

**‘HOW WILL YOU DO FOR A HUSBAND?’:
THE ENACTMENT OF WIFEHOOD IN SHAKESPEARE’S MACBETH**

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Introduction

Wifehood is unlikely to be the first theme to come to mind while reading or watching William Shakespeare's Macbeth. Important public issues are at stake: a rebellion is to be suppressed, a battle is to be fought, a treacherous traitor is to be executed, and the succession to the throne is to be ensured. Scotland expects every man to do his duty; this is men's rebellion, men's war and in short, men's world. Yet, the public and exclusively masculine realm of the play does not exist without its complement of the private and rather feminine world. These two are separated as well as intertwined in this tragedy, and it is in the latter where the women of Macbeth reside. Two women, both wives, both mothers—theirs is the domestic home front constituting marriage.

The purpose of this Pro Gradu Thesis is to look into that private sphere of Shakespeare's Macbeth and to explore what it reveals of being a wife. This research is likely to be most fruitful and worthwhile, since both women in the play are defined first and foremost as wives; they carry their husbands' names and relate to them in their status: Lady Macbeth is referred to as her husband's "fiend-like queen" (5.11.35)¹ and Lady Macduff is identified as "The Thane of Fife had a wife" (5.1.36). Even more significantly, the Folio version of Macbeth, which first appeared in Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies in 1623, always refers to Lady Macbeth as "Lady" and to Lady Macduff

¹ All references to Shakespeare's Macbeth in this work, except for the note 2, will refer to The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et. al. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

simply as “Wife”.² Their own individualities or personalities remain quite unknown and irrelevant to us compared to their function in the play; in fact, Alan Sinfield even suggests that one could not consider at least Lady Macbeth as an independent character at all, but rather as “a disjointed sequence of positions that women are conventionally supposed to occupy.”³ The same could be applied to Lady Macduff as well; therefore, this work lays emphasis specifically on the function of wifhood in Macbeth, not on the women characters themselves per se. My task is threefold: I will first introduce the common ground for this discussion by concentrating on what was thought about wives during the sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and then apply those definitions to the play itself. Finally, I will argue for two conclusions: first, that Macbeth endorses the idea of companionate marriage over the traditional model of subordinating the wife and second, that by dramatizing the inevitable contradictions imposed on the role of the wife during this period the play thus challenges them to a degree.⁴

² William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. G. K. Hunter (London: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 189-190.

³ Alan Sinfield, Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 53, see also pp. 56, 64.

⁴ Thomas Rist, personal communication.

1. The Ideal Wife in Renaissance England

In this chapter I will attempt to describe the position and the expected duties of the good wife in Renaissance England (c. 1500-1640) according to various sources. Yet, before proceeding any further, I want to remind the reader of the limits of such an account quoting Valerie Wayne in her introduction to Edmund Tilney's The Flower of Friendship, “[t]he history of ideologies of marriage in Renaissance England does not readily make a coherent narrative.”⁵ I could not possibly provide anything resembling exclusive dogma within this thesis without sacrificing my main focus, which is, after all, the wives in Macbeth. Therefore, the following description will not be totally conclusive: it will cover only the main ideologies generally. However, I believe it is substantive and enlightening enough for further interpretations and conclusions with regard to the play itself. Another issue that I wish to point out is the fact that “wife” in itself represents a general stereotype “functioned to control and to confine women”, which after the Reformation in England “was the archetype of the good woman” as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford maintain.⁶ Thus, many of the qualities and the requirements applying to the good wife may also be regarded to concern the overall female sex.

⁵ Valerie Wayne, “Introduction,” The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 1.

⁶ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 66-67.

1.1 The Traditional Ideology of Submission and Obedience

The Bible constitutes the foundation on which the discussion concerning the position and the duties of a wife in a marriage during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century England is based. In particular, the account of creation of man and woman in Genesis has fundamental importance. Man was created in God's image, "Thus God created the man in his image: in the image of God created he him..." (Gen. 1:27),⁷ whereas woman was brought into being out of man, "And the rybbe which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and broght her to the man" (Gen. 2:22-23). Also the Pauline letters, especially to the Ephesians are referred to time and time again. The two essential English sources concerning marriage during this time, which both draw on the authority of the Bible according to their authors, are The Book of Common Prayer and the Homilies.⁸ According to Joan Larsen Klein, "English views about women and marriage in the early modern period must be considered in the light of the ceremony of marriage and the prayers relating to it in The Book of Common Prayer, relevant statements in the catechism and the homily, "Of Matrimony", in the second of the two volumes of homilies..." (Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 3). In fact, Klein stresses that the ceremony of marriage and the homily on marriage are "the norm in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. All other statements about women and marriage either develop this norm or represent deviations from it" (Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 3). Other

⁷ The Geneva Bible, A facsimile of the 1560 edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

⁸ Joan Larsen Klein, "Introduction," Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 3.

writers such as Carroll Camden confirm this, “[t]he Elizabethans considered marriage bonds to be holy bonds, and that premise underlies all the discussion of the working partnership of husband and wife.”⁹ Therefore, it seems only logical to begin the elaboration of the position of a wife in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England by first examining “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony” in The Book of Common Prayer and then “An Homily of the State of Matrimony” in the Homilies.

First of all, “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony” in The Book of Common Prayer (1559) defines marriage as “holy matrimony, which is an honorable state, instituted of God in Paradise, . . ., signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church.”¹⁰ It also contains the reasons why God ordained matrimony: first, for “the procreation of children”; second, as “a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication” and third, “for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity” (“The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony”, p. 5). This concerns both of the spouses. However, as the husband and wife exchange the marital vows, both promising to “love”, “honor”, and “keep” the other, wives must furthermore pledge to *obey*, and also to *serve* their husbands (“The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony”, p. 6) [emphasis added]. According to Klein, “[t]he principal basis for this long-established vow of subjection enforced upon women in the ceremony of marriage itself is scriptural, . . . Only men were created in the ‘image and

⁹ Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman (Houston: The Elsevier Press, 1952), p. 109.

¹⁰ “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony,” The Book of Common Prayer (1559), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in

similitude' of God. Women took their 'beginning' out of men. Thus a new husband is told to honor his wife 'as unto the weaker vessel,' and women are told to obey their husbands as they do the Lord God, for their husbands are their heads as Christ is head of the Church..." ("Introduction," Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 4). This is based on St Paul's teaching in the Bible: "[w]ives, submit your selves vnto your husbands, as vnto the Lord. For the husband is the wiues head, even as Christ is the head of the Church... Therefore as the Church is in subjection to Christ, euen so let the wiues be to their husbands in euerie thing" [sic] (Eph. 5:22-24). William Gouge's sermons in his Of Domesticall Duties refer precisely to this issue, which Ruth Kelso summarizes as following: "[t]he man is the wife's head, ..., the wife her husband's body. Her submission to her husband is voluntary because he is her head and therefore worthy, as Christ is worthy the submission of the church. The wife's first duty must be to acknowledge her husband as superior and respect his superiority, since God has commanded her subjection."¹¹ Indeed, while the husband is equivalent to Christ, the Church is compared to the wife; this analogy succinctly accounts for the supremacy of the husband in marriage. As Klein concludes, "[t]he dominion of husbands over their wives, which shaped the institution of marriage and much of its practice for centuries, is thus explicit in the ceremony of marriage itself" ("Introduction," Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 4). To sum up, "the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" explicates very thoroughly what a good wife is expected to be like: she is to love, honor, keep, obey and

England, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 5.

serve her husband performing subjection and showing respect. Yet, according to Ruth Kelso, “the most important virtue of the woman as a wife is obedience,” which “meant complete surrender of the woman’s will and desires to her husband’s wishes” (pp. 95-96). Therefore, first and foremost, a disobedient wife always equals to a bad wife.

In addition to the Bible and The Book of Common Prayer, the influence of the Homilies on the discussion on a good wife in England during this Early Modern period is also very extensive, as can be conceived from the fact that they were “ranked next to them in authority” and that they were actually “intended ‘to be read in every parish Church agreeably’” while “Church attendance was obligatory” (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives, and Widows, pp. 11-12). Specifically, “An Homily of the State of Matrimony” in The Second Tome of Homilies (1563) offers quite enlightening material concerning the position and duties of the wife in this period. In this homily “[t]he wife is exhorted to obey and serve her husband because this is the duty laid upon her by God and nature” (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 13), which restates exactly the same message of “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony” in The Book of Common Prayer. This duty exhorted by God is referred to the Bible quoting the teachings of St. Paul mentioned in the previous paragraph (Eph. 5: 22-24); in addition, the same idea is also confirmed by quoting St. Peter, “[y]e wives, be ye in subjection to obey your own husband” (I Pet. 3:1).¹² As for the duty by nature, the Homily maintains, “[f]or the

¹¹ Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 93.

¹² “An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” The Second Tome of Homilies (1563), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 17-18.

woman is a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind.

Therefore they be the sooner disquieted and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind more than men be, and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions” (p. 16). The entire argumentation apparently rests on the basic idea of woman’s overall inferiority, her natural and inherent weakness compared to man.

Therefore, it is divine and natural that a wife, this “weaker vessel”, should submit herself to her husband; indeed, anything else would be considered inappropriate and quite unnatural. In short, the homily reaffirms the ideas already illustrated in the “Form of Solemnization of Matrimony”: the good wife should “obey and cease from commanding and perform subjection” to her husband (“An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” p. 17).

The logic behind this explains itself, “[f]or this surely doth nourish concord very much when the wife is ready at hand at her husband’s commandment, when she will apply herself to his will, when she endeavoreth herself to seek his contentation and to do him pleasure, when she will eschew all things that might offend him” (“An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” p. 17). According to the Homily, if the above requirements are met, “so shalt thou [the wife] honor God, and live peaceably in thy house” (p. 18). In addition to submission, the Homily stresses “*shamefastness and sobriety*” as the qualities of a good wife (p. 19), while patience (p. 20) and silence (p. 21) are commendable too.

However, “[b]oth husbands and wives are exhorted to pray to God that the devil may be hindered from his unceasing attempts to destroy the concord and love that presently exist between them, from his attempts to drive them into adultery and a life of sin, from his attempts to ensnare their souls” (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives, Widows, pp. 12-13). To resist this “common enemy of man” (3.1.70) who “banisheth away concord,

charity, and sweet amity, and bringeth in dissension, hatred, and irkesomeness“ (“An Homily of the State of Matrimony,” p. 16) is then their acknowledged common duty. In conclusion, Klein summarizes finally the intent of this homily: “to establish patriarchy, commanded by God and instituted in Paradise, as the foundation of family life” (“Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 13).

These two important texts concerning the primary duties of a good wife as well as the Bible, which they draw on, clearly establish obedience and submission the essential requirements of a good wife. This is argued by taking it for granted that women are weaker than men as the Bible is interpreted to show in Genesis, thus nature requires submissiveness. The other argument, the divine reason for such obligation is simply because God ordained it as St Paul preaches. Thus, the concept of woman’s inferiority and hence the duty of a wife to submit herself to her husband are to be considered extremely significant. Undeniably, it constitutes the most crucial element because of its huge impact and durability in concern with the rest of the overall analysis.

In order to expand my discussion beyond examining merely the highly religious sources, I want to provide yet another and this time more secular example of the importance of this traditional view establishing the wife’s submission and obedience. The humanist Juan Luis Vives’s work A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman (1523) serves as such case in point. Despite its royal commission, by Catherine of Aragon for her daughter Mary Tudor (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 97), this book became very popular in England: Klein maintains that eight other English editions followed the first publication (“Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 98). Doubtlessly The Instruction of a Christian Woman

rests heavily on the orthodox submissive basis accounted for before; for example, Vives refers to a wife's position, "I will that she shall give him great worship, reverence, great obedience, and service also; which thing not only the example of the old world teacheth us, but also all laws, both spiritual and temporal, and Nature herself cryeth and commandeth that the woman shall be subject and obedient to the man."¹³ Vives's insistence that a wife should offer "worship" and "reverence" to her husband is especially worth noting; the duties of an ideal wife connote religious language and practice. Indeed, Vives seems quite explicit in the issue of submission throughout the whole work, "[f]or in wedlock the man resembleth the reason and the woman the body. Now reason ought to rule and the body to obey if a man will live...But foolish women do not see how sore they dishonest themselves that take the sovereignty of their husband, of whom all their honor must come. And so in seeking for honor, they lose it. For if the husband lack honor, the wife must needs go without it" (p. 115). In short, "the husband is his own ruler and his wife's lord" (Vives, p. 116).

Furthermore, according to Vives, the wife ought to be to her husband "as Eve was unto Adam, that is to say, his daughter, his sister, his companion, and his wife"; ultimately, "another himself" (Vives, p. 112), totally without any separate identity or existence. As Camden rephrases, "they must have one heart, one will, and one mind" (p. 110). Thus, two really are expected to become one in this union and the husband is the one. Of course, this was true as far as the law of the land was concerned: as The Law's

¹³ Juan Luis Vives, The Instruction of a Christian Woman, trans. Richard Hyrde (London, [1529?]), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and

Resolutions of Women's Rights (1632) states, "they [husband and wife] be by intent and wise fiction of law one person", except when the wife commits a crime.¹⁴ The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights draws heavily on Genesis and the account of the Fall explaining, "here the reason...that women have no voice in parliament. They [women] make no laws, they consent to none, they abrogate none. All of them are understood either married or to be married and their desires are subject to their husband...The common law here shaketh hand with divinity" (pp. 32-33). In the twentieth century such subordination could be regarded as a serious case of identity crisis and blatant inequality from the wife's point of view; after all, to be considered an extension of your spouse for all one's life without any actual political influence may cause some challenge on mental health and it surely clashes with individualism. Yet, it is important not to draw too critical conclusions; the modern value judgments about the culture in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries should be avoided. Besides, if in theory a wife is exhorted to act in a particular way, it does not necessarily follow that in practice such recommendations are lived up to. For Vives, however, the wife's lot stands for the aforesaid loss of individualism, inferiority and subjection; a good wife is truly altruism itself incarnated.

Nevertheless, despite emphasizing the wife's inferior status insisting that the husband clearly rules in a marriage, Vives still argues that the wife has a profoundly significant duty in marriage to fulfill, namely to act as an safeguard against her husband's

Marriage in England, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 114.

¹⁴ The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights (London, 1632), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 32.

lapses from “goodness”, “...but thou, good daughter that wilt do well, shalt not withdraw thine husband from goodness, but rather exhort him unto virtue though thou shouldest be sure to lose all thy goods...” (p. 116). Roland Mushat Frye stresses the same issue explaining that during this time in England “the wife had not only the right but the duty to dissuade her partner from the courses of evil and to persuade him into the ways of righteousness.”¹⁵ Therefore, the eternal life in God is for them both to strive for involving “the conjugal forwarding by each of the other’s salvation” (Frye, p. 103). This “mutual obligation” as Frye calls it (p.103) is worth stressing, because it will have much relevance later to Macbeth.

There is one more issue that needs to be stressed here and to be kept in mind throughout the whole discussion: the fact that obedience to husband entailed obedience to God, since “[i]n the traditional Renaissance world order, love and obedience to social superiors constituted obedience to God.”¹⁶ Therefore, the wife’s rebellion against the husband is not merely understood as a matter of personal rebellion, an individual against another; it is also interpreted as a universal rebellion against God himself. Conversely, by obeying the husband, the wife also conforms to God, which shows very clearly how religion plays a central part during this period in justifying the distribution of power within a marriage ultimately in the husband’s favor. If God and the husband are to be equated in the question of submission and obedience, surely this state of affairs acts as a deterrent diminishing the probability of a wife’s unruly behavior; the threat of sin is not to

¹⁵ Roland Mushat Frye, “Macbeth’s Usurping Wife,” Renaissance News (Volume 8, Issue 2, Summer, 1955), p. 103.

be underestimated, particularly in such a religious period. The promise of a heavenly reward also ought to inspire. Besides, a rebellion might also be a dangerous course of action concerning this life time too; as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford explain, “[s]ociety tolerated a high level of violence against wives as a normal feature of domestic relations” (p. 140). Divorce being unavailable and wifebeating with other mistreatments “from verbal and psychological harassment and threats of violence, physical assault and attempted murder, to actual homicide” common (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 140-141), subjection and obedience may probably have seemed the most sensible and safe course of action to follow.

1.2. The Emergent Ideology of Companionship

Although the ideology of subordinating wives to their husbands was extremely influential in the discussion of marriage and the wife’s position in it during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century England, there were yet other kinds of ideas about the role and duties of a wife in matrimony. One of the most prominent among them was the concept of companionate marriage, which I will discuss next.

Even though the Bible was referred to establish woman’s inferiority and to justify a wife’s obedience and submissiveness, it nevertheless contributed importantly to this companionate ideology too. Indeed, according to Valerie Wayne, “[t]he construction of woman as a companion to man has often been based on a passage in the Old Testament,

¹⁶ Diane Elizabeth Dreher, Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), p. 16.

where woman is created after God says, ‘It is not good that the man shulde be him selfe alone: I wil make him an helpe mete for him’”(pp. 13-14). Relating to this “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony” is also recalled to make mention of it in the third reason why God ordained marriage (see chapter 1.1). However, in addition to the Bible Wayne notes also other sources emphasizing amity; they include the classics, for example Aristotle and Plutarch (pp. 15-16), and the writings of humanists, who emerged as a group stressing this particular and quite friendlier attitude towards the institution of marriage during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wayne explains that in fact “[b]y including friendship in their definition of marriage, the humanists could give renewed emphasis to companionship” (p. 26). Thus, within this tenet a wife is not so much defined solely as an inferior submitting to her superior; rather her role as a friend and as a companion to her husband is now highlighted.

