

Caitlin Genord

EN 363 Paper Tragedy

November 29

Macbeth and His Lady Growing Inversely
Exploring Marina Favila's "*Mortal Thoughts*" and *Magical Thinking in Macbeth*

Marina Favila's article "*Mortal Thoughts*" and *Magical Thinking in Macbeth* diagnoses Macbeth's slow abandon from a war hero to the life of a dreadful murderer. She explains how the world of magic, introduced with the witches, causes Macbeth to be attracted to the pleasure principle. As a result, Macbeth cannot rely on his ethical thoughts and "he imagines a future act as a memory" (Favila 4). She compares Macbeth to an infant in terms of his moral development because he relies so fully on the pleasure principle and he is easily persuaded by his "mothers" Lady Macbeth and the witches. Just as "the baby attempts to transfer his universe into that of the original wish and learns in the process that action, and not thought, gives birth to consequence," Macbeth begins to act solely because of his desire to secure his position. Macbeth in a sense, diminishes in terms of his development and his morality weakens as he becomes like a child. At the start of the play he is seen as a war hero and he slowly becomes a murderer who sees not purpose to live. Her sympathetic reading of Macbeth serves to solve his difficult character development (or underdevelopment). It seems that Favila blames Lady Macbeth for Macbeth's reliance on the pleasure principle. Although she may be responsible for his initial clutch on the crown, Macbeth continues to do whatever it takes to secure his position and she is no longer involved. Using Marina Favila's argument that Macbeth seeks to isolate the pleasure principle from the reality principle, I will show how Lady Macbeth grows inversely of Macbeth as she

develops a more definitive relationship with remorse and morality which reveals Shakespeare's tendency to construct strong female characters.

Favila defines the pleasure principle as committing any action in order to attain a desire or a wish. As Macbeth begins to ponder his potential position as king he begins making justifications for his actions that secure his social position. Once Macbeth actually does secure the crown, it isn't enough. "To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature Reigns that which would be feared" (Macbeth 3.1.50-54). Here we see Macbeth relying more and more deeply on the pleasure principle as the play moves along. He does not give much thought into the destruction or harm he is causing others but is instead solely worried about his personal success. Once Act 4 begins, Macbeth has completely abandoned the reality principle and is deeply reliant on the pleasure principle. He is willing to do whatever it takes to remain safely king. Macbeth goes on a sort of murdering spree and his attachment to the pleasure principle is on an ultimate high. This is seen in the lines, "The castle of Macduff I will surprise, Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls That trace him in his line. No boasting like a fool. This deed I'll do before this purpose cool" (4.1.157-160). It is also important to realize that this climax occurs after Macbeth revisits with the witches. The witches are symbolic of the pleasure principle because they are magical and bring Macbeth further and further from reality as he focuses his attention on their prophesy.

Favila argues that Lady Macbeth, like the witches, fosters Macbeth's reliance on the pleasure principle. While I agree that initially Lady Macbeth is asserting her power by deceiving Macbeth, I think she develops into a much more complicated character by the play's end. Favila writes, "Unlike her husband she will not be immobilized by her picture of the future. Instead, she

uses this imaginative ability to spur her on to the plotting and planning of the deed at hand” (Favila 11). Lady Macbeth does not always rely on the pleasure principle and she is not directly affected by the witches. However, at the start of the play Lady Macbeth lets the ‘magic’ get to her and she too relies on the pleasure principle. This is seen in her convincing Macbeth to kill King Duncan and Banquo. This action is the only way to achieve a favorable consequence, so Lady Macbeth had to convince Macbeth to murder Duncan. She doesn't put any real thought into besides to taunt Macbeth and question his manhood. Lady Macbeth acting on her immediate thought and desire says, “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. (1.5.4-8) Here we see the manipulation that Lady Macbeth has relied on to assist her achievement of the pleasure principle. She is willing to tell Macbeth whatever it takes to get him to go through with the murder so that the couple may take over the position. Favila argues that, “Her attempts to cast her husband as desire incarnate, drained of the milk of human kindness to embrace the pleasure principle without the reality principles, are completely unsuccessful” (Favila 14). But are these actions completely unsuccessful? She is able to convince Macbeth but she begins to deeply regret her influence on him later on in the play.

