An exploration of how language and context augment the construction of a prototypical female identity represented in the portrayal of Desdemona and Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

By

Radeshree Naidoo

219095569

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in English Studies in the School of Arts
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Supervisor: Professor MZ Malaba
3 February 2022

DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters, in the Graduate Programme in the School of Arts,

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Radeshree Naidoo, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
   a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
   b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Radeshree Naidoo
Student Name

02 February 2022
Date

[redacted]
Signature

[redacted]
Name of Supervisor

[redacted]
Signature

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dearly departed parents, Mr Narismooloo (Tina) Naidoo and Mrs Chintamoney (Sindha Naidoo). You have taught me the value of having dreams as well as the effort and perseverance that are required to realise my aspirations. You have instilled in me the qualities of being singular and resolute, believing in myself, and never giving up hope.

Acknowledgements
Vetrivel Muruganukku Arogara

To My Lord Muruga, I am grateful to You, for prayers heard and prayers answered.

- Professor Mbongeni Malaba: Thank you for your constant supervision and positive attitude. You have always given me constructive feedback with patience and kindness. It was not always easy as much of my research had to be conducted during the Covid Pandemic, within the confines of my home. Your motivation, support and great insight helped me persist, despite adversity and difficulty.

- My dearest husband Keith Naidoo: I could not have done this without your encouragement and belief. Thank you for pushing me to grow, for your uncanny adeptness at identifying and solving all my problems and for your inexhaustible love. My beautiful children, you are my most prized possession. Your love, patience and constant motivation has been unparalled. Tanika, you are my inspiration and my motivation; I appreciate all the late hours you put in to advising me, outlining a plan of action, and keeping me on track to succeed. Kaedyn and Chevarl, I appreciate all the sacrifices you two have made so that I could focus on my work. I am always immersed in the unconditional love of my phenomenal sons.

- To my sisters Sandra, Sabarshni, Emeshni and Vannasa, it is through your love and support that I was confident enough to embark on this degree. Your beautiful hearts, ferocious protectiveness and your unrelenting determination to help me do better, be better and feel better are unrivaled. You have given me the gift of your irreplaceable time, for which I am eternally grateful and consider myself blessed.

- My heartfelt appreciation to my Brothers-in law, Rudy and Kevin who have showered me with support, advice and encouragement through every step of my journey. To my awe-inspiring nieces Adelene, Floshell, Kandice, Kyleen, Shilon, Kayleigh and my sweet pea, and my doppelganger, Tezaria, thank you for your love, support, encouragement, prayer and motivation. I appreciate the regular calls and words of motivation from Craig, Kavlyn, Gary, Angelo and my baby Matheysh. The most welcome distractions from you, Mathey has helped me through this arduous journey. It is my hope that this study will prove to be a source of encouragement to all the potential academics in our family. Rowen, Wes'lee, Xhaidy, Derelle, Kameron, Meha and Mia.

- My Naicker family: Ken Naicker, Roshini Naicker, Trisha, Delia, Losh, and Chris, I cannot find the words to express my gratitude for the unbridled joy you all bring to my life. Roshini Naicker, you have stepped up and taken responsibility. You embraced the role of a mother and paved the way for me to work and succeed, enabling all the late hours and long evenings Thank you, Meha, my baby genius, for elevating my spirits during every troubling moment.

- Mary Laban, my academic sounding board and greatest cheerleader, thank you

Abstract

My research is based on a qualitative study of the characterisation of females in two Shakespearean tragedies, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. The focus of the study is the impact of language and contextual factors of the Shakespearean era on the construction of a female prototype. Since ideals of male dominance have severely confined Shakespeare's female characters, either villainy or passivity seems to predominate. In my study, I aim to highlight how these stereotypes depict the most typical character traits in females, which create prototypes. Shakespeare used conventional notions of women being either evil or subservient and dutiful and these notions became entrenched as female stereotypes which to an extent justify their inevitable downfall and demise. This study will attempt to provide diagnostic evidence from the language in the plays, to accentuate the role of language in reinforcing the inequity between the roles of men and women. A comparative textual analysis will be conducted of the character traits of the leading females and their foils. This study will gain insights into patterns as suggested by Irving Ribner (1960) which were elaborated by Melodie Fox (2011) using Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory, which augment the construction of the prototypes of passivity or villainy in the female identity.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Personal and academic rationale

Teaching Shakespearean dramas, more specifically, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, has been an enlightening experience. I have observed that the analysis of a drama by both educators and learners is based chiefly on how characters are portrayed. . Being an Indian female, I am familiar with the entrenched patriarchy in our society. I would say my family is progressive and liberal in its outlook, but the concept of a woman's place in this world is so deeply etched in our minds that we stop recognising the different ways in which it manifests. During my years of studying and teaching Shakespearean tragedies, I have noticed a pattern that seemed to emerge, that even a powerful female character, for example, Lady Macbeth, succumbs to a weakness. The psychological toll that her actions take on her as a female is juxtaposed to that of Macbeth's bravery when he is adamant about fighting until the end. Desdemona's passivity overshadows her strength in defying her father by marrying Othello, because she succumbs to the dominance of her husband. My intention in selecting this topic is to highlight the impact of language and contextual factors in shaping canonical writing, specifically the Shakespearean perspective on women.

2. Research Problems and Objectives:

a. How did language and contextual factors of the Shakespearean era impact the construction of the female prototype?

b. What are the roles of the female stereotypes on the construction of the prototypical female identity in Shakespearean tragedies?

c. What impact did social, political and cultural contexts have on the construction of the female identity, in the Shakespearean tragedies?

d. What effect does communication and language have on casting the female characters into the prototypes of subservience or villainy?

e. To what extent are Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, despite their respective paradoxical natures, crafted along the prototypes of villainy or passivity?

f. To what extent does the characterisation of the male counterparts, Othello and Macbeth, crystallise the prototype of female weakness?

3. Brief summary of chapters

Chapter 1. The chapter is based on the theoretical framework for this study. The prototype theory will serve as the lens through which I will study the characters and the critical studies of the texts which were conducted by scholars of various schools of thought. The prototype theory outlines that how closely something resembles a prototype determines if it is an example of a natural notion that is the most typical, and that shares the maximum number of characteristics or features with additional instances (Wittgenstein, 2001). My study of Shakespeare's tragedies reveals that the most typical character traits that women possess are traits that are tempered by negative qualities. Pragati Das (2012) offers the explanation that William Shakespeare's plays were set in the Elizabethan age, and he based all of his works on Elizabethan society. Das states that the Elizabethan era was a time when women were portrayed to be weaker than men but in some of Shakespeare's tragedies like *Macbeth*, females display "great intelligence, vitality, and a strong sense of personal independence" (2012, p. 36). The paradoxical nature of Lady Macbeth's and Desdemona's power and defencelessness has led me to explore the notion of the construction of a prototypical identity. The feminist theory will be used as a framework to examine and contrast the roles, actions, experiences, interactions, and communications of female and male characters in the plays, *Macbeth* and *Othello.*

A construction of a gender identity is significantly influenced by the social, political and historical context within which the play is set. The chapter explores the theories of essentialism, cultural materialism and new historicism which influence the shaping of the female identity. A feminist analysis which includes the work by contemporary critics Lynda Boose, Carol Neely, Marianne Novy and Cristina León Alfar are incorporated in this research.

Chapter 2 discusses the construction of the female identity in Shakespearean tragedies. A study of cultural materialism has illuminated my understanding of the extent to which the patriarchal context influenced Shakespeare's writing. This chapter focuses on values, beliefs and worldviews that dominate society, class struggles and political appropriations of Shakespeare's plays. According to Alan Sinfield (2006), canonical texts have a layer of complicated language and cultural implications. He argues that the main conceptual disputes within cultural materialism involve the degree to which social conditions determine culture. I will discuss some of the critical

theoretical interactions between cultural materialist and feminist theories to show the factors contributing to the prototypical representation of Shakespeare's female characters. The theory of essentialism, the belief that every entity possesses a set of traits essential to its identity and function will be contrasted with social construction, which focuses on how extensively identity is formed based on social interaction (Dollimore, 1990), to ascertain the role that each theory plays in creating the identity of the female characters in *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

Chapter 3 revolves around the role of language in entrenching gender inequities in *Othello*. Again, The Feminist Theory will be used as a framework to examine and contrast the roles, action, experience, interaction and communication by female and male characters in *Othello*. Neeti Mahajan elaborates on Desdemona's character, stating that Desdemona shows “exemplary passivity in adversity” (2015, p.50) and becomes a stereotype thereof. She adds that although Desdemona is initially portrayed as a strong woman, “as the play progresses, she weakens” (2015, p.50). Ann Jennalie Cook concurs with Mahajan's view, suggesting that Desdemona is often "criticised for her rebelliousness but also blamed for her passivity" (1972, p.187). This depiction of passivity in female characters aligns with the criterion of a typical attribute highlighted in the prototype theory, which is the focus of analysis in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 is based on the role of language in entrenching gender inequities in *Macbeth*. Sally McConnell-Ginet (2011) argues that female characters become agents in communities of practice influenced by environmental circumstances, including social class and the gender of those with whom they communicate. Bakhtin's view is that the meaning of the words spoken will be dependent on the circumstantial conditions of that specific time and setting (Holquist 2010). Discourse analysis of *Macbeth* will focus on how language is used in given settings by exploring Bakhtin’s as well as McConnell-Ginet and Penelope Eckert's interpretive repertoires to obtain a more nuanced view of the impact of language in *Macbeth* in creating stereotypical behaviour.

Chapter 5 focuses on the extent to which the characterisations of the male counterparts, Othello and Macbeth, reinforce the prototype of female weakness. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia proposes that language represents a distinct perspective on the world, characterised by the social, cultural, and political nature of all texts (Holoquist, 2010). Critical analysis of the physical description, behaviour, inner thoughts, reactions and speech patterns of the male

protagonists, Othello and Macbeth, will be conducted. A further analysis of action, language and speech patterns of male and female foils will shed light on how language augments the stereotypical behaviour and expectations in females. The role of cultural materialism and patriarchy will form the framework for establishing the creation of the male identities and how their courses of action run in opposition to that of their respective female counterparts. The juxtaposition of the construction of the female and male identity will highlight that the Shakespearean female is crafted along prototypes that are modified by negative character traits that render the female characters defenceless to impending doom.

4. Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review section forms the basis for understanding the factors influencing the construction of the female identity, which contributes to the creation of prototypes in Shakespearean tragedies. It also builds a logical framework within the context of related studies. Having established the criteria used to construct a prototype, an analysis of language, and the context within which the plays are set, will be explored. The information utilised within this literature review includes theories based on the impact language and the political, social, and cultural contexts have in constructing the female identity in the Shakespearean tragedies *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Both teachers and students tend to base their interpretation of a play almost entirely on how the characters are portrayed in Shakespeare's works, which can result in a biased and one-dimensional understanding of the play. Lynda Boose asserts that in the contemporary classroom, the discussion about "meaning" in Shakespeare has shifted because,

> once the issue of gender became a significant consideration within the classroom, the lopsided representation of that issue within Shakespeare's plays became a focal point in literary commentaries. (1987, p.726)

I intend to highlight the impact of language and contextual factors in shaping canonical writing, specifically the Shakespearean perspectives on women. This chapter foregrounds an exploration of what constitutes gender and gender identity, and it delves into categorisation and the factors affecting the construction thereof.

Gender refers to social or cultural distinctions that are generally associated with being male or female. Craig Hill (2008) cites Milton Diamond's definition of gender identity by stating that it is the extent to which one identifies as being feminine or masculine. Sally McConnell-Ginet (2011) develops this definition by saying that gender is “not only about individual identities but also about the ideologies, institutions, social relations, and social practices through which individuals experience and give content to these identities” (2011, p.8). She argues further that the factors that contribute to the formation of gender and sexual identity are significant on both the individual and social levels.

One of the critical social structures that govern interaction is the category or position that a person occupies, which is a significant determinant of how people will treat the individual. According to

Linda Lindsay (2015), all societies are organised according to generally stable rules that govern the conduct of social interaction. Donald Wehrs also identifies patterns of thought and emotion in Shakespearean tragedies that “lock otherwise admirable characters into asocial consistencies, preventing affective intuitions from modifying self-understanding and judgement” (2006, p.68). Females and males are, therefore, statuses with different normative roles. The rigid definitions and associated stereotypes are oversimplified notions that members of the same status group share a number of primarily negative characteristics are used to justify discrimination based on biological differences. Melodie Fox states that according to feminists, the biological difference is exploited by the "patriarchal society to justify fitness for gender roles, which almost exclusively places women as being subordinate to men" (2011, p.155). Social stereotypes are instances of metonymy in which a subcategory is socially acknowledged as representing the entire category. The use of social stereotypes encourages the making of quick judgements about a group of people (Lakoff, 2008, p.71); as a result, it yields prototype effects.

Eleanor Rosch (1999) focused on two consequences of categorisations: first, if categories are defined solely by characteristics that all members have, then no member should be a better representation of the category than any other member. Second, if categories are determined only by features intrinsic to the members, then categories should be independent of the characteristics of the person categorising. Rosch asserted that the studies she conducted, demonstrated that categories have best examples, called "prototypes", and that all of the “specifically human capacities play a role in categorisation” (Coleman and Kay, 1981, p.391). Rosch's (1999) prototype theory of concepts originating in cognitive psychology determines membership in a category through the possession of specific properties. However, group membership does not require possession of all qualities. This idea is echoed by Wittgenstein, who believed that context determines the meaning of a word or what conditions are in place at a particular moment (Hacker *et al*., 2009).

The member will probably possess all features typical to the group, but if he “possesses some, but not all, he still retains membership in the group” (Hacker *et al*., 2009, p.23). Melodie Fox (2011) researched different ways to categorise sex and gender. According to Fox, a prototype can be either a paragon or an ordinary member of a group, and it varies between persons and situations, making it contextually variable. Gender has been classified as a “social construct, quirk of psychosocial

development, biological set, inconsequential human trait, performance, sociolinguistic activity, and self-perpetuating illusion" (2011, p.154), within the field of gender studies. The categorisation which determines membership in a group will be used in my study to create a parallel with the properties that female characters possess, which casts them into prototypes.

Shakespeare used conventional notions of women being either villainous or subservient and dutiful, and he used these prototypes to mobilise and, to an extent, justify their downfall and demise. Instances of an essential notion are characterised, according to the prototype theory, by their resemblance to a prototype that is the best or most typical example (Hacker *et al*., 2009, p.23). My research will be based on the categorisation of the female traits, more specifically as characterised in Shakespearean dramas *Othello* and *Macbeth* through the characters of Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, respectively. I aim to analyse the role of context in defining the characters of Lady Macbeth and Desdemona through the lens of new historicists and cultural materialists.

According to Graham Bradshaw, cultural materialism "registers its commitment to a social order that exploits people based on race, gender, sexuality and class," (2018, p.11). However, feminist critics, notably Lynda E. Boose (1987) and Carol Thomas Neely (1998), accuse cultural materialism of theorising power as an indestructible system of restriction, a system that presents subjugated groups as the consequences of the dominant. The female identity thus seems to be something patriarchy confers to women. According to Linda Lindsay, "all societies are structured around relatively stable patterns that establish how social interaction will be carried out" (2015, p.2). One of the most important social structures that organise social interaction is a person's category or position, which is a significant determinant of how he or she will be treated. Females and males have, therefore, different statuses with different normative roles. Research conducted by Huriyyah ALRaznah reveals that the feminist attitude embraces the powerful mind and the intense passion of Lady Macbeth. Despite Lady Macbeth being "one of the most overpowering female figures on the stage of the Shakespearean theatre, she cannot exceed male authority" (2020, p.132).

Change is most effectively understood through comparison to the material aspects of daily life. The use of this theory focuses specifically on social arrangements that emphasise women's roles,

most notably the family, domesticity, and motherhood, drawing attention to the aspects that promote women's marginalisation.

