason and betrayal of kinship, Lady Macbeth is hell-bent upon proceeding with their plan to murder Duncan. Macbeth, on the other hand, is cognizant of the repercussions this offensive act might have, as seen in his soliloquy where he measures the pros and cons of the same. This aspect showcases Macbeth's ego in action, which strikes a balance between the id and the superego (even though later, his id takes over, thus proceeding with the murder). In retrospect, Lady Macbeth believes in the idea of *carpe diem*, that is, to act in the moment without consistently worrying about the future.

What Triggers Sleepwalking: Ego or Restrained Superego?

The superego operates on the morality principle, which strictly takes into account the social and moral implications associated with it, while disregarding the desires of the individual. What we observe in the character of Lady Macbeth, at least in the beginning, is a complete lack of the superego. However, this does not mean that her morality radar has completely gone off the charts. As the play progresses, the gradual shift in Lady Macbeth's personality is evident; from being overly ambitious to accepting their predicament, as she denotes "what's done is done" (Shakespeare 3.2.11-12), and finally being consumed by intense guilt and remorse. In the words of Harish Gamit, her ego is symbolized by the fact that she "gradually distances herself from her husband, the instigator of Macbeth's crimes, becomes marginalized, turning from an agitator to a mere spectator of Macbeth's atrocities." (13)

If there had been a play solely based on Lady Macbeth, the sleepwalking scene would act as the climax, leading to her eventual suicide. Somnambulism, the medical term for sleepwalking, serves as a period of trance in which an individual is neither conscious nor completely unconscious. It may appear as though the person is awake, but in actuality, it is an evident manifestation of their unconscious mind. Normally, the body and mind function in harmony; however, sleepwalking represents a disruption in this coordination, wherein the mind fails to send the appropriate signals to inhibit locomotion during sleep. This scene stands as a testimony to the mental agony that she had been going through, despite her ritualistic, deliberate defeminization.

The imagery of blood and children functions as a recurring trope in *Macbeth*. Thus, Rosenberg claims, "That a babe is Macbeth's most powerful symbol has been suggested by L. C. Knights and Cleanth Brooks." (14) Ironic is the fact that Lady Macbeth in her id stage, her

previous defeminized self, uses these two aspects of human commonality as rationalizing metaphors for the usurpation of Duncan's throne. However, later, while she is sleepwalking, her visual and olfactory hallucinations related to the blood spots are evidence of the repressed guilt that externalizes itself. (La Belle 385) What she had once sort of gained victory over has now come to haunt her in the form of a literal nightmare. Additionally, the infancy imagery used earlier in terms of infanticide now becomes a state that Lady Macbeth is slowly descending into. We shall discuss more about this when we delve into her regression stage. Such prominent changes in her character show that she is a human after all; if not, she would certainly be no less than a sociopath or the representative of pure evil, standing along with Hecate herself. (Munro 34)

The difference between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's manifestation of guilt is pretty juxtaposing. Being a man and a warrior, he has the scope for translating his emotional turmoil into justified aggression on the battlefield. Lady Macbeth, by contrast, has to unwillingly repress her remorseful outbursts that end up taking a toll on her mental health, which finds an outlet only through the unconscious state of the mind, materialized through sleepwalking. No matter how much she tries to convince Macbeth about not dwelling in the past, she herself is stuck in it and cannot seem to move past it. The famous quotation, "What's done cannot be undone" (Shakespeare 5.1.68), shows her acceptance of reality, but at the same time, the failure to reconcile with it, as a result of the emotional burden weighing down her shoulders. While Macbeth sees the murder as an individual act, Lady Macbeth sees it as a collective one. She considers herself as much a participant as Macbeth in the successive impulsive murders of Duncan and others to safeguard his esteemed position. Although Macbeth is an adult who acts on free will, Lady Macbeth is an easy scapegoat of misogyny to rationalize his aggression and anti-social tendencies.

Critics, however, have conflicting viewpoints on whether this is a situation of the ego or the superego acting. Is this an instance of character development or just the defeat of woman-power? Some critics believe that her mental agony does not result from actual remorse; instead, it is fear of the consequences of the grotesque crime she has partaken in. This phenomenon is what we may believe the ego to be taking its course, that is, striking a balance between the impulsive id and the excessively moralistic superego. However, Gamit has found a term that is a perfect blend of the ego and superego, which truly represents Lady Macbeth's state of mind during her somnambulism: "restrained superego." (15)

Regression

Regression is a defence mechanism in which an individual subconsciously returns to an earlier stage of development, often as a way to cope with stress or anxiety. They make use of escapism to help revert to a time when they felt more secure and less overwhelmed.