Lady Macbeth shows the opposite progression of Macbeth as she begins to realize the trouble they have caused and feels deeply guilty about their unwarranted seize of the power. When Macbeth is having visions of Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth sticks up for him and tries to protect her husband's reputation. It seems at this point she begins to understand how deeply conflicted Macbeth has become and she feels guilty about making him this way. Favila believes that Lady Macbeth “is the mother who hallucinates the infant to fulfill her own desire, not the other way around, and her desire is to render Macbeth a man child full of reckless purpose and

daring but void of fear and remorse, void of super ego” (Favila 11). It is difficult to argue that Lady Macbeth’s desire is for Macbeth to become like this. Lady Macbeth begins to deeply regret the murders her husband has committed and notices how the public are reacting. Her guilt is seen in several passages throughout act’s four and five in lines like, “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” (3.2.6-9). This excerpt really shows Lady Macbeth’s development as a character and her reliance on the reality principle. This sort of reality check is her way of saying it is better to be the victim than to be the murderer who has to deal with so much guilt. As Lady Macbeth begins to feel immense guilt for what her husband has done, Macbeth continues to commit horrifying actions to secure the ‘safety’ of his kingship.

Lady Macbeth’s death is a significant clue that her remorse is too powerful to handle. She supposedly kills herself because she is unable to deal with the pain of their crimes. Right before her death, Lady Macbeth says, “Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” (5.1.30-33). This is her final disapproval of Macbeth and his attachment to the pleasure principle. It is clear that as Lady Macbeth develops into a character who experiences deep regret and remorse, her husband becomes more desensitized. When Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth’s reaction is unexpected and inappropriate. He does not in any way take responsibility for her death and likely envies her death. He reacts saying, “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more. It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing” (5.3.15) Here we see Macbeth showing his lack of value for living and life in general. This seems to coincide with Favila’s argument that, “his journey will move backward, not forward: from a failed father to a cowed husband to a gullible child to a greedy infant to what lies both before and beyond life, death” (Favila 5). Here

Favila has outlined the progression of Macbeth's life. In the end Macbeth becomes like a greedy infant and after Lady Macbeth dies Macbeth too seems to desire death himself but for completely different reasons. While Lady Macbeth dies out of torment and guilt, Macbeth dies because he sees no value in life since there is no way he can protect his position any longer.

It seems that Lady Macbeth's character in *Macbeth* is meant to be a message.

Lady Macbeth is known as one of Shakespeare's most famous female characters. At the start of the play she comes off as rather evil because of her role in manipulating Macbeth and her reliance on the pleasure principle. Shakespeare gives her masculine qualities and she even begs, "unsex me" (1.5.4). This might be Shakespeare's way of giving Lady Macbeth a sort of power that cannot be attained by simply being a submissive woman. Lady Macbeth plays the powerful role in her relationship with Macbeth and she is able to convince him to do awful things for her advancement. However, Shakespeare sheds a positive light on Lady Macbeth before the play's end. She ends up being the one who embraces reality and understands the harm they have caused. She is the one who readers can respect at the end of the play. While Macbeth becomes encapsulated by his crime, Lady Macbeth seeks forgiveness and this may be Shakespeare's way of sending a message about womanhood. The evil woman becomes the remorseful woman in *Macbeth*. Although Shakespeare constructs Lady Macbeth and introduces her as a strong and powerful female character she becomes more feminine and empathetic by the end.

References

Favila, Marina. "*Mortal Thoughts*" and *Magical Thinking in Macbeth*. The University of

Chicago Press, Aug., 2001. Vol.99 No. 1. *Modern Philology*.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/439153>

Shakespeare, William, and G. Blakemore Evans. *Macbeth*, The Riverside Shakespeare.

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. Print.