One of the humanist sources that pays considerable attention to this particular function of a wife in marriage is the work of Erasmus, whose entire definition of marriage takes the aspect of companionship into account; matrimony is praised as “this fellowship most honest and pleasant of all.”¹⁷ In his A Right Fruitful Epistle...in Laud and Praise of Matrimony Erasmus emphasizes strongly this concept of “fellowship” shared by a husband and a wife as he proposes the main argument, “[f]or at the beginning when He had made man of the slime of the earth, he thought that his life should be utterly miserable and unpleasant, if he joined not Eve, a companion, unto him. Wherefore He

¹⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, A Right Fruitful Epistle...in Laud and Praise of Matrimony, trans. Richard Taverner (London, [1536?]), Daughters, Wives and Widows:

brought forth the wife not of the earth, as he did man, but out of the ribs of Adam, whereby it is to be understood that nothing ought to be more dear to us than the wife, nothing more conjoined, nothing more fast glued unto us” (p. 73). Doubtlessly this manifests a less stern position for a wife; after all, the role of the partner is a step up from the total and exhaustive subjection stipulated earlier. Thus, according to Erasmus, in marriage, “the fellowship of all chances [sic]” (p. 82), the wife is “[a] sweet companion to youth, a kind solace of age” (p. 83), who in case of adversity “shall be one which may comfort you, which may sit by your side, which may serve you, which may covet your grief to be hers”, and “If ye [the husband] have wealth, your felicity is doubled” (p. 82). In fact, he ultimately praises quite highly a wife’s role in marriage: “[t]he wife’s love is with no falsity corrupted, with no simulation obscured, with no chance of things [di]minished, finally with death only (nay, not with death neither) withdrawn...her only respect is to you, of you she hangeth, with you she coveteth to die [sic]” (p. 82). Although the purpose of Erasmus’s A Right Fruitful Epistle...in Laud and Praise of Matrimony is to persuade a man to marry (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 66), and for the sake of strengthening the argument Erasmus may be describing marriage with somewhat too idealistic terms, the fact still remains that Erasmus specifically lays stress on companionship, not on subjection and obedience. Arguably, he is convinced that this method will persuade his reader more effectively than insisting on the husband’s privilege to dominate thus relying on the appeal of friendship over subordination. In summary, Erasmus describes the married couple as a team, sharing a partnership in which both of

the spouses have an important niche of their own and for better or for worse they stand by each other. Clearly, as the exhortation of the hierarchic structure is put aside to a degree, the result is a more amicable and intimate model of marriage.

Yet humanists like Erasmus were not the only group accentuating the importance of companionship in marriage. During the sixteenth century in England, the Reformation was changing the society and along with the religious turmoil attitudes towards marriage too. To begin with, before this profound historical event Catholicism had asserted that although marriage was an appropriate thing to be engaged in, celibacy was still a much more highly valued position.¹⁸ However, the Reformation replaced this dogma of idealized chastity by a new emphasis on the importance of wedlock; indeed, “[t]he married state now became the ethical norm for the virtuous Christian” (Stone, pp. 100-101). At the same time as “[t]his sanctification of marriage” (Stone, p. 101) was under way, the definition of marriage itself and the wife’s position in it were under transformation as well. Since the newly established Anglican Church in England did not “legalize divorce with remarriage by the innocent party for the adultery or desertion of the wife, . . . , the Tudor Protestants had no alternative but to urge the importance of affective ties as a necessity for marriage, in addition to the old Pauline arguments” (Stone, p. 101). In short, more attention was now paid to the factor of affection in marriage and hence the emphasis on companionship. However, as can be deduced from the phrase “in addition to the Pauline arguments,” the wife’s subjection was still quite clearly presupposed. In fact,

Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 83.

¹⁸ Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800, abridged. Ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), p. 101.

although “[t]hrough the elevation of marriage to an equal rank with celibacy, and the development of the home as a school of faith, the Protestants enhanced the status of the married woman,”¹⁹ women were still considered inferior to men and hence, submission and obedience nevertheless continued to represent the main basis for the wife’s position. This naturally resulted to “an inherent contradiction between the ideal of wedded comradeship and the compulsory nature of wifely subjection” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 135).

Indeed, as the Reformation took root, Puritanism emerged as one of the most important parties in this whole newly invigorated discussion on marriage and the wife’s position in it in England. This movement contributed in a very significant way highlighting the aforesaid importance of companionship; “[i]nstead of her husband’s obedient subject, she was now his willing (although still obedient) partner” (Dreher, p. 34). In order to account for the share of this group in the issue, I will examine the views of William Perkins, who “was one of the most famous and respected of Puritan preachers and writers” according to Klein (“Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 151). Within my limited space and focus in this thesis Perkins serves to exemplify this party in general, as Erasmus has humanists.

In Christian Economy (1609) Perkins “stresses that sexual union in marriage is not sinful in itself even when it occurs apart from the desire for procreation, a position which did much to foster what became the Puritan emphasis on companionate marriage.” (Klein, “Introduction,” Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 152). Indeed, Klein argues,

¹⁹ Betty Travitsky, “Introduction,” The Paradise of Women, ed. Betty Travitsky

“[i]n fact, Perkins’s language often implies true mutuality in marriage” (“Introduction,” Daughters, Wives, Widows, p. 152). For example, he maintains, “the happy and prosperous estate of the family, ...consisteth in the mutual love and agreement of the man and wife”²⁰ who have two principal duties: “cohabitation and communion” (Perkins, p. 168). Cohabitation Perkins defines as “their quiet and comfortable dwelling together in one place for the better performance of mutual duties” (p. 168), whereas “[t]he communion of man and wife is that duty whereby they do mutually and willingly communicate both their persons and goods each to other for their mutual help, necessity, and comfort” (p. 169). He continues maintaining that “[d]ue benevolence must be shewed with a singular and entire affection one towards another” (Perkins, p. 169). However, while Perkins advocates mutuality and companionship in Christian Economy, the traditional hierarchy is not totally rejected as I have explained before. The wife is still required to fulfill the two already quite familiar duties, “[t]he first is to submit herself to her husband and to acknowledge and reverence him as her head in all things...[t]he second duty is to be obedient unto her husband in all things, that is, wholly to depend upon him both in judgment and will” (Perkins, pp. 172-173). Therefore, although the wife is promoted to share a partnership, her role in it is defined inferior to that of the husband.

To conclude, humanists and puritans gave a new emphasis on the institution of marriage emphasizing companionship, but the traditional way of regarding marriage as a

(London: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 7.

²⁰ William Perkins, Christian Economy, trans. Thomas Pickering (London, 1609), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 157.

hierarchical structure in which the husband was above the wife was still influencing and dominating the discussion. In fact, as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford summarize, the wife's unequal position was self-evident; the whole discussion concerned only the form (p. 132).

1.3 The Dialogue of the Two Ideologies

In order to better understand the complexity of the whole discussion concerning wives during the sixteenth and seventeenth century England, it is revealing to study the conduct books, since the purpose of them is specifically “to enunciate ideologies” (Wayne, p. 1). Edmund Tilney's The Flower of Friendship provides an illustrative example: the work offers versatile material in the form of a dialogue between the different ideologies of what constitutes the good wife (and husband). With regard to the duties of the good wife, Tilney's book admits several points of view. For example, on the one hand, the traditional view emphasizing obedience finds a fervent supporter in the character of lady Julia, “[f]or this maryed woman, ..., must of dutie be unto hir husband in all things obedient, and therefore if he, sometimes moved, do chaunce to chide her, she must forbear.²¹ She expounds her reason too, “God commaundeth it, and we [i.e. the wives] are bounde so to doe” (Tilney, p. 133.). Yet on the other hand, the partnership or even dawning equality is also inferred when the character of Isabella suggests, “...as meete is it, that the husband obey the wife, as the wife the husband, or at the least that

there be no superioritie betwene them, ...” (Tilney, p. 133). This exemplifies the emergent view in highly equalitarian terms and even if the other characters finally reject it in their conversation, its mere existence proves that the discussion of the role of the wife was far from simple and uncontested during this time. In short, Wayne summarizes that “Tilney presents the dominant ideology of marriage by setting it off against other ideologies that were articulated in Renaissance discourses on marriage” (p. 38).

Overall, Tilney’s conduct book offers an extensive list of the duties of the good wife, the first of which “is to lyke, and love well” (p. 128). Others include “to increase a perfection of love, and above all imbrace chastitie”(p. 128), to “seeke gently to redresse them [the husbands], indevor to please them, and labour to love them, ...” (p. 129). Tilney also stresses the significance of shamefastness, which he considers “the only defence that nature hath given to women, to kepe their reputation, to preserve their chastity, to maintein their honor, and to advance their prayse” (p. 132). Furthermore, the wife ought to “keepe alwaies hir house” (p. 134), because that is her duty and “[t]he chiefest way for a woman to preserve and maintaine this good fame” (p. 136). It is also extremely important to have “chastitie of bodie” (p. 137) in addition to “honestie of behaviour, and talke” (p. 137). He even suggests, “to looke well to hir huswifery, ..., not to sit alwayes ydle, but to spend hir time in some profitable exercise” (p. 137). Finally, according to Tilney, “the chiefest point of a housewife [is] to cherish hir husband” (p. 138).

²¹ Edmund Tilney, A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in Marriage, called the Flower of Friendship (London: Henrie Denham, 1568), ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 135.

The example of Mistress Katherine Stubbes, in A Crystal Glass for Christian Women, (1591) written by her husband Philip Stubbes, confirms the question that such an ideal wife actually existed meeting all these demands. Overall, in Mrs. Stubbes crystallizes all the good qualities of an exemplary wife: passivity, withdrawal, and submissiveness (Klein, "Introduction," Daughters, Wives and Widows, p. 140). She is praised for possessing "modesty, courtesy, gentleness, affability, and good government" according to her husband,²² and in addition to all this, she is said to have adjusted herself to her husband's moods, "[i]f she saw her husband merry, then she was merry. If he were sad, then she was sad" (Stubbes, p. 143). This quality was also emphasized and exhorted by other writers, such as Vives, "[f]or she is no good wife that is merry when her husband is sorry, or whole and lusty when he is sick and heavy" (p. 116) and Edmund Tilney, "...hir husband, whose face must be hir daylie looking glasse, wherein she ought to be alwaies prying, to see when he is merie, when sad, when content, and when discontent, wherto she must alwayes frame hir owne countenance" (p. 138, see also Camden, p. 123). According to Margaret J. M. Ezell, the goal is "adaptability; it is not that the wife has no mind of her own, but that she deliberately alters it if necessary to conform with her husband's situation...she never challenges his role."²³ The good wife then always strives for the proper adjustment of her state of mind, which should be consistent with that of the husband's. This train of thought reflects the ideology that both the husband and the wife

²² Philip Stubbes, A Crystal Glass for Christian Women (London, 1591), Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 141.

are only one body and one mind—the assimilation is complete. Further traits of this perfect wife include not to contradict the husband in any thing, “but by wise counsel and sage advice, with all humility and submission seek to persuade him” (Stubbes, p. 143) and to adhere to silence, “[s]he obeyed the commandment of the Apostle who biddeth women to be silent” (Stubbes, p. 142, see also Camden, p. 123). Finally, “[s]he would never suffer no disorder or abuse in her house to be either unproved or unreformed... as she excelled in the gift of sobriety, so she surpassed in the virtue of humility” (Stubbes, p. 142).

In summary, quoting Ruth Kelso, “[t]hese then are the qualities that seem to have been most highly and frequently recommended in wives: obedience, chastity, silence, discretion, love, and modesty”, whereas “piety was largely assumed to underlie and guide all other virtues” (p. 108.). She further maintains, “[t]he rest of the wifely virtues in reality are included in the first. An obedient wife will, of course, be chaste and modest, having no eye, ear, word, or desire for any other man than her husband; she will be patient under all possible burdens that God and her husband can lay upon her; she will not chatter when her husband wishes to talk or be silent; she will love him, with all his faults, and conform her manners to his; she will dress in accordance with his wishes; she will diligently look after his house and children, and will therefore not plague him by wanting to gad about; she will, in short, do everything as he would command her without waiting for commands and with good will and grace”(p. 97).

²³ Margaret J. Ezell, The Patriarch’s Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 40.

1.4 The Motherhood Perspective

Although my main focus in this thesis specifically concentrates on the wives during the Early Modern Period in England, it seems also relevant to bring up the issue of motherhood for the simple fact that “[t]he majority of women who became mothers were wives” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 149). Arguably, these two roles should not be totally separated because they come together in meaningful ways. For instance, motherhood and wifedom may complement each other or they may contradict each other, but quite definitely they will cast light on one another and help to analyze the subject in a more comprehensive way. As Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford argue, “[m]otherhood played a large role in constructing women’s subjectivities” (p. 164). Therefore, I want to briefly examine motherhood during the sixteenth and seventeenth century England in relation to the discussion of the ideal wifedom itself; later on this will have specific relevance to Macbeth, since both wives in the play are also mothers.

First of all, according to Stone, “the ideal woman” had three functions in a household: “housekeeping”, “breeding” and “rearing of children” (p. 138), the last two specifically concerning motherhood. The importance of offspring cannot be highlighted enough in this period of an unusually high mortality; in fact, especially “[i]nfant mortality rates were extraordinarily high.”²⁴ Thus, the woman had an invaluable part in a family to assure the continuity of the line threatened by “the constant presence of death” (Stone, p. 54). Quite naturally, “[t]he higher the social level, the greater the importance attached to child-bearing” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 150). Indeed, within such circumstances a

safely delivered and healthy child was worth all the more protecting and cherishing, although at the same time Stone argues that the emotional bonds between parents and children must have been overall weaker, “to preserve their mental stability, parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their infant children” (p. 57). Still, according to P. Mack, “any mother who confessed that she could not love her child was considered by physicians to be suffering from mental disorder” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 159).

As the Reformation called for a change in the position of a wife, it also affected the position of a mother; according to Betty Travitsky, “the Protestants elevated the function of the mother” (p. 7). In fact, Travitsky argues that during the English Renaissance “there was the development of a ‘new mother’ who was a learned, pious, and responsible woman with increased and clear-cut responsibilities for the raising of her children as well as a clearly recognized right to self-development for her own sake” (p. 49). She explains this development by “an increased respect for the married woman and particular appreciation of her importance in child nurture” (Travitsky, p. 49). The reason why during this time “a good deal of stress was laid by all writers on the advisability of the mother’s nursing her own baby” (Kelso, p. 118; see also Camden, p. 134) is clear: “for the women of the nobility and the patriciate, the ladies of the courts and cities of Renaissance Europe, declined to nurse their babies.”²⁵ Indeed, the usual way for a mother of the upper classes to deal with infants was to give them to hired nurses to be nourished.

²⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, “General Introduction,” The Norton Shakespeare (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 2.

However, the choice of such a nurse was to be made meticulously since according to the common belief, the milk transmitted the qualities of the breast-feeder to the baby (Travitsky, p. 57). According to Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, “[t]he higher a woman’s social status, the less likely she was to suckle her own child” (p. 155). Yet, it is worth remembering that refusing to breast-feed does not equal to refusing to love. In any case, there was “an overwhelming body of advice from physicians, humanists, and priests, drawing from authorities as old and as honored as Aristotle and Plutarch...Outside the humanist tradition, marriage manuals and hortatory sermons—Catholic and Protestant alike—presented the arguments for maternal nursing” (King, p. 13). Thus indisputably, the “new mother” of Renaissance was supposed to nurse her own infants, “transmitting her own good qualities to her offspring by her breeding of the child in her womb, and by her nursing it at her own breasts” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 67).

Elizabeth Clinton, Countess of Lincoln, offers a revealing example of this new and vigorous exhortation to breastfeeding: in fact, her work, The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie, is basically “a series of justifications for breast-feeding” (Travitsky, p. 57). The Countess advocates vehemently this practice, for example, maintaining “doe goe on with that loving act of a loving mother; in giving the sweete milke of your owne breasts, to your owne childe.”²⁶ She continues further even more poignantly, “every woman ought to nurse her owne childe...For it is the expresse *ordinance* of God that mothers should nurse

²⁵ Margaret L. King, Women of the Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 12.

²⁶ Elizabeth Clinton, The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie (Oxford: John Lichfield and James Short, 1622), The Paradise of Women, ed. Betty Travitsky (London: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 58.

their owne children, & being his ordinance they are bound to it in conscience” (Clinton, p. 58). Throughout her entire work she is obviously very concerned of this defect of mothers not breast-feeding their own children passionately speaking for it repeating consistently her plea.

In conclusion, as one of the reasons why God ordained marriage is for the procreation of children, being a mother is a central duty of a wife. And not only a mother, but also a good mother; as William Perkins says, “[c]hildren are the gift of God, and therefore married folks are not only to use the means but also to pray for the obtaining them” (p. 170). This reflects the stance taken in “An homily of the State of Matrimony”, “God giveth children by his blessing...in that they be brought up by the parents godly in the knowledge of God’s word, ...that finally many might enjoy that everlasting immortality” (p. 14). Thus, the wife in a marriage ought to pray for having children and bring them up with the help of her husband “godly” so that they too would be saved. Indeed, “barrenness was seen as an unhappy female condition, perhaps even, as the Bible suggested, a punishment for sin” (Mendelson and Crawford, pp. 149-150). Overall, not to want children at all or not to take the best possible care of this gift both signify acts against God and nature.

To summarize everything thus far, “[d]uring Shakespeare’s time, attitudes about women and the family were in transition. Traditional sources defined love as obedience in a woman’s relationship with her father or husband, while in progressive discussions companionship in marriage was emphasized, and the wife was called a friend and helpmeet” (Dreher, p. 16). However, as King states, “[t]he assertion and reassertion of male control over females in marriage during the Renaissance is an inescapable fact” (p.