John Brannigan claims that "texts of all kinds are vehicles of politics in so far as texts mediate the fabric of social, political and cultural formations" (2016, p.3). Although Brannigan (2016) contrasts the two theories, he asserts that Shakespeare, according to cultural materialist critics, is just as likely to inspire images and concepts of dissension and violation for twentieth-century readers and audiences as he is to uphold the moral norms of liberal humanism. Brannigan (2016) claims that new historicists have been more interested in Shakespeare's plays as examples of a prominent cultural form of the era in which the text is written, making the imbalanced power relations visible. My research on the applicability of new historicism and cultural materialism has resulted in the realisation that these two theories are very much intertwined and compatible with a study of this nature. I will refer to the work of Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore as the voices of cultural materialism, and I will refer to the research by Stephen Greenblatt as the voice of new historicism.

John Higgins (2013), influenced by Raymond Williams, who initiated the use of the term "cultural materialism", claims that this theory plays its role in becoming the site of ideological struggle and in constructing and reproducing the social totality. According to Williams, literature is a shaping of the world and a process of transformation through which the author impacts the world. From the viewpoint of cultural materialism, literature is a production method and a social activity whose position cannot be defined by the concept of an ideological framework. Each author operates within a network of literary conventions, literary traditions, and language-based social ties. Williams, therefore, emphasised that "literature was an epistemology for gaining insight into the history of the social totality" (Higgins, 2013, p.43). Cultural materialism is concerned with the ideological dynamics in play within Shakespeare studies and contemporary portrayals. One of the basic notions of cultural materialism is social stratification as well as how the dominant social class justifies itself by establishing socially-marginalised people as the "other," a strategy that produces an emerging trend in gender and race issues. Informed by the premise that ideological supremacy is never absolute and that every ideology contradicts itself to a certain point, cultural materialism analyses texts for indications of subversion and political dissent. Lynda Boose, however, argues that in materialist critiques, gender "ends up getting displaced into some other issue; usually, race or class and women are silently eradicated from the text" (1987, p.729).

Jonathan Goldberg opposes such a feminist-biased view and believes that silence is a strategy of empowerment for villains like Iago in *Othello,* and that silence could also signal power in women (2003, p.75). The contention here is that although the plays provide the impression that power is contingent on occupying particular culturally defined speaking positions, the fact that one remains silent does not suggest that one is powerless inside the plays' cultural framework.

Stephen Greenblatt (1982) investigates the relationship between texts and the sociohistorical circumstances in which they were written. He is of the opinion that texts not only serve as of the documentation societal structures that have shaped and continue to shape history and society, but that these writings also play an important role in the social processes themselves. As a result, Greenblatt's perspectives will be utilised in order to investigate his thoughts regarding the connection between text and context, as well as the connection between writing and society during the Elizabethan historical period. Linda Boose (1987) says that by the contextualisation of Shakespearean drama inside of such a selective vision of "history," even the voices that Shakespeare gave women are silenced. She claims that "women slip once again into mute invisibility, weighted down once more with that which has been singled out to serve as the authoritative narrative" (1987, p.732). According to Jan R. Veenstra (1985), Greenblatt devises a materialistic explanation of the principle of meaning by recognising the “currency that circulates in systems of negotiation and exchange as universal energy”, (1985, p.187). Greenblatt offers a scientific explanation of the principle of value and meaning. The delight, sorrow, worry, and myriad additional feelings that a text or play may evoke in its audience are the products of "social energy" inscribed inside these works (1985, p.187). Carol Thomas Neely, however, concurs with Boose in that new historicism tends to "to oppress women, repress sexuality, and subordinate gender issues" (1998, p.7). New Historicism, according to Neely, encourages feminist Renaissance scholars who study textuality and history "to surround, contextualise and over-read Shakespeare's texts and other canonical texts with new work by women's historians, social historians, and feminist critics" (1988, p.7), instead of reproducing discourses in which women are always already subordinated.

Johnathan Goldberg (1985) refutes the notion of oppressive gender distinctions that feminism has accentuated, arguing that the fundamental idea of gender asymmetry needs to be read through and interpreted in order for a legitimate feminist discourse to emerge.

Goldberg argues further that the rationale behind why Shakespearean plays do not reflect the patriarchy or misogyny of the Elizabethan culture is because the culture represented on stage is the culture offstage (1985, p.23). Peter Erickson creates a Shakespeare who consistently criticises dictatorial patriarchy while still affirming its benevolent counterpart. According to Erickson, Shakespeare does endow his female characters with the exceptional strength ascribed to them by critics, but women's roles are inevitably qualified by Shakespeare's overwhelming notion that social order requires male rule (1987, p.334).

Jonathan Dollimore (1990) attempts to differentiate Materialism from New Historicism and instead calls it "Cultural Materialism" Along the same lines as Greenblatt, he believes that the human person is a product of its specific moment in history, that the human experience is determined by social and ideological frameworks, and that consciousness and cognition are inherently historical. On the other hand, in contrast to Greenblatt, he is more forceful in emphasising the tactic of ideological conflict, in which dominant ideologies aim to impress themselves on the consciousness of the person, therefore suppressing and marginalising opposing viewpoints.

Marianne Novy (2017) stipulates that men dominate in the hierarchy of gender relations in Shakespearean dramas. Feminist critic Jeanne Addison Roberts places the societal norms of Shakespeare's time in perspective with regard to modern criticism. Roberts contends that it is fruitless to hold Shakespeare responsible for the skewed picture of the world. He only knew a patriarchal society (2002, p.367). Novy explores how Shakespeare's tragedy acts out “two related but distinct conflicts: the conflict between mutuality and patriarchy and emotion and control” (2017, p.3). She asserts that in the hierarchy of patriarchy, men dominate women whilst in the social interactions based on mutuality, there is recognition of the subjectivity of both partners (Novy, 2017). This study argues that Desdemona and Lady Macbeth display subservience to their male counterparts. In the area of mutuality, Desdemona is perceived as naïve, impressionable and vulnerable whilst Lady Macbeth is perceived as evil, callous and calculating.

The concept of essentialism originated in the work of Plato. Debates are intense between essentialism and social constructionism in the construction of the character's identity. Essentialism is a theory that views every entity as having a set of attributes that are necessary to its identity and

function. The position that Karl Popper had on essentialism is summarised by John D. DeLamater and Janet Shibley Hyde (1998). They argue that despite the fact that Plato's idealism in early Western thought held that all things have such an "essence," an "idea," or a "form," Popper brought Essentialism back into the contemporary culture on the philosophy of science, but at the same time, he rejected it soundly. According to Karl Popper, Essentialism is defined by the best and "the truly scientific theories which describe the 'essences' or the 'essential natures' of things which are the realities which lie behind the appearances" (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998, p.10). Popper claims that "the scientist can succeed in finally establishing the truth of such theories beyond all reasonable doubt" (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998, p.10). According to Jeremy Shearmur and Geoffrey Stokes (2016), Popper was critical of the idea that essences could be grasped intuitively. In modern usage, Essentialism is a concept that certain events are natural, unavoidable, universal, and biologically determined.

Readings of Shakespeare by cultural materialists might draw focus on the process of historical-culture formation in order to critique political developments, as cultural materialism's major objective is to intercede in the reproduction of repressive ideological systems. According to Alan Sinfield (2006), canonical texts have a complexity of language and cultural implications. He contends that the primary conceptual disagreements within cultural materialism concern the necessity of viewing culture as subject to social contexts. Sheila T. Cavanagh (2019) uses Sinfield's reading of *Macbeth* to demonstrate that Cultural Materialist analysis goes against the grain of Shakespeare's text to demonstrate alternative political possibilities. Cavanagh asserts that Sinfield sees the regicide in *Macbeth* as more than the work of an ambitious dictator; rather, the idea that he can kill the monarch at all indicates that the king is vulnerable to such an action. (2019, p.407). I will discuss some of the critical theoretical interactions between cultural materialist and feminist theories to show the factors contributing to the prototypical representation of Shakespeare's female characters.

Carol Neely argues that because men are traditionally associated with control and reason and women with sentimentality, the social strife between patriarchy and mutual respect reproduces the intra-psychic pressure between control and emotion; by dominating women, men seek control over the irrational portion of society and themselves. (1987, p.314). Essentialists view human identity, including gender, as generally constant and pre-social in its entirety or in part. At the same time,

constructionists concentrate on how identity is socially formed and has the potential to change over time. There can be intracultural and intercultural differences with how identity is formed. Deborah A. Prentice and Dale T. Miller (2007) contend that not every category is created equal. Some categories are essentialised in that they are portrayed as having profound, secret, and unchangeable characteristics that define their members. For instance, "women" are portrayed as having an underlying truth, a substance that defines their essence. The existence and nature of this essence endow the category women with many defining characteristics: the category is specific, with sharp boundaries; it is natural and has existed in roughly its current form since the beginning; involvement in the category is involuntary and unchangeable; and many of the category's observable characteristics reflect the essence's operations (Prentice and Miller, 2007).

The idea that a woman's identity is based on "transhistorical, eternal, and immutable essences, has been rejected by many anti-essentialist poststructuralist feminists who are concerned with resisting any attempts to naturalise human nature" (Fuss, 2016, p.1) in which people are forced to listen to the dictates of what is deemed natural to human behaviour. Certainly, the most prevalent accusation in critiques of Luce Irigaray's psychophilosophy, is Essentialism. Diana Fuss (2016) investigates Luce Irigaray's critique of the concept of being fundamentally female. Irigaray raises the question of how Essentialism could serve feminist theory and politics. Irigaray considers the deployment of Essentialism for strategic purposes, a reference to strategic essentialism, in which intragroup differences are temporarily downplayed, and unity is assumed to achieve political goals. There are ways to consider and discuss the essence of a person that are not always reactionary (Fuss, 2016). Irigaray is and is not an essentialist "because there is a double gesture" toward Essentialism in Irigaray, which is characterised by "both constructing and deconstructing their [women's] identities and their essences, simultaneously" (Fuss, 2016, p.70).

Nigel Parton (2009), uses the insights of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, to define social constructionism as a philosophy that examines the various ways in which society can shape an individual's experience. This paradigm operates under the presumption that "the reality is socially produced," (2009, p.26) and this is its most essential premise. The theory contends that an individual's experience of the world is structured, and that language is the foundation upon which individuals construct their understanding of the world around them. According to Nigel Parton (2009), Berger and Luckmann were particularly concerned that social theories focused on

explaining the impersonal laws of social order rather than how social order was an outcome of social action. Parton claims that their primary premise was that humans in interaction create social worlds through the verbal and symbolic activity that they engage in. These social worlds provide coherence and purpose to what is fundamentally an open-ended and unformed human existence. Society is not a system, a machine, or an organism; rather, it is a symbolic construct made up of ideas, meanings, and language that is always evolving as a result of human activity (Parton, 2009, p.25). The categories that we employ to delineate activities and individuals are provided to us by the language. Combining investigations of language use at the micro-level and social settings at the macro-level is characteristic of the type of research known as a discourse study. Thus, regardless of the particular orientation of discourse research, the factors uniting the analytical variations are their standard philosophical bases: social constructionism and linguistics.

John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (2018) argue that critical discourse studies can be characterised as a hub of text-analytical techniques that investigate the relationship between language and social reality from a position of power and empowerment. They contend that discourse participates in the construction, modification, and negotiation of ideologically charged meaning and that the reality of daily life is shared. Thus, shared characterisations of individuals and events result in the creation of habits. In practice, knowledge can be established at the societal or subgroup level. Language is central to challenging existing structures and ideologies.

Language offers meanings at two levels: primary content with the message expressed, roughly what is said and secondly, the style of the persona and the attitudes projected, often called social meaning. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2011) draw on the notion of communities of practice, to illuminate the interaction of gender and language. Eckert (2000) argues that linguistic variation must be viewed as a social practice. Communities of practice refer to groups of people who interact on a fairly regular basis, in the course of which they develop and maintain natural ways of talking and other social practices. Much communication is not within a local community of practice, but arguably most learning happens there, including developing communicative practices usable in interactions with strangers outside one's local communities. Through their speech, the female characters in Shakespearean dramas may no longer become agents in what McConnell-Ginet would call "communities of practice" (McConnell-Ginet, 2011, p.67). These communities are defined by factors arising from environments, such as social class, level of education, and the

gender of the persons with whom they communicate. Lady Macbeth could easily imagine the murder of Duncan since it followed the same trajectory as Duncan's instruction to kill Macdonald and the Thane of Cawdor. She emulates the acts of the males that surround her.

McConnell-Ginet (2011) argues that it is logical for a female speaker to adopt distinct speech patterns and elements when speaking alone (monologue) versus when conversing with a man or woman. The language and communication of the female Shakespearean characters that seemingly contrast with each other will be discussed in the chapter on language study. Therefore, these events can be seen as being moulded based on her relationship with her husband, reinforcing Novy's notion that women were seen as a part of power relations between the sexes (2017, pp.3-4). The most effective frameworks that have sought to do this have emphasised either gender difference or male supremacy.

McConnell-Ginet (2011) further highlights the role of language in social life; the focus, she claims, is on linguistic practice as part of actually constructing one's self and one's social relations. Its role reflects the emerging realisation that identities and social relations do not exist separately of involvement in linguistic and other social practices; they develop from the things people do and are created by what they say and how they talk. This social constructionist perspective does not mean that people are simply free to construct whatever identities and social relations they might want to: language users are indeed agents, but their possible actions are constrained both externally and internally. Nonetheless, people are continually doing what Sally McConnell Ginet (2011) calls identity work. Feminist linguistics have frequently focused on language as indexing or pointing to gender identity; in other words, on ways of talking as reliable pointers to the identity of the talker, this “social constructionist approach to gender and sexual identities views these, and other identities as not a matter of who or what people are, but a matter of what people do: rather than have identities, people perform them” (2011, pp.7-8).

According to Alison Martin (2013), Irigaray claims that women were linked with substance and nature at the expense of a specific position for women. Women become subjects if they internalise male subjectivity, but there is no unique subject status for women. Irigaray aims to demonstrate the lack of a female subject position, the assignment of all things feminine to nature, and, finally, the lack of true sexual difference in Western culture. Irigaray's work has prompted constructive

conversations around the definition of femininity and sexual difference, in addition to the application of strategic essentialism. According to Diana Fuss, Irigaray asserts that to be a subject, one must enter language culture. She argues that language itself must evolve if women's subjectivity is to be acknowledged on a societal level. She argues that language constantly excludes women from active subject positions and that including women within the existing form of subjectivity is not a solution (Fuss, 2016).

In order to demonstrate that language is responsible for excluding women from subjectivity, Sarah Tyson investigated the research conducted by Luce Irigaray, which ties the exclusion of women from subjectivity in Western culture to the differences between men's and women's speech patterns. Her hypothesis was that there are gender-specific general speech patterns and that women do not typically occupy the subject position in language. She also hypothesised that women's speech patterns differ from those of men (2013, p.487).

Furthermore, she argues that women were reluctant to take on the subject position in language experiments. Felicia Kruse (1991), in her article, "Luce Irigaray's 'Parler Femme' and American Metaphysics", discusses 'Parler-femme' as a term used by Irigaray to connote a distinctive style of female exchange and speech which is grounded in the morphology of the female body. For her, 'parler-femme' or 'speaking as a woman' is essential to undermining phallocentric logic and the arrival of women as subjects. It signals a place for women in language and so points towards the transformation of the current phallocentric order (Kruse, 1991).

Mikhail Holquist (2010) highlights that Mikhail Bakhtin reiterates that things exist exclusively in their relations and the location of specific authors in the speech-genres in their spatial and temporal context that they effect into action. Things do not exist by themselves. Bakhtin states unequivocally that each person is constantly in dialogue with other people and with everything in the world. Everything addresses people in some specific sense. A person is exclusively addressed in his peculiar place in the world. Bakhtin states that one can see one's exterior only through the perspectives of other people.

Bakhtin's examination of dialogism is given a more comprehensive treatment in *The Dialogical Imagination* by use of the idea of heteroglossia. The research places an emphasis on the process of constructing a text by combining pre-existing assertions or speech-genres. According to

Holquist (2010), each work is built from a variety of writing styles and voices, as well as an original and individualised use of language. Even within the confines of a single point of reference, there are always a number of different voices and points of view. Bakhtin argues this cannot be attributed to the author since the language which is used has been borrowed from others. He criticises such an emphasis on the author, which he sees as expressing a monological view of the text. In my study, I will focus on what Bakhtin argues as the author performing a particular syncretic expression of social heteroglossia. According to Samantha Ortiz (2019), the originality does not lie in the individual elements of the text; instead, it is to be found in the combination. In her study of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein's *Repurposing of Feminine Domestic Language through the Lens of Bakhtinian Heteroglossia, and Dialogic Theory* she gives the definition of heteroglossia as a construct of language that has its roots in social and historical contexts and is receptive to feminist criticism "that is concerned with the disruption of patriarchal language and the exploration of marginalised voices within dominant discourses" (2019, p.2). The social and historical world is also therefore characterised by heteroglossia. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the linguistic system in each individual's brain is formed from and influenced by experience, and the process of construction depends on the associative principles of contrast, similarity, continuity and frequency on a social scale (Holquist, 2010).

