

Reflections in the Mirror

Literature is a critical mirror that obliquely reveals social problems. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Hawkin's *Lady M* portray the title characters as victims of societal injustice: Macbeth through the caste system, and Lady Macbeth through gender inequity. Through their work, Shakespeare reveals the social problem of government's feudal caste system, and Hawkins reveals the social problem of gender inequity and reminds people of the importance of families.

Shakespeare successfully illustrates that Macbeth's tragedy is that he becomes a victim of the caste system due to his need for power and brutal adaption to the environment. A caste system is a social system based on ascribed statuses, which are traits or characteristics that people possess as a result of their birth (Modern Stratification Systems). During the 1600s, social and political power was in the hands of the nobility, who claimed their authority from service to society and superior "blood" (A Hybrid Economy). Therefore, within the feudal society of the caste system, power means everything.

First, Britain's social caste system gives Macbeth a strong ambition to consolidate power for himself and his family. Macbeth is initially the heroic warrior who, together with Banquo, fights loyally in support of his king against the rebels. Since the caste system denies equal opportunity for individual advancement and offers the king large amounts of power, ambition to gain more power and higher position becomes progressively larger within the ruling class.

Macbeth demonstrates that this process continues until it destroys human nature. Macbeth's ambition spirals out of control and forces him to murder Banquo.

Second, the caste system strongly undermines social stability. From 1600 to 1640, the king of Scotland from James VI to Charles I was changed more than four times (Undiscoverdscotland). Under the cruel atmosphere of scrambling for power and wealth, Macbeth becomes brutal in order to adapt to his living environment. Macbeth abandons reasoning mindless savagery and plunges from covert to open slaughter in order to consolidate his crown. He kills all the people who continuously constitute a threat to him including Macduff's wife and children. Macbeth is representative of the type of people who are institutionalized by the caste system. The caste system changes Macbeth's human nature by stimulating his ambitions and affecting his living environment. Therefore, the caste system is the real murderer that pushes Macbeth to the guillotine, ultimately making him a victim of its repression.

While Macbeth is a victim of his system of government, Lady Macbeth falls victim to gender inequity in Hawkins successful illustration of the play. First, the unequal social system raises Lady Macbeth's ambition and makes her become a murderer. In the 17th century, there were only a few women who attained positions of power. Most women, regardless of class, would have expected to get married eventually (Plowden, 2012). In order to pursue power, Lady Macbeth tricks Macbeth into killing Duncan by using cunning and manipulative words. Second, the unequal social system limits Lady Macbeth's life value. In the 17th century, bearing and rearing children was of course a major part of most women's

lives (Plowden, 2012). As the queen of Scotland, it is more important for Lady Macbeth to have a child than for a woman in a lower class. Lady Macbeth suffers the pain of being unable to have children, and she goes in and out of sleep with delirious visions of babies crying. Finally, envy makes her leave her conscience behind. She cruelly kills Lady Macduff and her children and holds Lady Macduff's baby in her arms to enjoy the experience of being a mother. If the society Lady Macbeth lives in were more equal and democratic, she would have been better able to pursue power and position and not be ridden with envy and angst about bearing children.

Hawkins successfully uses Lady Macbeth's love, affection, and desire of family to remind people the importance of families. The *Lion King*, *West Side Story*, and *She's the Mare* are all modernized adaptations of Shakespeare (Flair, 2012). The big difference between *Lady M* and these other plays is *Lady M* still adheres to the original text instead of creating a fully modern version. The purpose of this choice is to emphasize that the play takes place in the 17th century and not today. Although the world in 1600s England is not as complex as the world we live now, the people who live in 17th century has strong desires for family. However, from 1867-1929, the number of divorces steadily increased, from 9,937 in 1867, to 201,468 in 1929 (WisegEEK, 2010). More currently, Time Magazine has reported that more and more women today are afraid of losing their jobs from taking time out to have a child (Lederman, 2012). Family will take care of your wellbeing, and try their best to provide you the greatest comforts in the world. However, modern society dictates a shift from dedication to family to dedication to job. In contrast to there situations, Lady Macbeth prefers

to betray her conscience and sacrifice her life to pursue a family through murder. Hawkings' work serves as a reminder about the dangers of ignoring the importance of family.

The society in which Shakespeare lived was strongly hierarchical. Shakespeare successfully criticizes the government by revealing the disadvantage of the caste system. Turning forward to today, Hawkins obliquely reveals the problem of both the 17 century and current societies --gender inequity and failing family relationship. Although *Macbeth* and *Lady M* have absolutely different perspectives and focuses; they both clearly present the current social situation as a mirror and leave space for people to think.

Citation

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