

Anxiety of Effeminacy and Desperation for Masculinity: A Re-reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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Abstract

Shakespeare's presentation of the witches in Macbeth complement the theme of masculinity embedded in the play. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth embrace brutal violence as a masculine virtue leading to tragic consequences. It is intriguing that they are attracted to and misled by three witches who have a hermaphrodite-like appearance. The witches, the response they generate from the characters on stage and the tragedy of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, altogether become a critique on early modern European obsession with manliness and its anxiety with effeminacy. This article builds upon discourses of masculinity and gender in Shakespeare criticism and aims to explore the educative aspect on masculinity which is still relevant in this century.

Keywords: masculinity; witch; effeminacy; gender; identity; Renaissance.

The urge to guard and maintain the status-quo of socially defined identity of gender is one of the characteristics of Renaissance European society. Artists and playwrights sometimes interrogated the status quo resulting in debate and controversy. A commonplace allegation was that the stage was making the men effeminate. Gary Spear observed, 'It is now almost commonplace to discuss effeminacy in English culture in terms of the antitheatrical pamphlets that emphasized the corrupting power of the transvestite theater and named the early modern stage as one site from whence the epidemic of "effeminacy" spread outward

into society' (409-10). In renaissance Italy 'to dress as a woman implied "becoming" a woman and taking on a passive role that was associated with the dangerous sin and even more dangerous crime of sodomy' (Ruggiero 744). Jean E. Howard points out similar beliefs in polemical works in England in the sixteenth century: 'wearing effeminately ornate clothes would, in Stubbes's words, make men "weake, tender and infirme, not able to abide such sharp conflicts and blustering stormes" as their forefathers had endured' (424). Howard was quoting from Philip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583). Howard shows that cross-dressing was punishable for women and shameful for men because it disrupted the hierarchy of gender and class. Cross-dressing is also sinful as per Christian doctrines; however, there were several examples of males masquerading as females in ancient classical literary traditions which found a new life during the renaissance: in the Greek tragedies of Euripedes, in the narrative traditions of Odysseus, Achilles and Hercules and also in the myth of 'Jove cross-dressing as a woman to seduce the nymph Calisto' (Ruggiero 746) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Consequently, renaissance Italy was a vortex of continuous redefinitions of masculinity reflected in its art and architecture. The dominant trend was to achieve a perfect balance between soft grace and civility on the one hand and physical stamina and strength on the other which can be noted in Donatello's *David* (in bronze) and Micheangelo's paintings and sculptures, most notably *David*. The legacy of Spartan strength and endurance have for ever been celebrated. But the feminine charm of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*¹ has been a never-ending source of bafflement and disturbance for centuries of onlookers and art critics. Although the impact of Renaissance Italian sculptors and painters on sixteenth century English writers is a subject of which not much can be told in concrete terms, Jonathan Woolfson informs that in recent years 'research on this subject has been active, revealing many connections between visual developments in England and Italy in a wide range of contexts.' Woolfson has explored this subject from the beginning of the Tudor period till the 1540s when the Elizabethan age is yet to begin. However, sixteenth century London was most likely to catch the Italian preoccupation with the perfect balance in manliness. Besides Italian comedies, Castiglione's *The Courtier* is perhaps the most important channel of import of Renaissance cultural ideas and values into England. Interestingly, we find Count Ludovico in Castiglione's influential book *The Courtier* disapproving the contemporary men's fashion of bringing feminine grace in appearance although he is also preoccupied with the sense of balance which to him is more a matter of

mind and temperament than of looks. His ideal courtier will be a man of arms but not indifferent to the delights of music and dance. Replying to the enquiry of messer Bernardo Bibbiena if he looks manly, Count Ludovico assures him in the following manner:

Still it [Bibbiena's appearance] is of a manly cast and at the same time full of grace; and this characteristic is to be found in many different types of countenance. And of such sort I would have our Courtier's aspect; not so soft and effeminate as is sought by many, who not only curl their hair and pluck their brows, but gloss their faces with all those arts employed by the most wanton and unchaste women in the world; and in their walk, posture and every act, they seem so limp and languid that their limbs are like to fall apart; and they pronounce their words so mournfully that they appear about to expire upon the spot: and the more they find themselves with men of rank, the more they affect such tricks. (Bk I, 28-9).