According to Holquist (2010), Bakhtin criticises Saussure because his view of language is a closed system. He asserts that Bakhtin's critique rests on the notion that such perspectives are complicit in the formation of a cohesive language that is utilised as a means of centralising power. Typically, the "standard" or unified language is derived from the aristocratic group's speech. Its linguistic hegemony inhibits the heteroglossia of numerous varieties of common speech. In a scenario of heteroglossia, the prevailing viewpoint or one's own viewpoint gets defamiliarised. Bakhtin's perspective contradicts the notion that language is merely a means of information transmission. According to Bakhtin, language and external experiences cannot be directly related. Instead, language connects to a societal context of interacting ways of building meaning, which always mediates the interaction between each speaker and the world—any specific technique of forming meaning or of perceiving highlights some characteristics of an object while obscuring others. Every language usage is accommodated by social methods of meaning construction.

These social means of formulating meaning are in a constant state of fluctuation; they can be contested in dialogue and change. A subject, according to Bakhtin, should know how to reject dictatorial speech and adopt only those features of the perspectives of others that correspond to his or her own experiences and beliefs. Bakhtin describes such a subject as having an active, independent, and responsible discourse, respecting the autonomy of the foreign word. Heteroglossia results in permanent linguistic and aesthetic alterations (Holquist, 2010). According to Ortiz (2019), to include feminist heteroglossia into the cultural canon, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, in their different works, retrieve the true social goals contained in the language of their social strata. The oppression of female characters is illustrated by the fact that the meaning of any language usage depends on the social intentions of language as they existed during Shakespeare's time.

Nonetheless, focusing on gender as involving just properties of individual linguistic agents can obscure vital insights into how gender affects language production. For example, production patterns might show systematic dependence on the gender relations between agents, or they may show dependence on other contextual features that make gender more or less salient in particular situations of language use.

I have organised much of my discussion around the difference between gender identities and power, with male dominance as a critical component of gender relations. However, I have tried to shift attention to the typification of the female attributes and the extent to which contextual factors influence them. I will also critically discuss gender as a determinant of social address and the resulting orientation toward linguistic variation and change. An analysis of male power in language will be conducted. The subordination of women as a result of the action of their male counterparts will be highlighted. This analysis aims to build on the notion that the existing prototypes will emerge.

5. Chapter 2: Construction of the female identity in the Shakespearean tragedies *Othello* and *Macbeth*

Shakespeare's plays provide insightful data on gender and identity perspectives, and because of the variety of these representations, it is possible to draw a number of analogies and contrasts regarding how the feminine identity is created. John D. DeLamater and Janet Shibley Hyde (1998) state that modern essentialism consists of a belief that certain phenomena are natural, unavoidable, and biologically determined, while social constructionism, in contrast, rests on the belief that reality is socially constructed and emphasises language as an essential means by which we interpret experience. Shakespeare only creates two types of women, the virtuous subhuman and the deceptive subhuman, according to Marilyn French (1981). William Shakespeare's dramas present females as vicious, conspiring, malicious, strong-willed and assertive beings as in the initial characterisation of Lady Macbeth and as submissive, repressed, deprived and silenced beings, as reflected in the portrayal of Desdemona.

Charlotte Witt (2011, p.13) maintains that essentialism holds that specific properties make an individual who he or she is. Gender essentialism is therefore a type of essentialism that examines a characteristic quality or feature, the attribution of intrinsic, innate qualities to women and men. The theory of gender essentialism dictates that specific universal, innate, biologically and psychologically-based attributes of gender are the core reason for observed differences in the behaviour of men and women. Witt (2011) explains further that “women were taken to be females who have (in virtue of being female) certain natural aptitudes, such as those for nurturing or intuitive reasoning, and normative corollaries about women’s different or inferior social status were thought to be legitimate” (2011, p.30). Desdemona's roles as Othello's wife and Brabantio's daughter, her obedience and the importance placed on her chastity, which is communicated through the symbol of her handkerchief, are the products of the patriarchal society in *Othello*, reflecting the ideal woman in Elizabethan society. According to Elizabeth Grosz (1994) in the theory of essentialism, a woman's essence is seen to reside in nature or biology. However, in some instances, Grosz states, “the essence of a woman lies in given psychological characteristics – nurturance, empathy, support, non-competitiveness and the like" (1994, p.47).

The role of gender essentialism in constructing Desdemona's character will be analysed through her behaviour, language and action. Maternal dependency, blind obligation, passivity, her proclivity for being defined as angelic, the obligation she feels to be a peacemaker, her impetuosity and immaturity will be examined as being her set of intrinsic qualities. She proclaims a love without considering the repercussions on her family, the state and her lover. Shakespeare alludes to the naivety and innocence of a young Desdemona who seems more in love with experiencing the adventurous life with Othello than with actually being in love with Othello. Sunita Nimavat (2017) states that the Elizabethan women were raised to prioritise being good child-bearers who are trained at performing household tasks. Nimavat further asserts that "in the Elizabethan order, female characters were expected to remain obedient and silent to their fathers and husbands" (2017, p.147); in this view, the woman is valued for her role as a nurturer. Othello's words, “she loved me for the dangers I had passed /And I loved her that she did pity them” (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:168-169), is an indication that Desdemona is enthralled by Othello's story-telling powers, while the Moor is enchanted by the Venetian's sympathetic response to his history. Her sympathetic response further consolidates the maternal dependency that Othello has come to expect in his relationship with Desdemona.

Barbara Shapiro concurs with Adelman's assertion that Othello's relationship with Desdemona is steeped in anxieties around the role as a nurturer and providing maternal empathy. She points out how Othello initially responds to Desdemona precisely for her "maternal pity" (2003, p.64). In a similar vein, Janet Adelman also argues that Othello undermines the basis for his martial identity in that he exchanges it for one in which he is dependent on Desdemona. This dependency "reawakens the sense of vulnerability that Othello had managed to conceal from himself through his identity as a soldier" (2012, p.65). Desdemona further embodies this maternal dependency when Othello complains of having a sore head as she immediately goes into the mode of nurturer. Her speech mimics that of a verbal exchange between a mother and child in that Desdemona asks a question then offers an answer to the initial question by using a subsequent question. She asks,

> Why do you speak so faintly?
> Are you not well? (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:291-292)

Othello mimics a child's behaviour and reports the reason for his discomfort. Desdemona responds that the reason for his illness is that his eyes are sore and offers a cure, then attempts to render treatment, behaviour that typically maternal. Desdemona's portrayal as fulfilling Othello's maternal dependency on her is revealed when she also reassures him that he will feel well shortly:

> Faith, that's with watching; 'twill away again:
> Let me but bind it hard, within this hour.
> It will be well (pulls out a handkerchief). (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:294-296)

Jennifer Ann Doody (2017) asserts that Desdemona has the attributes that are typically linked with male heroics, such as ambition, bravery, and tenacity. She says that these are qualities that are generally connected with male heroes. Before Desdemona ever appears in front of an audience, she disobeys her father as well as the social conventions of the Elizabethan era by running away with a person of a different race. She makes such a compelling argument that the most powerful people in the room side with her during her introduction. The boldness of Desdemona is demonstrated once more when she requests to accompany Othello on a military mission that he is required to carry out on the night of their wedding (Doody 2017, p.13). Despite an initial show of bravado, Desdemona withers into a fragile and naïve passive character. Her adamant appeal to accompany her husband is steeped in societal expectations of her as a wife. She feels she has to fulfil her duty as his wife. She further establishes her adherence to societal expectations when she addresses her father on where her loyalty lies and cites her mother's loyalty to him.

Diana Fuss claims that an essentialist assumes that innate or given essences “sort objects naturally into species or kinds, whereas a constructionist assumes that it is language, the names arbitrarily affixed to objects, which establishes their existence” (2016, p.138). Sally McConnell-Ginet (2011) asserts that gender is about individual identities and the ideologies, institutions, social relations, and practices through which individuals experience and give content to these identities. Shakespeare presents Desdemona as a paradoxical character: first, an authoritative woman who seamlessly takes control and later, an innocent maiden. Desdemona, faithful to the stereotypical characterisation of women, becomes emotionally drawn to Othello based on his heart-wrenching tales of his childhood.

Othello's description of her behaviour during his visits to Brabantio intensifies her fascination with him:

> But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
> Whichever as she could with haste dispatch,
> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
> Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
> To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:148 -153)

Desdemona's emotional investment in the situation grows, and she eventually urges Othello to share more details about his life with her. She readily sheds tears of compassion and asserts that this is because she is easily moved and that:

> She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
> That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:163 -164)

Her naivety is reinforced by the manner in which she fell in love with Othello; even her father finds it so unfathomable that he attributes her love to Othello's use of witchcraft. Othello, too, recognises the opportunity to ply her fancies by embellishing his narratives. She, being the typical protected and innocent young lady, falls prey to these stories of adventure and in sheer ignorance proclaims that she is moved to such an extent that she forgets the reserve of an innocent and properly bred young woman, and instead tells him that if he had a friend who desired to win her favour, Othello should teach him how to woo her. Othello claims that "she lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:214). In stating this, Othello has implicitly revealed his uncertainty over the depth and sincerity of Desdemona's love for him, and he is portraying her as the naïve and impressionable individual that women are stereotyped as being. Despite this subtle revelation of his uncertainty about the sincerity of her love, he is married to Desdemona which intensifies the lack of importance a female's desire was given. The reference to her awe about his adventures hints that due to her limited experiences, she mistook her fascination as her falling in love with him. Desdemona's limited experiences and her desire to experience more in her

mundane life means that she was forced to operate covertly to break free of her father, once again highlighting the fact that it was not purely out of undying love for Othello that she married him. She highlights her impetuousness and hastiness in deciding to marry due to her desire to gain freedom from Brabantio. It is merely the fact that she is completely naïve and without experience that causes her to be incapable of judging the far-reaching ramifications of the move that she is taking, which ultimately leads to her falling into Othello's arms. Lewes Zimmern (2008) argues that the very same qualities of naivety lead to her inevitable tragic demise.

She then displays a deep understanding of her role as a daughter and a wife and justifies her duty to her husband by saying:

> I do perceive here a divided duty…
> My life and education both do learn me
> How to respect you…as my mother show'd
> To you, preferring you before her father…
> I challenge that I may profess
> Due to the Moor my lord. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:179–184)

Her speech is an indication of her sense of duty. Crawley (2010) states that Desdemona conforms to "constricting paradigms rooted in a hegemonic gender schema" (2010, p.14). She argues that instead of Desdemona thinking and acting as an individual who behaves in accordance with her desires, she repeatedly demonstrates that she occupies a relational mode of being in that she constantly subjects herself to oppression by her husband and father. She does not insist on loyalty to Othello at the expense of respect for her father but instead acknowledges that her duty is "divided". Her action emphasises her acute awareness of patriarchal societal norms. In her description of her duty as "divided", Desdemona reveals that obeying her father and following his instructions is vital to her existence, an existence in which she embodies the essence of the female. Desdemona further emphasises the role of the male in a female's life and expresses her reliance upon Brabantio and Othello for wisdom and instruction.

Emily C. Bartels (1996) analyses Desdemona's testimony as stressing her obedience and she disguises her unprecedented choice in a husband by citing a social and familial precedent. Her display of adherence to social norms is accentuated when she declares her respect to her "noble

father" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:180) and acknowledges that she is "bound" to him "for life and education" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:182), that he is "the lord of duty" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:184), and that she is "hitherto [his] daughter" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:185). She then insists that her marriage fulfils her "duty" to turn from father to husband, as daughters must and as her mother did, "preferring [Brabantio] before her father" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:187). Bartels asserts that in Desdemona aligning her action with that of her mother's, "she strategically glosses over two factors that make her marriage radically different and socially taboo: that firstly she has eloped and secondly that she had eloped with a Moor" (1986, p.425). Bartels asserts further that Desdemona possesses the maturity and tact to deflect "attention from the incriminating specifics of her case by finding fault with society for assigning women an impossible divided duty" (1986, p.426). This brings into question whether her bold stance was indeed an act of assertiveness. She tactfully uses her family history and the patriarchal system entrenched in familial dynamics to justify her act of eloping. In doing so, she makes the audience aware that she is cognisant of her place and her action is within the parameters of societal expectations.

Desdemona insists on joining Othello in Cyprus, and seeking permission from the Duke, strategically presenting her plan as a better option for her father, who she fears would otherwise be put "in impatient thoughts/By being in his eye" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:242-243). She claims that by joining Othello, she will avoid her father's choler, and in doing so, she inadvertently acknowledges and accepts her subservient role. Desdemona's interventions do not markedly disrupt the political system because her objective (to join Othello in Cyprus) aligns with that of the Venetian state (to have Othello there fighting in the war). Her action correlates with society's expectation of her as a wife. Her proposed plan means that Othello will fulfil the needs of the state, so her apparent show of bravado coincided with the dictates of the patriarchal ethos; therefore, what she demanded was not exactly offering any resistance to an already cast plan. Her speech is an indication of her sense of duty.

Desdemona struggles to prove her loyalty and respect. She implores Othello repeatedly to think about Cassio's situation, and by doing so, although Cassio's plight is at the centre of the drama, she demonstrates that she possesses both an independent will and the cognitive abilities essential to convince others of her point of view. Emily C. Bartels (1996) asserts that although she displays audacity in her act of eloping with a Moor and following him to Cyprus, she meets the expectation

of being "so good a wife" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:234) and her compliance to the societal circumscriptions regarding the duty and the role of a wife is an indication to that she is not entirely as daring as she is perceived to be. Bartels describes her as becoming "the perfect wife, who remains perfectly submissive to the end and whose very self consists in not being a self, not being even a body, but a bodiless obedient silence" (1996, p.13).

Desdemona defines her role as a peacemaker as a part of the essence of who she is and rather impulsively assures Cassio that she will put things right. Jennifer A. Doody reinforces that Desdemona has a penchant for defending those who are unjustifiably accused and poorly treated, and this is a pattern she will continue by coming to Cassio's defence (2017, p.18). Desdemona, in her determination to play the peacemaker, decides that she will "talk [Othello] out of patience" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:23) and "intermingle everything he does / With Cassio's suit" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:25-26). True to form, she does so, pestering Othello to meet with Cassio "shortly", "to-night at supper", "To-morrow dinner," or "to-morrow night" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:56-60). Although he adamantly claims that he "will deny thee nothing" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:76), his acquiescence serves to satisfy her and she is silenced. Desdemona boldly advocates for Cassio; her constant pestering of Othello until he again embraces the lieutenant is, however, evidence of her naivety in that she does not consider the possibility of evoking jealousy in Othello. Finally, she reaches the peak of her assertiveness and tells Othello:

> This is a trick to put me from my suit
> You'll never meet a more sufficient man. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.2:101-102)

This may be perceived as evidence of Desdemona being courageous, but it is more reflective of her naivety as she innocently praises another man without considering the potential inappropriateness of this as a married woman. She is unaware of Othello's insecurities, focuses on her role as a peacemaker, and refuses to be diverted from this. She is unperceptive of her husband's deeper and true feelings. When Othello asks to be left "but a little to myself' (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:85), she does not consider his reasons or his possible emotional turmoil. Desdemona simply responds by assuring him, "Be as your fancies teach you;/ What e'er you be, I am obedient" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:88-89). Crawley asserts that Desdemona's response reveals that although

she “possesses cognitive faculties and a will of her own, she will ultimately allow Othello to make the final determinations regarding issues that affect her” (2010, p.14).

In so doing, Desdemona indicates that she is aware that her obedience is expected and will be rewarded.