Lady Macbeth's Self-Infantilization

The sleepwalking scene highlights Lady Macbeth's descent into self-infantilization. Throughout the play, we come across recurring imagery associated with children, with references to blood and infancy, all of which signify a relationship between the body and the mind. (La Belle 381) Earlier in the play, her willingness to abandon motherhood is witnessed, literally and symbolically offering to sacrifice her ability to nurture a child in exchange for Macbeth's power. This presents a paradox, given the stark difference in the significance of infancy at the beginning and towards the end of *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's use of such enigmatic recurring symbols to expose the commonality that binds all humans, whilst the unholy invocation becomes a sacrifice of both, is worth noting. The inclusion of a candle during her sleepwalking, though dependent on the director's interpretation, serves as a compelling symbol of her psychological landscape. This regression into a more primitive, childlike state is an outward manifestation of her heightened guilt in the form of lullabies and fragmented language. The candle represents her reliance on the assuring, comforting and peaceful nature of the light guiding her, much like a child. Therefore, most directors of the play would make sure to efficiently use the candle as a prop to convey the hidden meaning to their audience. Conversely, directors like Siddons' portrayal of putting down the candle frees both of Lady Macbeth's hands to compulsively wash away the imaginary blood throughout the entire scene. (Bernstein 33)

This phase of regression mirrors that of Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. As Esther spirals into clinical depression, she longs for a return to childhood, seeing death as a possible escape that might restore her lost innocence. (Schwartz and Bollas 162) Similarly, Lady Macbeth's descent into depression and madness, arising from her repressed emotions, seems to be her attempt to revert to a pre-adult stage, a retreat from the horrors she has helped create. Both characters, in their mental decline, contemplate suicide as a way of breaking free from the oppressive forces of patriarchy. (Tomarken 85)

The Symbolism of (Blood)line

One significant aspect of Lady Macbeth's physical and mental disintegration is her disgust towards blood, which stands in stark contrast to her earlier nonchalance about the violent murder she had orchestrated. Lady Macbeth's outrageous claims of unsexing herself defined her as a sub-human, a weird blend of human and witch. However, acts like compulsive washing of hands and growing fear of blood indicate her regression to a childlike state, or more appropriately, to an ordinary human, where she is frightened by what she once commanded. The sleepwalking scene in *Macbeth* is considered to have supernatural elements depicting Lady Macbeth's supposed demonic possession, though scientifically speaking, it could also represent a psychological unravelling, such as schizophrenia, brought on by her repressed guilt. The visual and olfactory hallucinations, furthermore, reflect the mental instability that can arise from such emotional repression.

Lady Macbeth's fear of blood is also tied to a deeper anxiety about Macbeth's bloodline and patrilineage. (Chamberlain 82) Her earlier invocation of the dark spirits, which involved the brutal murders of those in line for the throne, left them without an heir. This absence of a male successor is not only a blow to Macbeth's legacy but also the symbolic death of his lineage. Thus, Richmond states, "The lack of an heir is a significant failure in kingship, and anxieties about the succession in the Elizabethan period found expression in tragedies from Gorboduc onwards." (20) She regrets this and feels personally responsible as she sought power at the expense of the natural order that acts as yet another instance of regression, indicating the cessation of her menstrual flow. In this respect, Sadler's perspective is in sync with the theories of medical humanities, as he states, "the wombe communicates to the heart by the mediation of those Arteries which come from Aorta." La Belle justifies this statement by saying, "If the thickened blood blocks the passage of the womb, then, it also stops up the access to the heart from which remorse could flow." (382) Rather than symbolizing menopause, it signifies a return to a pre-pubescent state, an attempt to erase her biological femininity as a means of reclaiming control. Ultimately, her suicide represents the final stage of this regression (much like Esther), where she retreats entirely from life, unable to cope with the aftermath of her actions.

Conclusion

Lady Macbeth's psychological turmoil in *Macbeth* offers a compelling exploration of Freudian defence mechanisms, bringing forth the intricate interplay between her conscious and unconscious states of mind. Through the mechanisms of identification, projection, displacement, repression and regression, Shakespeare has quite skilfully constructed a character whose descent into madness is not merely a consequence of external circumstances but is deeply embedded in her internal conflicts. Her deliberate defeminization and alignment with the witches demonstrate her attempt at identification, while projection exposes her internalized anxieties regarding ambition and gender roles. Displacement allows her to redirect her repressed desires and gender dysphoria, while the repression of her mental turbulence manifests in her eventual breakdown, culminating in the iconic sleepwalking scene. Finally, regression signals her ultimate retreat into a childlike state, showcasing the fragility of her psyche under the emotional burden of guilt and remorse.

By dissecting Lady Macbeth's defence mechanisms through a psychoanalytical lens, this paper sheds light on the broader implications of gender defiance and dysphoria when *Macbeth* was composed, where power and ambition in women were often linked with psychological instability. Shakespeare's portrayal of Lady Macbeth does not just serve as a testament to the depth of his psychological insight but also heavily challenges rigid gender polarities by depicting a woman who both defies and succumbs to societal expectations. Hence, Lady Macbeth's tragic unravelling underscores the profound consequences of unresolved psychological conflicts, reinforcing the timeless relevance of Shakespearean tragedies in understanding, analysing and interpreting the human mind.

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