According to Castiglione, men used a lot of effort, even adopting the practice of 'unchaste' women, that is, of applying cosmetics. Such practices were most likely followed by men in the sixteenth and seventeenth century England as Thomas Tuke wrote *A Treatise Against Paintng [sic] and Tincturing of Men and Women: Against Murther and Poysoning: Pride and Ambition: Adulterie and Witchcraft. And the Roote of All These, Disobedience to the Ministry of the Word. Whereunto is Added The Picture of a Picture, Or, the Character of a Painted Woman* which was published in 1616. It is interesting that using make-up was associated by Tuke with diverse vices including adultery and witchcraft. I find that early modern European society kept on upholding what R. W. Connell defined as hegemonic masculinity while in the arena of art and performance art, subordinated masculinities kept on reasserting itself. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity may be practised by only a minority but it is 'normative' and 'ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men' (832). The plays of Shakespeare portray the dangers of hegemonic masculinity and reassert subordinated masculinities and this paper discusses the point with reference to one play, namely *Macbeth*.

Critics are not unanimous regarding this theme in *Macbeth*. While Marilyn French argued that 'ambiguity about gender roles... is the keynote of the play' (242), Janet Adelman argued that there is presence of male subconscious fear of 'maternal malevolence' (4) in

several of Shakespeare's plays; in *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth and the witches represent malevolence and 'female chaos' (133). Regarding *Macbeth*, Robin Headlam Wells finds that the dominant heroic concept of masculinity: 'bloody, bold and resolute' (4.1.79) is upheld by 'heroes and villains alike' (139). He argues, '...like Virgil's *Aeneid*, the play is an anatomy of heroic values that offers no solution to the conundrum it dramatizes' (143). The phrase 'bloody, bold and resolute', quoted by Wells, was uttered by the second apparition shown by the witches and they are not the final words of the play itself. I argue that the play intends to represent the dangers of the value-system which apprises brutality and fears effeminacy.

Although men had to play the roles of women and dress as women, the dramatic action in Shakespeare's tragedies, unlike the comedies, is free from the socially non-commendable cross-dressing. What is more significant as far as gender is concerned is that the tragedies are very much involved with prejudicial notions of masculinity and femininity. The conservative and hegemonic idea of manliness, free from all womanly traits, represented in brutal violence, is a key theme in *Macbeth* and this theme is complemented by the presence of witches who are beings of indefinite sexual identity. Witchcraft was practised in England and Scotland by both males and females. So why did Shakespeare give them a hermaphrodite-like appearance? It is described by Banquo in Act 1 scene 3: 'you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so' (1.3.45-7) ². It is therefore obvious that the witches are also an integral part of the discourse on manliness and womanliness embedded in the play.

Janet Adelman interprets the witches as representation of malevolent 'female chaos' (133) and 'destructive maternal power' (131, 146). While she acknowledges their androgynous existence, yet she argues that they 'constitute our introduction to the realm of maternal malevolence...' (132). This again is contradicted when she argues that 'to a certain extent, they [the witches] help to exorcise the terror of female malevolence by localizing it' (136). The androgyny of the witches represents primarily the ambiguity of values, as also asserted by Marilyn French (242). The confusion regarding fair and foul prevails in the mind of the protagonists. At the same time, they represent the foggy and filthy ideas regarding identity and gender prevailing in society. Adelman is right in pointing out that witches in the play are portrayed as per English beliefs rather than Continental beliefs. But English beliefs on witches actually do not fit in with her scheme of arguments. The word 'witch' according to *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, is derived from Old English *wicca* (masculine) and

