

A Review of
***Lady Macbeth* by Susan King a Novel Published in the Year 2008, Reprint**
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Incredulity towards phallic centered metanarratives from feminist perspective is believed to have begun with the publication of Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968) and later with Kate Millet's phenomenal Ph.D. thesis *Sexual Politics* (1969), feminist works which insisted on active participation of readers in the meaning making process. Ellmann's and Millet's resistance to accept readers as passive participants of phallically dominated canonized texts further paved the way for revisionary writings of hitherto unquestioned texts. *Lady Macbeth*, a novel comes under the genre of revisionary writings and is thus an attempt by Susan King to offer a renewed perspective to the much-villainized historical character, Lady Gruadh, aka Lady Macbeth by letting the voice of Gruadh dominate the entire novel.

Susan King's *Lady Macbeth* in its novelized form not only reveals the gaps and silences in the canonized history compiled by historians such as John of Fordun, Andrew of Wyntoun, Hector Boece and later Ralph Holinshed but also challenges the dramatized version of the same offered by Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon through his unforgettable play *Macbeth*. The postmodern perspective offered through King's novel points out the misrepresentation of Macbeth and Gruadh by the greatest English playwright, primarily because the historical material used by Shakespeare for his play was *Holinshed's Chronicles*, which itself was a gross distortion of history as has been pointed out by the postmodern historians such as Fiona Watson, Peter Ellis, Benjamin Hudson as well as Malcolm D Broun. In her attempt to revision Gruadh not as a dramatic personage but as a historical character who was not hated but rather was much revered by her people, King's novel uses first-person narrative technique instead of omniscient narration and thus lets Gruadh tell her story, which though is in fictionalized form, is based on King's intensive research on these two historically maligned characters.

Another important feature about King's novel is that though the novel is named as *Lady Macbeth*, it is only to let the readers know that the novel is about one of the most infamously famous characters created through Shakespearean ink. However, once the readers participate in the revisionist journey offered by Susan King through her mini narrative and

begin to actively re-vision Lady Gruadh based on the first-person narrative of Gruadh, King's narrative technique compels her readers to take notice of Gruadh as an individual in her own right. Consequently, though with the understandable initial hesitancy to acknowledge Lady Macbeth as Lady Gruadh because of the immortalization of Gruadh's name as "Lady Macbeth" by Shakespeare, once the readers proceed with Gruadh's narrative, King's readers cannot help but acknowledge Gruadh's individuality as "Lady Gruadh", a rightful Queen of Scots who ruled alongside her husband King Macbeth as his equal for seventeen long years.

King's novel begins with a prologue through which Gruadh's informs her readers about her present situation as a dowager queen, as Macbeth, the rightful king of Scots has been slain by Malcolm III by treachery. Gruadh also informs her readers that though Lulach her son has been acknowledged as the next rightful king of Scots, Malcolm III refused to recognize him as a king and instead has proclaimed himself as the king of Scots. Gruadh further informs her readers about Malcolm III's persistent attempts directed to either make her bend to his will and become his queen or relinquish her active political life and spend her days in a convent. King's Gruadh then uses a flashback technique to take her readers on a journey which begins with her childhood. Gruadh introduces her readers to her royal lineage and also lets her readers know that her position as the only princess descended from Kenneth Mac Alpin ensured her exposure to constant threats not only from the royal clans, but also from the other warlords who wished to covet the title of kingship with the help of her royal lineage. At very young age Gruadh finds herself thrown into a political turmoil which entailed experiencing the worst tragedies in her life. However, instead of letting herself to be victimised by the circumstances, Gruadh understands that the political game also offers an opportunity to be a player, if one aspires to be the one. King's Gruadh thus becomes one of the important players of the eleventh century Scottish politics who successfully carves her identity as a warrior queen.

It is worthwhile to note that King's *Lady Macbeth* is not just an attempt to deconstruct the vilified image of Gruadh by revisioning it through the postmodern mini narrative, but along with Gruadh, King's postmodern mini narrative is also an attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct historical Macbeth, who in Shakespearean drama appears as a usurper and who in order to fulfil his uncontrolled ambition treacherously kills Duncan in his sleep. King's novel points out that Macbeth had a legitimate claim to kingship and in fact his claim to kingship was more justifiable as compared to Duncan because of Macbeth's marriage to Gruadh which for the first time in Scottish history had combined two royal clans of Scots. Further as is pointed out through King's novel, Duncan was not an efficient or capable King of Scots and his regime of around six years was replete with constant internecine skirmishes as well as external wars. Also, King's Gruadh lets her readers know that contrary to Shakespearean imaginative death sequence, Duncan was killed in a fair battle which decided the future kinship for Macbeth, who ruled for seventeen peaceful years.

King's *Lady Macbeth* also provides the readers with ample evidence of rich cultural heritage of Celtic traditions which were termed as pagan under the onslaught of Roman Christianity. Through King's novel thus, one gets to see friction between the dominance of rigid form of Christianity and the liberal form of Christianity accepted by Celts which came to be known as Celtic Christianity. Gruadh's first-person narration points out that when it came to position of women in the society, Celtic Christianity was much more liberal than the rigid Anglo-Saxon or Romanic form of Christianity.

Lady Macbeth also re-visions the role of witches, or women who were immortalized as evil and wicked creatures and whose identity as women too was questioned as can be seen through Shakespearean drama. Witchcraft as it appears in King's novel was not any diabolical or satanic activity but was the skill possessed by few people either with the help of their innate ability or power acquired through learning of traditional knowledge. King's novel further points out through ample evidential incidents that in terms of its effect or potency, witchcraft as well as magic could provide comfort and protection to the early medieval Celts who were yet away from the impact of advancement of science and medicine. In fact, King's novel points out to its readers the necessity of historicization of history in order to find the reasons behind terming this traditional craft as demonic in the later centuries.

Indeed, King's novel convincingly points out that canonical histories scripted by Eurocentric patriarchal culture remained grand narratives due to their constant production and reproduction and thus were naturalized as foundationalist narratives which for centuries remained unquestionable histories. These historical narratives were written from the dominant ideological perspective and thus history that readers consumed was history as seen from the supremacist ideology. As a result, the ones' whose history was written were not there to object it or defend themselves, not because they were the subalterns who couldn't speak, but because they belonged to the culture which still believed in oral history. Their history and culture passed on for ages through bardic tradition and consequently for them bards were their chroniclers, preservers as well as propagators of their ancient culture and tradition. However, their culture remained inscrutable to foreign civilizations which had the tradition of documenting not only their own history but also of those who they came in contact with. Thus, the ink which described history and culture of those who had not yet begun to script their own history was through jaundiced lens which portrayed the inscrutable peoples and their culture as barbaric, savage and pagan which needed intrusion of their civilizing mission.

Indeed, *Lady Macbeth* as a revisionary novel by Susan King comes across as an endeavour by King to historicize the history by letting Lady Gruadh, aka Lady Macbeth weave her own micronarrative to describe not only the history, politics, religion and culture prevailed during the era that she lived in but through Gruadh's first-person narrative King also exposes the gaps in the canonical narrative which were instrumental in making both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as metaphors of utter villainy and as ruthless usurpers of power.