

= Lady Macbeth =

Lady Macbeth is a character in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c.1603 ? 1607) . She is the wife of the play's antagonist , Macbeth , a Scottish nobleman . After goading him into committing regicide , she becomes Queen of Scotland , but later suffers pangs of guilt for her part in the crime . She dies off @-@ stage in the last act , an apparent suicide .

According to some genealogists , Lady Macbeth and King Duncan's wife were siblings or cousins , where Duncan's wife had a stronger claim to the throne than Lady Macbeth . It was this that incited her jealousy and hatred of Duncan .

The character's origins lie of the accounts of Kings Duff and Duncan in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) , a history of Britain familiar to Shakespeare . Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth appears to be a composite of two separate and distinct personages in Holinshed's work : Donwald's nagging , murderous wife in the account of King Duff , and Macbeth's ambitious wife Gruoch of Scotland in the account of King Duncan .

Lady Macbeth is a powerful presence in the play , most notably in the first two acts . Following the murder of King Duncan , however , her role in the plot diminishes . She becomes an uninvolved spectator to Macbeth's plotting , and a nervous hostess at a banquet dominated by her husband's hallucinations . Her fifth act sleepwalking scene is a turning point in the play , and her line , " Out , damned spot ! , " has become a phrase familiar to many speakers of the English language . The report of her death late in the fifth act provides the inspiration for Macbeth's " Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow " speech .

Analysts see in the character of Lady Macbeth the conflict between femininity and masculinity , as they are impressed in cultural norms . Lady Macbeth suppresses her instincts toward compassion , motherhood , and fragility ? associated with femininity ? in favour of ambition , ruthlessness , and the singleminded pursuit of power . This conflict colours the entire drama , and sheds light on gender @-@ based preconceptions from Shakespearean England to the present .

The role has attracted countless notable actors over the centuries , including Sarah Siddons , Charlotte Melmoth , Helen Faucit , Ellen Terry , Jeanette Nolan , Vivien Leigh , Simone Signoret , Vivien Merchant , Glenda Jackson , Francesca Annis , Judith Anderson , Judi Dench , Renée O'Connor , Tabu , Keeley Hawes , Alex Kingston , Angela Bassett and Marion Cotillard .

= = Origins = =

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth appears to be a composite of two personages found in the account of King Duff and in the account of King Duncan in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) . In the account of King Duff , one of his captains , Donwald , suffers the deaths of his kinsmen at the orders of the King . Donwald then considers regicide at " the setting on of his wife " , who " showed him the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it . " Donwald abhors such an act , but perseveres at the nagging of his wife . After plying the King's servants with food and drink and letting them fall asleep , the couple admit their confederates to the King's room , where they then commit the regicide . The murder of Duff has its motivation in revenge , rather than ambition .

In Holinshed's account of King Duncan , the discussion of Lady Macbeth is confined to a single sentence :

" The words of the three Weird Sisters also (of whom before ye have heard) greatly encouraged him hereunto ; but specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing , as she was very ambitious , burning with an unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen . "

Not found in Holinshed are the invocation to the " spirits that tend on mortal thoughts , " the sleepwalking scene , and various details found in the drama concerning the death of Macbeth .

Although Macbeth's wife can be traced to a real @-@ world counterpart , Queen Gruoch of Scotland , Shakespeare's fictional character is tied so weakly to her that the bonds are virtually non @-@ existent .

= = Role in the play = =

Lady Macbeth makes her first appearance late in scene five of the first act , when she learns in a letter from her husband that three witches have prophesied his future as King . When King Duncan becomes her overnight guest , Lady Macbeth seizes the opportunity to effect his murder . Aware her husband 's temperament is " too full o ' the milk of human kindness " for committing a regicide , she plots the details of the murder ; then , countering her husband 's arguments and reminding him that he first broached the matter , she belittles his courage and manhood , finally winning him to her designs .