wicce (feminine) and the verb *wiccian*. The adjective ‘wicked’ comes from the same Old English source; ‘wicca’ was also a name for the cult of witchcraft in England as per the entry for ‘wicca’ in *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Lara Apps and Andrew Gow did a commendable research on the presence of the male witches in early modern Europe and also on the subsequent effort of deleting the male witches from witchcraft historiography. They prepared data of different places across Europe on the percentage of male witches convicted in comparison to female witches convicted. Their data reflect that in Essex, between 1560 and 1602, twenty-four percent of all witches convicted were male (45). Hence for an English audience of the early seventeenth century, witchcraft is not inevitably a feminine affair; Shakespeare’s witches are also not inevitably ‘female’. Clark and Mason report that William Davenant’s adaptation of the play was ‘the form in which *Macbeth* was ‘known in the theatre from the 1660s’ (98) and that since Davenant’s time the ‘Witches had been played by male actors as a comic turn’ (99) and Henry Irving considered himself an ‘innovator in having female witches’ (99). The witches therefore do not represent maternal malevolence.

In Holinshed the witches are unequivocally feminine: ‘...the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromanticall science’ (Muir ed., 171-72). In *Macbeth* the witches are not goddesses but they do foretell the future like the Delphic oracle in Sophocles’s *Oedipus: The King*. Oedipus argues within the play that he is a victim of ‘savage power’³; the witches, unlike the Oracle are not respectable at all but they claim that they can bring about devastation – the way they plan to harm the captain of the Tiger in Act 1 scene 3 is a case in point. This shows their socio-historical existence and status in European society rather than their power. In *Macbeth*, the witches are physically present and they tempt the protagonist; they represent a historical reality. Terry Eagleton observed that the witches ‘are exiles’ from the patriarchal society based on ‘routine oppression and incessant warfare’ (47). It is significant that the actors who played the witches in the Globe Theatre’s 2010 production, as reported by Carol Atherton, ‘developed backstories for their characters that explained why they were isolated from society, leading to the vindictive behaviour they display in Act 1, Scene 3’. However, their physical existence on stage has relevance which transcends mere pointing out of a marginal entity. Shakespeare deliberately gives them an androgynous dimension although in reality they were either female or male. The witches are referred to as weird sisters who look like

men. Banquo's description brings to mind the image of hermaphrodites, who were traditionally identified in early modern Europe as having masculine physique and sporting feminine attires (Gilbert 2). The early modern man had little knowledge of hermaphrodites; for him they were mysterious people lacking sexual identity and hovering the borders of human society and hence they are objects of fear. Shakespeare made the witches more fearful to his audience by making them look like hermaphrodites. Banquo, who is rational as well as conscientious, fails to explain the gender of the witches although he is sure that they are 'instruments of Darkness' (1.3.124). The witches become an objective correlative of the confusion within the Renaissance man. Banquo's confusion is a rallying point of the early modern confusion and inability to comprehend gender. Their grotesque appearance reflects the confusion within rather than that without because in Shakespearean vision, 'In nature, there's no blemish but the mind' (*Twelfth Night* 3.4.318).

That the witches, like the hermaphrodites, are outsiders and live a marginal existence are reflected in the first witch's begging of the sailor's wife in Act 1 scene 3 and the way the sailor's wife drives her away: 'Aroynt thee witch!' (1.3.6). The word 'Aroynt' is obviously a colloquial expression. Kenneth Muir annotates that the origin of the word is unknown; however, 'rynt thee' is an expression used by milkmaids to a cow when she has been milked, to bid her get out of the way and the phrase 'arent the wich' is quoted in a record in Stratford-upon-Avon. (10-11). Macbeth calls them 'secret, black and midnight hags' (4.1.48). Nobody in the play seems to revere the witches. Ruth Gilbert's description of the social position of hermaphrodites in early modern Europe is noteworthy here:

...hermaphrodites raised a series of ontological and epistemological questions. Was the hermaphrodite a sublime spiritual figure or a grotesque monster? Was it an idea or a reality? How could hermaphroditism be explained or categorized? Above all, hermaphroditism generated stories about sex, gender and sexuality. (1).