38). Therefore, “Renaissance texts on the role of women universally called for wifely submission, but with a varying emphases [sic].”²⁷ Indeed, “on marriage the girl passed out of the control of her father into the hands of her husband, who thereafter had the sole responsibility for her. As his duty toward her rested on the predication of his superiority to her in strength and wisdom, so her duty toward him rested on the assumption of her inferiority and necessary subjection to him” (Kelso, p. 92). It is especially important to notice that “[o]nly when husbands acted in opposition to divine law, said all the treatises, could their wives disobey them. Then, however, the chief duty of good wives was to try *lovingly* [emphasis added] to bring their errant husbands back into the virtuous ways” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, p. 240). All in all, there is a strong case to suggest that the role of a good wife does not appear to be easy to fulfill. After all, to be merry when your husband is merry and sad when your husband is sad does demand immense resources from the silent, obedient, submissive, chaste and good wife. Yet, naturally this represents a twentieth century view on the whole state of affairs; it is quite possible that wives in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England found their position more agreeable. Indeed, as Lawrence Stone so aptly remarks, “[h]uman beings...can adapt fairly easily to a very wide range of expectations, from the repressive to the permissive, so long as the rules are clearly understood and generally accepted” (p. 123). Arguably, there is less confusion when a wife is told over and over again that she should submit and obey; there is also more security when the specific duties and the position are unambiguously clear.

²⁷ Joan Larsen Klein, “Lady Macbeth: ‘Infirm of Purpose,’” The Woman’s Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), note 2, p. 251.

Moreover, since the women must have known what was required of them as wives, their expectations were not presumably utterly unrealistic either (Mendelson and Crawford, pp. 131-132); thus, fewer disappointments probably resulted. Finally, as Mendelson and Crawford maintain, “the subservient role which society imposed on women did not preclude the possibility of passionate love and devotion by wives as well as husbands” (p. 132.) However, interestingly enough, Vives concedes that a wife’s position in a marriage is such that “[a] man wolde rather leave all and dwell in a desert than to dwell in such misery and bondage” (p. 126). In conclusion, and based on the above discussion, the significance of submission, obedience and silence in addition to companionship as the fundamental qualities should be emphasized. In the next two chapters, it remains to be seen how Shakespeare’s two wives in Macbeth will play this role.

2. The Wives in Macbeth: Lady Macbeth

There are many similarities between the circumstances of the two wives in Macbeth; first, both Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff are married to courageous Thanes of Scotland: the military nature of their households is imbued in the business of war engaged by their heads. Second, they both reside strictly at home, totally preoccupying themselves with their own isolated family sphere while depending wholly on their husbands. Third, they both are mothers, although only Lady Macduff's child is present in the play. Fourth, they both die at the end of the tragedy: one is killed and the other supposedly commits a suicide. In fact, as far as the outset of their overall situations is concerned, Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff seem very much alike; the differences between them become apparent in their performances in the roles of wives and mothers. The next two chapters will concentrate on this; my purpose is to compare Shakespeare's two wife characters in Macbeth to the portrait of the good wife that I have discussed earlier. However, due to the fact that Lady Macbeth has a more substantial part in the play compared to that of Lady Macduff, who only appears in Act Four, Scene Two speaking less than forty lines, the main attention will be drawn to Lady Macbeth. As this comparison is applied, it becomes obvious that their cases are actually quite complex; they both fit and do not fit the model. This is especially clear with regard to Lady Macbeth, who will be the focus of the discussion first; although the prevalent image of

her has been “the wicked wife,”²⁸ she has also been called “up to her light, a perfect wife.”²⁹ Grave reasons must account for such controversial images and opinions and the next chapter aims to explore this inconsistency using the internal textual evidence in the play itself and some critical interpretations relating to it.

2.1 The Prerequisite of Wifhood

It may seem axiomatic to begin by maintaining that a wife should be a woman, i.e. she ought to be a member of the female sex. However, this plain and almost self-evident requirement is worth repeating because it has relevance to Macbeth due to Lady Macbeth’s invocation:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
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.

(1.5.38-48)

This speech establishes that Lady Macbeth wishes to undo her feminine sex; she states this clearly, “unsex me here” (l. 39). The effort of unsexing relates first of all to her

²⁸ Lucy Brashear, “‘My dearest partner in greatness’: A reappraisal of Lady Macbeth,” Selected Papers from the West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association, ed. Michael J. Galpano (Volume V, spring 1980), p. 14.

physiological essence of womanhood: menstruation and breast-feeding. She attacks this specifically in two ways: first, “[w]hen she pleads ‘make thick my blood,/Stop up th’access and passage to remorse,’ she is asking for the periodic flow to cease, the genital tract to be blocked.”³⁰ Thus, Lady Macbeth wants to stop her menstruation, identified as the “compunctious visitings of nature” (l. 43), which “is the most apparent natural visitation associated with her sexuality” (La Belle, p. 382). By pleading for this transformation, “she wills away her ability to conceive” as she intentionally “destroys her own fruitfulness” (La Belle, p. 385). The perversion of the situation horrifies; Lady Macbeth puts a curse deliberately on herself not to be able to become pregnant. To be sure, she craves for the state of sterility. Her husband’s futile lamentations for “a fruitless crown” (3.1.62) and “a barren sceptre” (3.1.63) are consistent with Lady Macbeth’s request; “[t]he destruction of the menstrual flow ultimately destroys the lineal flow” (La Belle, p. 385). Second, Lady Macbeth asks for the milk in her breasts to be taken for gall (ll. 45-46): this presents “the image of the corrupted breasts” (La Belle, p. 382). These two wishes are intimately linked together; as Jenijoy La Belle explains, “[m]enstrual blood is meant to nourish the infant—during pregnancy as blood and after pregnancy in its transformed state as milk. A stoppage of the menstrual blood therefore prevents the formation of mother’s milk” (p. 383). Wanting to undo her menstrual blood, Lady Macbeth wishes to undo her milk too, asking instead for “gall” to fill her breasts. Indeed, “both images deal with the pollution of the primary and secondary feminine organs” (La

²⁹ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Third edition, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), p. 332.

Belle, p. 382). In conclusion, Lady Macbeth “imagines an attack on the reproductive passages of her own body, on what makes her specifically female.”³¹ This is an obvious effort to kill the woman inside, i.e. the roles of a mother and a nurturer. However, as Thomas Rist remarks, Lady Macbeth is not exactly asking to become a man, only to be unsexed.

Yet, the pursuit of destroying womanhood entails even more than an attack on the physiological essence; it also aims to reverse the cultural role and the nature of a woman, which equals to being the weaker vessel. This view is already elaborated in the previous chapter and Karen Newman sums it up, “[i]n early modern England, . . . woman figures the human body, its corruptibility, fragility” in addition to “its power to inspire desire, to multiply and to reproduce” [sic].³² In Macbeth the maintained weakness of a woman is exemplified in Macduff’s description of the assumed feminine stereotype, “O gentle lady, ’Tis not for you to hear what I can speak. The repetition in a woman’s ear Would murder as it fell” (2.3.79-82). As Carolyn Asp asserts, women are construed “weak, dependent, non-political, incapable of dealing with violence” in this play;³³ their sensitive and “gentle” nature is supposedly “full o’th’ milk of human kindness” (1.5.15). Consequently, for Lady Macbeth womanhood “means lack of courage and foolish, unrealistic responses

³⁰ Jenijoy La Belle, “‘A Strange Infirmity’: Lady Macbeth’s Amenorrhea,” Shakespeare Quarterly (Volume 31, Issue 3, Autumn, 1980), p. 382.

³¹ Janet Adelman, “‘Born of Woman’: Fantasies of Maternal Power in Macbeth,” Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 98.

³² Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 6.

to a challenge:”³⁴ she has internalised the expectations of her sex in the world of the play. It is “remorse” (l. 42) and “compunctious visitings of nature” (l. 43) that are to be suppressed, both relating to the idea of denying her “womanly” feelings and hence, hardening her heart. This is further exemplified in Act One, Scene Seven, ll. 54-59 and in Act Three, Scene Four, ll. 60-65. In short, “[s]he abjures her womanhood in order to be impregnated with cruelty” (La Belle, p. 383). A potential murderer must be capable of carrying out the deed; thus, Lady Macbeth needs this cruel state of mind to be able to murder king Duncan as she is planning with her “keen knife” (1.5.50). Quoting once again La Belle, Lady Macbeth has “to achieve an unfeminine consciousness” (p. 381). Arguably, Lady Macbeth considers herself unable to commit the crime without denying her assumed feminine nature. Therefore, it must be done away with and the process of unsexing the female body includes both undoing its reproductive function and abolishing the emotional frailty and remorse. The physiological unsexing correlates with the psychological unsexing because as Jenijoy La Belle argues, “in Elizabethan physiological psychology, ... functions and processes of the body were believed to have mental consequences” (p. 381). Therefore, “[t]o free herself of the basic *psychological* characteristics of femininity, she [Lady Macbeth] is asking the spirits to eliminate the basic *biological* characteristics of femininity” (p. 381). These two aspects come together in the same image of resisting the way of nature, “[i]f the thickened blood blocks the

³³ Carolyn Asp, “‘Be bloody, bold and resolute’: Tragic Action and Sexual Stereotyping in *Macbeth*,” *Studies in Philology* (Volume LXXVIII, number 1, Late winter 1981), p. 158.

³⁴ Irene G. Dash, *Women’s Worlds in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), p. 185.

passage of the womb, then, it also stops up the access to the heart from which remorse could flow” (La Belle, p. 382). To conclude, psychologically, Lady Macbeth aims to block away pity and remorse, whereas physiologically she wishes to do away with menstrual blood: defeminization is sought after on both levels. She denies her role as a woman and consequently as a wife and a mother: I will return to the issue of motherhood more specifically later. As Peter Stallybrass summarizes, “Lady Macbeth is shown in the very attempt of overthrowing a norm inscribed in her own body. ‘Remorse’, ‘compunctious visitings of Nature’, and the ‘milk’ of ‘woman’s breasts’ ... are established as the ‘feminine’ virtues even as Lady Macbeth negates them.”³⁵ The disturbance of gender is complete.

Lady Macbeth executes this malignant effort to abolish her female sex by asking for the help of the spirits; invocation provides the means for this ardent wish. Naturally this as such connects her to the witches in the play, but another link joins Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters too. As Janet Adelman remarks, “the disturbance of gender that Banquo registers when he first meets the witches is played out in psychological terms in Lady Macbeth’s attempt to unsex herself” (p. 97; see also Stallybrass, p. 196). Thus, Lady Macbeth actually yearns for the self-same sexless quality and existence that the witches already possess, “You should be women, And yet your beards forbid me to interpret That you are so” (1.3.43-45). Moreover, as far as the invocation itself is concerned, Klein maintains, “Lady Macbeth refuses from the outset to consider the first author of her being, the last judge of her actions, and the life to come...Shakespeare may even intend

³⁵ Peter Stallybrass, “Macbeth and witchcraft,” Focus on Macbeth, ed. John

us to conclude that she has renounced her God” (The Woman’s Part, Klein, pp. 241, 243). The good wife should always put her faith in God, yet Lady Macbeth inverts this, praying to the ungodly creatures.

To conclude, the ultimate paradox stands thus: since only a woman can be a wife, by asking not to be a woman Lady Macbeth is in fact asking at the same time not to be a wife at all. Surely a wife who wishes to undo the foundation of the female sex on which her role is built proves herself as a bad wife; it is unnatural and rebellious to try to strive for sexless existence and dangerous not to mention horrifying to wish away pity and remorse. Lady Macbeth ought to be content with her role as Macbeth’s wife and as a woman, not to plead for a change. Yet, her speech in Act One, Scene Five, ll. 38-52 exemplifies a disturbing attempt to annihilate gender making Lady Macbeth seem an utterly unnatural woman and wife.

However, Lady Macbeth’s motivation for wanting and asking for such a transformation should not be disregarded. To be sure, the appeal per se typifies unnatural womanhood and unruly wifedom, yet the reason for this effort to destroy her feminine sex and the emotions relating to it is clear: Lady Macbeth considers it to be the only way to help her husband to accomplish what she thinks he wants. And that is the crown of Scotland. Therefore, to replace “remorse” (1.5.42), she asks from the “murd’ring ministers” (1.5.46) “direst cruelty” (1.5.41); she assumes this is needed from her part under the circumstances to advance her husband. Nothing in the play suggests that Lady Macbeth wants to unsex herself for selfish reasons; on the contrary, her willingness to do

injustice to her sex particularly for her husband's sake constitutes the ultimate proof of the profound dedication she portrays to her husband's cause. The essence of Lady Macbeth is being a woman, and to try to sacrifice that could be thus seen as the biggest sacrifice she can perform. Indeed, metaphorically she is willing to die for him. Lady Macbeth's determination, will power and strength to pursue that course of self-destruction are phenomenal; as A.C Bradley claims, "[s]he sets herself without a trace of doubt or conflict" to aid her husband (p. 322). Applying the psychological self-suggestion she focuses her mind completely and deliberately to pursue her husband's interest, "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be What thou art promised" (1.5.13-14). Everything else is meaningless. As Lady Macbeth resolves to make Macbeth's wish come true, she demonstrates tremendous commitment and dedication. However, this kind of sacrifice may well be argued to exceed the appropriate limits; no advice or exhortation demands defeminization as a good wife's duty. Instead, it may rather have been considered to pose a threat to society in general; women and naturally wives need to submit themselves to the rule of men and be content with their place in the bigger scheme of things. Unsexing blurs the clear gender distinction, and hence, the danger of subversion increases.

Moreover, in the end no invocation can transform Lady Macbeth really into a sexless being. As Klein argues, she "is never able to separate herself completely from womankind" (The Woman's Part, p. 241). Towards the end of the play it becomes more and more obvious that she differs enormously from the qualities she asks for from the spirits. Arguably, already the fainting in Act Two, Scene Three could be seen as foreshadowing her failure to embrace cruelty. In Act Three, Scene Two Lady Macbeth

also “betrays a tentativeness and uncertainty unrecognizable in the woman of act 1” (Dash, p. 180). Even her inability eventually to kill king Duncan, because he resembles her father does not seem to correspond to her striving for cruelty. Therefore, “[s]he does not lack the ‘compunctious visitings of nature’, although she intends to override them.”³⁶ In short, “Lady Macbeth’s prayers are never granted” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, p. 245). Accordingly, she should not be utterly condemned in this regard; her fantasy of unsexing proves to be only exactly that: an empty, although impressive, wish. Furthermore and more importantly, the fact that she has to ask for such transformation must surely mean that to begin with, she is a very feminine character, “no such invocation would be necessary if that womanliness did not exist.”³⁷

To summarize, on the one hand, Lady Macbeth personifies the wife utterly dedicated to her husband because of what she is willing to do to herself in order to promote him: to ask both physiological and psychological unsexing. On the other hand, the invocation itself stands for an effort to undo her presumed fundamental feminine nature and thus her wifehood, not to mention motherhood, is being denied by the same request. Paradoxically, she is and is not the good wife in this regard.

After discussing this rather basic condition of wifehood, I want to concentrate on those duties and requirements that are explained in chapter one. And since submission, obedience and silence constitute the key requirements of a good wife, in addition to being

³⁶ Derek Russell Davis, “Hurt minds,” Focus on Macbeth, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 213.

³⁷ Carol J. Carlisle, “Helen Faucit’s Lady Macbeth,” Shakespeare Studies (Volume 16, 1983), p. 211.

actually a woman, it seems reasonable to examine next how well or how ill Lady Macbeth fulfills them.

2.2 Submission, Obedience and Silence

Strong evidence exists to suggest that Lady Macbeth fails to fulfill these three central demands; on the contrary, she in fact perverts the good wifehood in these respects. The play offers many cases in point to prove this argument, particularly in the first Act. For example, in Act One, Scene Seven Macbeth decides after a longish introspection not to advance the murder of the king. He states this clearly, “We will proceed no further in this business” (1.7.31), and a good wife should accept this; after all, the husband is her lord. Yet, Lady Macbeth refuses to assent to her husband’s resolution; instead, she becomes angry and starts scolding her husband:

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem’st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would’,
Like the poor cat i’ th’ adage?

(1.7.35-45)

A reply in itself disregards the requirement of silence, but the content and especially the tone of that speech are anything but submissive or obedient. In case of a disagreement a

good wife would have meekly dissembled the matter, or at most used sweet talk to persuade her husband to reconsider or to act differently as Stubbes and Klein maintain (see chapter 1.3. and chapter 1.4). Conversely, Lady Macbeth in Act One berates and taunts her husband behaving very much like a true Renaissance shrew as Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus have pointed out.³⁸ Macbeth has hardly enough time to answer her apologetically, “Prithee, peace. I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none” (1.7.45-47) when his railing wife ventures even further:

What beast was'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. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I sworn
As you have done to this.

(1.7.47-59)

According to Kittredge, “she uses...the three stock arguments of a woman with a man, especially of a wife with a husband. `You would do it if you dared—but you daren't.` `You would do it if you loved me—but you don't.` And finally, `If I were a man, I'd do it myself.`”³⁹ The second approach typifies nothing better than a case of sexual blackmailing, and incidentally a “capacity to give or withhold sexual favours” constitutes

³⁸ Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 126.

a significant trait of a wife dominating her husband, as Lawrence Stone explains (p. 139). Unmistakably Macbeth wants his wife to love him, but a submissive and obedient wife surely would not take advantage of such a situation using it as an instrument to subject her husband. This turns out to be exactly though what Lady Macbeth is guilty of and it proves that she perverts submission and obedience into blatant domineering and disobedience. Later, in Act One, Scene Seven she shows more of the same as she goes on contemptuously trivializing Macbeth's puny doubts with "We fail! But screw you courage to the sticking-place And we'll not fail" (1.7.59-61).