The King retires after a night of feasting . Lady Macbeth drugs his attendants and lays daggers ready for the commission of the crime . Macbeth kills the sleeping King while Lady Macbeth waits nearby . When he brings the daggers from the King 's room , his Lady orders him to return them to the scene of the crime . He refuses . She carries the daggers to the room and smears the drugged attendants with blood . The couple retire to wash their hands .

Following the murder of King Duncan , Lady Macbeth 's role in the plot diminishes . When Duncan 's sons flee the land in fear for their own lives , Macbeth is appointed King . Without consulting his Queen , Macbeth plots other murders in order to secure his throne , and , at a royal banquet , the Queen is forced to dismiss her guests when Macbeth hallucinates . In her last appearance , she sleepwalks in profound torment . She dies off @-@ stage , with suicide being suggested as its cause , when Malcolm declares that she died by " self and violent hands . "

In the First Folio , the only source for the play , she is never referred to as " Lady Macbeth " , but variously as " Macbeth 's wife " , " Macbeth 's lady " , or just " lady " .

= = Sleepwalking scene = =

The sleepwalking scene is one of the most celebrated scenes from Macbeth , and , indeed , in all of Shakespeare . It has no counterpart in Shakespeare 's source material for the play , Holinshed 's Chronicles , but is solely the Bard 's invention .

A.C. Bradley notes that , with the exception of the scene 's few closing lines , the scene is entirely in prose with Lady Macbeth being the only major character in Shakespearean tragedy to make a last appearance " denied the dignity of verse . " According to Bradley , Shakespeare generally assigned prose to characters exhibiting abnormal states of mind or abnormal conditions such as somnambulism , with the regular rhythm of verse being inappropriate to characters having lost their balance of mind or subject to images or impressions with no rational connection . Lady Macbeth 's recollections ? the blood on her hand , the clock striking , her husband 's reluctance ? are brought forth from her disordered mind in chance order with each image deepening her anguish . For Bradley , Lady Macbeth 's " brief toneless sentences seem the only voice of truth " with the spare and simple construction of the character 's diction expressing a " desolating misery . " Lady Macbeth 's compulsive washing of her hands to rid them of blood is reminiscent of hand washing common among sufferers from Obsessive @-@ compulsive disorder .

= = Analyses of the role = =

= = = Lady Macbeth as anti @-@ mother = = =

Stephanie Chamberlain in her article " Fantasizing " Infanticide : Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England " argues that though Lady Macbeth wants power , her power is ? conditioned on maternity ? , which was a ? conflicted status in early modern England . ? Chamberlain argues that the negative images of Lady Macbeth as a mother figure , such as when she discusses her ability to " bash the brain of the babe that sucks her breast " , reflect controversies concerning the image of motherhood in early modern England . In early modern England , mothers were often accused of hurting the innocent lives that were placed in their hands . Lady Macbeth then personifies all mothers of early modern England who were condemned for Lady

Macbeth's fantasy of infanticide. Lady Macbeth's fantasy, Chamberlain argues, is not struggling to be a man, but rather struggling with the condemnation of being a bad mother that was common during that time.

Jenijoy La Belle takes a slightly different view in her article, "A Strange Infirmity: Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea." La Belle states that Lady Macbeth does not wish for just a move away from femininity; she is asking the spirits to eliminate the basic biological characteristics of womanhood. The main biological characteristic that La Belle focuses on is menstruation. La Belle argues that by asking to be "unsex[ed]" and crying out to spirits to "make thick[her] blood / Stop up th[is] access and passage to remorse," Lady Macbeth asks for her menstrual cycle to stop. By having her menstrual cycle stop, Lady Macbeth hopes to stop any feelings of sensitivity and caring that is associated with females. She hopes to become like a man to stop any sense of remorse for the regicide. La Belle furthers her argument by connecting the stopping of the menstrual cycle with the persistent infanticide motifs in the play. La Belle gives examples of "the strangled babe" whose finger is thrown into the witches' cauldron (4.1.30); Macduff's babes who are "savagely slaughter'd" (4.3.235); and the suckling babe with boneless gums whose brains Lady Macbeth would dash out (1.7.57-58) to argue that Lady Macbeth represents the ultimate anti-mother: not only would she smash in a baby's brains but she would go even further to stop her means of procreation altogether.

