

Shakespeare's female characters assignment

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Come, you spirits, That tend on mortal thoughts, unsexes me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty! " demanded one of them furiously (Shakespeare 853). " If I be waspish, best beware my sting," sneered the other (Shakespeare 333). Although they emerged nearly five centuries ago, the women who said these lines are undeniably two of Shakespearean most famous female characters. Lady Macbeth and Katherine are still known today as conspicuous figures in Shakespearean plays.

The first stands out as a strong, manipulative, cunning woman; so ambitious to achieve her goal that she even becomes fear-provoking (Corning). The latter is prominent for her temper and feral exhibitions of rage. She is repulsed by men's attitudes toward her and repeatedly spits degrading insults at them in fury. She is revolted at the idea of having to comply with her father's wish of her wedding one of her wooers. Considering the time period Shakespeare lived in, one can conclude that the female characters in his plays behaved ways that was came as a shock to such a patriarchal society (" Shakespearean unruly Women").

Shakespeare portrayed them in roles that, for his era, were reserved strictly for men. Women of this era were not the strong, powerful, intelligent females we see in Macbeth, nor were they the like the Ironic Katherine, who we meet in Taming of the Shrew, who even dares to strike Petruchio upon being angered by his insolence. Females were not at all thus; they were creatures raised to believe themselves inferiors to men (" Elizabethan Women"). However, despite all this criticism, Shakespeare portrayed his female

characters in a way that they transcended the pre-established constraints of his time.

This portrayal of women is due to the Elizabethan period's influence. By having an unmarried woman as a monarch, he was inclined towards writing plays that pleased her. In order to understand Shakespearean representation of women, it is necessary to take into account the era he lived in. One must consider the roles and expectations for women in his society. As mentioned above, Shakespeare lived in the Elizabethan period. Queen Elizabeth Tudor I assumed the throne as an unmarried woman and remained unmarried throughout her entire life (Thomas).

Her reign brought innovative ideas about women to England. Even though they could not attend universities, some upper class females were able to receive a basic education. Some were even taught to speak different languages, play instruments, and dance ("Elizabethan Women"). However, the Elizabethan era is rather paradoxical. The irony of it lies in the fact that despite having a single woman as a monarch, the situation for women in society, particularly for single women, did not improve significantly. Women were expected to be the stereotypical stay-at-home mothers that they had always been.

The unmarried women of the Elizabethan society were limited to certain roles. At a certain point, women had two alternatives; marriage or life at a nunnery. However, as monasteries were terminated, the only option left for them was marriage; household service ("The Role of Unmarried Women..."). When Shakespeare was hired by an acting company called Lord

Chamberlain's Men, he first came into close contact with the queen (Finely). Queen Elizabeth was a frequent spectator of the company's plays. Shakespeare was faced with a slight dilemma.

He had to write plays to please both an unmarried monarch, and a patriarchal society (Richardson). As a result, Shakespearean female characters turned out as something untraditional, yet by some degree, still the typical females of his era (Racking 67). Shakespearean female characters did depend on the male characters on some level (Corning). They depended on either on their fathers when they were young or on their husbands later on in life. An example of this can be observed in Othello, in the first act when Desman says that she owes her life, her up-bringing, and education to her father.

Later on in the same act, Othello believes he will be away from her for some time. He requests that the duke provides her with accommodations and a monetary allowance in his absence (Shakespeare 827). Obviously, this implies that Desman would not be able to fend for herself while Othello is away. This accurately reflects the situation for women in the Elizabethan society. Desman depended first on her father, and then on Othello for money, food, and shelter. Even by going to early productions, the gender stereotypes for women could be observed.

In early productions, the roles of the female characters were played by young men or boys whose voices hadn't changed. Having a female actress was regarded as something highly inappropriate and unnecessary. It was not a role for women (Duisenberg 7). Consequently, until the year 1660 there

were no female actresses on stage (Thomas). Yet even though they did not appear on stage, Shakespearean female characters held surprisingly dominant roles (Milliard). To support this proposal, two of Shakespearean most prominent female characters will be analyzed. Different aspects of their behavior will be evaluated.