These two speeches (1.7.35-45; 47-59) are the main evidence to prove that Lady Macbeth is not a submissive, obedient and silent wife; instead of submission, she portrays aggression; instead of obedience, she characterizes defiance, and instead of silence, she resorts to scolding. A good wife would never have defied her husband's will and questioned his manhood and courage the way Lady Macbeth does. Nor would a good wife have misused her husband's love for her as a tool of manipulation, again the way Lady Macbeth does. She does not appear meek, silent or inferior to him in any way in the first Act of the play; on the contrary, she wears the breeches. Indeed, other passages contain further evidence to confirm the case, for example, Act Two, Scene Two. In this scene Macbeth returns from committing the murder of King Duncan and Lady Macbeth is waiting for him. She makes chilling remarks to her husband in this scene too, just like in the previous scene in which they were together: when Macbeth is grieved by the sight of his bloody hands, Lady Macbeth snaps at him, "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight"

³⁹ C. J Sisson, "Public Justice: Macbeth," Major Literary Characters: Macbeth, ed.

(2.2.19); when Macbeth is perplexed by his inability to say ‘amen’, Lady Macbeth ignores coldly his confusion, “Consider it not so deeply” (2.2.28) and “These deeds must not be thought After these ways. So, it will make us mad” (2.2.31-32); when Macbeth is agitated about the voice crying ‘Sleep no more’, Lady Macbeth patronizes him and begins to order him around, “Go get some water And wash this filthy witness from your hand. Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there. Go, carry them, and smear The sleepy grooms with blood” (2.2.44-48). As Macbeth refuses this, she expresses her indignation by the contemptuous snarl, “Infirm of purpose!” (2.2.50): in fact, this summarizes succinctly her whole attitude towards him thus far. In short, there is far too much nagging. Lady Macbeth hardly shows any signs of a submissive and obedient wife in the first two acts; she predominantly personifies the perversion of good wifeness with domination, reproof and disobedience. As Roland Mushat Frye suggests, “[t]here need be no insistence upon the differences between such gentle, and above all submissive, wifely persuasion and Lady Macbeth’s caustic tactics of domination in the crucial seventh scene of the first act and second scene of the second act, to cite two outstanding examples” (p. 103).

Although it is now established that Lady Macbeth fails the duties of submission, obedience and silence at the beginning of Macbeth, the tragedy still includes three more acts; possibly she will redeem herself fully and totally in the course of the play. However, this will never be. In addition to the particular and already mentioned passages in Acts One and Two, Lady Macbeth resorts to the same pattern of scolding later in Act Three,

Scene Four when Macbeth is terrified of the ghost of Banquo. This becomes manifest first by her annoyed phrase, “Are you a man?” (3.4.57), after which she proceeds with the main berating:

O proper stuff!
 This is the very painting of your fear;
 This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
 Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
 Impostors to true fear, would well become
 A woman’s story at a winter’s fire
 Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself,
 Why do you make such faces? When all’s done
 You look but on a stool.

(3.4.59-67)

Even more follows, “What, quite unmanned in folly?” (3.4.72), and finally, “Fie, for shame!” (3.4.73), leaving once again no doubt of Lady Macbeth’s shrewish nature. She is here using the same scolding like before hanging tightly on this mode of behavior; her old habits have not died or disappeared. On the contrary, here they reveal themselves just as strong as previously. The same old railing and domineering wife echoes her very same old taunt as in Act One, Scene Seven, “When you durst do it, then you were a man” (1.7.49). The argument remains unchanged; according to Lady Macbeth, her husband is acting like a woman, with “these flaws and starts” (l. 62), which is unbecoming him. Instead, they fit to “A woman’s story at a winter’s fire” (l. 64). Earlier Macbeth was stirred by her wife’s bitter words reacting to her chiding; however, in this scene he is unreachable by the same method and the same argument staying rapt regardless of his wife’s berating. The difference in his reactions is probably due to the horror caused by Banquo’s ghost, but also possibly to the effect of numbing: the more railing, the less response. Interestingly enough, Lady Macbeth may seem to act like a good wife from the

guests' point of view; all they see is a wife who apparently tries to reassure, help, comfort and justify her strangely behaving husband. A revealing example of this is her comment pronounced "aloud" before the assembly according to text (p. 2592), "My worthy lord, Your noble friends do lack you" (3.4.82-83). The guests are, however, unaware of what Lady Macbeth says to Macbeth confidentially, because as the stage directions read, "She speaks apart with Macbeth" (p. 2591). It is precisely her private exchange of words with her husband that reveals her true nature and actual unconcern with his state of mind as a matter of comforting or helping. On the contrary, she reprovcs him vehemently and shows no genuine regard for him at all; it is all about not spoiling the feast and behaving like a woman, or like a stark raving madman. Overall, Lady Macbeth's situation in this scene is highly controversial; on the one hand, as the queen she has a notable role of a hostess to fulfill to her guests, i.e. she needs to keep up the public front, on the other hand, her private role of Macbeth's domineering and disobedient wife causes her to reprimand her husband's disturbing behavior, but of course that cannot be acted before the guests. The pressure is even intensified by the fact that this happens to be the Macbeths' first public event after the coronation. It is almost possible to picture Lady Macbeth smiling in one minute reassuring that all will be well and flaring up next demanding that Macbeth pull himself together. The audience's privilege is to be constantly fully aware of the deceptiveness of her character as it witnesses both the private and the public dialogues, whereas the guests see only what she allows and wants them to see hoping to make good impression or at least do some damage control.

Finally, if even all this evidence does not suffice to prove Lady Macbeth a bad wife with no regard to submission, obedience and silence, the last scene in which she

appears adds the finishing touches to the case; even while sleepwalking, she carries on with the same taunting attitude, “Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier and afeard? What need we fear who knows it when none can call our power to account?” (5.1.31-33); “No more o’ that, my lord, no more o’ that. You mar all with this starting” (5.1.37-38); “Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo’s buried. He cannot come out on’s grave” (5.1.52-54). And then she delivers her last and the most horrifying speech: “To bed, to bed. There’s knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed” (5.1.56-58). Apparently, she relives the past in this scene, but the fact remains that even asleep and unconsciously, Lady Macbeth cannot shake the domineering, disobeying and scolding mode away from her. Her unruly stance repeats itself in her dream only further highlighting her shortcomings as far as these duties are concerned.

Arguably, Lady Macbeth fails especially the requirement of submission, because from the moment when she first enters the play she already gives every indication that she is a stronger and more dominant spouse of the marriage. As soon as Lady Macbeth has read the letter that informs her of the witches’ predictions, she takes the reins: already she has committed herself to make those premonitions come true, “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be What thou art promised” (1.5.13-14). As Richard Flatter points out, “although the letter does not speak of murder, she does so at once.”⁴⁰ [Note: this was italicized because Flatter seems to emphasize it specifically, but I have removed the italics]. After having made up her mind that Macbeth will be the king, she moves on

preparing to take care of it, "...you shall put This night's great business into my dispatch,...(1.5.65-66); "Leave all the rest to me" (1.5.71). A good wife should discuss the matter with her husband, and he would be ultimately the one who would decide what, if anything, is to be done. Conversely, in the Macbeths' household, no shared consultation takes place or is needed: the wife has already decided the course of action and so shall it be. Moreover, according to Lady Macbeth, Duncan enters "Under my battlements" (1.5.38); the possessive determiner "my" explicitly indicates her pre-eminence at home. In the end it is indeed Lady Macbeth who has the whole plan figured out; she is like an enthusiastic "stage manager" as Linda Bamber describes,⁴¹ who after giving a pep talk to an insecure actor, finally moves on to details:

We fail!
 But screw your courage to the sticking-place
 And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—
 Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
 Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains
 Will I with wine and wassail so convince
 That memory, the warder of the brain,
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
 A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep
 Their drenched natures lies in a death,
 What cannot you and I perform upon
 Th'unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
 His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
 Of our great quell?

(1.7.59-72)

She is definitely taking charge of everything: not only has she convincingly contributed to Macbeth's change of mind about the killing, "I am settled, and bend up Each corporal

⁴⁰ Richard Flatter, "The Question Of Free Will, And Other Observations On Macbeth," English Miscellany (Volume 10, 1959), p. 95.

agent to this terrible feat. Away, and mock the time with fairest show. False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (1.7.79-82), she orchestrates the whole affair: making the grooms drunk, ringing the bell, returning the daggers to the murder scene, smearing the supposed scapegoats with the king’s blood and hurrying her husband and herself back to their chamber finally putting on their nightgowns. She is never irresolute or terrified, which seems quite unnatural and almost too horrifying to be true. Throughout the whole business of the murder the ecstatic passion is driving her hurriedly on. The roles of a husband and a wife are undeniably perverted; she leads while he follows, which indicates the total unnaturalness of the Macbeths’ household compared to the conceptions prevailing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, the gender roles are perverted too: Macbeth seems weak and passive, whereas Lady Macbeth strong and active.

To grasp Lady Macbeth’s domineering character more clearly, her words in the play provide a solid basis. Especially significant is her frequent use of the imperative mood of a verb: “*look* like the time”, “*bear* welcome in your eye”, “*look* like the innocent flower”, “*leave* all the rest to me”, “*screw* you courage to the sticking place”, “*consider* it not so deeply”, “*Go, get* some water”, “*wash* this filthy witness from your hand”, “*Go, carry* them and *smear* The sleepy grooms with blood”, “*Give* me the daggers”, “*Retire* we to our chamber”, “*Get* on your nightgown”, “*Be not* lost So poorly in your thoughts”, “*Wash* your hands, *put* on your nightgown, *look not* so pale” and “*Come, come, come, come, give* me your hand”. Also her use of the modal “shall” is worth noticing: “Glamis

⁴¹ Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in

thou art, and Cawdor, and *shalt be* What thou are promised” and “you *shall put* This night’s great business into my dispatch”. All this charging and compelling fits commanding authority very well; yet, the inconsistency between this and the exhorted loving and gentle speech by a good wife is conspicuous. I find it intriguing that in fact, as Janet Adelman suggests (pp. 100-101), in many passages Lady Macbeth seems to act more like a mother to Macbeth than a wife; she is bringing him up like a male child to be a man. Indeed, ‘be a man’ is her argument over and over again; it constitutes the key aim for his “education” and the specific mold that she wants Macbeth to fit. Lady Macbeth’s virtual maternal relationship with her husband relates to her use of language; with such an extensive number of imperative verb forms, it is almost possible to create the illusion of Macbeth as a child who is commanded continuously: “do this” or “do not do that”. Obviously this is no submissive or respectful tone to take with a husband, who ought to rule as the superior head of the household, but it becomes quite explicable within a parent-child interaction. Therefore, Lady Macbeth’s ostensible parental discipline makes her seem the more dominant party in their union; Adelman thinks her “strength” lies partly in her ability to “make him imagine himself as an infant vulnerable to her” (p. 101).

Furthermore, Lady Macbeth’s tendency to order becomes apparent in all her social interactions, not just with Macbeth; with servants, naturally, “*Give* him tending”, but also with guests, “*Speak, speak*”, “*Help* me hence, ho!”, “*Sit*, worthy friends”, “Pray you, *keep* seat”, “*Feed*, and *regard* him *not*”, “*Think* of this, good peers, But as a thing of custom”,

“I pray you, *speake not*”, “*Stand not* upon the order of your going, But *go* at once”. Also with the “spirits That tend on mortal thoughts” it is Lady Macbeth who wields control, “*Come* you spirits”, “*unsex* me here”, “*fill* me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty”, “*Make* thick my blood”, “*Stop* up th’access and passage to remorse”, “*Come* to my woman’s breasts” and “*take* my milk for gall”. Even nature herself is not spared, “*Come*, thick night”. Since such a huge part of Lady Macbeth’s lines consists of giving commands, her words themselves argue against her submissiveness, obedience and most of all silence pronouncing her rather an anti-wife.

Another interesting point in Lady Macbeth’s language is its force, which relates to the many imperative forms. She rarely says anything nice or compassionate and even when she does, the words have only a slight impact compared to all her harsh and provocative ranting and ordering. And because she uses the overpowering and berating language in the beginning of the play, it quickly brands her as a scold; it is hard for the audience to shake this memory of her later when she speaks differently. Undeniably Lady Macbeth’s power is in her speech; her language makes her sound like a terrifying domestic virago, which puts yet another twist on the ideal of wife’s sweet speech and silence.

Therefore, all in all from the beginning of the play to the end there more than sufficient supply of evidence exists to conclude that Lady Macbeth fails to fulfill the good wife’s duties of submissiveness, obedience and silence: she defies, chides, scolds, taunts and threatens her husband in altogether four different acts and scenes.

To be sure, Lady Macbeth behaves disobediently and disrespectfully dominating and upbraiding her husband in several passages from which a good wife ought to refrain

herself. Yet, she does not berate him to take personal pleasure or to be mean. On the contrary, as with the request for unsexing, her motivation could not be more unselfish and noble: it is one again all for her husband's sake. Indeed, as Linda Bamber has so well put it, Lady Macbeth rebukes her husband, because she "find[s] him slow to serve his own interests" (p. 92) and Richard Flatter suggests the same, "on more than one occasion, she chides and rebukes him...She does so, however, not because she wishes to domineer over him, but to serve him, i.e. to help him to jump the obstacles in his path...She scolds him into doing the deed. She must be cruel, only to be kind. What she does is an act of love, not of domination" (p. 104). Thus, it is possible to justify Lady Macbeth's conduct by suggesting that she is continually under the impression that she is in fact doing her husband a favor by helping him to achieve his goal. Arguably, Lady Macbeth wants only the best for him, which according to her is to be the God's appointed ruler in the realm; to obtain the crown is to reside at the top of the earthly ladder of hierarchy. Because for her there simply exists no other conceivable scenario exclusive of her narrow focus on her husband, she decides to help him in any way she can. Her single-mindedness is truly tremendous; if Macbeth wants something, Macbeth will have it if it is up to her, yet surely this, as the unsexing, portrays strong loyalty and dedication. Therefore, the reason why Lady Macbeth gets so upset and behaves so unruly is her frustration as she witnesses her husband not seeming to realize what is good for him and start acting accordingly. She undeniably thinks she sees her husband's interest better than himself and hence, she acts more like a mother with a child than a wife with a husband. Her impatience and exasperation grow along with her husband's hesitations making her say quite harsh things to him, but only because as far as she is concerned, he seems foolishly and cowardly

failing to take the full advantage of his situation. In conclusion, for Lady Macbeth, the end justifies the means.

Besides, it is an oversimplification to argue that Lady Macbeth exemplifies disobedience, domineering and scolding unexceptionally throughout the play, although as I have claimed, she quite consistently follows that specific pattern. Yet, as paradoxical as it may appear, there still are examples to be found of Lady Macbeth acting as an obedient, submissive and silent wife. For instance in Act Three, Scene Two she personifies the exact role model of all of the above requirements. Here she addresses her husband reverently, “my lord” (3.2.10), and in a clear contrast to her earlier unruly behavior she now asks irresolutely, “What’s to be done?” (3.2.45), even holding her peace when told to “Be innocent of the knowledge” (3.2.46). Especially her indecisive bafflement, “What’s to be done?” (l. 45) strikes a discord; apparently she has lost her domineering initiative. Indeed, it once seemed almost inconceivable to imagine Lady Macbeth ever to say, “Come on, gentle my lord. Sleek o’er your rugged looks, be bright and jovial Among your guests tonight” (3.2.28-30). Yet, she does articulate this resembling impeccably a good wife with gentle speech and a loving, liking and supportive attitude.

However, those few moments of submission and obedience contradict Lady Macbeth’s behavior and words in the beginning of the play. This “new” or rather “different” Lady Macbeth is the anti-thesis of the “old” version of her, the Lady Macbeth that appears in the first two Acts. Suddenly, she is very much the opposite of what she was a while ago and the requirements and duties of the good wife now fit much better than before. The fact that her husband is now crowned the king cannot account for her more commendable behavior, because later on in the banquet scene she in any case

continues acting insubordinately again. Indeed, this abrupt and temporary change of heart is so remarkable and so puzzling that it almost eludes any explanation. Nevertheless, I find Alan Sinfield's argumentation considering this issue very convincing. He interprets Lady Macbeth's case as "a story about the supposed nature of women" comparing her to Desdemona in Othello: "initial bold behavior is succeeded eventually by a reversion to 'feminine' passivity, with an episode of nagging the husband in between" (p. 56). In conclusion he says, "Lady Macbeth is a fantasy arrangement of elements that are taken to typify the acceptable and unacceptable faces of woman, and the relations between them" (Sinfield, p. 56). "[T]he acceptable and unacceptable faces of woman" apply to wives in general as well, since most of the duties and requirements are not at all separated as I have mentioned in the introduction.

Yet, the earlier perversion of the roles of a husband and a wife, as well as a man and a woman, is reverted for good: from now on the Macbeths represent the supposedly appropriate model with the husband in charge and the wife passively staying in the background. In fact, Act Three is the turning point in the play as far as Lady Macbeth's power in influencing action is concerned: never again will she have decisive vote to cast on anything from now on, because Macbeth's domestic tyranny takes care of all. Lady Macbeth simply ceases to dominate, although she does still act irreverently and inconsiderately. If this change happens so smoothly and suddenly, she may not even have had the control before had Macbeth not allowed that to happen. This, of course, brings the question of Macbeth's manhood back into the limelight. It may be as Erasmus argues after all, "[n]o man...had ever a shrew to his wife, but through his own default" (p. 84).

To sum up, there is evidence both for and against Lady Macbeth's failure in the duties of submission, obedience and silence. Yet, although some critics, for example Flatter, vehemently try to defend Lady Macbeth, arguably her character would have been more likely to be condemned in these issues in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This simply because even if Lady Macbeth's motivation behind her shrewish behavior is granted basically good, the fact of the matter still remains that she is nevertheless disobedient, domineering and scolding. Nothing changes this; indeed, quoting her own words, "What's done is done" (3.2.14). Consequently, although she plays the part of a good wife momentarily in Act Three, Scene Two, by that time it is too late to fully recompense the damage: she has already lost her credibility after all that has been said and done before her transformation and her later shortcomings only worsen her case. Undeniably it is quite problematic to reconcile her disobedient railing with her temporarily changed and more commendable behavior, but at least one thing is certain: Lady Macbeth fails to act consistently as a submissive, obedient and silent wife. More than enough examples abound to contradict that role. The only occasion for a wife to disobey and refuse to submit to her husband is when the husband is acting against God, as chapter one explains. Lady Macbeth's situation constitutes no such exception; on the contrary, it is quite the opposite and the next chapter will focus more closely on this issue.