Coleridge's description of the witches locates them within the dark recesses of the human mind rather than on earth: 'they are the shadowy, obscure and, fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature, elemental avengers without sex or kin' (219). The witches are not without sex, rather they reveal that absence of sexual stereotype is considered fearful by early modern society. It is intriguing that Shakespeare chooses to depict

an equivocation of gender in the witches who were generally either female or male as we know from the documents cited by Lara Apps and Andrew Gow. I think that the witches' sexual identity or lack of it is deeply linked with the dramatist's scheme of depicting the play as a tragedy of culture which nourishes foggy and filthy notions of gender and identity. Sex is so essential to identity in early modern society that hermaphrodites are outsiders in society; moreover, the conservative approach towards gender is exclusive rather than inclusive so that 'masculine' cannot accommodate any traditional 'feminine' trait of character; the witches mock at these standpoints and by so doing become ominous. Early modern society resisted the fluidity between 'male' and 'female' depicted in theatres and upheld the exclusively 'masculine'. While Shakespeare's comedies through cross-dressing and disguise mocks this mindset, the witches uncover the hollowness of the conservatist mindset. It is interesting that Macbeth who is introduced to the audience as the model of virile strength and 'bloody execution' is drawn towards and tempted by the androgynous witches. Macbeth seems to be fond of them as he returns to them in the apparition scene and the witches seem to be always waiting and planning and preparing for Macbeth. They rejoice with drumbeat the arrival of Macbeth: 'A drum! a drum! / Macbeth doth come' (1.3.30-31).

The witches were already a controversial issue when Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was staged, thanks to Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* and King James I's *Daemonologie*, published in 1584 and 1597 respectively. Shakespeare utilized the popular issue to delve deep into the social human psyche: his witches indicate the marginal existence of hermaphrodites at one level and at another, they symbolise the collective unconscious of early modern English society regarding confusions of gender.

The Macbeths idolise as well as project a dangerously exclusive idea of masculinity which incorporates action and violence and nothing else. However, neither of them is exclusively brutal or violent by nature. The human side of the husband and wife render it as a tragedy of culture rather than a tragedy of character. Adelman argues that Lady Macbeth is more 'frightening' (136) than the witches, but she does not discuss the human side of the character. After all the high-sounding evocation of evil spirits to unsex herself, Lady Macbeth is frightened by the call of the owl which gives the 'stern'st goodnight' (2.2.4) and after boasting that she can kill a sucking baby she is unable to harm the sleeping king because he resembled her father. She does not belong to the category of 'pelican daughters' (3.4.74) in

King Lear. After the sleep-walking scene, in retrospection, Lady Macbeth's role seems heroic as she conceals her own sufferings in order to protect her husband from falling apart. Although Macbeth shares his mental agony with his wife, Lady Macbeth hides all her agonies within herself so that her husband, 'too full o'th'milk of human kindness' (1.5.17) remains mentally strong and fortified. But Lady Macbeth also has her share of the milk of human kindness, otherwise she would neither have felt the way she does in the murder scene, nor would she have suffered from sleep-walking and guilt-ridden conscience. She, who has been her husband's 'dearest partner of greatness' (1.5.11) has been largely left to herself as Macbeth, after the murder of Duncan, chalks out his plans all by himself. In her sleep, she is still taking almost motherly care and reassuring her husband: 'Wash your hands, ... I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave again' (5.1.58-60). But she has no one with whom she can share her agony. She gets no paternal care unlike her husband. Hence, it is very natural that it is she, rather than Macbeth who develops this mental disease. It is significant that in the world of Macbeth where pseudo-masculinity is idolised a woman's love and sacrifice go utterly unrecognised and she remains deprived of mental support and care. One of the causes of the tragedy of the Macbeths is Lady Macbeth's serious conviction that to be cruel is to be masculine and to be kind is to be feminine. It is not her error of judgement but it is an acquired prejudice. This is the ideological base on which her adventure of unsexing herself is launched.

Macbeth confesses of 'vaulting ambition' but Lady Macbeth does never speak of a personal ambition distinct from her husband. She has no dream other than that of her husband: 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be / What thou art promis'd' (1.5. 15-16). She is the traditional wife in patriarchal society whose identity is inseparable from that of her husband. Ironically, after all her attempts to 'unsex' (1.5.41) herself and fill herself with 'direst cruelty' (1.5.43) she uses her sexual self to persuade her husband to agree to utilize the opportunity to murder Duncan:

Lady M. Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd 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. (1. 7. 35-39)