The more powerful aspects as well as their weaker aspects will serve as evidence to support the proposal that Shakespearean female characters held dominant roles yet while on some level, till being characteristic of the Elizabethan era. Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespearean most prominent creations. Put simply, Lady Macbeth is full of evil. She is a ferocious, brutal, cold-blooded character from the moment she is introduced in the play. She pressures her husband into committing regicide as though it were something casual. It is she who drugs the king's companions and prepares the weapons for the murder.

When her husband vacillates about killing the king, she manipulates him into following through by questioning his manhood. Finally, he gives in and murders the king. After committing the crime, she orders him to go back. When he refuses to do so, it is she who goes in herself and wipes the bloody weapons on the unconscious attendants to frame them. For anyone who has read the play, it is undeniable that Lady Macbeth's character is particularly eccentric. Yet in certain ways, she is contradictory. Certainly, it is true that Lady Macbeth is a dominant female. Nevertheless at a particular point in the story, her strength begins to degrade.

Lady Macbeth constantly acknowledges a connection between masculinity and ambition. This particular play has quite a few references to gender territories. This is exemplified when Lady Macbeth cries for the spirits to “unsexes” her (Shakespeare 859). By using the word “unsexes,” she acknowledges the link she believes exists between femininity and weakness and cowardice. She wishes to be “unsexes” so that her influence would have an effect on her husband. A “feminine” character could not carry out an act that required such wickedness and strength. She considers her husband too soft or too kind to go through with it (Shakespeare 859).

Another reference to the gender stereotypes is the dialogue that occurs right before Macbeth kills King Duncan. Watching her husband hesitate to go through with the plan, Lady Macbeth reacts by suggesting that he is not masculine enough. Apart from challenging his masculinity, she also questions his love for her. She then proceeds to asking him a series of rhetorical questions as an attempt to manipulate his actions. She asks whether he was drunk earlier on when he was entirely supportive of the plan (Shakespeare 863). She calls him a coward for not daring to do that which he said he would.

Macbeth replies that he is only doing what is appropriate. Lady Macbeth retorts that he was more of a man when he was willing to kill the king. 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” (Shakespeare 864). She then makes a savage remark that she would rather dash out her husband's brains than to break her word, had she sworn anything the way Macbeth did. Near the end of the scene, Macbeth alludes to his wife's masculinity by making a comment that

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she should only have male children, for her “undaunted mettle” (Shakespeare 857) would pass on to them.

Yet as aggressive and brutal Lady Macbeth may appear, certain aspects of her character, certain comments indicate that she is not as brutal as she mess. When speaking to her husband about killing King Duncan, she tells him that she is unable to commit murder because he greatly resembles her father (Shakespeare 864). This tiny piece of information, which appears to be unimportant, is evidence that Lady Macbeth is not the ruthless creature she lets on to be. In addition to this, we see how Lady Machete's character begins to transform after the murder of King Duncan.

After the regicide, Lady Machete's role is no longer as powerful and influential as it was in the first two acts. Her relationship with her husband slowly begins to degrade. When Macbeth plans on killing Banana, a character who he feels is a threat to his power, he tells her nothing (Shakespeare 870). Another example of the deterioration of their relationship is seen in the banquet scene. Macbeth sees the ghost of Banana and begins yelling at it to leave. Lady Macbeth, irritated by her husband's behavior, yells at him for making a scene in front of their guests (Shakespeare 877).

Lady Macbeth slowly begins to break down and submerge into madness. Her sensitivity to the guilt turns into a great burden and eventually drives her insane. By the end of the play it overpowers her. In the last scene we see her, she has been reduced to this creature that sleepwalks, ranting on madly about horrifying images and recollections, apparently hallucinating. She yells about wanting to get rid of the spots of Duncce's blood (Shakespeare 879).

This is metaphorical to her desire to rid herself of the guilt she feels for her role in King Duncane's murder.

One can conclude that Lady Macbeth is certainly a classic Shakespearean female character. On one hand, powerful, ruthless, and dominant, yet on the other hand, displaying signs of weakness and sensitivity as her character diminishes. Apart from Lady Macbeth, another well-known Shakespearean character is Isabella, the virtuous Katherine. In the play, she is well known as an aggressively, nasty tempered woman; a shrew. She is well known in her town, Padua, for lashing out at anyone who angers her, and discharging her fury by nastily insulting and even striking him or her who dares enrage her.