2.3 Discouraging Damnation

A fundamental duty of a good wife during the sixteenth and seventeenth century England was to beware of the devil and to resist him as "An Homily of the State of

Matrimony” and Vives emphasize in chapter one. This obligation entailed not solely the wife’s personal concern for her own soul and salvation; in fact, according to Robert Wilkinson, she was “to assist her husband against all assaults of the devil” (Frye, p. 103). Thus, the wife’s function was in fact to act as her husband’s safeguard guiding him into virtue avoiding vice. However, if the husband refused to resist the temptation of the devil but instead embraced it, “[w]omen knew that their duties did not include obeying a husband in wrongdoing” (Mendelson and Crawford, p. 138). Therefore, although the requirement of obedience and submission was nearly indisputable, this was considered significantly the sole exception of the case.

Before comparing Lady Macbeth’s actual performance to this specific duty, it is important to examine her particular circumstances. To begin with, this obligation applies to Lady Macbeth’s case quite evidently: her husband harbors “black and deep desires” (1.4.51) entertaining “thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical” (1.3.138) in his mind (see also 1.3.49-55,136-141; 1.4.48-53; 1.7.47-48). Admittedly, in this ominous musing on regicide evil is brewing. But to put it rather dramatically, he has not yet been won over by the dark side; as Alan Sinfield maintains, Macbeth possesses “a radically insecure subjectivity, one swaying between divergent possible selves and vulnerable to manipulation” (p. 64). On the one hand, he is, quoting once again Sinfield, “acting out the dominant story” (p. 63): Macbeth’s current and actual identity consists of being the king’s subject, the Thane of Glamis and of Cawdor. Yet, on the other hand, he is intrigued by “an alternative scenario...namely that he might overthrow Duncan and replace him” (Sinfield, p. 63). This prospect looms in his imagination as a possible identity: a conceivable realization of what he envisages he could be haunts him. Macbeth is, if you

will, in conflict with himself: he could go either way acting out the real or the “fantastical”. Arguably, the tragedy is that he finally chooses to realize the scenario of the envisioned self usurping the kingship, as Asp claims, “he succumbs to the temptation that faces every tragic hero set within a world of limits, the temptation to override those limits and establish himself as an omnipotent center of reference” (p. 156).

With this overall context of Lady Macbeth’s husband’s conflict of identities in mind, it is time to look into a good wife’s duty of forwarding her husband’s salvation, which is all the more interesting issue since Macbeth will eventually murder the king. An obvious question then rises concerning his wife’s role in the whole predicament. First, it is important to notice that Lady Macbeth knows for certain that her husband is vulnerable having grave doubts and gnawing hesitations to “wrongly win”:

Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou’dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries ‘Thus thou must do’ if thou have it,
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.

(1.5.14-23)

This speech establishes Lady Macbeth fully aware of her husband’s unstable state of mind swaying between what he wants and what keeps him from getting it; he will not easily “catch the nearest way” (l. 16). At this point she, as his wife, has the duty of preventing him from pursuing these unholy intentions by actually “playing false”; otherwise it would be giving in to the evil. Lady Macbeth, however, assumes the crime to be the only way to proceed from now on, and immediately she is willing and ready to murder Duncan

herself, “Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark To cry ‘Hold, hold!’” (1.5.48-52). This is, after all, why she asks for the unsexing as I have explained. Already Lady Macbeth does not appear to be forwarding at least her own salvation. However, her plans change later: she cannot bring herself to murder Duncan, because he resembles her own father (2.2.12-13). Nonetheless, all this obviously casts serious doubt on whether she takes a different approach to the issue with her husband.

Unfortunately, Lady Macbeth’s own willingness and eagerness to pursue the lethal course of action foreshadows her failure to guard her husband’s soul. But not only will she fail, which in itself does not exclude the possibility that she could have been trying her best to succeed; she perverts this duty most condemingly. To put her motive aside for a while, the fact of the matter is that she encourages her husband to obtain the crown of Scotland for better and for worse. Even though Macbeth actually decides otherwise (1.7.31-35), she instigates him still further on. Her means is her rhetoric; her power is the power of language:

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.

(1.5.23-28)

Lady Macbeth’s plan is concocted: she will lure her husband with the asset of speech, thus influencing his contradictory mind. Already the audience feels sorry for Macbeth: first the witches and now this. However, whereas the weird sisters only hail and offer no binding premonitions, Lady Macbeth mercilessly taunts her husband to commit the crime;

she presents her case making all other alternatives to murder quite unacceptable and inconceivable. I have already quoted in full Lady Macbeth's instigations in the previous chapter proving her a disobedient and domineering wife, and the same passages work as evidence concerning this issue as well (see 1.7.35-45, 47-72). Act One, Scene Seven is the part of the play, which makes the case quite clear: Lady Macbeth's incitement to wrongfully seize the crown fundamentally condemns her with regard to the duty of safeguarding her husband's soul. She makes her husband feel himself an impotent coward and threatens to withhold sexual favors as I have mentioned. According to Janet Adelman, for Lady Macbeth the murder is equivalent to masculinity (p. 93), although for all the play reveals she has no reason to accuse Macbeth of the lack of it. On the contrary, his manliness has been stressed more than sufficiently in the first Act with the epithets like, "brave" (1.2.16), "valiant" (1.2.24) and "worthy" (1.2.24), and he himself admits, "I have bought Golden opinions from all sorts of people" (1.7.32-33). In the world of the play a man's role is undoubtedly to be a courageous, fearless, daring and valorous warrior, anything but a weak effeminate coward. Hence, for Macbeth the accusation of cowardice as a soldier constitutes the ultimate spur: manhood constitutes the core of his identity, "I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none" (1.7.46-47). Lady Macbeth knows perfectly well her husband's courage-based identity, and she takes advantage of it without blinking her eye. The power she has as his wife she puts into ruthless and ingeniously evil use. In addition to that, it may be presumed that she probably has some sexual appeal, which combined with the advantage of knowing her husband's weak spot, the charge of being a coward, adds up to a potent combination: to quote the witches, "the charm is firm and good" (4.1.38). The essential prerequisite to this

maneuvering is Macbeth's state of mind: Alan Sinfield's suggested wavering back and forth between possible self-realizations (p. 64) provides the fertile soil for her wife's scheming manipulation to grow. The precious reward will be "the golden round". Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to proceed with his own idea in a way that is totally horrifying, even ecstatic, and she turns out to be so good at it that one has to admire her at least to a degree, although she arouses undoubtedly more fear and disapproval. Arguably, Lady Macbeth's tampering with Macbeth's mind correlates in some degree with Iago's influence on Othello: both instigators arouse awe and disgust, both are conniving opportunists, who will not flinch from taking advantage of the suitable situation, and both manage to work behind the scenes deceiving others: the beauty of it is that no one else suspects anything. Indeed, as far as specifically Macbeth is concerned, "[n]othing in the text indicates that the men in the play suspected Lady Macbeth" (Dash, p. 175). Yet, Lady Macbeth's position as her victim's wife intensifies the horror of perdition admittedly more compared to the effort of undoing by the enemy from outside: of all the people in the whole world, his own wife furthers Macbeth's ruin. Ironically, in the only situation when it would have been appropriate for Lady Macbeth to disobey her husband, she obeys, and offers more than necessary support, almost reaching an obsessed obligation. Otherwise, when she should have submitted and obeyed, she refuses. As Joan Larsen Klein summarizes, "Lady Macbeth violates her chief duty to her husband and her God when she urges Macbeth to murder his king" (The Woman's Part, p. 240), since she was the one who is supposed to be "guiding her husband's spiritual salvation" (Brashear, p. 14).

Therefore, no evidence exists in the play to suggest that Lady Macbeth in any way forwards her husband's salvation by objecting to "the courses of evil" (Frye, p. 103); never is she hesitant or opposed to the murder in theory or stopping or dissuading Macbeth from committing it in practice. Instead, she wants it to come about and takes for granted that it will. Embracing the whole idea of the immoral deed she urges her husband to proceed with it helping him in the implementation: this is assisting, not resisting the devil as Roland Mushat Frye concludes (p. 103). Thus, the good wife's duty to discourage damnation by helping her husband to obtain salvation is shamelessly perverted by Lady Macbeth. In short, she personifies the antithesis of a husband's safeguard as she goads him on to "the primrose way to th'everlasting bonfire" (2.3.17-18). The result is that Macbeth's own ambitious mind has no stabilizing system of checks and balances; what he wants, his wife wants it for him too, even more than himself. Accordingly, Lady Macbeth proves to be a bad wife and an accomplice to a most devious murder. And even worse, Lady Macbeth never repents her part in the crime, nor the fact that she instigates her husband to commit it. If she ever had tried to prevent, let alone been scrupulous about the crime, it would be harder to judge Lady Macbeth regarding this issue. But she deliberately "urges the hero beyond the limits of decency in his struggle for power in that world" (Bamber, p. 91). It is the story of Adam and Eve retold.

Thus, the question whether Macbeth would have committed the crime without Lady Macbeth's instigation is pure and unnecessary speculation: doubtlessly she contributes to it as he agrees to realize her fully recommended "alternative scenario" of the imagined identity, to which Alan Sinfield refers (p. 63). In fact, her ruthless and efficient maneuvering proves that "[s]he does not shrink from acknowledging that

compulsion may help an uncertain story to prevail” (Sinfield, p. 64). Relating to this, Janet Adelman suggests that Macbeth becomes “a representation of primitive fears about male identity and autonomy itself, about those looming female presences who threaten to control one’s actions and one’s mind...(p. 90). Arguably, this pervasive fear of a female or specifically wife’s influence on a husband is embodied in the character of Lady Macbeth. Karen Newman gives a significant historical perspective relating to this issue, “contemporary writers...recognized the special nearness of wives, their knowledge of their husbands’ habits and faults, and the possibility they might use that knowledge against them—in short, they recognized the circulation of power within the sexual relation and the threat of sexual difference” (p. 17). Indeed, wicked wives who corrupt their beloved husband’s minds seem to pose a clear and present danger.

To be sure, Lady Macbeth seizes the opportunity to instigate Macbeth to commit a regicide, but the question of her motive for such provocation is highly relevant. And again, as with the effort of unsexing, it is all done in order to help her husband (Sisson, p. 120; Flatter, p. 104). Nowhere in the play does Lady Macbeth express her personal desire to become the queen as her reason to urge Macbeth to “do the deed”; as A.C. Bradley points out, “[t]hey have no separate ambitions” (p. 306; see also Brashear, p. 16). Indeed, she never speaks of the plan to kill Duncan as something she wants to achieve specifically for herself in the first person singular ‘I’, and only on one occasion she includes herself in her husband’s reward, “...you shall put This night’s great business into my dispatch, Which shall to all *our* nights and days to come Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.” (1.5.65-68) [emphasis added]. Yet, surely to be the wife of the king would be far more powerful and glorious than to be the wife of Thane of Glamis and of Cawdor.

And Macbeth in fact informs her of the prophecies, “. . . that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised *thee*” (1.5.10-11) [emphasis added]. Considering this, Lady Macbeth’s emphasis on her husband’s priority in this issue of the murder as her ultimate objective appears to be all the more unselfish: she is in it only for the advancement of Macbeth, “Glamis thou art and Cawdor, and shalt be What thou art promised” (1.5.13-14). Other passages reaffirm this, “. . .All that impedes thee [Macbeth] from the golden round Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem To have thee [Macbeth] crowned withal” (1.5.26-28) and “ you [Macbeth] would Be so much more the man” (1.7.50-51). The crown is something “Which thou [Macbeth] esteem’st the ornament of life” (1.7.42). Therefore, Lady Macbeth may disagree with her husband, but there never remains any doubt that she would not put him as her first and foremost concern, which a good and dutiful wife ought to do. It is possible that she is enthusiastically trying to fulfill her wifely commitment by supporting her husband’s desire and thus, her selfless effort to help her husband devotedly is in principle what good wives are made of. She harnesses her mind and body, her whole person, to work for her husband’s good according to what she believes he wants. As such this is all very admirable. Relating to this, the audience may even wonder whether she would have contributed to the murder of Duncan at all if she had foreseen the consequences of it to her dear husband. Obviously, he suffers considerably from the crime, which is already clear judged by his behavior in the scene following the murder: the remorse, “This is a sorry sight” (2.2.18) and the terror, “But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’?” (2.2.29) shake him while “every noise appals” (2.2.56). Indeed, his futile anxiety and dread expressed finally, “I have lived long enough” (5.3.23) must be far from the earthly

might and glory with “solely sovereign sway and masterdom” (1.5.68) what Lady Macbeth actually wished for him. Thus, although undeniably she contributes bringing him to his ruin, doing him disservice instead of a service, certainly this outcome is the opposite of what she had in mind. In fact, they are both plagued by “the affliction of these terrible dreams That shake us nightly” (3.2.20-21); therefore, Lady Macbeth undoes herself likewise. This is further exemplified particularly in Act Five, Scene One: “She has light by her continually. ’Tis her command” (5.1.19-20), she washes her hands compulsively (5.1.23-26) and she suffers from “A great perturbation in nature” i.e. sleepwalking (5.1.1-9). Finally, even to go on living turns out to be too much to ask. Her childish conviction, “A little water clears us of this deed” (2.2.65) may crystallize her naïve blindness to any harmful consequences, yet it is quite improbable to conceive Lady Macbeth ever wanting deliberately to destroy both her husband and herself.

Furthermore, and still avoiding to mitigate her instigation in the murder of Duncan in any way, Lady Macbeth’s role in the other actual bloodsheds in the play is almost nonexistent. It is all Macbeth’s own idea to kill the grooms in Act Two, Scene Three; in fact, Lady Macbeth wanted them to live to take the blame, “bear the guilt Of our great quell “ (1.7.71-72), which is why she “drugged their possets” (2.2.6). Certainly Lady Macbeth remains merely a confused outsider in the murder of Banquo and the attempted murder of Fleance (3.2.31-36, 45), because her husband exhorts her to “Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, Till thou applaud the deed” (3.2.46-47). And as far as the massacre of Macduff’s household is concerned, nothing indicates that Lady Macbeth has anything to do with those particular slayings either, except that she later knows about the killing of Lady Macduff, “The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?” (5.1.36-37).

In the end, the imagined infanticides being only flickering fantasies, Lady Macbeth's real connection to any crime or foul play is the killing of Duncan. Yet, as I suggest, there is no shortage of opportunities to instigate further abominations; Lady Macbeth cannot be blamed for all the crimes.

Moreover, and this is extremely important, it is incorrect to claim that the main responsibility even of the murder of Duncan falls on Lady Macbeth: if it did, Macbeth could not be considered a tragic hero, if that term is understood to refer to the protagonist's own free willingly self-inflicted downfall (Flatter p. 92; see also Bradley, p. 7). In fact, to give Lady Macbeth the full credit for the entire murderous affair, would rather be labeling Macbeth as a dupe: no hero would lay the excuse of his own actions entirely on his nagging wife's incitement. The same applies to the influence of the witches too. However, and significantly, Macbeth "never once blames his Lady for the deed,"⁴² or the weird sisters for that matter (Bradley, p. 302): he knows it better. Indeed, it is crucial to keep in mind that ultimately Macbeth himself as an independent individual has to take responsibility for his own choices and actions, especially when he knows the difference between right and wrong (Dash, p. 155). In essence, he chooses evil and hence he perishes, i.e. he "deserved his fall" (Flatter, p. 92). As A.C. Bradley says, "the idea of the tragic hero as a being destroyed simply and solely by external forces is quite alien to" Shakespeare (p. 15). Thus, all the time Macbeth's temptation is both within as well as without himself, yet Lady Macbeth's voracious language turns the sympathy towards Macbeth and against her (Dash, p. 165). Yet, eventually, "Lady Macbeth's threats of

violence, for all their force and cruelty, are empty fantasies”; she has only the power of words, not deeds and so “[s]he seems to epitomize the sixteenth-century belief that women are passive” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, p. 244). Flatter agrees warning his readers not “to be misled by the Lady’s words. Her speeches are stronger than she is; she protests too much” (p. 103). Therefore, no matter how much she speaks about committing the murder by her own hand (1.5.48-52), she cannot act it out, “Had he not resembled My father as he slept, I had done’t” (2.2.12-13). Thus, ultimately she is passive, he is active and a huge difference exists between providing the murder weapon and actually using it.

To summarize, although on Lady Macbeth’s behalf must be acknowledged her utmost and unselfish dedication to her husband’s cause, and the point that it is fundamentally Macbeth’s own idea and act to murder the king, in reality she nonetheless promotes her husband to an immoral and wrongful crime of a murder. In theory, the wife is surely supposed to encourage her husband, but the limits of the support have to be taken into serious consideration. Much more is at stake here than the earthly power and glory: the fate of the murderer’s and the accomplice’s “eternal jewel” (3.1.69).

Unmistakably, Lady Macbeth ignores her duty to God by urging her husband to murder Duncan for all the right reasons; yet ironically, she ends up brings the destruction on herself and is involved partly causing her husband to do the same for himself. Even if granting Lucy Brashear correct maintaining that Lady Macbeth’s “sense of duty in her husband’s behalf inhibits her ability to discriminate between noble and ignoble enterprise” (p. 21), still at best Lady Macbeth’s dedication could be characterized as

⁴² Elizabeth Nielsen, “Macbeth: The Nemesis of the Post-Shakespearean Actor,”

extremely naïve. And as far as the duty of promoting her husband into goodness and virtue is concerned, she in any case fails it. Thus, in the end the bold enterprise of upgrading man's position in the Great Chain of Being with self-help using all means necessary finds its most persistent advocate in Lady Macbeth.