Ibrahim Alhiyari (2019) and Joan Ozark Holmer (2005) refer to Desdemona as a warrior yet a peacemaker. This idea is reinforced when she adamantly and excitedly decides that if she is left to be "a moth of peace" and he will "go to war" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:255), then the "rites for which I love him are bereft" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:256). Joan Ozark Holmer (2005) however, argues further that Desdemona is not the proverbial "moth of peace" in that she follows her husband to the battlefield to be by his side during the war. She asserts that Desdemona has prioritised military over marital duty (2005, p.133). Desdemona displays weakness; however, her struggles are relatable in certain aspects. Joan Ozark Holmer also argues that her weakness is understandable in that "no matter how greatly good Desdemona is," (2005, p.155), "Shakespeare remarkably succeeds in making her human with recognisable fears, desires, and deceptions" (2005, p.155). She is a woman living under challenging circumstances. She values certain things: one being her perceived wifely duties, above having a voice of her own. Othello instructs Desdemona to go to bed, and she merely replies, "I will, my lord", despite the fact that she is aware that doing so will lead to her certain death. Her spirit has evidently already been doused (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:8). She has come to the conclusion that there is nothing else she can do to save herself, and she is making an effort to accept the awful fate that has been dealt to her with grace. Alhiyari (2019) asserts that Desdemona is a spiritual warrior "whose crusade is to endure, temper, and reform the human weaknesses in her spouse's personality, albeit meeting no success in this undertaking" (2019, p.43). When Cassio enlists Desdemona's help as a mediator, she vows to make Othello's life miserable until he agrees to reinstate Cassio:

> Thy solicitor shall rather die
> Than give thy cause away. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:27-28)

In doing so, she inadvertently fulfils the stereotypical view of the female as a peacemaker. Although Othello is gripped by his ignorance and anger, his petulant, sarcastic criticisms of Desdemona help to demonstrate her failure when he tells Lodovico that "she's obedient, as you

say, obedient,/very obedient" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:255-256). Othello later calls Desdemona a strumpet and a whore, and she almost begins to see the error of her blind subservience, to the point that she tells Emilia that she has "no lord" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:102).

However, she remains woefully ignorant and too unassuming, stating that:

> Those that do teach young babes
> do it with gentle means and easy tasks:
> he might have chid me so; for, in good faith,
> I am a child to chiding. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:115 -118)

Her earlier assertiveness and readiness to speak boldly, addressing the Duke and the chamber have metamorphosed into a silent acceptance of her plight. She refers to herself as a child who received a scolding from Othello.

Desdemona challenges Elizabethan expectations for women but still fails due to a constrictive and gendered society. Her inevitable submissiveness and passivity are foreshadowed throughout the play but are revealed as she becomes unguarded and vulnerable in each scene that follows the loss of her handkerchief. Desdemona sings "The Willow Song", a song her mother's maid sang to lament her lost love. Her subconscious seems to understand her impending doom as she states:

> That song tonight
> will not go from my mind. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.3:25–26)

While singing the ballad, Desdemona is startled by a knocking at the door. Her reaction to the knocking reflects the fear she experiences and juxtaposes her initial show of bravado. Desdemona continues to sing more lines from the song "Willow" which is a song of lost love and intense heartache. The predicament of the character in the song mirrors Desdemona's predicament: like the speaker of the song, she realises that her husband no longer loves her, and she is devastated. The man in the song, like Othello, rejects his wife with disdain, first accusing her of not being faithful and then sending her away. Desdemona's words and actions suggest optimism that Othello's anger with her will fade, but the singing of "Willow" reveals that deep within, she knows Othello's love for her is dead. She realises that she has mixed the lines and confused the sequence of verses. She says, "Nay that's not next" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.3:53). The substitution may denote

her slow drift towards madness as an attempt to rationalise the behaviour of Othello. This marks the exposure of her innate weakness and her proclivity towards becoming so emotionally charged that she cannot process her thoughts coherently hence the mixing up of the lyrics of the song.

After Othello strikes her in public, all she says is, "I have not deserved this" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:240). She is not enraged at what she should refer to as atypical behaviour. Instead, in her lack of a correlated reaction, she implicitly displays an acceptance of the physical abuse. Desdemona's response that she did not deserve the physical abuse lends itself to the view that Desdemona believes that other types of behaviour will warrant and perhaps justify the physical abuse of women at the hand of a man, and in so doing, she is making the audience aware that she is cognisant of her place and her role. The irony is that Othello's act of striking her ought to have mirrored Emilia's horror when she finds out that Othello had harmed Desdemona. Desdemona, however, calmly expresses a simple truth that she has done nothing to deserve it. As Lodovico notes, Desdemona reacts like an "obedient lady" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:248). When faced with Othello's distrust, she declares that she is "honest" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:65) while addressing herself to his "will" and "pleasure" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:24-25). After Lodovico has complimented her obedience, Othello ridicules Lodovico’s statement saying:

> Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn.
> Sir, she can turn, and turn; and yet go on
> And turn again, and she can weep, sir, weep;
> And she's obedient, as you say, obedient;
> Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears.
> Concerning this, sir- O well-painted passion! (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:252- 257)

Othello, too recognises that Desdemona displays obedience but uses it as a means of demeaning her and questioning her chastity. However, she does not question Othello as she relies on her subservience as a means of getting Othello to calm down. She responds by weeping meekly instead of responding with anger.

She is undoubtedly becoming more unreceptive, but she does react in a way that draws attention to the change in her demeanour:

> I cannot weep,
> nor answers have I none
> But what should go by water? (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:117-119)

Shakespeare depicts that Desdemona is at her weakest point and has lost her assertiveness. As a result, Desdemona will turn into a submissive woman to prove to Othello that she loves him dearly.

In her willingness to take responsibility for her murder, Desdemona absolves Othello from blame and displays the submissiveness that society expects of women. Emilia, in an attempt to find the person responsible for Desdemona's imminent death, asks, "O, who hath done this deed?" to which Desdemona's final words are, "Nobody, I myself. Farewell./Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:133-134). She hides the truth and takes the blame for her death. Bilal Tawfiq Hamamra (2020) cites Micheal Neil's argument that the murder of Desdemona suggests that "Shakespeare's tragedy shows us a society incapable of learning, desperate only to cover what it feels should never have been disclosed" (2020, p.1). It is far more acceptable that Desdemona has an emotional weakness that leads to her "suicide" than a narrative of a noble General who has engaged in "battles, sieges, fortunes" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:130), murdering his wife. Even in her dying moment, Desdemona adheres to the narrative dictated by the Elizabethan society and fabricates a story to protect her husband's honour`.

Desdemona attempts to challenge Elizabethan expectations of women but is unsuccessful due to a constrictive and gendered society. Despite her asserted independence in defying her father by marrying Othello at the beginning of the play, in the end, Desdemona is reduced to a shadow of the woman that she used to be. Desdemona's inherent independence is defeated by her desire to be an ideal woman and wife, and in resigning herself to silence, she accepts her fate at the hands of her beloved husband, Othello. Crawley (2010) states that Desdemona is complicit in her own oppression because she consistently acquiesces to the hegemonic desires of her husband and to the expectations of society. Desdemona is destined to be subjugated since she exemplifies the

archetypal characteristics of a woman, and as a result, her death is unavoidable. Despite such extraordinarily spirited behaviour, Desdemona becomes the most conventional spouse. Mainly, she is seen genuflecting for Cassio to be reinstated, adopting the pitiful position of a wife who is attempting to assert influence over her husband.

Lady Macbeth, like Desdemona, possesses a paradoxical characterisation. Initially, she exudes confidence, power, control, and steadfastness in achieving her objective, yet there are incidents in which she reveals a gentle and vulnerable side. As *Macbeth* progresses, Lady Macbeth's character is whittled down to an insecure, weak and psychologically unstable individual who needs constant care and supervision. Lady Macbeth is initially portrayed as the polar opposite of Desdemona. She appears evil, manipulative and dangerously ambitious in her machinations to attain power. Georgianna Ziegler states that Lady Macbeth represents "a wife who is strong-minded, ambitious and given to evil in a period in which most women did not have careers, when a good nature and grace, not aggressiveness, were admired and when husbands were expected to have the last say in matters concerning their married life" (2013, p.120). The essence of the female as being good-natured and graceful has been rejected by Lady Macbeth in that she calls on evil forces to "unsex" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:39) her. By carrying out such an act, she acknowledges the existence of the female essence but realises that feminine qualities will create hindrances in her zest to attain power. Lady Macbeth is cognisant of the limitations of her gender identity, and the invocation of evil is Lady Macbeth's attempt to seize a masculine power to achieve her political goals. In this way, her character is influenced by the patriarchal and societal expectations of the era in which the play was written. Her act is not one of rebellion or revolt against the internalised social norms, but rather an acknowledgement of it and an attempt to circumvent the limitations by repudiating her femininity:

> 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! (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:40-43)

According to Pragati Das (2012), in considering Lady Macbeth's characterisation, it must be noted that feminine desires for power were seen as unnatural. Her drive, a sense of purpose, savagery,

and complicity in the murder of King Duncan deviate from the stereotypical female qualities, making Lady Macbeth an atypical female character. This depiction of Lady Macbeth as blindly ambitious and unscrupulous reflects her depth of awareness of the measures she would have to resort to, in mobilising her plan of action. Mary Balestraci puts forth that "every woman is by nature more ambitious than man, but she is ambitious only vicariously, i.e., on behalf of her husband if she is married" (2012, p.179). Lady Macbeth's ambition appears to be fashioned on Balestraci's argument since her plan to kill Duncan is fuelled chiefly out of a need for her husband, Macbeth, to gain power as the king. The idea for this scheme was first conceived after it was revealed that the witches had predicted that Macbeth would one day become king. Balestraci cites William Hazlitt's assertion that Lady Macbeth is a villainous character primarily because she acts in a way that is contrary to expected gender norms, he also considers the influence of gender. Balestraci (2012) describes Lady Macbeth as a woman who not only hated but feared those around her. Balestraci (2012) uses this quote to support her argument. According to Balestraci, Hazlitt considers Lady Macbeth to be a frightening and dangerous character chiefly due to the fact that she is able to repress her feminine nature, albeit for a limited length of time, in order to accomplish her aim (2012, p.164).

Fuad Nabhan (2020) cites T.K. Dutt, who disagrees that Lady Macbeth possesses the strength of will and singleness of purpose. According to Nabhan, T.K. Dutt states that Lady Macbeth's "singleness of purpose is to be attributed in great measure to her lack of imagination" (2020, p.28). She will not allow her thoughts to wander beyond the accomplishment of the murder and the realisation of her husband's ambition:

> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:65-66)

Lady Macbeth's words show that she is so focused on attaining power that she is blinded by her ambition and fails to consider the dynamics surrounding regicide. The repercussions of regicide are dire, yet she remains focused on the act itself. She overestimates her power, and as Dutt rightly claims, her purpose has not been clearly defined since she views the act they are about to commit very microscopically (Nabhan 2020). She displays a degree of naivety in believing that if they "consider it not so deeply" (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.2:29) and if Macbeth can "Look like th' innocent

flower, But be the serpent under 't" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:66-68), they will be able to enjoy sovereignty. In her overestimation of her inner strength, she reinforces the lack of foresight and the naivety associated with women's actions instead of a more mature Macbeth who is greatly concerned with the toll it would take on his reputation and the risk of being punished for his wrongdoings.

Lady Macbeth is conscious of the need to denounce all passivity, emotion, maternal instinct and subservience to be fully able to execute her plan. Hannah Lee (2019) suggests that Lady Macbeth demonises her role as a maternal figure to participate in violence and political conspiracy. Lady Macbeth is unique in that her act of unsexing herself makes possible the absence of prescribed gender identity. This gender ambiguity results in the action of Lady Macbeth being unrestrained by the dictates of society or predetermined female qualities. Lady Macbeth's decision to make her gender incoherent allows her to use her rage without permission from men. The act of unsexing requires cruelty and unrepentant remorse. She feels empowered to circumvent all of the expectations of a female and can fully embody the role of the master manipulator to goad Macbeth into performing regicide. Lady Macbeth manages to do this because identity and power hinge on the discussion of concepts inherent in one's gender; sans the gender identity, she enjoys the freedom to select behaviour that will best suit her purpose.

Lady Macbeth summons external forces to remove all feminine traits. She wants to be devoid of any human emotion so that she will feel no regret or guilt. Lady Macbeth pleads for her breast milk which symbolises life, purity, and motherhood, to be turned to bile. Bile is symbolic of her intended evil. Her plea reinforces the characterisation of the female as a villainous individual. William Caroll says that in Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, "she seeks to undo what Shakespeare's audience would have understood as her essential femininity, particularly her maternal, or potentially maternal, characteristics" (1999, p.347). Lady Macbeth renounces her feminine traits. The symbols that she uses are breast milk and blood: compassion and fertility, but this not only disavows what physically makes her a woman since she also rejects feminine innocence by asking to be filled with evil and asks for remorse to be taken away, two characteristics that go against the "soft, weak, and sympathetic" (1999, p.348) female that Carroll describes.

According to Emma King, the first invocation made by Lady Macbeth enhances her role as a 'mother' to Macbeth's political ascension, whereas this later speech reverses the trend and strengthens Lady Macbeth's status as an antagonist (2019, p.28). Initially, she conjures up images of a child enveloped in a blanket, as she asks that:

> my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry 'Hold, hold!' (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:42-44)

Her intrigues and the furtherance of Macbeth's aims appear to be protected from outside interference or harm by the "blanket of the dark," which gives the appearance of swaddling or obscuring them. In order to establish herself as the symbolic mother, she makes the announcement that it is her desire to shield and foster his aspirations, by using maternal imagery and language. Although she desires to detach herself from feminine qualities, she displays an innate awareness of the role she is meant to fulfil and, in so doing, acknowledges the stereotypical essence of a woman. The use of the image of swaddling alludes to the inherent role of a woman as a mother. This is further intensified with the use of the words "blanket" and "cry", referencing a woman's role as her child's protector. She implicitly accepts that she is taking on the role of a mother protecting Macbeth's future and acting in his best interest.

At a banquet hosted by Macbeth, he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting at his place at the table after being informed that Banquo was killed. The appearance of Banquo's ghost is a manifestation of Macbeth's guilt. Macbeth's deteriorating mental acumen becomes apparent as a result of his hallucinations. His act of killing Duncan and hiring men to murder Banquo have affected him psychologically since the extent of his evil action plagues him. Lady Macbeth takes the responsibility of detracting attention by reassuring his guests that it is a momentary fit. Upon the ghost's reappearance, Macbeth becomes visibly distressed and is once more reliant on Lady Macbeth to assuage the guests' fears or suspicions, again highlighting Macbeth's maternal dependency on her.

She further reinforces the gender identity existent during the Elizabethan era by deciding to be proactive as she fears Macbeth’s nature as:

It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:18-19)

She equates human kindness to a specifically feminine trait, and in saying that Macbeth is full of human kindness, she reveals her lack of faith in him being able to draw on his masculinity to commit the murder. The maternal dependence identified in Othello is mirrored in the sequence of events prior to Macbeth's execution of regicide. Macbeth's letter reveals his excitement at informing his wife of the witches' prophecy; however, he displays no intention of catalysing the fulfilment of this prophecy. Instead, Lady Macbeth solely hatches the plan, steers the unfolding of events, and instructs Macbeth regarding his role in the plan and how she will facilitate the accomplishment thereof. She conjures the plan of regicide. Macbeth is dependent on his wife's decisiveness. Macbeth relies on his partner for support, and she immediately embarks on a protracted plan of expeditiously obtaining the throne for her husband. Lady Macbeth is fully cognisant of the evil and villainous nature of their intended action:

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.
He that's coming must be provided for, and 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:61-68)

Her words again evoke the image of the deadly serpent hidden under an innocent flower. Lady Macbeth instructs Macbeth how he should mask his plan to dispose of Duncan. She is critical in planning the murder and takes complete control of the plan since Macbeth becomes weak-willed and is psychologically too weak to soldier on. Janet Adelman (2012) asserts that maternal power in Macbeth is not embodied in the figure of a particular mother. Instead, it is differentially used throughout the play, evoked primarily by Lady Macbeth. Her looming female presence threatens to control the actions and the mind of the male. She questions his masculinity about bending his will to her own: "you would/ Be so much more the man" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:50-51). She gives

him reason to prove his manhood so much so that his action will align with her plan of usurping power by killing Duncan.