As the plot unfolds, we discover that Katherine is an especially intelligent, independent, and clever woman. She will not succumb to marry any of the dull-witted men who she usually has contact with. Though at first it may seem that Katherine's behavior is thus by nature, as we see more of her throughout the play, it is safe to assume that her behavior is a result of feeling unhappiness and discomfort at her environment. She despises the male-dominated, patriarchal society she is stuck in. She is also resentful and jealous because her father, Baptista, always favors Bianca, her younger sister.

Katherine hints this in various ways. When Baptista announces that Katherine must get married before her younger sister Bianca may, he is almost implying that Katherine is somewhat of a burden that he would like to get off his hands first. In response to this, Katherine asks if it is his intention to make a fool out of her amongst Bianca's suitors (Shakespeare 324). In

addition to this, Katherine also shows displays her anger and Jealousy towards Bianca when she binds her hands and violently interrogates her to find out for which one of her suitors she is affectionate (Shakespeare 327).

The issue of who was going to marry Katherine is resolved when Patriotic, a friend of one of Banana's suitors, comes to Pad in search of a wife (Shakespeare 330). At first, he is only attracted by Katherine dowry and quickly goes o meet her. Upon meeting him, Kate seemingly despises Patriotic. Their first meeting consists of an argument in which he calls her a wasp. Infuriated by his audacity, she strikes him. Patriotic simply replies that if she strikes him again, he will strike her back (Shakespeare 333). Following this meeting, Patriotic reports to Baptists that he was successful at wooing Katherine.

Shocked by this, she responds by quickly contradicting him. Ignoring her, Patriotic announces that they have agreed to marry the following Sunday. Oddly, Katherine does not object (Shakespeare 336). It seems that Katherine, who was used to out-witting the unintelligent men who normally surround her, is intrigued by Buttercup's clever responses. Patriotic then engages in a series of unusual methods to "tame" her. He arrives inebriated and late to the wedding. Then after marrying her, he tells her that he will now do with her what he wishes.

He orders her to go to Verona before the feast. Then, upon getting to his home, he does not allow her to eat or sleep for days, saying that he would not have her eat his poor food or sleep in his inadequately made bed. However his treatment of her is not without reason. His intention is to make

her see how preposterous her behavior was; to give her a taste of her own medicine. By the end of the play, Buttercup's success at "taming" her is so effective, that she obeys him in practically everything he tells her to do. At the end of the play, she and Patriotic go back to Pad.

The last impression she leaves on the reader is when she gives a speech about the devotion and loyalty a woman owes to her husband. Katherine is the typical of Shakespearean characters. Looking at her role in society superficially, it would seem as though she is the classic female of his era. She depends on the male characters for survival. Similar to Desman and her dependence first on her father, then on Othello for a home and survival in society, the way Katherine depends teen on near Tanner Ana Petroleum Is comparable.

Yet Katherine Allays an array of unusual characteristics for a female of the Elizabethan period. It was not common to see a female abusing men as Katherine did. Not only her treatment of men, but a woman behaving the general way Katherine did, degrading anyone who she felt deserved it, with her cruel insults, and her nasty temper was absolutely shocking. In the eyes of a patriarchal society, the image of Katherine was not unlike the image left by Lady Macbeth. Although the two characters differ greatly, they are similar in various ways.

At the beginning of the play, they are both fierce, dominant women. Yet at a certain point in the play, their dominance begins to diminish. For Lady Macbeth, this occurs after Macbeth kills Duncan and needs her no more. He kills and carries out other deeds by himself, without even informing her. Her

guilt about murdering Duncan weakens her so much, that she commits suicide. In *Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine weakness is displayed when she demonstrates that she can be "tamed." Patriotic is able to shape her behavior in the way he wishes.

As mentioned above, her final speech evidences her transformation from a "shrew" to a compliant, obedient wife. Many factors may have influenced Shakespearean portrayal of his female characters. However the main influence was his frequent contact with Queen Elizabeth I and the pressure to please an unmarried female monarch and a patriarchal society simultaneously. However, despite them having a common weakness, Shakespearean most conspicuous female characters have one major aspect in common: they were women portrayed in a way that transcended the limiting roles which their society had assigned them.