So far the discussion of the duties of the good wife has followed the lines set by the traditional view of marriage: obedience, submission, silence, and forwarding salvation. However, as the emergent ideology of marriage exhorted, the good wife's duty was also to be her husband's companion and helpmate. Next I want to examine Lady Macbeth's overall role in this regard, since she already has such an inspiring part in the murder of Duncan.

2.4. Companionship

In order to achieve a more extensive picture of Lady Macbeth's role as a wife, her part should also be compared to the ideal of companionship endorsed by the emergent ideology. As I have indicated earlier, this lays the emphasis more on affective, shared and loving fellowship, while still the traditional duties are included as well.

To begin with, based on the discussion in the previous subchapters, a certain amount of relevant issues were already resolved concerning Lady Macbeth's companionship. First of all, a commendable companion would not taunt and scold her husband as Lady Macbeth does. Undeniably, her shrewish behavior depicted especially in Act One, Scene Seven surely fails to correspond to what Erasmus and the others whom I

have referred to in favor of marital friendship had in mind. Lady Macbeth should have treated her spouse with dignity, humility and respect, speaking lovingly and reverently, yet she fails to do so most of the time. Second, a considerate companion would not disregard her husband's feelings and rule over him as the audience witnesses Lady Macbeth doing. She ignores Macbeth's hesitations and in a totalitarian and disobedient manner puts the pressure on him to have her own way without taking her husband's reluctance into serious consideration. Indeed, she might be regarded more like a mother to Macbeth than a wife as far as her domineering is concerned. Their relationship at the beginning of the play does not seem to be any friendly fellowship: more likely it appears to be comparable with the battle of the sexes. Third, and most significantly, a virtuous companion would not instigate her partner to commit something so horrendous as a murder, which ultimately leads to his own doom and destruction. As Klein says, "[i]n a grim perversion of married companionship, Lady Macbeth responds by assuming the feminine role of comforter and helper" (The Woman's Part, p. 244) to accomplish something that she is in fact supposed to prevent. The admirable ideal is diverted. Lady Macbeth shows how much power she has as Macbeth's wife and the waste is that she could have done so much good with it. As his good companion, she could have welcomed her husband home from the battlefield joyfully with open arms and she could have congratulated him on his recent promotion as the Thane of Cawdor while being quite satisfied with that. She could have been proud of him and shown her appreciation and support by praising his recent success in fighting for the apparently worthy cause and she could have given God her thanks for bringing him back safe and sound. She could have loved him for what he is. However, she does nothing of the kind; on the contrary, she

urges him to murder the king, all else is insufficient and insignificant. This is a great abuse of companionship. Fourth, Lady Macbeth cannot be seen as a good companion to her husband because she does not put her faith in God, but instead in “spirits that Tend on mortal thoughts” (1.5.39) as was explained in chapter 2.1. As Joan Larsen Klein explains, “[h]aving apparently denied her God, Lady Macbeth puts her trust in the murdering ministers of Hell. Thus she disobeys the first rule of marriage as it was formulated in the sixteenth century (The Woman’s Part, p. 242). Therefore, “[d]espite her wish to aid her husband, Lady Macbeth cannot give him that lasting companionship under God, which the Homilies saw as true marriage” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, p. 242). In the Macbeths’ marriage the husband is inclined to share all with his wife, which is clear from his letter and from the fact that he confides the whole idea of murder to her in the first place. Yet, she deliberately exploits his willingness to take her into consideration and misuses her influence accusing him of effeminacy and driving him vehemently into unlawful action. In conclusion, in all these regards Lady Macbeth fails to act her husband’s exemplary companion representing once again rather the shocking perversion of the ideal.

However, although Lady Macbeth’s shortcomings as a companion are to be noted, it would do her injustice not to bring forth the counter-evidence too: the case of Lady Macbeth is very complicated as I have already tried to present. First, one thing which immediately argues for Lady Macbeth’s good companionship, is the stress that the companionate marriage lays on love and affection. There can hardly be any doubt that Lady Macbeth loves her husband very much: in fact, more than anything else. This should already be conspicuous from all the previous chapters dealing with her: whether it is to ask unsexing or to encourage him to murder by railing and disobeying, Macbeth is always

her priority. She would never have behaved the way she did had she not loved her husband so much as she does. The dedication, the commitment and the support that she exhibits speak for her remarkable affection themselves. Indeed, Lady Macbeth stands by Macbeth one hundred percent; a significant example of this is offered in Act Three, Scene Four; “[e]ven when she is most grossly provoked, by Macbeth’s extraordinary behaviour in the banquet-scene”, Lady Macbeth never gives up on him; instead, she is desperately inventing and improvising excuses for him.⁴³ Actually, Bradley argues that here “she saves her husband” from public humiliation (p. 330). She does what a good companion should: her loyalty is unfaltering; her support is unswerving. She never gives up publicly their secrets and she is there for him all the time.

Other indicators in the play that confirm Macbeth as his wife’s first priority, is for instance the fact that Lady Macbeth does not seem to possess an individuality of her own at all since she has such an absolute commitment and dedication to her husband’s cause. As I have already mentioned in my introduction, Alan Sinfield argues that Lady Macbeth is not actually a character at all. Linda Bamber agrees; according to her, both Lady Macbeth and Volumnia in Coriolanus “are the heroes’ collaborators or stage managers rather than independent centers of self-interest” (p. 92). She continues asserting that “in these plays [Macbeth and Coriolanus]...the primary representatives of the feminine are not Other to the hero” (Bamber, p. 92). Thus, according to Bamber, there exists no actual separation between Lady Macbeth and Volumnia and the protagonists; these women “merely repeat the demands these heroes make upon themselves” (p. 92). Arguably, Lady

⁴³ Lisa Hopkins, The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands

Macbeth indeed closely personifies an immersing fusion to lose herself into her husband totally and willingly ignoring herself. Valerie Wayne's remarks on Tilney's "loving wives" may actually shed some light on this matter, "women were encouraged to abandon their wills through total union with their husbands"; "[a]s she becomes his possession, he becomes her obsession" (pp. 64-65). Admittedly, this seems to be exactly what happens; besides the preoccupation with her husband, Lady Macbeth has apparently no life of her own. For example, she almost never actually thinks of herself in the course of the whole play; the question "What about me?" almost entirely eludes her mind, which is always filled with her husband's supposedly owned wants, needs, ambitions and cravings. This tragedy contains plenty of passages in which Macbeth demonstrates self-examination; in fact, many times he submerges himself totally in his own inner world, for instance in 1.3.129-141; 1.7.1-28; 2.1.33-64; 3.1.49-74; 5.3.23-29, and these only to mention a few. However, compared to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth emerges as a character that lacks true independence; rather, she seems more to "complete" her husband, which is incidentally Sigmund Freud's conception of her (Sinfield, p. 56; see also Davis, p. 210). Yet, this particular state was in fact the norm of an ideal wife according to Vives (see chapter 1.1). Lady Macbeth fulfills it; both Macbeths strive for one Macbeth only, and that one is for the husband. And still, in the play more than enough situations exist in which it would appear appropriate for her to think about herself. For instance, in Act Three, Scene Four, in the banquet scene, something is terribly wrong with Macbeth because of the way he acts; Lady Macbeth cannot help realizing that he is beyond the point of keeping things

under control and living with the consequences of his actions. He seems to be losing his mind (only he sees the ghost) and it must be a frightening omen, but Lady Macbeth shows no sign of introspection. She is preoccupied solely by Macbeth's state of mind and feelings, not sacrificing a thought for herself. Arguably, all she ever wanted is for her husband to be happy, to get what he wants and to help him to get it. For herself she wants nothing because Macbeth constitutes Lady Macbeth's center of the universe around which she, his reflecting planet, evolves. In short, Macbeth is her invincible hero, her ambitious husband, her only friend: all the world's people in one Thane. Therefore, Lisa Hopkins seems quite correct with regard to Macbeth when she claims that the representations of the marriage in Shakespeare's late plays are partly concerned for "its cost to identity, personal freedom and gender solidarity" (p. 12).

Further proof of Lady Macbeth's lack of own individuality can easily be observed as the play unfolds and her role diminishes radically after the first two acts. Beginning from Act Three Macbeth shuts her off; she is no longer his confidant, lover or partner in anything any more; as Klein notices, "[a]fter Macbeth becomes king, he, the man, so fully commands Lady Macbeth that he allows her no share in his new business" (The Woman's Part, p. 246). Thus, "[t]he crime . . . brings separation between them, gradually, fatally, finally" (Sisson, p. 120). Macbeth starts pursuing his compulsion to ensure his position being enrapt within himself quite thoroughly leaving no room for his wife. Therefore, instead of happily reigning with her King, she has been separated from her husband altogether; indeed, "Lady Macbeth is now neither companion nor helpmate" (Klein, The Woman's Part, p. 247). Suddenly Lady Macbeth also has no substance or cause to live anymore either, "Naught's had, all's spent, Where our desire is got without content"

(3.2.6-7). Without Macbeth she has nothing and she is nothing. In fact, after this disruption in their union, the play hardly even stages her: there is only the banquet-scene (3.4.) and finally the sleepwalking-scene (5.1.) before she is pronounced dead. Malcolm finally suggests that she eventually commits a suicide, “his fiend-like queen—Who, as ‘tis thought, by self and violent hands Took off her life—” (5.11.35-37).

Second, as it is clear that Lady Macbeth loves her husband, it is likewise clear that her husband loves her no less. A part of Macbeth’s letter to his wife provides an illustrative example, ““This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.”” (1.5.9-12). Certainly Macbeth himself considers his wife as his “partner”, who is moreover and significantly “dearest”. This internal piece of evidence contradicts with the idea that Lady Macbeth actually is a bad companion; obviously her husband has a different opinion and surely he should know it best. Another indication of Macbeth’s affection for his wife can be detected in his way to address her: she is lovingly called in addition to the above, “My dearest love” (1.5.56), “love” (3.2.30), “dear wife” (3.2.37) and “dearest chuck” (3.2.46). Moreover, at the end of the play, when the doctor has been called to see Lady Macbeth, her husband is anxious for her first asking, “How does you patient, doctor?” (5.3.39) while then continuing:

Cure her of that.
 Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
 Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
 And with some sweet oblivious antidote
 Cleanse the fraught bosom of that perilous stuff
 Which weighs upon the heart?

(5.3.41-47)

And finally, when Duncan says, “We coursed him at the heels, and had a purpose To be his purveyor; but he rides well, And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath hold him To his home before us” (1.6.21-24), “the great love” is, who else, but Lady Macbeth. Therefore, the Macbeths undeniably share love and affection. Doubtlessly they also have a very intimate relationship involving sexual attraction; this is hard to pinpoint in the text, but it seems inexplicably imbued in the subtext in their dialogue especially in Act One, Scene Five and in Act Three, Scene Two. To summarize, this is a married couple very much in love and very much attracted to each other. Their close attachment to one another may perhaps be due to their childlessness: no love is spared outside their union.

Third, although to instigate the murder of king Duncan can be interpreted as a gruesome perversion of companionship on the part of Lady Macbeth, the crime itself with the preparations still represents two partners working together for a common goal: both the husband and the wife plan to kill their royal guest. Fundamentally they function as a married unit against the rest of the world sharing partnership in crime, and the most illustrative example is Lady Macbeth’s speech in Act One, Scene Seven, ll. 59-72. As she explains her version of the plan, she continuously reiterates not their assigned separate roles, but their shared element in the affair: “*We* fail!” (1.7.59), “*we*’ll not fail” (1.7.61), “What cannot *you and I* perform upon Th’ungarded Duncan?” (1.7.69-70), and “What not put upon His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt Of *our* great quell?” (1.7.70-72) [emphases added]. Thus, the murder constitutes their common project and they are in it together. Lady Macbeth even emphasizes their devised common reaction once the body has been discovered, “Who dares receive it other, As *we* shall make *our* griefs and

clamour roar Upon his death?" (1.7.77-79) [emphasis added]. Indeed, regardless of their own parts and the fact that Lady Macbeth mainly delegates, it is all very co-operative: in Act Two, Scene Two also the potential failure is seen as theirs both to deal with, "Th' attempt and not the deed Confounds *us*" (2.2.10-11), as well as the potential regret, "These deed must not be thought After these ways. So, it will make *us* mad" (2.2.31-32) [emphases added]. Lady Macbeth's comment, "A little water clears *us* of this deed" (2.2.65) [emphasis added] may be considered the ultimate statement with regard to such togetherness. This whole affair shows explicitly the great potential of a working companionship: if two partners can achieve so much together in the service of evil, the extent of the power for some good cause must be equally impressive.

Fourth, even though Lady Macbeth can be seen taunting and railing undeniably in Act One, Scene Seven, in Act Two, Scene Two another reading of her behavior may be suggested. When Macbeth returns from killing the king, it is possible to read Lady Macbeth's lines as offering comfort and encouragement. For example, "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight" (2.2.19) is a phrase that can be understood either as a reprimand or as a reassurance. Others include, for instance, "Consider it not so deeply" (2.2.28), "Why, worthy thane, You do unbend your noble strength to think So brain-sickly of things" (2.2.42-44), "Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood That fears a painted devil (2.2.51-53), and "Be not lost So poorly in your thoughts" (2.2.69-70). The same applies to Act Five, Scene One too, "What need we fear who knows it when none can call our power to account?" (5.1.32-33), "No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that. You mar all with this starting" (5.1.37-38), "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried. He cannot come out on's grave" (5.1.53-54),

and “To bed, to bed...Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed” (5.1.56-58). If this material is interpreted as Lady Macbeth trying to sooth her husband, as it well may be, then this provides evidence of her commendable companionship. Nevertheless, she remains partly responsible for creating such a situation in which her husband needs support: if Duncan were alive, there would be no reason to comfort Macbeth.

Fifth, later on in the course of the play more details prove Lady Macbeth as a good companion, for example, her speech in Act Three, Scene Two:

Naught’s had, all’s spent,
 Where our desire is got without content.
 ‘Tis safer to be that which we destroy
 Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.
Enter Macbeth
 How now, my lord, why do you keep alone,
 Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
 Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
 With them they think on? Things without all remedy
 Should be without regard. What’s done is done.

(3.2.6-14)

This passage establishes Lady Macbeth adjusting her mood very admirably for the benefit of her husband; indeed, this adjustment, which Vives, Stubbs and Tilney exhort from a good wife, is superbly exemplified here. First, she reveals alone her anxiety about their situation: the first four lines offer a glimpse into Lady Macbeth’s private thoughts displaying no courage, defiance or domineering anymore. Klein may have a point maintaining that “Lady Macbeth...does little else but think of horrors past” (The Woman’s Part, p. 248). However, as soon as Macbeth enters, she changes her tone and composure acting suddenly like a comforting partner, totally suppressing her prior feelings and concerns: the private angst is transformed deliberately into compassionate

reassurance. Arguably, Lady Macbeth is trying her best to offer her husband support and encouragement, yet for all the play shows, she herself seems to need it more than Macbeth, who has just prepared to have his next victims assassinated in the previous scene. And as Dash points out, “[s]he not he, has been alone” (p. 181). Act Three offers even further examples too to prove Lady Macbeth a good companion. Her comments before the banquet, “Come on, gentle my lord, Slink o’er your rugged looks, be bright and jovial Among your guests tonight (3.2.28-30), “You must leave this” (3.2.36) and even “But in them nature’s copy’s not eterne” (3.2.39), and after it, “You lack the season of all natures, sleep” (3.4.140) all speak on her behalf. All this indicates that she might yet value her husband’s well being, which would explain why she remains continuously preoccupied with his state of mind.

To conclude on companionship, based on all of the above textual evidence Lady Macbeth may not be a perfect companion, but many things suggest that she is definitely not entirely a deplorable one either in this regard. Certainly she perverts her role as her husband’s helpmate by being an accomplice to a murder and behaving disobediently and domineeringly, but then again, her behavior exhibits quite dedication, commitment, loyalty and support for her husband. Macbeth surely esteems her very highly. This paradoxical mixture of both of the commendable and disturbing features, which may be summarized to describe Lady Macbeth’s partnership, should not however diminish the fact that the Macbeths obviously love each other very much. Indeed, they seem quite intimate at the beginning of the play sharing almost everything from the bed to the secrecy of planning the murder.

2.5 Hosting and Housekeeping

As the ideal wife was exhorted to stay at home all the time (see chapter 1.3), she was also supposed to take good care of her household. Lady Macbeth fulfills the first requirement fully: she never leaves her house. Apparently, she never even receives any visitors in their estate in Inverness when she is alone. But as far as taking care of her household is concerned, Lady Macbeth manifests less exemplary behavior; this becomes evident when examining her role as a hostess to her guests. True, at first sight she seems to embody the perfect hostess to king Duncan when he arrives in her home in Act One, Scene Six:

All our service
In every point twice done, and then done double,
Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
Your majesty loads our house. For those of old,
And the late dignities heaped up to them,
We rest your hermits.

(1.6.14-20)

However, after having witnessed right in the previous scene Lady Macbeth's soliloquy containing her firm conviction that Macbeth will become the king (1.5.13-14), her sinister invocation asking for "cruelty" in order to wield her "keen knife" (1.5.38-52), and her ominous prophecy that "O never Shall sun that morrow see" (1.5.58-59) for Duncan to leave their house after his "fatal entrance...Under my battlements" (1.5.37-38), "the fulsome insincerity of her verse is by now unmistakable to us" as Brian Vickers says.⁴⁴ Because of what has happened earlier, it is obvious that at this point of the play Lady

⁴⁴ Brian Vickers, Returning to Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 105.