According to Antonella Gravina (2020), Lady Macbeth undermines Macbeth to the extent that he feels a compulsion to prove his manhood as she is aware that men's weaknesses are vulnerable to female language, especially since women are exposed to their weaknesses:

> 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'the adage? (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:35-45)

Lady Macbeth questions Macbeth's confidence, stating that his initial agreement to execute Duncan was out of drunken confidence and not an intrinsic desire. She questions his bravery and states that it does not correlate with his desire as he lacks valour. In her speech, she references the societal expectations of a man in that as a soldier, Macbeth should be brave; however, as she states, he displays cowardice and a lack of bravery in his hesitation to seize power by killing Duncan. Cristina Alfar (1998) analyses Lady Macbeth's expectations of Macbeth as means of exposing the expected male identity; Alfar says that when Lady Macbeth "encourages Macbeth's violence by questioning his manhood, she is perceived not just as shrewish but as the play's source for the definition of masculinity as violence" (1998, p.180).

She acknowledges in this speech the gender role that the husband and wife conform to and manipulates Macbeth's instinctive need to prove his manhood. Lady Macbeth possesses certain essential qualities of a female from the very outset. The dutiful wife of Macbeth, a warrior fighting in the war, keeps the home fires burning in Iverness while her husband is away at war.

She holds her husband in high regard. Before reading the letter regarding the witches' prophecy, she refers to Macbeth as "Great thane of Glamis! Worthy thane of Cawdor" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:62). She addresses him in the context of his title in Scotland. Her reference to him as Great Glamis accentuates the respect and esteem in which she holds him. Macbeth, however, addresses Lady Macbeth as his "dearest love" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:67), placing her prime importance as her role in their marriage, her role as his wife is what resonates first, as is evident in his selection of words to address his wife. The manner in which they greet each other, albeit subtly, entrenches gender roles in a very patriarchal system.

Lady Macbeth's characterisation is carefully crafted in that her essence as a female is alluded to in how she reacts to the news of the potential upward mobility in Macbeth's career. The primary focus of Christina Alfar's (1998) comparison of Lady Macbeth's actions to early modern behavioural recommendations for women, is on the significance of women's subservience to their fathers and husbands. It has been argued by Alfar (1998) that Lady Macbeth's villainy is not caused by her own internal drives, but rather by her efforts to repress her nature in order to serve the ambitions of her husband. Marguerite Tassi (2011) states that one way in which critics attempt to classify Lady Macbeth's actions as loving, as well as directly springing from her femininity, is by connecting her with the idea of women as men's "moral compass," and saying that she, as a woman, "take[s] upon [her] shoulders the moral duty of empowering what is right" (2011, p.282). Saying that women must be men's moral compasses confines women as they will constantly need to know and do what is right, and it gives them the duty of assisting their husbands while alleviating the men of this responsibility. Cristina León Alfar (1998) essentially argues the opposite saying that Lady Macbeth is too traditionally supportive and good. If she turns ruthlessly, lethally (and stereotypically) masculine, "it is because she must do so to reflect—as conduct manuals demand—the bloody desire of her husband" (1998, p.113). She thus becomes a "parodic depiction of wifely duty" whose "behaviour adheres to rather than transgresses her gender role" (1998, p.181). Lady Macbeth is driven by ambition and is willing to clothe herself in darkness to attain greatness for herself and her husband. She does not foresee that her guilty conscience will plague her. She belittles Macbeth's nobility of character and takes the lead in convincing him to perform a crime that he was initially very hesitant to do. Janet Adelman suggests that Macbeth seeks to fulfil Lady Macbeth's equation of masculinity and agrees to murder Duncan, which "seems not an escape route but the tool of a man driven to enact the ferociously masculine strivings of his wife" (2010, p.36).

Lady Macbeth's action is without careful consideration, and in its thoughtlessness, it is criticised as typically female as if thoughtlessness was the cause of Lady Macbeth's destruction and a characteristic feminine quality. To a limited extent, I agree that her action is impetuous in that she fails to consider the ramifications in the way that Macbeth has. He is aware that God ordains the King, and to kill a King will be a sin. However, Lady Macbeth is not entirely irrational and impetuous because she considers the elements of Macbeth's nature that may impede her plan. She believes that Macbeth is:

> is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:17-18)

She, therefore, feels it her duty to ensure that Macbeth is sufficiently prepared psychologically to see the plan through. Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth by listing the sacrifices she would make in making sovereignty possible for him. She displays a lack of maternal instinct as she says:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:54-58)

Lady Macbeth uses this analogy to express the extent she would go to, to make certain that she achieves her intended goal and makes good on a promise. She further uses this to highlight Macbeth's lack of conviction. This corroborates Lady Macbeth's attempt to seize a masculine power to overcome her husband's feminised reticence to achieve their political goals. However, the masculinity that she assumes is not sustained by Lady Macbeth. While she seeks power, such power is attained by any means but is not sustained. Her inability to support the masculinity is shortly exposed as she confesses to Macbeth that her failure to murder Duncan herself is rooted in the fact that the sleeping Duncan resembled her father (Alfar 2003). Her trepidation to commit murder is evidence that despite beckoning evil forces to unsex her, she possesses the female sensitivity that hinders her from performing such acts. Her cowardice is shown when she refuses to admit to this weakness and uses Duncan's resemblance to her father as an excuse. This offers a striking contrast to the cold malignity of Lady Macbeth that invoked the spirits to make her less

humane, but it does align with my proposition that her initial show of villainy was merely to mask the inevitability of her fate as a female character.

However, Lady Macbeth's masculine ambition contributes to the destruction of humane values and political poise, which characterise the play. She is highly spirited and speaks courageously to convince Macbeth that her plan will be easy to execute. Lady Macbeth, in the quotation above, says to her husband that while feeding her child, she can easily pull out the lips of the child and dash the child's brains out.

Lady Macbeth's mention of a nursing child amid her dreadful language reveals a gentle feminine aspect as she admits to knowing and experiencing the tenderness of loving a child. She also reveals an awareness that the gentle feminine side will translate to her inability to escalate her plan, so she renounces such attributes brazenly and prioritises the plan to usurp power over her maternal instincts. Her speech also reveals her dependency. She is unable to execute her plan independently. She calls on the spirits to unsex her for her to be able to see the plan through, which indicates her dependency on external forces, thereby fulfilling the stereotype of the weak female, alluding to the inevitability of her destruction.

Lady Macbeth plummets into a world of guilt, exposing herself as an enfeebled figure. The act of her fainting upon receiving the news of Duncan's death may be more than a farce to convince the others of her shock and anguish that the King was murdered. As soon as Lady Macbeth heard the news about King Duncan’s death, she became faint and genuinely needed to be carried away as this news revealed the stark reality of her action. Her reaction, in turn, exposed her weakness. Macduff's reaction to Lady Macbeth fainting is a display of the stereotypes attached to the female in Elizabethan times as he states, "Look to the lady," (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.2:97) as if it was expected and accepted that women are emotionally fragile and would need care upon receipt of the news of a person's death.

Macduff’s words serve to establish the gender roles in times of adversity, whereby the male is expected to show bravado and support the emotionally distraught female.

Lady Macbeth's mind becomes 'infected' (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:72) by guilt and madness. Her speech degenerates from the caustic self-assurance in earlier scenes to the tremulous repetition of a fragmented mind:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:49-51)

She repeats her words, and she imagines unreal events. In her physical attempt at removing the blood from her hands, her speech once again becomes repetitive and is indicative of corrosive guilt. She says:

> Out, damned spot! Out, I say! —One, two. Why, then, 'tis time to do 't.
> Hell is murky!—Fie, my lord, fie! (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:26-27)

Her obsession with removing the spot of blood is an indication of her mental frailty. According to Emma King (2019), Lady Macbeth seeks to "wash away" her murderous sins by physically scrubbing her hands. Zhong and Liljenquist's (2006) thought-provoking "Macbeth Effect" theory declares that "any threat to people's moral purity might lead them to seek to literally cleanse" (2006, p.1451). Lady Macbeth becomes obsessed with carrying light around her constantly, and her obsession with the darkness reveals her fear. This is an ironic reversal of her "Come thick night" soliloquy. She tries to eradicate the guilt of being instrumental in the murder, but she believes that by literally washing her hands, she can wash off the blood that represents the foul act of murder. She wants to be rid of the 'damn'd spot[s]' (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:35) since she is afraid that she will be damned to hell for her act. Again, this inability to accept the ramifications of her action as well as face adversity consolidates the perception that women are emotionally dependant and lack the confidence and stamina that men are thought to possess.

Fuad Nabhan adds that when a woman is filled with ambition, she becomes more frantic than a man and this frenzied ambition causes her to lose the balance of her mind (2020, p.28). Lady Macbeth succumbs to this stereotypical expectation of women filled with ambition, as she is overcome with guilt. As a result of her troubled mind, she is reduced to sleepwalking while desperately trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain. This is a clear contrast to her earlier desire

to be filled with "direst cruelty". Michelle A. Labbe (2010) asserts, "Lady Macbeth is no longer able to sleep restfully—because her conscience finally begins to trouble her and because this affliction is perhaps a form of divine punishment for her" (2010, p.16). The somnambulism indicates her decline into psychological disorder and mirrors Macbeth's earlier hallucinations; however, unlike Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is unable to draw on her masculinity as the feminine side of her has overwhelmed her. Lady Macbeth's sensitivity due to her guilt becomes a weakness, and she is unable to cope. As a result, Lady Macbeth loses control of her mental stability.

Although Lady Macbeth was successful for a time in concealing her conscience and avoiding any public displays of remorse, her guilt ultimately caught up with her. Shakespeare foreshadows the unravelling of Lady Macbeth's initial stoicism. Her words to Macbeth, "these deeds must not be thought after/ these ways;/so, it will make us mad" (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.2:33-35), is indicative of her subconscious awareness of the fate that eventually overtakes her. In her assumed character of the powerful and ambitious wife, she attempts to allay Macbeth's fears of guilt by stating that a bit of water would wash away the evidence of the deed, but later her natural feminine abhorrence of the smell of blood finds expression:

> Here's the smell of the blood still, All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh! (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:37-38)

Lady Macbeth is overwhelmed by fear and an insidious sense of guilt because of the heinous crime that she had emboldened Macbeth to commit: regicide. In addition, her conscience is being tormented by the knowledge of the crimes she and her husband committed to gain power. As a result, Lady Macbeth is never able to regain the full power she initially coveted. Lady Macbeth was therefore not victorious in her attempt at gaining power because she lost the determination to overcome feminine stereotypes.

6. Chapter 3: The role of language in entrenching gender inequities experienced by female characters in *Othello*

An analysis of a character's language enables the reader to have the power to identify the societal, contextual and political forces present that influence specific types of responses. Bakhtin argues that culture and language are inextricably linked to one another. The social function of language is the conveyance of the group's shared values, beliefs, and customs, as well as the instillation of a sense of shared group identity (Holquist, 1981). As revealed in this synthesis, the significance of variables of gender, position, and societal and political contextual factors will be considered. Language is a medium through which characters interact and communicate love. Language is used to transmit information regarding power and authority and is used to perform one's identity.

Bakhtin claims that the communication between two or more individuals gives birth to language. Language never arises in isolation. He also states that dialogue can be found even in expression that is not distinctly interactive (Holoquist, 1981). Milton Sarkar (2018) cites Jeremy Hawthorn, who propounds the idea that "all utterances involve the, 'importing' and naturalisation of the speech of others, all utterances include inner tensions, collaborations, and negotiations which are comparable to the process of dialogue" (2018, p.38). This chapter considers the manipulation, vilification and victimisation of the lead female character, Desdemona, in *Othello*, through the lens of Bakhtin's theory of Heteroglossia. Desdemona is motivated and influenced by the gender normative behaviours that dictate appropriate goals and ideals for women, specifically married women, which take precedence in her perception of reality. Desdemona, like Lady Macbeth, struggles with a conflict of identity in that she possesses paradoxical traits of both strength and weakness and the power dynamics within her relationships are revealed in her language.

Desdemona displays boldness in her acts of elopement with a Moor, joking about women's virtue with Iago, advocating adamantly on Cassio's behalf, lying to Othello about the loss of the handkerchief, talking about adultery with Emilia and ultimately taking the blame for her murder. However, Desdemona is mainly a submissive character, most notably in her inability to defend her virtue convincingly and prevent her death. The play portrays Desdemona contradictorily as having a self-effacing yet naïve demeanour, being a faithful wife, and a bold, somewhat brazen and independent personality. Desdemona defies the restrictions of patriarchy by wilfully separating herself from the male authorities in her life. She removes herself from her father by going against

his wishes and marrying Othello; unlike many daughters of the Elizabethan era, she does not involve Brabantio in the decision. This representation of her defiance immediately depicts her as forceful and capable of making decisions without the guidance of a male.

The ensuing course of action by Desdemona goes against her first display of conviction. Marvin Rosenberg states: 'Desdemona was not meant to have a spineless tenderness, though her partisans have sometimes charged her with it' (1992, p.211). This lack of spinelessness further reveals itself in Desdemona's direct address to the Duke when she asks to accompany Othello to Cypress so that she can enjoy 'the rites for which I love him' (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:255), a direct reference to her rights as Othello's wife and her need to be with him in a physical sense. Desdemona is candid in justifying her need to accompany Othello. She argues that if she had to stay in Venice while he went off to fight in a war in Cyprus, her importance to him would be negated. She reveals her view of her duty as a wife, in that she feels that a wife has to be constantly by her husband's side, supporting his endeavours. Her absence will translate to her inability to perform her duty. She, therefore, wishes to support him regardless of what he does or where he goes. Desdemona says:

> So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
> a moth of peace, and he go to the war,
> the rites for which I love him are bereft me
> and I a heavy interim shall support
> By his dear absence. Let me go with him. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:290-294)

Desdemona's words reinforce her unequivocal devotion to her husband Othello; even in the face of going to a battlefield, Desdemona defines herself in terms of the role she plays alongside Othello. Thus, she bravely requests her rightful place alongside Othello.

Desdemona's boldness and confidence are further exemplified when she addresses the Duke and her father on her love for Othello. Her speech indicates her thoughtfulness in that she does not blatantly dismiss her father's importance in favour of her loyalty to Othello. She, however, acknowledges that hers is a "divided" duty. Desdemona is courageous enough to stand up to her father, and she even partially rejects him in public when she says:

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter: but here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:182-191)

Family life was critical in the Elizabethan era. The father was the head and the ruler of his family. His power, might and authority were recognised as part of the existing social order. Children were brought up to fear, conform and respect parents. Bruce Young states that the family in Shakespeare's time was "male-dominated, even cruelly so" (2008, p.158). A son would call his father "Sir", while a daughter as Desdemona does would refer to the father as, "My noble father…you are the lord of duty" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:180-84). In this speech, it is noticeable that Desdemona starts with "My noble father" and ends with "the Moor my lord". She shows respect for her father Brabantio, by saying "My noble father" at first and then presents her final option, which is to leave with Othello for the island of Cyprus by saying, "the Moor my lord".

Cook (1980) adds to Young's description of male-dominated family life by saying that the defiance of parental authority was rarely tolerated. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, it was considered quite scandalous for a lady to marry against the will of her parents. Gordana Galić Kakkonen and Ana Penjak (2015) further elaborate that this defiance of parental authority represents a "rejected ritual model" (2016, p.26). Desdemona addresses the implicit patriarchy, and her words, albeit direct and brazen, show obedience to her husband. In the same way that her mother showed obedience to her husband, Brabantio, so too will Desdemona acknowledge her husband, Othello. When questioned by her father about disobeying him and marrying Othello, Desdemona very deftly defends herself and justifies her transgression on the grounds of patriarchal obedience and duty (Mahajan 2015, p.9). Her action demonstrates Desdemona's independence from her father, which seems to be the aspect of her character that she most wishes to emphasise

at the beginning of the play. However, Ram Prasad Rai (2016) asserts that Desdemona says without any fear that she must serve both her husband and father (Rai 2016, p.54), placing both the males in the position of power and control while placing herself in a position of submission and subservience.

