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'Lady Macbeth is a female character who changes during the play.'

Starting with this moment in the play, explore how far you agree with this view.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this extract
- how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a female character who changes in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

Shakespeare disseminates Lady Macbeth as a female with a pivotal role in the play; inciting Macbeth to commit the wretched regicide against King Duncan. Lady Macbeth believes she is anchored to an inferior status in society and wishes to be delegated. Her ambition leads to her being overcome by remorse leading her to death and the path of hell.

In the eponymous tragedy, Shakespeare adeptly promulgates Lady Macbeth—a manipulative, malevolent, ambitious women—as an archetype of ambition. She desires to transform into a masculine figure to fulfil the usurpation of King Duncan in the patriarchal society where women were seen as insignificant, voiceless beings in the Jacobean era. Her desire is underscored through the imperative when wishing for the spirits to “unsex” herself and “fill her from crown to toe with top full of direst cruelty”. Lady Macbeth’s direct plea to the spirits aligns with King James VI views on the supernatural as malignant and a source of disarray and disturbance, written in his book referred to as ‘Daemonologie’. The imperative employed when she commands to be ‘unsexed’ signals her desperation and tenacity to obtain power. She is under the influence that to perform such a sacrilegious act requires her to be elevated to the status of a male. She perceives Macbeth to be a pusillanimous, timorous, cowardice individual, lacking the ambition and valour to perform such a ‘masculine’ act. Lady Macbeth’s pivotal role in igniting Macbeth’s primal desires of power and status is foreshadowed here. Despite her becoming masculine, Shakespeare portrays the notion that women are completely unable to transcend their gender limitations and therefore utilises Macbeth as a ‘puppet’ to exert authority over

and commit such heinous acts. The desires of power is stimulated by the 'id' presented by Doctor Freud who warned against this, presenting Lady Macbeth's character as a tenacious character.

Shakespeare skilfully dismantles the duplicitous, dubious, malignant character of Lady Macbeth when she almost commands Macbeth to become an ambiguous individual betraying the trust of close relationships in exchange for tyrannical rule. She commands this noble warrior to "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under'th". The clever technique of Lady Macbeth to obtain control can be clearly seen when she utilises natural imagery of a 'flower', connoting naivety. The main goal of Lady Macbeth is to obtain kingship and the remaining path is through Macbeth—a trusted warrior perceived as veracious. This simile illustrates the concept that Macbeth should appear as naive but should betray the trust of his supporters. The serpent is a reptile inflicting harm. This symbolises the façade of innocence. The idea of a serpent alludes to the Biblical story of 'The Fall' where the devil was in the form of a serpent with an ulterior motive to misguide Adam and Eve and the rest of humanity foreshadowing the future murders he commits. The same way a serpent devours a flower, the same way Macbeth's ambition will consume and overtake his noble qualities, foreshadowing his betrayal of homosociality; where men held close relationships between each other in terms of assistance and foreshadows his eventual downfall and demise. Lady Macbeth can be viewed as a catalyst for Macbeth's insatiable desires. However, Lady Macbeth is almost mocking Macbeth and emasculating him commanding him to perform acts which he condemns. She is the figure that is perpetuating these thoughts of Macbeth presenting her malignant, dual nature.

Finally, Lady Macbeth is juxtaposed in the finale of the play where she faces a moral quandary and inner turmoil. Shakespeare cleverly displays Lady Macbeth as a warning of those who attempt to exceed all gender limitations and expectations. Her deep trauma is seen

when she exclaims “Out damned spot!, Out I say”. The repetition of ‘out’ shows that Lady Macbeth begins to sense the ramifications of “adding fuel to fire”. She begins to understand the consequences of contributing to the regicide and usurpation of the Jacobean belief of God’s lieutenant. Shakespeare aims to warn us of the effects of blasphemy. He attempts to please King James VI by conveying a clear message to him that any individual that decides to overthrow you will face dire consequences, from eventual deterioration of Lady Macbeth’s mental health to her committing suicide because she was overcome by excessive contrition. Shakespeare further reassures the King by having Lady Macbeth describe hell as “murky”. The adjective murky suggests quite a horrifying image of hell which is directly alluded to the Bible. By Lady Macbeth describing hell as a location of misery, torment, Shakespeare aims to subtly warn anyone that if they alter and destroy the ‘Divine Order’ (Jacobean belief) then they will surely face a tragic end, reassuring King James. This presents the eventual demise of Lady Macbeth through her contrition showing her as a character who undergoes a drastic altering, becoming a completely mentally decapitated individual.

In conclusion, Lady Macbeth attempts to remove the entirety of her feminine traits relegating her, causing her to be inferior, attempting to subvert power dynamics, completely emasculating and relegating Macbeth. Her deceitful personality is accentuated when she contributes to what Jacobean’s believe as ‘God’s lieutenant’s’ murder by commanding Macbeth to appear as a deceptive being but then causes her to reach her eventual downfall where Shakespeare aims to display her as a figure destined to hell, assuring the King and conveying a warning to the nobles.