Macbeth is only role-playing; her actions and words are deliberately fitted to this particular occasion. In reality she turns out to be a lethal hostess to Duncan plotting her royal guest's death. Thus, the disguised evil intent behind this whole charade proves her only to be a true hypocrite rather than a good wife fulfilling her duty as a good hostess. Her impersonation is nevertheless most successful: she seems most polite, humble and respectful and hence Duncan is deceived along with everyone else. Indeed, she takes her own advice given to her husband:

To beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under't.

(1.5.61-64).

Vickers defines this an instruction “in hypocrisy” further noticing the overall “dichotomy between appearance and reality” in Macbeth (p. 104). Arguably, this episode constitutes a clear case of it. Moreover, the whole incident becomes even more appalling when it is considered what sort of a guest king Duncan really is to Lady Macbeth: not only is he the ruler of the land, who has just promoted her spouse (1.2.63-67), but he is also her husband's cousin, i.e. his kinsman (1.2.24; 1.7.13), i.e. her own in-law. And a generous one too; as Banquo reveals, Duncan has “Sent forth great largesse to your [Macbeth's] offices” (2.1.13), adding even more significantly, “This diamond he [Duncan] greets your wife [Lady Macbeth] withal By the name of most kind hostess” (2.1.14-15). Of course it would have been reprehensible to be a devious and deadly hostess to any guest, but Shakespeare deliberately plants all these aggravating circumstances amounting to an even more accumulative case against Lady Macbeth, the diamond maybe adding the finishing touch.

Furthermore, “welcoming” Duncan remains not an isolated proof of Lady Macbeth’s disturbing hosting; she continues her deceptive bravado of acting out the role of “Fair and noble hostess” (1.6.24) later in Act Two, Scene Three when the king’s murder has been discovered. After the alarum bell has been rung and the whole house is in a state of full confusion, she has the nerve to enquire, “What’s the business, That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak” (2.3.77-79), and then to imitate the guiltless reaction, “Woe, alas—What, in our house?” (2.3.83-84). According to Brian Vickers, the latter example is “one of the most brilliant pieces of hypocrisy Shakespeare ever invented”, since “[t]his is what any innocent hostess would say in those circumstances” (p. 106). And then Lady Macbeth faints, “Help me hence, ho!”(2.3.115). There have been arguments for and against the genuine nature of that faint (Dash, p. 173). Some critics claim that she is only pretending to swoon in order to draw attention away from her husband (e.g. Brashear, p. 18); certainly he seems on the verge of actually revealing their crime in his agitated condition. Others insist on the authenticity of the faint, either being caused by “exhaustion” (Dash, p. 173) after having used all her energy organizing the whole affair, or resulting from “the news of the killing of the grooms,”⁴⁵ which she surely did not plan or foresee. It has even been suggested that “the effects of her wine cannot carry her further” (Nielsen, p. 197) referring to her confession, “That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold” (2.2.1). Arguably, Lady Macbeth’s previously exhibited ability to pretend speaks for the fakeness of the faint; the audience undeniably knows her to be a master of manipulation and disguise, since she has

⁴⁵ R. A. Foakes, “Images of death: ambition in Macbeth,” Focus on Macbeth, ed.

resorted to such deception earlier. In fact, after all she has said and done so far in the course of the play, it is quite feasible to expect more of the same.

However, there also exists occasions when Lady Macbeth may be considered to be a sincerely good hostess to her guests. For example, in the beginning of Act Three, Scene One she refers to Banquo's presence as the Macbeths' "chief guest" at the banquet, "If he had been forgotten It had been as a gap in our great feast, And all-thing unbecoming" (3.1.11-13). Nothing indicates that she is dissembling this time. Another situation is found in the banquet scene, which constitutes definitely her biggest and most important public appearance thus far. The event starts well as she welcomes the guests appropriately, "Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends, For my heart speaks they are welcome" (3.4.6-7). After that she takes specific care that they enjoy themselves:

My royal lord,
 You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
 That is not often vouched, while 'tis a-making,
 'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home.
 From thence the sauce to meat is ceremony,
 Meeting were bare without it.

(3.4.31-36)

When Banquo ironically keeps his promise not to fail the feast, Lady Macbeth truly shows her ability to excel in hosting. As her husband is doing his best to spoil the party, she tries to keep things under control,

Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
 And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
 The fit is momentary. Upon a thought
 He will again be well. If much you note him
 You shall offend him, and extend his passion.
 Feed, and regard him not.

(3.4.52-57)

This proves that Lady Macbeth is working hard to save the occasion and more of the same follows, “My worthy lord, Your noble friends do lack you” (3.4.82-83), “Think of this, good peers, But as a thing of custom. ‘Tis no other; Only it spoils the pleasure of the time” (3.4.95-97). Finally, the only thing left for her is to resort to disperse the assembly, “I pray you, speak not. He grows worse and worse. Question enrages him. At once, good night. Stand not upon the order of your going, But go at once” (3.4.116-119). Even though in the end the banquet unfortunately turns out to be a catastrophe, it cannot be regarded as the fault of the hostess; on the contrary, she did her best in order to make most of it. No matter how hypocritically she behaved with Duncan when he came to their home, there is no indication that Lady Macbeth is acting the same way in the banquet-scene. Now that her husband is the king she tries her best to do her part as his queen and naturally entertaining their guests is an important part of her new role. Therefore, regardless of acting quite unquestionably as a bad hostess to one of her guests in the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth redeems herself being quite commendable hostess to her other guests later.

The last issue to consider within this chapter is Lady Macbeth’s other household management. There is only scarce material to examine, but as far as the chores are concerned, I agree with Klein’s argument, “Lady Macbeth’s preparations for and clearing up after Duncan’s murder become a frightening perversion of Renaissance woman’s domestic activity” (*The Woman’s Part*, p. 245). Actually, all those things that would prove her a good housekeeper in normal circumstances at that point in the play actually turn out to represent only a gruesome mockery. For example, laying the daggers ready

resembles laying the table and hence, a brutal murder is being prepared in a manner of a household task. Thus, Klein concludes that all this activity with the business of murder is actually a perversion of “her wifely roles of hostess and helpmate” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, p. 241). Indeed, Lady Macbeth’s housekeeping is perverted too. Yet, her behavior as a housekeeper is not altogether condemnable; as the play shows, “[a]t home, Lady Macbeth remembers to give ‘tending’ to the messenger who comes with the news of Duncan’s arrival” (Klein, The Woman’s Part, pp. 245-246; see 1.5.35-36).

To sum up this subchapter, Lady Macbeth fails to be a good hostess to Duncan, but she actually can be regarded to act like one to her other guests. Most of her household work, on the contrary, condemns her because it is done in the service of evil.

Finally, as one of the most important duties of a good wife during this period was to be a good mother, and as I have already introduced that topic earlier for the discussion, Lady Macbeth’s motherhood yet remains to be examined.

2.6 Motherhood

Although the question of Lady Macbeth’s child is in itself an old canard, the play makes it clear that Lady Macbeth is in any case a mother: the statement “I have given suck”(1.7.54) proves this. Thus, despite the fact that her child (or children) does not exist in the play itself, Lady Macbeth can still be evaluated as a mother, which I intend to try in this chapter.

First, an important fact argues against Lady Macbeth’s good motherhood: her imaginings of being a bad mother:

I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
 As you have done to this.

(1.7.54-59)

This is a description of a horrible mother prepared and willing in her mind to commit infanticide. The most appalling part in this speech may perhaps be the line “while it was smiling in my face” (l. 56), the operative word being “smiling”; innocence, vulnerability and helplessness are met crudely with cold rejection, “plucked my nipple from his boneless gums” (l. 57) and violent destruction, “dashed the brains out” (l. 58) by the creator herself. The context of these lines is the scene in which Lady Macbeth is trying to spur her husband on to commit the murder of Duncan, and apparently the most extreme linguistic taunt that she can come up with finds its realization the image of shattering her own baby’s skull. But certainly to speak or to fantasize like this does not correspond to the portrait of a good mother; after all, she should protect and cherish her offspring. As Klein says, “...although Lady Macbeth may once have had a child, its absence from her life and her willingness to contemplate its destruction contradict the Homilies’ view that children are an end of marriage, a blessing upon their parents, and a means of enlarging God’s kingdom” (The Woman’s Part, p. 242). A good wife or a good mother is not supposed to be ruminating over the idea of crushing her baby’s skull; it is monstrous and unnatural. Indeed, Janet Adelman even argues that right in the above quoted speech “maternal malevolence is given its most horrifying expression in Shakespeare” (p. 96). Thus, claiming to be able to reject and slay her issue, Lady Macbeth perverts the duties of the good mother that she should heed to.

Another issue that also indicates Lady Macbeth's failure as a good mother is the fact that she asks her milk to be taken for gall (1.5.45-46). "For" is glossed in The Norton Shakespeare as "take my milk *in exchange for* gall" (p. 2572), which implies, as Janet Adelman says, "imaging in effect that the spirits empty out the natural maternal fluid and replace it with the unnatural and poisonous one" (p. 98). However, other readings are possible as well concerning the same phrase. For instance, Adelman suggests that maybe this could be analyzed as if "Lady Macbeth is asking the spirits to take her milk *as* gall, to nurse from her breast and find in her milk their sustaining poison. Here the milk itself is the gall; no transformation is necessary" (p. 98). Still, regardless of how the line is finally interpreted, obviously any mother who wishes that gall has some effect or relation to her nursing milk is unnatural and bad; the whole image of a mother breast-feeding venomous liquid to her vulnerable infant is chilling to say the least. Moreover, as Peter Stallybrass points out, Lady Macbeth's invocation in fact establishes the spirits "as her children" (p. 197). Since Lady Macbeth in fact willingly wishes to give her milk to the "murd'ring ministers" (1.5.46) instead of any human infant, unnatural corruption rather than life-giving nurture is embraced. Both of these infanticide imaginings relate to the practice of breast-feeding; in the first case, the baby is aggressively torn away from the source of its nutrition and thrown brutally to death. In the second case, the milk is seen as poison digested by the spirits. Arguably, Janet Adelman's definition of the latter, "perverse nursery", applies to both (p. 98).

Third, as I have already explained in chapter 2.1, Lady Macbeth pleads for stopping her menstruation altogether in her invocation in Act One, Scene Five; apparently she does not want to have children at all. This could yet be seen as another wish of

infanticide because as Jenijoy La Belle remarks, “[s]topping the processes of procreation is tantamount to murdering infants—albeit yet unborn” (p. 284).

To sum up, in the course of the play *Lady Macbeth* is presented first as a mother who does not wish to have children. Then she entertains the idea of poisoning her milk with gall while offering it voluntarily to the spirits. Finally, she imagines violently crashing her baby’s skull. While the last impression probably horrifies the most, nevertheless *Lady Macbeth* speaks only of causing the death of her child. Based on all this, *Lady Macbeth*’s fancies portray her very much as an anti-mother: she perverts breeding not wanting to have offspring and raising not wanting to protect and take good care of her infant. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that *Lady Macbeth* has actually been linked to “the ‘terrible mother’ stereotype” (Brashear, p. 14), which is an idea that Carl Gustav Jung has postulated as Edith Whitehurst Williams quite correctly points out.⁴⁶

To be sure, *Lady Macbeth*’s imaginings indicate that she indeed represents a disturbing mother figure. Yet, there is also evidence in the play to argue for the opposite case, that actually, she makes a good mother. One noteworthy issue establishing her commendable motherhood is her own statement, “I have given suck” (1.7.54). Although this plain fact may be overshadowed by the dramatic description of how she would handle this non-existent child, she nevertheless has breast-fed an infant at some point during her life. And this is important; a good mother was always supposed to nurse her own child as the numerous books emphasized during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century

England (see chapter 1.4). Lady Macbeth giving suck to a baby is even more remarkable, because as a member of a high-class in society (she can read and write [see 1.5. and 5.1], which are abilities confined very much to the upper social classes) it was even rarer for a woman to breast-feed their infants (see chapter 1.4). Lady Macbeth, however, has clearly not relied on any nurses but has nurtured a child herself, which in itself proves that she is or has been a good mother who has taken exemplary care of her offspring. It may be a small detail, but nonetheless speaking for her behalf.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that although Lady Macbeth speaks in such a horrid way of her child as I have elaborated earlier, she is *imagining* “dashing the brains out” and only *invocating* her milk to be taken for gall and her menstruation to stop. Beyond question there is a huge difference after all between fantasizing such things and actually performing them in reality. Lady Macbeth is only guilty of the first; nowhere in Macbeth is she putting into effect her wild fantasies. As a matter of fact, as I have already suggested, throughout the whole play she has merely the power of words, not deeds (see chapter 2.3). Consequently, there is no reason to suppose that Lady Macbeth means or ever meant to enact these imaginations of infanticide either; on the contrary, it is quite feasible to expect her not to realize them based on the incongruity between her words and deeds overall in the play. Arguably, she sounds more terrible than she actually is.

To conclude on the entire chapter two, Lady Macbeth cannot be simply categorized as a bad or good wife or a mother. Undeniably there are things to point in both directions in Macbeth, and therefore the whole picture of Lad Macbeth’s wifhood,

⁴⁶ Edith Whitehurst Williams, “In Defense of Lady Macbeth,” Shakespeare

and of motherhood for that matter, remains ultimately quite complicated. Shakespeare as an experienced playwright does not condemn her totally in these respects: an utterly bad or good wife or a mother would not make credible, complex or interesting characters. However, based on all the previous evidence, Lady Macbeth can still be regarded in many ways as an anti-wife and as an anti-mother, who attracts both fear and wonder. Certainly she manages to pervert to a degree all good qualities and expectations concerning both roles: submission, obedience, silence, forwarding her spouse's salvation, taking good care of her household, her guests and her children and finally, honoring her sex. Klein puts it all very succinctly, "[d]espite Lady Macbeth's heavy ignorance of Christian marriage, she conceives of herself almost exclusively as a wife, a helpmate. Thus she epitomizes at the same time that she perverts Renaissance views of the woman's role" (The Woman's Part, p. 243).

3. The Wives in Macbeth: Lady Macduff

As Lady Macbeth's role diminishes in the course of the play, another wife is being introduced. The Norton Shakespeare refers to her as "Lady Macduff" and for the sake of consistency I will retain this reference, although, as was mentioned in the introduction, originally she was called simply "wife" (see note 2). Lady Macduff has a substantially smaller part in Macbeth compared to that of Lady Macbeth; however, if any generalizations about wives in this tragedy are to be made, Lady Macduff's character should definitely be taken into consideration. Remarkably the two wives never meet in the play; Lady Macbeth's obsolete notion, "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?" (5.1.36-37) establishes the only connection between them.

3.1 The Prerequisite of Wifeness

Whereas Lady Macbeth's invocations plead to transform, sacrifice and abolish femininity, the fundamental basis of wifeness, Lady Macduff in comparison presents womanhood as something to cherish, profess and to be proud of. The contrast stands out quite clearly: instead of pursuing the disturbing effects of unsexing, Lady Macduff literally enjoys the fruits of femininity having her son with her on stage. Indeed, the female sex constitutes the core of Lady Macduff's identity, and it never occurs to her to destroy or deny it; quite on the contrary, she appeals to and relies on it:

Whither should I fly?
I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world, where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime

Accounted dangerous folly. Why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence
To say I have done no harm?

(4.2.73-79)

Depending on “Womanly defence” (l. 78), Lady Macduff identifies herself as specifically a woman, although in reality within her circumstances this means utter helplessness, “Whither should I fly?” (l. 73). Nonetheless, she accepts and respects her sex. There is nothing to suggest otherwise; therefore, Lady Macduff’s essence of wifedom, the female sex, establishes itself as a firmly fixed and treasured state. She has no need, reason or wish to change her womanhood being quite comfortable and satisfied with what and who she actually is. Moreover, Lady Macduff also undeniably preserves the honor of her sex thus perhaps presenting her a more respectable wife in the play. Finally, and as a result of all of this, Lady Macduff seems the more natural and less controversial wife in Macbeth; after the great thrill of Lady Macbeth’s treatment of gender, the safety and solace of her even mundane stability reassures.

3.2. Submission, Obedience and Silence

Even though Lady Macduff may be considered to portray more upstanding and undisturbed femininity, as a wife she is by no means perfect. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Lady Macduff fails to fulfill a good wife’s primary duties of submission, obedience and silence just like Lady Macbeth; thus, hers is the same story of disobedience, defiance and disapproval in regard to her husband retold. A revealing example of this is found in Act Four, Scene Two when Lady Macduff’s is faced with the

fact that her husband, Macduff, has departed Scotland for England and abandoned her and his entire household. First of all, she cannot conceive why her husband has left them behind, “What had he done to make him fly the land?” (4.2.1). This puzzlement strikes the audience as quite understandable within the circumstances, but Lady Macduff’s following behavior does not cohere with that of an ideal wife. As soon as her bewilderment passes, she accuses her husband of lacking patience, “He had none” (4.2.2) and of making a poor decision, “His flight was madness” (4.2.3). And if this were not unruly enough, she delivers a speech that clearly and consistently condemns her husband’s actions:

Wisdom—to leave his wife, to leave his babes,
 His mansion, and his titles in a place
 From whence himself does fly? He loves us not,
 He wants the natural touch, for the poor wren,
 The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
 Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
 All is the fear and nothing is the love;
 As little is the wisdom, where the flight
 So runs against all reason.