Desdemona's words are persuasive. Her confidence in addressing her father and the audience in this manner is fundamentally feminist, as she is asserting her right to her own life. This audacious act transforms Desdemona into a rebel or revolutionary, rather than the meek, timid woman she is so often accused of being. Desdemona has relationship issues within her family, but at the opening of the play, when she rejects her father, she confronts more fundamental forces. Marilyn French explores the masculine and misogynistic value system at work in *Othello*, "in spite of her male assertiveness in choosing her husband," French (2011) suggests, "Desdemona accepts her culture's dictum that she must be obedient to males" (2011, p.47).

However, Emily E. Buckley-Crist (2019) argues that Shakespeare establishes Desdemona as the agent during her courtship with Othello. Furthermore, Othello recounts to Brabantio and the Senate that his stories piqued Desdemona's interest to such an extent that:

> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear.
> Devour up my discourse. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:151-152)

Thus, Buckley-Crist places Desdemona as the active character in the context of her relationship with Othello, in opposition to her later action, which I can only characterise as inertia. Othello claims:

> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story
> And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.
> She loved me for the dangers I had passed. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:165-168)

Although it may appear ominous that Othello is able to recognise the disguised truth of Desdemona's story, seeing it as a "hint" and as referring to himself and Desdemona, rather than the hypothetical 'friend,' he tacitly concludes that Desdemona is telling lies, while he is telling the

truth. Ironically, Desdemona's narrative lies only to convey a deeper truth that she cannot articulate in a more direct way. Othello observes Desdemona's interest in his story-telling and then consents to tell his stories to her as well. Desdemona's response to Othello's tales of adventure and dangers experienced, culminates in the subtle clue from Desdemona that she would want to be wooed by a man who had both faced the dangers that Othello had and who could narrate the stories like Othello. Marcia Macaulay cites Stephen Greenblatt's argument that Othello submits to "narrative self-fashioning" on Iago's part because he engages in such self-fashioning: "his identity depends upon a constant performance . . . of his 'story' (Macaulay 2005, p.245). Similarly, Catherine Bates states: "Othello falls prey to Iago's story-telling because he is himself a story-teller, a man whose tale seduces Desdemona and has the power, according to the Duke, to win all the daughters of Venice" (Macaulay 2005, p.53).

Macaulay further asserts that Othello concludes his version of events with the declaration, "Upon this hint I spake" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:167), taking Desdemona's lead as a cue for his reaction. According to Othello's version of what had transpired, he places himself as the passive individual, reacting to Desdemona's prompt. Macaulay further asserts that Othello is with Desdemona only because she is lured in by his narratives of his adventures which she finds compelling. It is Desdemona who indirectly requests Othello to "woo" her. Based on Othello's recollection of the exchange, Othello, in this narrative, indicates that he had minimal interaction as he himself spoke only three times. This remarkable speech is attached to the "hint" that Desdemona has given; her speech was the act of requesting, which according to Macaulay (2005), Shakespeare also foregrounds: "Upon this hint, I spake" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:167-168).

The line ironically represents the dynamics in the relation between the two engaged in the dialogue, granting Desdemona agency. Brabantio, therefore, asks Desdemona to deny that "she was half the wooer" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:174). For Brabantio then, the more acceptable narrative of how Desdemona and Othello came to court would be if Othello wooed the passive Desdemona. Othello seems to take pride in the fact that he was the one wooed. Desdemona has chosen him rather than Othello pursuing her. In his description of their initial courtship he says: "For she had eyes, and chose me" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:189), which reinforce his awareness of the role she played in initiating their marriage. Desdemona provides a very different narrative of events concerning her courtship than does Othello. Othello has agency and he was active in his pursuit of Desdemona

since he claims to have acted upon a hint. He was accompanied by Michael Cassio in Desdemona's account.

Desdemona describes Cassio's input as significant to the eventual union; foregrounding he:

> That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
> When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
> Hath ta'en your part, to have so much to do
> To bring him in? (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:70-73)

Her use of the imperfect tense denotes a lengthy process during which Cassio persuaded her that Othello is a suitable suitor, as does her iterative expression "and so many a time". She shared her fears and trepidation that she experienced about Othello. This reveals that Desdemona was not immediately impressed with Othello as she did consider him a desirable suitor. Desdemona last asserts that Cassio "Hath ta'en your part". Cassio's role is not merely a go-between since Desdemona reveals that Cassio championed Othello's cause and assisted in convincing her to accept him as a husband. Unwittingly, Desdemona has effected a blow to Othello's pride.

Bakhtin's notion of 'heteroglossia' will be used to analyse societal, socio-political, and historical implications of language in *Othello* in relation to intensifying gender inequalities. Anna Murphy Jameson (2005) specifies that Desdemona is a character "associated with the palpable realities of everyday existence" and claims that "we see the forms and habits of society tinting her language and deportment" (2005, p.216). Jameson sees Desdemona as an ideally feminine character who cannot defend herself against the trials of life. Jameson also considers Desdemona's love for Othello and her tendency to be enthralled by Othello's worldliness and tales of adventure. She observes that, through Desdemona's affection for Othello, her real essence emerges: "gentleness gives the prevailing tone to the character-gentleness in its excess-gentleness verging on passiveness-gentleness, which not only cannot resent —but cannot resist" (Jameson, 2005, p.218). Othello's treatment of Desdemona as his possession is initially communicated when he refers to Iago as "a man of honesty and trust, to his conveyance I assign my wife" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:278-280). Othello's language reveals that he sees Desdemona as his possession. Othello believes that he can control where she goes and what she does. He reveals further that Desdemona has to be in the care of a male, if not Brabantio as the Duke suggested, then Iago. However, Othello

is not the only one to dismiss Desdemona's humanity. While conversing with Othello, a senator says, "Adieu, brave Moor; use Desdemona well" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:287). This quotation reveals how the women of Venice were being treated. The Senator conveys the notion that Desdemona is, in a sense, Othello's property and how he can do as he pleases and "use" her. Another example of how Desdemona is treated emerges in Othello's statement, "Come, my dear love, the purchase made, the fruits are to ensue" (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.3:8-10). When a man and woman are joined in marriage, it is perceived that they will live happily. However, during this period, women were simply objects living in a man's world and were used as men desired. Othello describes their marriage as Desdemona being bought and is expected to please him sexually in return for his favour. Even Iago, in his position as neither the husband nor the father says,

> Faith, he to-night hath boarded a land carack
> If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever. (Shakespeare, 1988, 1.2: 50-51)

This statement demonstrates that Iago perceives Desdemona as a treasure that Othello has attained, and love bears no relevance. Brabantio, in his reference to Desdemona as his "jewel" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:195), reveals that he perceives her as an object to be owned. She is later referenced as Othello's "perfect chrysolite" (Shakespeare, 1988, 5.2:145) and a pearl of great price (Shakespeare, 1988, 5.1:347). In his reference to Desdemona, even Iago says that Othello has stolen her away: "What, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves! thieves! / Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:79-80). Brabantio later claims he has been robbed: "O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.2:61). Diane Elizabeth Dreher states that to "actually perceive them (daughters) as objects, even precious objects, makes men love them in a misguided and distorted way. Most of these fathers love their daughters dearly but are insensitive to them as people" (Dreher 2021, p.49).

Although considered a possession, Desdemona proves herself a warrior when she fights for her marriage to be recognised. Othello witnesses Desdemona's courage in action when she testifies on his behalf, absolving him of the accusation of bewitching her before her father and the Venetian senate (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3.180-89). She then eloquently implores the Duke to allow her to stand by Othello's side in the war-threatened Cyprus. However, Joan Ozark Holmer (2005) believes that the reference to Desdemona as a warrior is used fleetingly and not developed in the

sense of Desdemona being a formidable force. Othello greets her in Cyprus as his "fair warrior" (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:180), and later, Desdemona calls herself an "unhandsome warrior" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:151), who is unable to carry out her duties; Desdemona fears that she has not performed her duty to stand by and support her husband. In her soul, she questions Othello's poor treatment of her, but as she speaks to Emilia, she says:

> But now I find I had suborn'd the witness,
> And he's indicted falsely. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:153-154)

Thus, Desdemona chooses to believe that the witness (herself) has lied. In this response, she assents to the superior position held by men in society in that she is willing to manipulate her recollection of the exchange and analyse it to align with the dictates of a patriarchal society.

Holmer (2015) explores her role as a warrior exclusively in the Christian context and perceives Desdemona's role as helping her husband eradicate his inferiority complex and overcome his military and psychological insecurities. Ibrahim Alhiyari (2019) concurs with Holmer's assertion and argues that Shakespeare attempts to make Desdemona's behaviour promote a religiously committed image of a married woman who is obedient, passive, and virtuous. Alhiyari asserts that despite Desdemona being "sequestered and silently killed without credible evidence and without the opportunity to exonerate herself over a hypothetical accusation" (2019, p.37), she absolves her husband of her murder and protects his honour.

When Emilia's questions her regarding who is responsible, she answers, "Nobody; I myself. Farewell" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:12). Throughout the drama, her forgiving nature is an attempt to remain faithful to Christ's forgiving idealism. Therefore, Alhiyari sees Desdemona as a spiritual warrior "whose crusade is to endure, temper, and reform the human weaknesses in her spouse's personality" (2019, p.43).

Desdemona internalises societal expectations in that she disparages herself when appealing for the reinstatement of Cassio in the position as Lieutenant; Desdemona says to Othello, before leaving, "Whate'er you be, I am obedient" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:90). Her words reinforce the subservient role she has accepted as Othello's wife, and regardless of Othello's actions, she remains obedient to him (Xu, 2019). Emily C Bartels asserts that Desdemona, by 'aligning herself with her mother,

she strategically glosses over two factors that make her marriage radically different and socially taboo: that she has eloped and eloped with a Moor' (Bartels 1980, p.425). She cleverly redirects the negative attention from her act of elopement by criticising society for placing an impossible "divided duty" (1980, p.425) on women.

Despite this obedience, advocating Cassio's behalf attests to Desdemona's assertiveness. Jennifer Ann Doody states that "even amidst increasingly threatening circumstances, Desdemona's character remains defiant, compassionate, and eloquent. Her alliance to goodness is her defining quality" (2017, p.10). Diane Elizabeth Dreher, however, analyses this goodness as Desdemona's downfall and states that Desdemona's error is that she is “like a traditional woman who lives for others, she chooses goodness over selfishness” (Dreher, 2021, p.93). When agreeing to intercede, she promises:

> Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do
> All my abilities in thy behalf. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:1-2)

Cassio has engaged in a drunken brawl, and by approaching Desdemona for help in his reinstatement, he is implicitly subscribing to the stereotype of the female being emotionally weak and showing pity. Othello too recognises this character trait in Desdemona when he says: "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,/And I lov'd her that she did pity them" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:167-68). Desdemona's pity for Cassio leads her to make a bold promise, saying, "before Emilia here/I give thee warrant of thy place" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3.19-20). She mentions Emilia's presence to accentuate the binding promise in that Emilia serves as a witness. This contributes to her naivety because she impetuously promises to restore Cassio to his position with limited knowledge of Cyprus's political climate.

Desdemona's sense of duty and overwhelming loyalty to other characters is also particularly evident throughout the play, especially her constant petitioning Othello on Cassio's behalf to help him obtain his position once again. She expresses her loyalty to Cassio with the words:

> For thy solicitor shall rather die
> Than give thy cause away. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:27-28)

Her declaration clearly shows her dedication to the cause of a person that she considers to be a true friend. This constant petitioning is done at the risk of Othello's displeasure, which he repeatedly expresses throughout the play. Her loyalty to those close to her illustrates her inner strength. She declares:

> If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
> To the last article: my lord shall never rest. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:20-21)

Desdemona is indeed very confident that she will be able to get Cassio what he wants. However, her naïve and trusting nature renders her oblivious to Iago's trap that she is stepping into. The act of Desdemona's passionate defence of Cassio strengthens Bakhtin's assertion that the use of another individual's voice, which serves to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way, influences the speaker's language and message. Bakhtin pinpoints the direct narrative of the author rather than dialogue between characters as the primary location of this conflict. Thus, the political and social context of male dominance cannot be ignored. Cassio, therefore, is the controlling force in Desdemona's unrelenting advocating of his cause. She recognises him not only as a loyal friend but as a male to whom she has to offer unopposed support. Novy (2017) asserts that the female characters "transcend" limits only temporarily and to men's advantage. Desdemona looks at male stereotypes as a reason to show compassion towards the male gender. Desdemona says:

> Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn;
> On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn:
> I prithee, name the time, but let it not
> Exceed three days: in faith, he's penitent;
> And yet his trespass, in our common reason—
> Save that, they say, the wars must make examples
> Out of their best—is not almost a fault
> To incur a private cheque. When shall he come?
> Tell me. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:71-79)

Desdemona's speech highlights her unyielding loyalty to a friend, but it also reinforces her naivety. She is innocent in advocating Cassio's cause, yet she reflects minimal knowledge of man's nature. Desdemona confronts Othello to pardon Cassio's indiscretions and reinstate him in his position as

the lieutenant. Despite Othello's assurance that he will speak to Cassio, Desdemona is adamant about pursuing the quest and demanding a specific time; however, he answers evasively. She criticises Othello for responding to her request so begrudgingly and with such reservation. Othello, however, tells Desdemona that he will not deny her anything, but he wishes to be left to himself for a little while.

Mingyue Xu (2019) argues that Desdemona's daring to pursue her true love and the bravery to request Cassio's reinstatement portray a powerful and insubordinate woman, contrary to the "obedient" image (Xu 2021, p.9). However, Desdemona is blind to Othello's discomfort over her repeated pleas. She is too naïve and unversed in the ways of men. She is oblivious that her relentless advocation for another man's cause may result in a fit of jealousy in her husband. In her response to Othello, Desdemona's innocence and naivety are highlighted. According to Marcia Macaulay (2005), Desdemona's support for Cassio is an unwitting aid to Iago since she defends another man to Othello and thus engenders jealousy on his part.

Marcia Macaulay says that the Iago-Othello critics "see Othello and Iago as closely identified with each other" (Macaulay 2005, p.107). Such critics find "the source of the tragedy in Iago-Othello's anxieties regarding women, sexuality, and marriage– anxieties that are universal and generated by underlying social or psychological paradigms" (Macaulay 2005, p.107). Mingyue Xu (2019) claims that Shakespeare values men's honour more than women's honour. In *Othello*, Desdemona's eloquence fails to defend her honour; however, the violation of Othello's honour can bring a tragic ending to the play. Othello uses imperatives in addressing Desdemona on the whereabouts of the handkerchief. He commands her to bring the handkerchief to him. His anger and dominance are met with Desdemona's sheer naivety:

> Othello. Fetch me the handkerchief: my mind misgives.
> Desdemona. Come, come;
> You'll never meet a more sufficient man.
> Othello. The handkerchief!
> Desdemona. A man that all his time
> Hath founded his good fortunes on your love, Shared dangers with you—
> Othello. The handkerchief! (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:80-86)

Desdemona is not adequately knowledgeable of Othello's propensity to being enraged nor of the nature of men. She is unable to recognise anger and jealousy in her husband. So instead, she inadvertently upsets him further by drawing the dialogue back to Cassio, the very individual with whom Othello believes Desdemona is having an affair. In this way, she seemingly confirms that her handkerchief is with her secret lover. Her naivety is reinforced when she innocently brushes aside the line of questioning, which is obviously pertinent to Othello. In her naivety, she seems to confirm the suspicions aroused by Iago. Desdemona's response contrasts sharply with Emilia's insightful analysis of men's natures when she says:

> Tis not a year or two shows us a man:
> They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
> To eat us hungerly, and when they are full,
> They belch us. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:97-100)

Emilia uses a metaphor of women being food to communicate her bitter indignation at men. Emilia believes that men perceive women as food to be consumed and regurgitated. She is sharp-witted, describing Othello's destructive jealousy accurately. She is also wise without knowing it when she retorts, 'The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave' (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.2:141). According to Amri, Siti Hardiyanti, and Isna Maylani (2020), Emilia's point of view is that men are always in a dominating position. Emilia's view of men is influenced by her position and experience, making her identify the males' intrigues around her easily (Hardiyanti, and Maylani, 2020, p.17).