Macbeth's 'hope' is personified here but the dialogue is also a comment on his appearance. Macbeth's 'hope' is personified as a fellow who was bold once but now reduced to a drunken fellow, who becomes green and pale to think of his former actions. The phrase 'green and pale' as commented by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason in the latest Arden Edition, has 'perhaps... overtones of girlishness, as in green sickness' (168). A man who looks pale and sleepy and not out of his hangover, is the least attractive to any woman and no man would like to be or to look like such a man before his loving wife or girlfriend. As long as his 'hope' of becoming the king is pale and sleepy (rather than strong and erect) Macbeth cannot look attractive. Macbeth cannot miss this underlying sexual innuendo of his wife's words as she theatrically delivers, 'Such I account thy love'. By equalling 'hope' with 'love' she accuses that his love for her has also become limp and pale. The anxiety 'I am looking pale and not manly' is a deep-rooted one in the male psyche⁴. Macbeth sacrifices his conscience by stepping into the trap of masculinity. In his book *Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined* J. J. Bola observes, '...masculinity is a performance; that is to say, it is acted out in a way that reinforces the widely held view of what is normal for those born as male' (20). But the 'widely-held view' may be a prejudice or a construction of patriarchal hegemony, or both.

Lady Macbeth posits a prejudicial as well as a dangerous view of masculinity, which becomes one of the reasons of their tragic downfall. In the same speech where she equates 'hope' (ambition) with love, she asks her husband if he is 'afear'd' to convert his 'desire' into 'act and valour' (1. 7. 39-41). Here manliness is further associated with 'valour' but here 'valour' is not merely courage but implies murder and violence as well. She concludes the dialogue by comparing Macbeth to 'the poor cat i'th'adage' (1.7.44). While the nation compares him to eagle and lion (1.2.35), Lady Macbeth compares him to 'the poor cat i'th'adage', that is, to a cat which would eat fish and would not wet her feet⁵. The whole speech consists of a series of questions ending up in the image of the poor cat, thus sharp accusations giving way to sharper ridicule, which is sure to pierce Macbeth. He reacts by claiming that he is the most daring of all men: 'I dare do all that may become a man / Who dares do more, is none' (1.7.46-47). Macbeth is thus trapped in fixed gender roles. Clark and Mason find a similar situation in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* - where female gender roles are fixed - in 'Angelo's injunction to Isabella: "Be that you are, / That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none"' (168). Macbeth's entrapment in gender roles allows Lady

Macbeth to unleash the dangerous discourse of destructive masculinity; she replies that when he dared to do the murder, then ‘you were a man’ (1.7.49). She does not stop there and speaks on boasting of her idea of daring:

...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 my boneless gums,
 And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn
 As you have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

Lady Macbeth presents a picture of unnatural daring which Macbeth or no other man or woman is likely to imagine in normal circumstances. Before this image of extreme cruelty, to kill King Duncan seems hardly a crime. However, ruthless killing is not unfamiliar to Macbeth as he ‘ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell’ but ‘unseam’d’ the rebel Macdonwald from ‘the nave to the chops’ and ‘fix’d his head upon the battlements’ (1.2.21-23). Lady Macbeth devalues the feminine virtue of motherhood - as well as the human virtue of kindness - which is trampled to nothingness by the socially acclaimed masculine virtue of being bloody and violent. Thus, manliness is equated with a dangerous view of cruel daring which does not accommodate even an iota of kindness or mercy. Lady Macbeth is successful in convincing Macbeth with her own vision of manliness because she herself believes in this pseudo-masculinity. She tries to be masculine in her attempts to ‘unsex’ herself. What is more horrible is the fact that Macbeth readily buys this idea of manliness which is evident from the remark he makes at the end of the scene:

Macb. Bring forth men children only!
 For thy undaunted mettle should compose
 Nothing but males. (1. 7. 73-75).

