

THE REVIEW OF CHARACTER OF LADY MACBETH IN THE  
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**Abstract**

The current article discusses one of the world's famous works by W. Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth. The author demonstrates the character of Lady Macbeth as a construct to explore the effects of power in the hands of women and to present power as a dangerous and destructive force when combined with ambition outside of the parameters. The article covers concrete samples utterances from plays and quotes to express the inner feelings of Lady Macbeth clearly.

**Keywords:** femininity, commitment, gender, power, lifetime opportunity, cruelty, battlements.

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**Introduction.** Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most famous and frightening female characters. When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan's murder, and she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She seems fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. At one point, she wishes that she were not a woman so that she could do it herself.

This theme of the relationship between gender and power is key to Lady Macbeth's character: her husband implies that she is a masculine soul inhabiting a female body, which seems to link masculinity to ambition and violence. Shakespeare, however, seems to use her, and the witches, to undercut Macbeth's idea that "undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.73–74). These crafty women use female methods of achieving power—that is, manipulation—to further their supposedly male ambitions. Women, the play implies, can be as ambitious and cruel as men, yet social constraints deny them the means to pursue these ambitions on their own.

Literature review. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself. Lady Macbeth's remarkable strength of will persists through the murder of the king—it is she who steadies her husband's nerves immediately after the crime has been perpetrated.

Afterward, however, Lady Macbeth begins a slow slide into madness—just as ambition affects her more strongly than Macbeth before the crime, so does guilt plague her more strongly afterward. By the close of the play, she has been reduced to sleepwalking through the castle, desperately trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain. Once the sense of guilt comes home to roost, Lady Macbeth's sensitivity becomes a weakness, and she is unable to cope. Significantly, she (apparently) kills herself, signaling her total inability to deal with the legacy of their crimes.

Lady Macbeth is even more ambitious and ruthless than her husband. As soon as an opportunity to gain power presents itself, she has a plan in mind. She uses her influence to persuade Macbeth that they are taking the right course of action and even takes part in the crime herself.

For a while she is able to suppress her actions but eventually she becomes unable to deal with the guilt of what she has done. She becomes unable to sleep, and mentally unstable, eventually dying in tragic circumstances.

Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull  
Of direst cruelty: make thick my blood,  
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th'effect and it.

*Come to my woman's breasts, And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief.*

**(Act 1 Scene 5)**

Shakespeare does not have any evil characters. What he has are ordinary human beings, like you and me, placed in situations that challenge and test them. Some of them, like Iago in *Othello*, have personality defects, but that's rare in Shakespeare and it's not the case with Lady Macbeth.

The challenges that Shakespeare presents his characters with generates different responses from different people. Lady Macbeth's challenge is that she discovers that her husband has been tempted by an encounter with three witches to do something about their prediction that he will become king. She knows that the king would have to die for that to happen. When she gets a message that King Duncan plans to spend the night with them at Glamys Castle it seems to confirm the thought that they would have to kill him and that this was their once in a lifetime opportunity. That's the situation into which she has been thrust.

She is as ambitious as Macbeth but she knows that for all his bravery in battle, all his soldierly and diplomatic qualities, he is basically much too soft –“too full of the milk of human kindness” – to take advantage of the opportunity. She makes up her mind to make him do it.

And she is right about his lack of resolve – they talk it over and he tells her that he just can't do it. She goes into high gear and virtually holds his hand through it. One of her strongest qualities is persistence and she shows it here. Macbeth hesitates, equivocates and falters but she holds firm. She argues the case, she mocks him, bringing his manhood into question, she appeals to his sense of loyalty to her, she takes him to bed, and she finally prevails.

Macbeth kills Duncan in his sleep and from that moment their marriage begins to fall apart. They each fall into their own guilt-trip and hardly speak to each other. As king, Macbeth fears his political enemies and embarks on a reign of terror while Lady Macbeth stays in bed, unable to sleep, having nightmares when she does manage it. While walking and talking in her sleep she gives the game away about what they have done and sinks into a moral, physical and spiritual collapse. When Macbeth is on his last legs, with the rebels closing in, he gets the message that she's dead. At that point, he says he doesn't have time to think about it. “She should have died hereafter,” he says. Their partnership in this murderous enterprise has destroyed their marriage.

The promise of strength that we see in her at the beginning of the play is an illusion. What we are seeing is naked ambition and a willingness to act on it without having the resources to deal with the consequences. We see how guilt can eat up your soul and destroy you. We see how hollow ambition is, both in her journey and Macbeth's. (Read the most significant Macbeth ambition quotes.)