(4.2.6-14)

Obviously, Lady Macduff cannot and will not accept her husband’s decision, although that is exactly what is expected of her as a submissive and obedient wife. On the contrary, she vehemently objects to Macduff’s flight and questions his judgment based on her own morals (Dash, pp. 161,192). Evaluating the situation by herself she reaches her own conclusions—“[s]he perceives flight as characterizing both fear and lack of reason when it endangers family, no matter what the ultimate goal may be” (Dash, pp. 192-193). An analogous incident occurred in the Macbeths’ household; when the husband made the decision not to murder the king, the wife refused to accept it (see chapter 2.2). The only

difference is that whereas Lady Macbeth defies her husband privately and directly face-to-face, Lady Macduff rebukes hers indirectly and publicly in front of their son and his friend Ross. Therefore, the defiance demonstrated by these two wives is basically the same; merely the methods of approach vary. Yet, even this dissimilarity arises from their specific circumstances: Lady Macduff is simply denied the opportunity of expressing direct reproof, since her husband has conveniently fled the country. Macbeth, on the other hand, remains at home fully exposed to his wife's rage. Both wives primarily use the medium of language to convey their disobedience and defiance; however, only Lady Macbeth is actually able to have some effect on her husband with her power of speech and influence the course of events. Conversely, Lady Macduff's words lack all the impact and so in this sense, Lady Macduff's vain protests prove her an utterly powerless wife.

The play never stages the Macduffs together, which is why the question whether Lady Macduff would have risen against her husband directly is highly speculative. The fact remains, however, that she defies him in her particular situation made available: it is condemnable in itself. As Dash points out, Lady Macduff "contributes dramatic commentary on the wife who uncritically supports her husband's ventures" exemplifying "the woman who questions her husband's actions" (pp. 187, 192). A good wife would have patiently deferred to her husband and fully accepted his judgment to flee submitting herself to his will; she would never have dared to defy and chide him so saucily in public. After all, Macduff's duty is to serve his country as a loyal and patriotic warrior; the society expects this from him. Clearly he has not gone to run any suspicious or vain errand on his own; as Linda Bamber says, "Macduff has left his family in order to do what is best for his country" (p. 93; see 3.6.24-39). Besides, Lady Macduff's attitude

distinctly contradicts with her husband's friend Ross's opinion of Macduff, "But for your husband, He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows The fits o'th'season" (4.2.15-17). Consequently, the way Lady Macduff acts is quite disrespectful and disobedient, not to mention selfish and disparaging. She fails to stand by Macduff unconditionally like a good wife should. Even though fully dependent on her husband, she is not in any point of the play submissive or adjusting; indeed, she is "rejecting any excuses for Macduff's actions" (Dash, p. 161). There is no support, only reprimands; she firmly considers her husband unwise to leave them and she boldly vents her disillusioned feelings. In short, "[i]n a play where a wife's major concern has been to help her husband reach his goal, Lady Macduff questions her husband's value system, unwilling to accept his power of reasoning over her own" (Dash, p. 192). Dash thinks that there might even be a hint of budding feminism in Lady Macduff as she "questioned existing male patterns of behavior" (p. 192). Interestingly enough, even the illusion of a good wife that Lady Macbeth so carefully creates and maintains in front of the guests in the banquet scene taking specific care not to chide her spouse in public is utterly shattered as far as Lady Macduff is concerned: Ross and her son witness Lady Macduff's outburst and all resentment is out in the open. This is reaffirmed later when Macduff's son asks whether his father was a traitor; Lady Macbeth confirms, "Ay, that he was" (4.2.45). Arguably, she seems most likely to refer not to Macduff's political treachery betraying the current king of Scotland, but to the domestic treachery of leaving his family on its own.

To be sure, Lady Macduff does not appear to personify the ideal submissive, obedient and silent wife of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as I have explained, but as with Lady Macbeth, any oversimplification deludes. On Lady Macduff's behalf

should be regarded the fact that she is not accusing and rebuking her husband for the sake of it or without a good reason: she and her children are in fact slain because Macbeth wants them dead and there is no one to protect them since Macduff is gone. Thus, from her standpoint she has every right to be upset; indeed, while Macduff is fulfilling his official obligation to his country, he is at the same time ignoring his duty to his family. Lady Macduff can only draw one conclusion, “He loves us not” (4.2.8), because he fails to take care of them. Furthermore, as Janet Adelman points out, “[t]he play moreover insists on reminding us that he has inexplicably abandoned his family: both Lady Macduff and Malcolm question the necessity of this abandonment” (p. 108). Therefore, and importantly, Lady Macduff finds herself not the only one who questions her husband’s decision to flee: another man, who is moreover a warrior like Macduff and also a king’s son, challenges this in the play, “Why in that rawness left you wife and child, Those precious motives, those strong knots of love, Without leave-taking?”(4.3.27-29). And, in addition, “the play never allows Macduff to explain himself” (Adelman, p. 108). Linda Bamber crystallizes the issue saying that “[a]lthough the arguments in favor of Macduff’s rescue of Scotland—even at the expense of his family—are implicit in the play as a whole, Shakespeare does not bring them up against Lady Macduff” (p. 93). She may protest all she wants but in the end Lady Macduff “is left unanswered in her quarrel with her husband” (Bamber, p. 94). In consequence, a mitigating factor in Lady Macduff’s case is simply her overall circumstances: not many wives could simply and humbly accept her husband’s flight in a similar situation no matter how good wives they otherwise might be. Silent acceptance of such a state of affairs is understandably most difficult. If she had been able to meekly reconcile herself to the state of affairs, she would have proved herself

an excellent wife. Yet, arguably Lady Macduff would also have represented an unnatural character; she arouses sympathy despite her shortcomings. Nevertheless, the method of chiding is inappropriate per se. Both wives should have used gentle speech and sweet words, so both Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff ultimately fail the duty of obedience, submission and silence.

3.3 Companionship

With regard to the overall issue of companionship the comparison between the two marriages is quite clear: even if only temporarily Lady Macbeth enjoys a much closer partnership with her husband being actively involved with their shared venture through joint efforts. At the beginning of the play the Macbeths truly represent partners in marriage, as well as in crime; no matter what glory or downfall comes, they are in it together. The tight and rewarding bond with each other is apparent from the fact that they want only the best for one another, Lady Macbeth, in fact, so badly that she ignores everything else. In short, quite an amount of love, sharing and co-operation speaks for itself. The same can hardly be said of the Macduffs: no negotiation takes place, communication fails and sharing is nonexistent. On the contrary, they in fact exemplify the traditional submissive marriage: the husband is the head and the sole ruler who expects his wife to accept his decision, his judgment and his rule as they stand. As long as Macduff simply does as he pleases regardless of his wife, no room is left for companionship in such a union. Arguably, this also may account for why Lady Macduff ends up being so discontent in addition to her own perception of his fear and lack of

reason: as Macduff's partner in marriage she feels being let down by her husband's refusal to take her into his confidence and by his abrupt departure. Therefore, after comparing these two marriages, I claim that in Macbeth Shakespeare in fact endorses the ideal companionship over the traditional model; even though Lady Macbeth abuses the friendship, which her husband willingly offers, they still share an affectionate, open and close relationship, whereas the Macduffs' union only typifies the highly hierarchical orthodox model facilitating the death of Lady Macduff and her son. Thus, regardless of its misuse, companionship is definitely overall portrayed with more recommendable terms in this play.

But surely this indicates only that because of Macduff's actions the partnership in general fails compared to the Macbeths. It is important to look more carefully into specifically Lady Macduff's role in the union to reach any valid conclusions on her role in this fellowship. To begin with, it is useful to examine the issue of priorities. Contrary to her wifely counterpart, Lady Macduff's first concern does not seem to be her husband; on the contrary, her rebuke "to leave his wife, to leave his babes" (4.2.6.) reveals that these two constitute her immediate importance. She even mentions herself before her children implying, perhaps, the order of precedence, which Macduff himself interestingly later reverses (4.3.212- 214). Whether Lady Macduff's selfishness is to be approved or disapproved of, the evidence for it still exists in the text. All she feels interest in is herself and her children; yet, her country suffers while Macbeth tyrannically rules (4.3.4-8, 165-177) and her husband bravely tries his best to make a difference for better on his hazardous trip to England:

Thither Macduff
 Is gone to pray the holy King upon his aid
 To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward,
 That by the help of these—with Him above
 To ratify the work—we may again
 Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
 Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
 Do faithful homage, and receive free honours,
 All which we pine for now.

(3.6.29-37).

However, Lady Macduff cannot see beyond her own narrow domestic sphere; as Linda Bamber says, she “thinks only of his obligation to herself” (p. 93). Indeed, her protest has a very egoistic tone in addition to maternal concern. It is obvious that she is not sacrificing her own individuality or her opinions at any point ignoring or forgetting herself for her husband’s sake. Therefore, in the play Lady Macduff’s feelings, thoughts and concerns are not to be identified similar to her husband’s, which obviously differs tremendously from Lady Macbeth’s disposition. This whole focus on herself and her children relates to the overall issue of Lady Macduff’s companionship: if she possesses other priorities before her husband and his cause, the quality of her input in the partnership needs seriously to be doubted.

Furthermore, as far as Lady Macduff’s attachment to her husband is concerned, her playful reply to the inquiry “How will you do for a husband?” (4.2.39) is worth noticing: “Why, I can buy me twenty at any market” (4.2.40). Although this is surely not meant to be taken literally, it interestingly reflects Lady Macduff’s lack of much emotional attachment and dedication to her spouse. It is very hard to imagine Lady Macbeth saying these words: her world constitutes solely her husband and even any light remarks of possible interchangeability of husbands are inconceivable. Lady Macduff, on

the other hand demonstrates almost a total lack of support, care or consideration for her husband. The only suggestion of these positive features expressed by Lady Macduff for her husband is her answer to a murderer inquiring the whereabouts of her husband, “I hope in no place so unsanctified Where such as thou mayst find him” (4.2.81-82). She could be here defending and protecting her husband against these killers; yet, that remark also could indicate her own independent and dignified defiance of the murderer rather than genuine care for Macduff. Indeed, Macduff does not appear to be very dear to her: no thought is spared on his welfare or person even in danger and in a different country, except for stressing his unreasonable and foolish nature to leave her and their children behind.

Finally, there is the issue of standing by one’s spouse. Indeed, both Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff raise the question of where the line is when the wife ought to support her husband and they provide different answers; in the case of Lady Macbeth there is a totally suppressed individuality and excessive promotion, even at the expense of morals, law and her sex, whereas Lady Macduff exhibits thriving concern for herself and her children with a blatant lack of encouragement for a worthy cause. As Dash says, there is a “graphic contrast between the two mortal women: the one who supports her husband, though he would ‘wrongly’ win, and the other who censures her husband’s decision to flee, leaving his family in mortal danger” (pp. 161-162). Based on her brief appearance in the play, it may be assumed that Lady Macduff would never have helped her husband as unconditionally and unselfishly as Lady Macbeth does because she actively questions his judgment when it contradicts with her own. Quite fascinatingly however, although “Lady Macduff opposes her husband’s enterprise whereas Lady Macbeth collaborates with her

husband” (Bamber, p. 94), it is still Macduff who seems more upset when both of the wives die. Indeed, “the reaction of the two husbands on hearing of their wives’ death is the reverse of what we might expect” (Bamber, p. 94): Macduff is very much in state of horror and shock, “My wife killed too?” (4.3.214), while Macbeth is at best indifferent, “She should have died hereafter” (5.5.16). In conclusion, the lack of support, attachment and dedication all result to the assumption that in fact Lady Macduff appears to be no companion or a helpmate, but primarily a mother, which serves as the focus in my last chapter on her.

3.4 Motherhood

As I have already claimed, whereas Macbeth serves as the ultimate focus of Lady Macbeth’s life, Lady Macduff’s whole world does not revolve solely around her husband. On the contrary, Lady Macduff is concerned about other people too, dispersing her attention. One reason for this is the fact that she is a mother; children provide Lady Macduff with something other than her husband to preoccupy herself with. In fact, Lady Macduff is identified first and foremost as a mother: the play makes this quite clear as her son reiterates her maternal role over and over again throughout the scene (4.2.32, 36, 44, 84). Moreover, Macduff himself also confirms this referring to her as the “dam” of “all my pretty chickens” (4.3.219). Arguably, the regard that Lady Macbeth channels into the husband-oriented obsession, Lady Macduff conveys into a tight maternal bond. Thus, while the play calls into question Lady Macduff’s wifely duties of submission, obedience and silence, it nevertheless praises her for being a good mother. This becomes obvious as

the only little scene in which she appears, Act Four, Scene Two, is examined. First of all, undoubtedly she loves her son very much and they have a close relationship as much as it can be deduced from her remarks to him, “Now God help thee, poor monkey!” (4.2.59), and “Poor prattler, how thou talk’st!” (4.2.64). Second, Lady Macduff fulfills both the duties of the mother, to breed and to raise children. The former is obvious already from the fact that she has a son, but the whole scene in which she and her child appear is imbued with examples of her excellent instruction. For instance, when the son asks, “What is a traitor?” (4.2.46), Lady Macduff’s educating is at its best exemplified: the mother’s answer, “Why, one that swears and lies” (4.2.47) testifies of teaching her offspring good values. Even though the witticism of the child lightens the discussion and amuses the mother further on in the scene, there is, however, a clear lesson being taught to the younger Macduff by her mother: he stands warned not to act like a traitor. Third, in addition to loving and teaching her child, Lady Macduff also exhibits a wish to protect them; this explains partly why she rebukes Macduff so vehemently, “to leave his wife, to leave his babes” (4.2.6). Valuing her children’s safety and welfare very highly proves that obviously Lady Macduff takes her maternal responsibilities seriously. Certainly she would make a terrible mother if she did not care for her own children.

Therefore, all in all Lady Macduff truly exemplifies an excellent mother: she loves, protects and teaches her child. Although the play omits to tell us whether she has breast-fed her child by herself, without a doubt Lady Macduff indeed personifies a very caring, warm and instructive mother figure. Nothing suggests otherwise: in her case the actualized endearments replace the fantasies of infanticide.

One more issue needs to be addressed: Lady Macduff's role in discouraging damnation. It is obvious that she possesses a clear conscience with regard to this duty; she never urges anyone to kill anyone or acts as an accomplice or as an instigator to anything immoral and illegal. Quite on the contrary, her morals are clear and she is the innocent victim who gets what she does not deserve. Her death arouses sympathy.

To sum up, I conclude that Lady Macduff provides an excellent example of good motherhood and womanhood: she excels in both loving and caring of her children and honoring her sex. Also her reasonable criticism with common sense is very admirable. Finally, she never jeopardizes her morals. However, Lady Macduff is still a wife who fails to support her husband and who questions his judgment not totally fulfilling the duties of submission, obedience and silence. Thus, her open critique in addition to her apparent lack of loving and caring companionship condemn her. Therefore, although Lady Macduff may indeed personify better the ideal of a good wife, she is not altogether the incarnation of it in the end.

4. The Final Conclusions: The Ideal Wife and Macbeth

Without doubt Lady Macduff personifies the ideal mother, but not the ideal wife; thus, her character does not complement fully and positively Lady Macbeth in this regard, who, already as the play shows, undoubtedly fails in many of the requirements. Consequently, based on the evidence in the play, neither wife indisputably fulfills the requirements set in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England of the good wife. To the question posed by Macduff's son, "How will you do for a husband?" (4.2.39), the wives in Macbeth provide no laudable answer.

After reaching this conclusion, it remains to attempt to expound it; in fact, to offer an explanation to the question of why this is so is the ultimate purpose of this Pro Gradu. At least two possible arguments present themselves as Jonathan Dollimore suggests: either "containment" or "subversion."⁴⁷ Thus, the first reason for Shakespeare to make both of these wives fail the duties of the good wife in Macbeth could be his intention in this play to endorse the current ideal of the model wife. Yet, certainly he would have succeeded in this much better had he separated the wives more distinctly making Lady Macduff the absolutely excellent wife and thus offered obvious comparison to Lady Macbeth. Dramatically speaking this would have given a clearer emphasis on the commendable features in the example of a virtuous wife who would have thrived and died as an innocent victim, whereas her unfortunate and less upstanding correspondent would have perished due to her own faults. In such a case the play would surely have

invited the audience to take heed and learn a lesson from the educative agenda of endorsing the ideal wifehood. But although this option was available, Shakespeare discarded it and specifically made both Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff fail the ideal.

Arguably, the second reason is more plausible, which Thomas Rist actually suggests (personal communication): by including two wives in Macbeth and ultimately making them both fail the requirements of the good wife set in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England, Shakespeare could be claimed to use drama in the form of this play as a means to expose how unnatural and demanding those qualifications and expectations from the wives are during his time. They simply are unrealistic; indeed, no wife can fulfill them, yet they are exhorted and expected to do so constantly and consistently. Thus, as Shakespeare draws the attention to the gaping disparity between the current expectations and requirements of the good wives in general and the wives in the play, I claim that Macbeth challenges the ideal arguing for the need of modification. In short, rather than endorsing the current values and duties of the ideal wife, Shakespeare's Macbeth criticizes them and exhorts a reassessment of what really is commendable. The critique stands out especially poignant in the case of Lady Macduff: since even the perfect mother cannot fulfill the qualities of the ideal wife, who can? In this play no wife, which leads to calling the qualities themselves in question.

Finally, regardless of their dispositions, both wives die at the end of Macbeth. By having them killed Shakespeare reminds his female audience that after all it is still best to

⁴⁷ Jonathan Dollimore, "Introduction," Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries, Second Edition (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. xx.

be a man and a husband in this world. The newly reorganized and reconciled world of the play is barren from the women's and the wives' point of view. As Janet Adelman summarizes, "[t]he play will finally reimagine autonomous male identity, but only through the ruthless excision of all female presence" (p. 91). Perhaps the ultimate challenge that Macbeth raises concerning the ideal wife actually echoes even more fundamental criticism: men's expectations and requirements of women in general. The audience may be actually asked to query patriarchy itself when the female, as wives, is represented only to be found falling short of personifying its fully recommended ideal and in the end to be swept away. Indeed, "Bring forth men-children only" (1.7.72).

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