It is strange that Macbeth thinks of Lady Macbeth as a prospective mother even after her boast of infanticide. Perhaps Macbeth has not taken the boast of his wife regarding infanticide literally because they are childless but he has taken it seriously that utmost cruelty is the essence of manliness and a woman who can conceive such cruelty can conceive only male babies. Macbeth belongs to a society where males are required to be bold and resolute; where a father cannot imagine a ‘fairer death’ (5.9.15) for his son who dies fighting for his

people. But the Macbeths – to fulfil their ambition - have equated apathetic violence with masculinity. This is the foggy and filthy idea of gender which is more horrible than the witches themselves. It is here that the germ of the tyrant Macbeth is born, the Macbeth who will conceive the murder of Fleance and the children of Macduff. Even in the twenty-first century human civilization is still haunted by this horrible vision of perverted manliness: in Beslan (in 2004) and in Peshawar (in 2014).

Macbeth could have argued that love is not proved by execution of hope or ambition. But reason and conscience are trifles when manliness is at stake. Hence, when a man's vulnerable area, that is, his manliness is questioned by a woman, he is likely to be confused. Macbeth's arguments - that Duncan is his guest, that Duncan is in 'double-trust' (1.7.12) and his vivid imagination of 'Pity, like a naked new-born babe' (1. 7. 21) - are all blown away by his desperation to prove his manliness. In the seventeenth century sexuality was the prime source of identity and a man could not prefer to be conscientious by risking his manliness. This is a fallacy of culture symbolically represented by the witches in their androgynous and grotesque appearance and marginal existence in society, which I have already argued above. The drama shows that a man would prefer to be a villain than appear impotent: so deep-rooted is a man's fear of impotence and anxiety of performance. The witches are an objective correlative of the subconscious fear of impotence.

That Macbeth, who is hyper-sensitive about his sexual identity, is misled by the androgynous witches speaks volumes about the complementary role played by the witches. To Macbeth they are more alluring than fearful. He is always eager to listen to their ambiguous stuff. The witches represent ambiguity in multiple layers: in sexual identity, in their language, such as 'the battle's lost and won' and the slogan of 'Fair is foul and foul is fair' in the opening scene and also in their apparitions. From Macbeth's perspective, the witches are 'secret' and 'black' (4.1.48) and belong to the nocturnal world of black magic and evil beyond the periphery of nature. Macbeth, himself limited and constrained by his sense of guilt, sin and sexual identity, is tempted by the magical world of the witches where his inhibitions, his helplessness and limitations may be magically resolved leaving him free to realize his ambition. However, this hope is never fulfilled: Macbeth is never secure and he finds himself wading into blood and brutality tediously; the witches cannot show him any magical release from this tedium.

The future is shown symbolically to him through apparitions by the witches but not interpreted. Only the last apparition of Banquo's ghost and the line of kings is crystal clear to him. He is falsely given a sense of fortification by the prophecy that he will be overcome by a man not born of woman and he is safe until Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane castle. The prophecies apparently point towards a world beyond the laws of nature, birth and femininity which does not exist. Macbeth feels amused and fortified but does not have the rationality to question the value of such prophecies.

The pseudo-masculinity of the Macbeths leads them to a hollow and disintegrated world 'Signifying nothing' (5.5.28). We are redeemed out of this vortex of hollowness by Lady Macduff who accuses her husband because he fails to perform the role of protector and leaves his family in his castle. She does not question his manliness but she does question his love and courage:

...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. (4.2.8-14).

The 'poor wren' is feminine as indicated by the pronoun 'Her' and yet the poor bird plays a protective role because it is courageous and loves its offspring. In his annotations in the Arden edition of the play, Kenneth Muir, citing from Noble's *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*, points out the biblical allusion from I John iv. 18: 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: for fear hath painfulness: and he that feareth is not perfect in love.' (118). Lady Macduff's accusation against her husband may be incorrect, yet she is accurate regarding courage. The passage indicates that courage and love have nothing to do with sexual identity and gender. This passage is theoretically necessary after Lady Macbeth's dangerous view of manliness which has a big impact upon Macbeth before he commits the murder of Duncan. The chief contribution of this drama, as far as discourse on gender is concerned, lies in detaching courage and fighting spirit from sexual identity. It does not

undermine the traditional role of a patriotic soldier or general but detaches its heroism from sexual identity.