Another potent trait that reveals Desdemona's dutiful nature, especially towards her husband, is her guilelessness and her lack of knowledge about the true nature of most women. This becomes particularly evident when she and Emilia discuss their views on infidelity and Desdemona questions:

> Dost thou in conscience think,–tell me, Emilia,–
> That there be women do abuse their husbands
> In such gross kind? (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.3:48-50)

Her disbelief that women would genuinely be unfaithful to their husbands reveals her overwhelming sense of duty and loyalty to Othello, as she has not even considered the possibility of being disloyal to him in this way. According to Diane Elizabeth Dreher, (2021), this is Desdemona's attempt to conform to "what should be", and therefore she fails to recognise the jealousy and what it represents, rendering her vulnerable to the dangers she brings and being unable to defend herself (Dreher, 2021, p.94). Unable to identify jealousy, she cannot acknowledge its presence in Othello and argues that Othello is void of any jealousy. Desdemona makes a playful reference to Othello's origins, suggesting that the "sun in his native land drew all such humours from him" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:30), making him impervious to jealousy. Therefore, his character is atypical of the Venetian tendency to be suspicious of women's behaviour. Her misjudgement of Othello's nature shows Desdemona's ingenuous and trusting nature since she does not realise Othello's propensity to be jealous. Desdemona says of Othello that:

> his unkindness may defeat my life
> But never taint my love. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:165-166)

Her words explain that she will be faithful and true to Othello despite his accusation of her infidelity. Desdemona is convincing in her declaration that she would love him even if his mistreatment were responsible for her death. The likelihood that she believes she can persuade Othello of her innocence is evident. However, she does not yet understand the gravity of the imminent danger. However, Emilia's analysis of the nature of jealousy seems to dispel the stereotype that women have a poor understanding of the nature of men. Emilia says:

> But I do think it is their husband's faults
> If wives do fall: (Say, that they slack their duties,
> And pour our treasuries into foreign laps;
> Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
> Throwing restraint upon us: Or say they strike us,
> Or scant our former having in despite)
> Why we have galls: and though we have some grace,
> Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know,
> Their wives have sense like them: They see, and smell,

> And have their palates both for sweet, and sour,
> As husbands have. What is it that they do
> When they change us for others? Is it sport? (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.3:63-74)

Despite this depiction of Emilia's higher level of comprehension of men's nature, it cannot be separated from the fact that this opinion is shared with Desdemona in moments of privacy only. Emilia does not portray this boldness in the presence of her husband or other male counterparts. Amri, Siti Hardiyanti, and Isna Maylani note that Emilia "shows obedience and weakness when she gets along with her husband, but on the other side, she often criticises and expresses her opinions which reject the domination of men" (2020, p.17). This works as an astute strategy on Emilia's part, given Iago's manipulative nature and his derogatory attitude toward women. Emilia once again displays a deeper understanding of men's natures when she questions whether Othello is jealous; however, Desdemona's response reveals her submissiveness. The intimacy of their private talks shows how female characters accept patriarchal structures. She argues that women are physically no different from men as women also have desires, and it is their husbands' fault if they do wrong. Iago displays no respect for his wife; however, after a brief hesitation, she chooses duty to her husband over loyalty to her mistress. Emilia supports her husband despite not receiving affection or respect until she hears that Desdemona's death is the result of Iago's intrigues. She first breaks the quiet when she defends the chaste Desdemona against Othello's brutal charges, and she is unafraid to expose Iago's betrayal when she uncovers Desdemona's dead body. As the play progresses, her voice becomes increasingly furious, but she demonstrates that "it is their husbands' faults if spouses fall" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:63-64); she has no place in a patriarchal society with such a vicious husband. Emilia's comments are harsh and cynical; her tone reflects her fury, but also a sense of helplessness and frustration at her powerlessness to oppose the system she was born into.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, it was quite uncommon for a woman to pursue a man in the same way that men pursued women. Desdemona did not let the fact that this was an accepted social standard prevent her from pursuing what, or more accurately, who, she desired. She does not let the fact that she is a woman prevent her from pursuing Othello's love. Desdemona's objectification, according to Mahajan's (2015) interpretation, is what ultimately leads to the construction of a female's repressed and silent self. In the case of Desdemona, it leads to extreme terror of her master

and husband Othello, so much so that she does not speak up when he makes false accusations against her and kills her. Women were repressed, and their silence was the expected and accepted behaviour. Women were stereotypically chaste and displayed obedience to their male counterparts. In choosing Othello as her husband, Desdemona has shown the ability to subvert the patriarchal hegemony. However, Amri, Siti Hardiyanti, and Isna Maylani argue that Desdemona's "life is full of restriction and control, and she dedicates her life to obey and be submissive toward her husband" (2020, p.13). Therefore, it is not out of character when Desdemona, without hesitation, absolves Othello of the blame for her murder. Her response may be intentional to portray how Desdemona herself feels after defending her choice of marriage to her father and shortly thereafter being put in the position of defending her faithfulness to her husband. At the beginning of the play, she is a supremely independent person, but as the play progresses, she struggles against all odds to convince Othello that she is not too independent. The manner in which Desdemona is murdered—suffocated by a pillow in a bed covered in her wedding sheets—is symbolic: she is suffocated beneath the demands put on her fidelity. Since her first lines, Desdemona has seemed capable of meeting or even rising above those demands. In the end, Othello stifles the speech that made Desdemona so powerful.

Iago firmly believes that without exception, women are deceitful, untrustworthy sexual creatures. Iago portrays women as being typically paradoxical by referring to them as "pictures out of doors" but "wildcats in your kitchens" (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:110). Therefore, a woman has to be domesticated. In his conversation with Emilia and Desdemona, he claims that women put on a pretence of being sweet in public, but in private, they are argumentative and unruly. According to Abuzahra (2021, p.191), the term 'wild' suggests that such cats are not domestic; that is, they do not live with people. It is clear, then, that Iago's use of this animal metaphor to describe women is that it is hard to live with them without being subjected to their ferocity and wildness, alluding to the fact that women need to be controlled or tamed. Mahajan, in his analysis, concurs with Abuzahra (2019), by saying that Iago associates women with only sex and subservience and equates them with beasts and the enslaved classes (Mahajan 2015, p.54). In Iago's use of the plural forms of the words: pictures, bells and wildcats, he implicitly states that his descriptions apply to all women and not only to Emilia.

Mohammad Alyo states that Iago considers himself a sage about women's nature, an expert about human development, and, most importantly, “an experienced analyst of human personalities" (Alyo 2019, p.144). Alyo (2019) posits that Iago mistrusts women and has a negative view of them. He observes that women appear to be amiable in public contexts; however, they are tumultuous in the context of their domestic or private settings, again alluding to the fact that women need to be tamed.

Desdemona is treated as an object by her possessive husband and father, which shows the marginalisation of women in society. Both Brabantio and Othello were trading Desdemona when Othello says:

> For such proceeding I am charged withal,
> won his daughter. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:93-94)

His words show that he treated Desdemona as a commodity that he won. Her father, Brabantio, too, said, "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:60), which shows the females were victimised and treated as objects. Siti Hardiyanti and Isna Maylani (2020), therefore, surmise that there is such a tendency to label women as powerless, often accepting sexual harassment or being exploited. Women, in this case, are positioned as objects while men as powerful subjects (2020, p.14).

Iago addresses Brabantio on Desdemona's relationship with Othello; he says, "an old black ram/ is tupping your white ewe" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:87-88). Desdemona is described as a ewe. A 'ewe' may refer to a beautiful woman in a gang of thieves. The conceptual mapping here is that ewes can be stolen without resistance or because of their foolishness. Desdemona, like a ewe, is stolen without realising that she is deceived, reinforcing the stereotypical view that women are dull-witted (Abuzahra, 2021, p.192).

In his treatment of Emilia, his wife, Iago reflects his attitude about women being possessions. Iago's claim reveals that he suspects his wife has engaged in sexual relations with Othello. Iago has a soliloquy after Othello has left for Cyprus in which he expresses his hatred for Othello, saying, "And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets/He has done my office" (1.3.323-324).

Iago's "office" is a reference to duty as a husband to have sexual relations with his wife. Iago again objectifies Emilia when he states,

> For that, I do suspect the lusty Moor,
> Hath leaped into my seat. (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:315-316)

He claims ownership and possession by declaring that it is exclusively his right and his place to engage in sexual relations with Emilia, not only because of his position as her husband but as a result of his sense of ownership. His plan to exact revenge is that he is "evened with him, wife for wife" (Shakespeare, 1988, 2.1:224). Iago is convinced that if he were to sleep with Desdemona, he would have satisfactorily avenged being cuckolded. Milton Sakar (2018) clearly states that "in the Bakhtinian framework, a word is like a baton passed from player to player where the touch of the earlier runner cannot be gainsaid" (Sakar 2018, p.18). Othello seems to mirror Iago's use of sexual references in his language. After being incited by Iago and Iago's allusion to the missing handkerchief, Othello questions Desdemona. Othello refers to her hand as being moist, which alludes to women being referred to as sexually charged.

Language is social in nature, therefore 'dialogism' is the expression of an author's ideas by means of a dialogue between two or more characters. Milton Sarkar cites Bakhtin's assertion that a literary text is not just a piece of writing whose meanings are created by the "play of impersonal linguistic or economic or cultural forces, but a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices…each of which is not merely a verbal but social phenomenon" (Sarkar 2018, p.38). In light of this, Snow (2015) argues that Othello instructs Desdemona to give him her hand only to comment that her hand is moist, referencing a sexual nature. His suspicion of her unfaithfulness gives covert expression to his disapproval of what he deems as a newly manifested sexual nature, as well as her failure to conceal it (Snow 2015, p.390). Desdemona replies that her hand has "felt no age nor known no sorrow", yet according to Snow (2015), this profession of innocence only seems to confirm the masculine anxieties Othello is trying to put to rest.

Othello says:

> This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.
> Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours requires
> A sequester from liberty, fasting, and prayer,
> Much castigation, exercise devout,
> For here's a young and sweating devil here,
> That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
> A frank one. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:37-43)

According to Snow (2015, p.390), Othello is cognisant that Desdemona's unbridled sexuality not only counters her innocence but supports the notion of her having a heart ready to love as indicated in Othello's words in the citation, "fruitfulness and liberal heart" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:43): it opens her to life as a woman and is the origin of her emotional commitment to Othello (2015, p.390). Othello's anxieties and fears force him to take this trait of Desdemona's as her vice. In an attempt to eradicate this unacceptable trait as evinced by her sweaty palms, he recommends religious instruction. Othello understands well the form of Christianity that functions not to absolve guilt but to instil it where there is an obstinate innocence.

Lodovico states that Desdemona is "Truly, an obedient lady" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:239). When Desdemona tells Lodovico of Othello's doubt about her fidelity, she displays her obedience to Othello by saying, "I will not stay to offend you" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:196). Desdemona affirms Lodovico's perception of her as obedient. However, Xu argues that some of Desdemona's behaviour and language demonstrate that she is disobedient in certain circumstances and is adequately audacious to resist the patriarchy (2019, p.7).

Hamamara (2020) asserts that Othello's language reveals that he is self-centred in that his focus is on the interpretation of his actions instead of the consequences for Desdemona. He says:

> then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well,
> Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,

Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe. (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:359-364)

Comparing Othello's senseless murder of Desdemona to the Indian who "threw a pearl away" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:345) implies a lack of recognition of her as a valued wife and an individual. Desdemona is again a "passive object of love" (Hamamara, 2020). Othello alludes to the objectification of female characters in that, like a pearl, she is lifeless and voiceless. According to Hamamara (2020), Desdemona's acceptance of the blame for her demise may be read as signs of her forgiveness of Othello. In her act of forgiveness she "courageously sacrifices the loss of her good name and gains the infamous reputation of a suicide" (Holmer, 2005, p.143). She forsakes her reputation for the sake of maintaining Othello's good name. She fulfils her duty as a wife who aims to serve and protect her husband. Doody argues that Desdemona's words are not simply passive, but a deliberate act of her will and her denial of Othello's part in her murder is more than simple subservience, but as Kaur (2015) claims, it is a deliberate refusal to entertain negative opinions of the husband she has chosen. This cements the esteem in which women hold their husbands. She disassociates deplorable behaviour from her husband and says:

My lord is not my lord, nor should I know him
were he in favour as in humour altered. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.3:124-25)

She does not attach the abuse to his identity as her husband. Pragati Das maintains that Desdemona "stands by her acceptance of her love for him as something sacred, with a martyr-like determination (Das, 2012, p.42). She tells Emilia, "his unkindness may defeat my life,/But never taint my love" (Shakespeare 1998, 4.2, p.161-62). In her role as a daughter and a wife, Desdemona is cognisant of how the male characters in her life receive her. Her actions reflected by her words aim not to displease them and shows a deliberate effort to align to their moods or intentions. When deliberating over her accommodation during Othello's stay in Cyprus ensues, she says,

Nor I; I would not there reside,
To put my father in impatient thoughts
By being in his eye. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:235-237)

In a conversation with Lodovico regarding Othello's doubt about her fidelity, her obedience to Othello becomes apparent when she says, "I will not stay to offend you" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:238). Shakespeare portrays her strength of character through the integrity that she displays when submitting to Othello's authority, as her action is in keeping with what she told Brabantio about the importance of being a dutiful and loyal wife. In Othello's response, his language is powerfully incendiary, and despite her contrasting tone of being calm, peaceful and placating, he does not cease in that he goes further and asks her whether she is a "Strumpet". His accusatory tone negates it as a question, and it remains an accusation levelled at Desdemona for being a prostitute. He does not afford her a chance to respond but refers to her as an "impudent strumpet" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2-83). Desdemona's response to his accusations is startlingly stoic. She very submissively states that

> No, as I am a Christian.
> If to preserve this vessel for my lord
> From any other foul unlawful touch
> Be not to be a strumpet, I am none. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:87-90)

Loomba and Sanchez (2016) interpret this as implying that Othello's touch is also unlawful: according to Loomba and Sanchez, Desdemona understands that Othello believes her to be a whore, and she is "metamorphosed by his bullying accusations into a curiously inert, cowering shadow of her former self" (2016, p.130). She lapses into a seeming passivity that contrasts markedly with her earlier vitality and free agency. Dympna Callaghan cites Dunsinberre, who states that to call a woman a whore not only casts aspersions on her morals but takes away her place in society (Callaghan, 2016, p.51). Women were generally deemed less than men and were expected to be submissive and generally keep a low profile compared to their husbands. It is clear that Othello is still the master in the relationship. Othello murders Desdemona, but she still stands up for his actions despite being wrong. Even in her responses and reactions to Othello's verbal abuse and actions, it becomes evident that Desdemona is increasingly subservient:

> Othello. Indeed!
> Desdemona. My lord?
> Othello. I am glad to see you mad.

Desdemona: Why, sweet Othello!

Othello: [Striking her] Devil!

Desdemona: I have not deserved this. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:184 -189)

Othello's reaction to Desdemona's reference to him as "sweet" reflects the esteem in which he holds her. However, after Othello, in his jealousy, has struck Desdemona and spoken harshly to her, she tells Iago, 'I am a child to chiding' (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:4). Protected by a system that makes women the weaker, dependent sex, Desdemona is unequipped to deal with such aggression; she is helpless against Othello. Desdemona's assertion that she did not deserve this treatment is indicative of her attempt to stand up for herself in the presence of Lodovico. Othello however does not take too kindly to this challenge and sees it as an attempt to undermine his position as the husband. Seeing that her assertiveness exacerbates the problem, Kaur claims that Desdemona thus retreats into childlike behaviour to escape reality (Kaur 2015, p.334).

Desdemona presents herself as "a child to chiding" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:4) who cannot negotiate for herself, and according to Bartels, she secures Iago's help to "win my lord again" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:149). Desdemona repeats her behaviour of relying on masculine influences to resolve her conundrums just as Cassio had to speak on Othello's behalf to convince Desdemona to engage in a relationship with him, so too is she now admitting her loss of power in her marriage and requesting Iago's intervention. According to Bartels (1996), the circumstances which surround Desdemona have changed. Desdemona is unable to interpret Othello's language and accusations. Despite his repeated accusations that she has been unfaithful, she continues to innocently ask, "What's the matter?" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.2:47). Bartels maintains that Desdemona is cognisant that her assertive articulation may work to her disadvantage and on the other hand neither will her obedience help her. In the face of Othello's distraction, Desdemona senses that only the intervention by Iago, ergo a man, may be effective (Bartels, 1996).