**Literary analysis.** Some significant character attributes of Lady Macbeth are:

Controlling – she understands that her husband doesn't have the savageness required to murder the king of his own accord, so she manipulates him. She plans out the murder, then takes control of events when Macbeth loses his mind.

Cruel – she is a violent, cold-blooded character who is happy to scheme the murder. She ridicules Macbeth when he doesn't agree to participate in her violent plans.

Two-faced – she welcomes King Duncan like a friend whilst at the same time planning his murder. She also advises Macbeth to be two-faced.

Here are listed some famous quotes of Lady Macbeth:

*“I fear thy nature;*

*It is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness*

*(act 1, scene 5)*

*“To beguile the time,*

*Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,*

*Your hand, your tongue; look like th’ innocent flower,*

*But be the serpent under’t.”*

*(act 1, scene 5)*

*“The raven himself is hoarse*

*That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan*

*Under my battlements”*

*(act 1, scene 5)*

*“Come, you spirits*

*That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,*

*(act 1, scene 5)*

Along with being Shakespeare's bloodiest play, "Macbeth" is also the one with the greatest number of outright evil female characters. Chief among them are the three witches who predict that Macbeth will be king and set the play's action into motion.

Then, there's Lady Macbeth herself. It was unusual in Shakespeare's day for a female character to be so boldly ambitious and manipulative as Lady Macbeth is. She's unable to take action herself, likely because of social constraints and power hierarchies, so she must persuade her husband to go along with her evil plans.

When Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill King Duncan by questioning his manhood, Shakespeare equates masculinity with ambition and power. However, those are two qualities that Lady Macbeth possesses in abundance. By constructing her character in this way (with "masculine" characteristics), Shakespeare challenges our preconceived views of masculinity and femininity.

Macbeth is a play created by Shakespeare that emphasizes and brings out the true tones of humanity through greed, ambition, and wanting, however through the use of figurative language as well as the combination of dramatic techniques, Shakespeare is able to express the dire emotions of Lady Macbeth as she begins to fall into madness and despair as for she is overcome with guilt and pity over the murders and actions that she carried out with Macbeth. This scene on the other hand introduces us to the leading themes of this play, blood, supernatural, and ambition. The meaning of this scene within the play was used to help show that as people become infected with greed and ambition, they are driven by those factors to commit horrible things, yet as time progresses they will come back to bite you in spite of what you have done and gained. Lady Macbeth is clearly suffering from those demons that are the remorse of her contribution to the murders with Macbeth. In this passage, Shakespeare will use techniques such as figurative imagery and dramatic techniques to express these emotions.

The clear message of Act 5 Scene 1, is to highlight and exploit the fact that Lady Macbeth is falling into madness and insanity due to her guilt and pity for what she has caused in the path to ensure that her husband is crowned king. This is shown when Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking and the Doctor and Gentleman are able to eavesdrop on what she is saying, when she says the statement: “A soldier, and afeard?” and “What need we fear who knows it when none can call our power to account?” These parts of the passage are her talking to herself in her sleep in which she attempts to comfort herself about the

murders and try to make sure that she can soothe herself out of the guilty conscience. When Lady Macbeth says: “A soldier, and afeard?”, what she means is that she has the mentality of a soldier, which is needless to say, brave, strong, and carries out actions without remorse due to the fact that they are instructed to go through life-threatening and changing aspects as a show of loyalty for their country and people. Lady Macbeth calls herself a soldier as she was the one that creates the drive of greed within Macbeth and is the leading cause of King Duncan’s murder as she pushes Macbeth over his own set line and killing his own leader. This requires the “mentality” of a soldier in which she calls herself. Yet she is afraid of the consequences, unlike a soldier, as for they are driven by loyalty and are shielded from the factors that might affect them when they are sent into battle. However, Lady Macbeth is still afraid of what will happen to her after the action she just did due to guilt and pity for the murders. When she says “What need we fear who knows it when none can call our power to account?”, it once again insinuates the fact that she is worried for her life that she may get caught and exposed for her actions against the kingdom even though, she was able to cover her tracks to the connections of the murders. Yet this does not change her mentality and still lives in guilt and fear that no matter what, she will eventually get caught and face a penalty for her crimes. This once again links back to the main message and drive of this scene which is to show that Lady Macbeth is getting eaten up by her own guilt.

**Conclusion.** In both Shakespeare’s time and in the time when the play takes place, women had a much lower status than would be the case today. Wives were little more than the property of their husbands and had no legal rights. Their purpose was to have children and support their menfolk. Lady Macbeth appears to be a much more feisty character with ambitions and desires of her own; there are characteristics that could imply a lack of femininity. It is worth remembering that in the original performance of the part of Lady Macbeth would have been played by a man and this would have helped to emphasize the character’s masculine qualities.

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