Lady Macduff is further complemented by Macduff. When Macduff laments for his family and children, Malcolm asks him to tolerate like a man and Macduff replies, 'But I must also feel it as a man' (4.3.221). Macduff in a way reminds the weeping Duncan overwhelmed with joy. Duncan said that his 'plenteous joys, / Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves / In drops of sorrow' (1.4.33-35). King Duncan was not feminine but he was definitely undiplomatic. He had already announced Macbeth the Thane of Cawdor and when Macbeth arrived he had no reward to give except 'drops of sorrow'.

The Bible says, 'Jesus wept' (John Chapter 1, verse 35) and Castiglione in Book I of *The Courtier* documents the weeping of King Alexander in his discussion on self-praise (28). In *Macbeth* Macduff's lamentation for his wife and children reasserts the view that for a man there is nothing wrong in weeping and it is not a sign of effeminacy. Emotion has no gender just as cold-blooded villainy has no gender; diplomacy has no gender; Cleopatra was diplomatic in *Antony and Cleopatra* in sending 'twenty several messengers' (1.5.65) to Antony and thereby not allowing him to forget her just as Octavius uses a team of spies to keep him updated all the time. But in diverse cultures, in times past and times present, gender has been attached with several characteristics of human beings. In fact, Macduff repairs the lost link between mankind and manliness, between emotion and manliness. Macduff weeps and shows his determination to liberate Scotland from the thralldom of Macbeth although he himself stereotypes weeping with femininity:

O! I could play the woman with mine eyes,
And braggart with my tongue. – But, gentle Heavens,
Cut short all intermission; front in front,
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland, and myself;
Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him too! (4. 3. 230-35)

It is up to the audience to see that there is no shame in playing 'the woman' as long as one has the courage and determination to fight against falsehood and tyranny. When Lear weeps in *King Lear* after betrayed by two of his daughters, he finds himself feminine:

O! how this mother swells upward toward my heart!

Hysterica passio! down, thou climbing sorrow!

Thy element's below. (2.4.54-56)

Coppelia Kahn, in her essay 'The Absent Mother in *King Lear*' argues that the play tracks the tragic hero's journey of finding and coming to terms with the emotional or motherly side in himself and also his journey of overcoming his misogynist views of womanhood and arriving at 'a new mode of being' (258). In *Macbeth*, it is the audience who are supposed to arrive at a new mode of being, being educated with lessons of gender. Both *King Lear* and *Macbeth* end with no female characters living; but it is not a fulfilment of male fantasy but it is ominous and disastrous caused by fallacious concepts of gender.

Finally, readers and lovers of Shakespeare are quite aware that honour and masculine glory of military valour appear trivial in Shakespeare's vision of time which can only be conquered by love and art:

The painful warrior famoused for fight,
 After a thousand victories once foiled,
 Is from the book of honour razed quite,
 And all the rest forgot for which he toiled:
 Then happy I, that love and am beloved,
 Where I may not remove nor be removed.

(Sonnet 25)

NOTES

1. Eleanor Beardsley narrates that responding to the invitation of King Francis I, Leonardo Da Vinci arrived in France in 1516. He 'came with three of his own paintings – 'Saint John the Baptist', 'the Virgin and Child with Saint Anne' and the Mona Lisa, all of which are part of the Louvre collection'. Leonardo died in France and the paintings also never returned to Italy. This fact is important for us because Italian influence on England in the sixteenth century 'mediated through France and the Netherlands' with which England had 'a longstanding and ongoing artistic relations' (Woolfson, Abstract).

2. All quotations of Shakespeare are taken from the Arden Editions: *Macbeth* (1994), *King Lear* (1985), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1995) and *Sonnets*, except *Twelfth Night* where the single line quotation is from New Cambridge Shakespeare edition (1989).
3. See *Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays*, translated by Robert Fagles, London: Penguin Books, 1984, p 207.
4. The phenomenon is still persistent. In *The Guardian* on 16 May 2020, Arwa Mahdawi reports (in the context of the pandemic caused by Covid 19), ‘Men are less likely to wear masks – another sign that toxic masculinity kills’; it is a survey conducted in the United States and England where several men suffer from the assumption that wearing masks ‘is a sign of weaknesses’.
5. See annotations on the line in *Macbeth*. Edited by Kenneth Muir. Arden Edition 1994.

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