== Lady Macbeth as witch ==

Some literary critics and historians argue that not only does Lady Macbeth represent an anti-mother figure in general, she also embodies a specific type of anti-mother: the witch. Critic Joanna Levin defines a witch as a woman who succumbs to Satanic force, a lust for the devil, and who, either for this reason or the desire to obtain supernatural powers, invokes (evil) spirits. English physician Edward Jorden published *Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* in 1603, in which he speculated that this force literally derived from the female sexual reproductive organs. Because no one else had published any other studies on the susceptibility of women, especially mothers, to becoming both the witch and the bewitched (i.e. demonically possessed), Jorden's findings helped create the foundation for the views popularized during the Renaissance about the relationship between women and witchcraft. Levin refers to Marianne Hester's *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of Male Domination*, in which Hester articulates a feminist interpretation of the witch as an empowered woman. Levin summarises the claim of feminist historians like Hester: the witch should be a figure celebrated for her nonconformity, defiance, and general sense of empowerment; witches challenged patriarchal authority and hierarchy, specifically "threatening hegemonic sex / gender systems." This view associates witchcraft and by extension, Lady Macbeth not with villainy and evil, but with heroism.

Jenijoy La Belle assesses Lady Macbeth's femininity and sexuality as they relate to motherhood, and witchhood as well. The fact that she conjures spirits likens her to a witch, and the act itself establishes a similarity in the way that both Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters from the play "use the metaphoric powers of language to call upon spiritual powers who in turn will influence physical events" in one case the workings of the state, in the other the workings of a woman's body. "Like the witches, Lady Macbeth strives to make herself an instrument for bringing about the future. She proves herself a defiant, empowered nonconformist, and an explicit threat to a patriarchal system of governance in that, through challenging his masculinity, she manipulates Macbeth into murdering King Duncan. Despite the fact that she calls him a coward, Macbeth remains reluctant, until she asks: "What beast wasn't, then, that made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man." Thus Lady Macbeth enforces a masculine conception of power, yet only after pleading to be unsexed, or defeminised. The Weird Sisters are also depicted as defeminised, androgynous figures. They are bearded (1.3.46), (which may also be associated with Lady Macbeth's amenorrhea). Witches were perceived as an extreme type of anti-mother, even considered capable of cooking and eating their own children. Although Lady Macbeth may not

express violence toward her child with that same degree of grotesqueness , she certainly expresses a sense of brutality when she states that she would smash the babe 's head .

= = Performance history = =

John Rice , a boy actor with the King 's Men , may have played Lady Macbeth in a performance of what was likely Shakespeare 's tragedy at the Globe Theatre on 20 April 1611 . The performance was witnessed and described by Simon Forman in his manuscript *The Book of Plays and Notes thereof per Formans for Common Policy* . His account , however , does not establish whether the play was Shakespeare 's *Macbeth* or a work on the same subject by another dramatist . The role may have been beyond the talents of a boy actor and may have been played by a man in early performances .

In the mid 18th century , Hannah Pritchard played Lady Macbeth opposite David Garrick 's *Macbeth* . She was , in Thomas Davies ' words , " insensible to compunction and inflexibly bent on cruelty . "

Sarah Siddons starred in John Philip Kemble 's 1794 production at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane and offered a psychologically intricate portrait of Lady Macbeth in the tradition of Hannah Pritchard . Siddons was especially praised for moving audiences in the sleepwalking scene with her depiction of a soul in profound torment . Siddons and Kemble furthered the view established by Pritchard and Garrick that character was the essence of Shakespearean drama .

William Hazlitt commented on Siddons ' performance :

In speaking of the character of Lady Macbeth , we ought not to pass over Mrs. Siddons 's manner of acting that part . We can conceive of nothing grander . It was something above nature . It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance . Power was seated on her brow , passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine ; she was tragedy personified . In coming on in the sleeping scene , her eyes were open , but their sense was shut . She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did . Her lips moved involuntarily ? all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical . She glided on and off the stage like an apparition . To have seen her in that character was an event in every one 's life , not to be forgotten .

Helen Faucit was critiqued by Henry Morley , a professor of English literature in University College , London , who thought the actress " too demonstrative and noisy " in the scenes before Duncan 's murder with the " Come , you spirits " speech " simply spouted " and its closing " Hold ! Hold ! " shouted in a " most unheavenly manner . " In the " I have given suck " speech , he thought Faucit " poured out " the speech in a way that recalled the " scold at the door of a gin shop . " Faucit , he believed , was " too essentially feminine , too exclusively gifted with the art of expressing all that is most beautiful and graceful in womanhood , to succeed in inspiring anything like awe and terror . " He thought her talents more congenial to the second phase of the character , and found her " admirably good " in the banquet scene . Her sleepwalking scene , however , was described as having " the air of a too well studied dramatic recitation . "

In 1884 at the Gaiety Theatre , Sarah Bernhardt performed the sleepwalking scene barefoot and clad in a clinging nightdress , and , in 1888 , a critic noted Ellen Terry was " the stormy dominant woman of the eleventh century equipped with the capricious emotional subtlety of the nineteenth century . "

In 1915 and 1918 , Sybil Thorndike played the role at Old Vic and then at the Prince 's Theatre in 1926 . Flora Robson played the role in Tyrone Guthrie 's Old Vic production in 1934 . In 1955 , Vivien Leigh played Lady Macbeth opposite Laurence Olivier at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford upon Avon . In 1977 at The Other Place in Stratford , Judi Dench and Ian McKellen played the infamous husband and wife in Trevor Nunn 's production . Other notable Lady Macbeths in the late 20th century included Judith Anderson , Pamela Brown , Diana Wynyard , Simone Signoret , Vivien Merchant , Jane Lapotaire , Helen Mirren and Janet Suzman .

Jeanette Nolan performed the role in Orson Welles ' 1948 film adaptation and was critiqued by Bosley Crowther in the New York Times of 28 December 1950 : " The Lady Macbeth of Jeanette

Nolan is a pop @-@ eyed and haggard dame whose driving determination is as vagrant as the highlights on her face . Likewise , her influence upon Macbeth , while fleetingly suggested in a few taut lines and etched in a couple of hot embraces , is not developed adequately . The passion and torment of the conflict between these two which resides in the play has been rather seriously neglected in this truncated rendering . " Michael Costello of Allmovie has described her performance as " uneven " and has also stated , " Her unique Lady Macbeth is either an exhibition of rank scenery @-@ chewing or a performance of intriguingly Kabuki @-@ like stylization . "

In 2009 , Pegasus Books published *The Tragedy of Macbeth Part II* , a play by American author and playwright Noah Lukeman which endeavoured to offer a sequel to *Macbeth* and to resolve its many loose ends , particularly Lady Macbeth 's reference to her having had a child (which , historically , she did - from a previous marriage , having remarried Macbeth after being widowed .) Written in blank verse , the play was published to critical acclaim .

Alex Kingston starred as Lady Macbeth opposite Kenneth Branagh in his and Rob Ashford 's adaption of *Macbeth* . The play was first performed at the Manchester Festival in 2013 and then transferred to New York for a limited engagement in 2014 .

Marion Cotillard played the character in Justin Kurzel 's 2015 film adaptation opposite Michael Fassbender .

= = In popular culture = =

During former United States President Bill Clinton 's 1992 campaign for the American presidency , Daniel Wattenberg 's August 1992 *The American Spectator* article " The Lady Macbeth of Little Rock " , and some twenty other articles in major publications drew comparisons between his wife and Lady Macbeth , questioning Hillary Clinton 's ideological and ethical record in comparison to Shakespeare 's famous character and suggesting parallels .