After Othello strikes Desdemona, Lodovico remarks, "did the letters work upon his blood?" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:275). These references to the state can be taken as pretexts, distractions from the "real" domestic drama. Lodovico's words serve to legitimise, almost excuse Othello's display of violence. Logically it may be perceived that he is pardoning his violent behaviour; if it is rooted in state politics, it is pardonable. In response to Lodovico's appeal to call Desdemona

back, Othello orders her to "turn," alluding to her adeptness at sexual engagements, "And turn again; and she can weep, sir [to Lodovico], weep;/And she's obedient, as you say, obedient, /Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears [to Desdemona]" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:273-277). Thus Othello implies that Desdemona is available to Lodovico or any other man because she is obedient. The message is clear that his judgement of his wife and, by extension, women have aligned to Iago's view of women as sexual creatures that need to be controlled.

Othello claims that his decision to kill Desdemona is intended to curtail her sexually deviant behaviour, "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.3:6). Nevertheless, Othello's ego supersedes his love for Desdemona. He is convinced of her infidelity but decides not to use his sword to kill her as he fears that he will "scar that whiter skin of hers than snow, as smooth as monumental alabaster" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:3-5). His words prove that he loves her, yet he is unwilling to allow her to ridicule him further with her infidelity. Derek Cohen (1992) claims that Othello's justification for murdering Desdemona is based on a rational system in which patrilineal succession and patriarchal authority are the cornerstones of the social process. Cohen elaborates that the process hinges on the sexual fidelity of women, and it, therefore, becomes the most pertinent value in the social structure. Othello's act which he describes as selfless or heroic in that he does it to prevent other transgressions, is intended to protect patriarchy. Although it may easily be perceived as an act of revenge for sexual betrayal, the political and the personal coalesce with particular force in cases of sexual offences (Cohen 1992).

Kaur maintains that Desdemona is helpless against Othello since she is not equipped to deal with such aggression; Desdemona thus retreats into childlike behaviour to escape from reality (Kaur, 2015, p.334). Kaur (2015) further asserts that it is because of Iago's insinuations that Othello's perception of Desdemona as his devoted wife, as opposed to his fear of her as a woman capable of infidelity, deepens. As a result, Othello spirals into a deep doubt:

> By the world,
> I think my wife be honest and think she is not;
> I think that thou art just and think thou art not.
> I'll have some proof. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3: 395- 398)

Despite his evident verbal confusion in his words, his actions speak volumes of the entrenched nature of the discriminatory treatment of women. Kaur concludes that in Othello's obstinacy, he refuses to hear Desdemona's denial of guilt and her protestations of innocence, thereby highlighting the subordination by the male (Kaur, 2015, p.334).

Desdemona is steadfast in her actions and unwavering in her views. Her strength of character amidst patriarchal authority while remaining dutiful and loyal, challenges our views of women in the 16th century. However, her ultimate demise forces us to consider the factor of the inevitability of her destruction as a female character.

7. Chapter 4: The role of language in entrenching gender inequities experienced by female characters in *Macbeth.*

Bakhtin's theory of Heteroglossia will be applied to the analysis of language as a conduit to reinforce Elizabethan stereotypes where contemporary questions of identity are explored through the lens of the socio-political background of *Macbeth*. Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth switch between different speech styles and registers; in this way, although reflecting the Elizabethan period, their speech is also audience-specific.

Sally McConnell-Ginet (2011) asserts that context is a determining factor of how people speak. She differentiates between different types of speakers; this is referred to as "communities of practice" and how their specific usage deliberately targets an audience (2011, p.17). The language of both male and female characters is underpinned by the conflict between femininity and masculinity which is in turn determined by societal expectations and gender-based concepts in Shakespearean England.

Femininity, or a lack thereof, in *Macbeth* is represented by Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff and the witches. Chakrabarti and Sarkar (2021) put forth that Lady Macbeth shares character traits with all the females in the play. Lady Macbeth, Hecate and the three witches do not restrict themselves to the feminine roles conferred by the patriarchal society and are considered evil. Yet, she and Lady Macduff have a positive characteristic in that they are both formidable people. In critical scenes within the play, when their husbands display weakness, the women remain resolute and do what they believe is right. Yet, Lady Macbeth has a very different conception of what is right than Lady Macduff. Lady Macbeth reveals her assertive, ambitious nature by persuading her husband to murder King Duncan, whereas Lady Macduff demonstrates her powerful nature in her fierce protectiveness when seeking to shield her son from Macbeth's murderers.

Raznah states that "Lady Macbeth is more associated with the wicked and cruel picture of medieval women that was drawn by society's misogynist attitude" (2019, p.133). The maternal dependency identified in *Othello* is mirrored in the sequence of events prior to Macbeth's execution of regicide. In his letter, Macbeth professes joy at sharing with his spouse the witches' prophecy. He displays a need for Lady Macbeth's validation that the witches prophesy is something to seriously consider instead of dismissing. He has no intention on acting on the information and places this

responsibility in the hands of his wife. In this, Macbeth offers agency to his wife who is the only one to create the regicide plot. Although her action is altruistically driven as her focus is the upward propulsion of her husband, she is well aware of how nasty and villainous their intended behaviour is. Macbeth is dependent on his wife's initiative and backing. She immediately starts working on a lengthy strategy to quickly bring her husband to the throne. When Macbeth loses his strength of character and is unable to move on psychologically, she plays a crucial role in the murder's planning and assumes total control. Despite her role in devising the plan, the ultimate decision to murder Duncan hinges on her ability to convince her husband to act. Macbeth argues,

> He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:12-16)

His hesitation is indicative of his moral dilemma; however, Lady Macbeth's ability to persuade him to go ahead with the plan symbolises the power that she has over Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's language and action indicate a disruption of gender roles as she initially usurps the dominant role in her marriage. However, the brevity of her dominance reveals that her attempt to break traditional roles leads to her inevitable demise. Raznah (2019) offers a differing view on Lady Macbeth's intention and disagrees that her plan of regicide was a selfless act supporting her husband's upward mobility. She states that "Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth is madly motivated to become the queen of Scotland, and this leads her to urge her husband, Macbeth, to accomplish her scheme of murdering Duncan, the King of Scotland" (Raznah, 2019, p.133). Thus, her actions can be perceived as selfish yet partially altruistic as Raznah argues that her need for the aggrandisement of her husband is a trait typical of females in that "Lady Macbeth paved the way for her husband's kingship because of her feminine passion to raise her family to royalty" (2019, p.133).

Lady Macbeth, however, does not accede to Macbeth's moral reasoning as to why Duncan should not be murdered. She says:

> The raven himself is hoarse
> that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> under my battlements. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:34-36)

Her words accentuate her inner darkness as the raven represents death and evil power. In comparison to her intention of regicide, the raven's strength pales, and it is rendered unable to communicate the news of Duncan's imminent death. Furthermore, these words are spoken shortly before her "unsex me" soliloquy and foreshadow the imminent revelation of the darkness of her soul. The confidence with which she refers to Duncan's entrance as fatal is symbolic of her steadfastness in adhering to her plan of killing King Duncan, unlike Macbeth, who deliberates over whether or not to kill Duncan and who wrestles with loyalty to his King. Emma King posits that Shakespeare's complicated gendered depiction of Lady Macbeth is designed such that the play is an iteration of an entrenched archetype that depicts women and their rage (King, 2019). Lady Macbeth despises the self-effacing qualities and values commonly ascribed to womanhood, and she seeks to eliminate all traces of them in herself:

> 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 the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The 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. 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!" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:40-54)

Lady Macbeth commands spirits to unsex her, thereby eliminating female qualities of tenderness, compassion and mercy, which she perceives as signs of weakness or a hindrance in achieving her objectives. She is cognisant of her limitations but is portrayed as adequately malevolent and deceitful to successfully carry out this dastardly deed. Lady Macbeth wants to be devoid of any human emotion to feel no regret or guilt. She pleads that her breast milk, which symbolises life, purity, and motherhood, be turned to bile, symbolic of her intended evil. Her plea reinforces Shakespeare's characterisation of the female character as a villainous individual. The language used in this soliloquy reveals a psychological dimension of Lady Macbeth as she decides to become a murderer. According to Jenijoy La Belle (1980), Lady Macbeth's references to specific parts of the human body have their intellectual context in Elizabethan physiological psychology in which functions and processes of the body were believed to have mental consequences. She summons the spirits to unsex her psychologically so that all emotion will be stripped away but also "to free herself of the basic psychological characteristics of femininity, she is asking the spirits to eliminate the basic biological characteristics of femininity" (Belle 1980, p.381). Janet Adelman concurs with Belle and states, "the metaphors in which Lady Macbeth frames the stopping up of remorse, that is, suggests that she imagines an attack on the reproductive passages of her own body, on what makes her specifically female" (2010, p.40).

Adelman (2010) asserts that when she invites the spirits to her breasts, she reiterates the centrality of the attack, specifically on undoing her maternal function. Her soliloquy represents her perception of what a man should be. Baskkaran and Tamilarasan (2020) cite Lady Macbeth's words as a shocking attack on masculinity, underscoring that a man should be robust, cruel, lacking in conscience and showing no remorse. Hannah Lee (2019) suggests that Lady Macbeth demonises her role as a maternal figure to participate in violence and political conspiracy. Lady Macbeth is, however, unique in that her act of unsexing herself makes possible the absence of a prescribed gender identity. This gender ambiguity results in the action of Lady Macbeth being unrestrained by the dictates of society or predetermined female qualities. Her decision to make her gender incoherent allows her to use her rage without permission from men. She feels liberated to sidestep all of the requirements of a female so that she can completely embody the role of the master

strategist to antagonise Macbeth into committing regicide. The act of unsexing needs both cruelty and unrepentant guilt. Lady Macbeth manages to do this because identity and power depend on the discussion of concepts inherent to one's gender; without the gender identity, she enjoys the freedom to select behaviour that will best suit her purpose.

Her famous soliloquy, one by which Lady Macbeth's character is defined, reveals more than just her obsession with being stripped of her feminine qualities; it reveals her insight into the limitations that her gender holds. Her desire to be unsexed stems from her desire to perform deeds that are atypical of a female. A post-structuralist analysis reinforces the inversion of masculine and feminine in the initial stages of the play however as the play progresses, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are reinstated to the stereotypical roles as male and female, respectively.

Lady Macbeth's allusion to the potential of motherhood with her reference to a woman's breast and milk, amid her dreadful language, reveals her gentle and feminine trait as she admits to knowing and experiencing the tenderness of loving a child. She also reveals an awareness that that gentle, feminine side will translate to her inability to effect her plan, so she renounces such attributes brazenly and prioritises the plan to usurp power over her maternal instincts. Her speech also reveals her dependency. She is unable to execute her plan independently. She calls on the spirits to unsex her to be able to see the plan through. This act indicates her dependency on external forces, thereby fulfilling the stereotype of the weak female, alluding to the inevitability of her destruction.

However, Cristina León Alfar (2003, p.125) claims that Lady Macbeth's speech is not motivated by an individualised agency because it serves to support the power and ambition of her husband. Alfar explains that "action for her, therefore, is always a fantasy with no substance" (2003, p.125). By this logic, Alfar argues that Lady Macbeth's attempt at conjuring spirits emphasises aspects of her role that are far removed from reality. Her impetuosity is significant in that her decision to murder Duncan is an immediate response to Macbeth's letter apprising her of the witches' prediction.

This impetuosity and her failure to circumvent the potential backlash is indicative of her myopia as opposed to Macbeth, who says:

> We will proceed no further in this business.
> He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:31-35)

Macbeth is rational and puts forth a valid argument against committing murder. Macbeth's reluctance is symbolic of his moral conscience, juxtaposed to Lady Macbeth's complete disregard for morality. Macbeth's refusal to carry out the heinous act suggested by his wife speaks of the importance he attaches to the honour he has received. His words are typical of an honourable and level-headed soldier. His ambition and greed do not impact the initial decision regarding the disruption of the natural order; his reluctance is voiced. George Gerwig (1985) argues that Lady Macbeth's loving character stems from her femininity; he states that her heart is set on gaining sovereignty for her husband, and she is unable to acknowledge any obstacle to her wish and its fulfilment. His justification is that Lady Macbeth's action is without careful consideration, and in its thoughtlessness, it is criticised as typically female as if thoughtlessness was the cause of Lady Macbeth's destruction and a characteristic feminine quality. Antonella Gravina (2020) asserts that the apparent contrast with Macbeth, in this case, shows the two different starting points of both characters: "the woman's ruthless obstinacy and lack of principles [is set] against the wavering attitude of Macbeth, torn between morality and his own ambition reinforced by the effective influence of his wife" (2020, p.15).

To a limited extent, I agree that Lady Macbeth's action is thoughtless in that she fails to consider the ramifications in the way that Macbeth has. He is aware that God ordains the King, and to kill a king will be a sin. Macbeth's deep deliberation is reinforced when he considers the possibility of the plan not working. He asks, “If we should fail?” (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:58). His deliberation indicates his ability to consider the impact of his actions, which shows his control and reason. However, Maria Howell argues that this question reveals a man that is undone, completely

"unmanned", reduced to a helpless child at the mercy of an all-consuming maternal presence (2004, p.15).

Mary Eagleton (2010) cites Luce Irigaray's argument that Lady Macbeth's mimicry of male speech renders a gender parody by incorporating female elements of speech, although she still insists on speaking as a male subject (Eagleton, 2010). Eagleton describes Irigaray's claims that Lady Macbeth's use of mimicry means that she must then recognise her feminine speech and replace it with a pseudo-male voice. However, this mimesis is indicative of women's ability "of bringing new nourishment to the language's operation" (Eagleton, 2010, p.308). Lady Macbeth brings this new nourishment by responding to Macbeth's fear of failure in a bold and confident tone, hence adopting a pseudo-male voice:

> We fail!
> But screw your courage to the stickingplace
> And we'll not fail. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:59-61)

This moment of courage highlights her perspective in their marriage: she sees it as a partnership where she has to fulfil her duties as a wife. Macbeth displays maternal dependence on her as he relies on her for her comfort and reassurance, and in her response, she is successful in assuaging his fears.

Lady Macbeth's inability to accept the validity of Macbeth's concerns represents her lack of understanding of political structure and intrigue. According to Dall (2000), Shakespeare implicitly suggests the danger of women's involvement in politics at the sovereign level through Lady Macbeth's unbridled political ambition. Her response to Macbeth's hesitation further evinces this lack of understanding as she begins to mock Macbeth and challenges his masculinity. Her response accentuates two elements of her character; firstly, she is out of her depth in understanding the political order in Scotland and cannot present an argument steeped in this context. Secondly, it highlights her deep understanding of the male ego, and she uses this to bully Macbeth into action.

She says:

> 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? (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:35-45)

Lady Macbeth is not entirely irrational and imprudent in that she considers the elements of Macbeth's nature that may impede her plan. She is aware that Macbeth is:

> too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:17-18)

She therefore feels she must ensure that Macbeth is sufficiently prepared psychologically to see the plan through. Her use of recognisable gender constructs reveals her ambition. Her concern is that her husband is too weak-willed to accomplish the prophesied rise in status that the witches promised. Her use of the word 'milk' evokes images of a woman, mother, and selfless nourishment. These are archetypal traits of a female. She equates human kindness to a specifically feminine trait, and in saying that Macbeth is full of human kindness, she reveals her lack of faith in him being able to draw on his masculinity to commit the murder. The inversion of gender identity is further exemplified in that Lady Macbeth appropriates the voice of the patriarchy and condemns Macbeth for the fact that his emotions lack productivity. Hannah Lee states that Lady Macbeth "feminises Macbeth by saying that he is full of milk as though Macbeth would have been the one to nurse their children" (2019, p.28).

Lady Macbeth clarifies that Macbeth is:

> not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:15-16).

In Lady Macbeth's opinion, ambition means nothing if wickedness and a lack of conscience do not assist in the enterprise. Lady Macbeth sustains control over the dialogue even when her husband returns to the scene. She addresses him with authority and a staccato of imperatives when she advises:

> 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. He that's coming
> Must be provided for, and 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:59-66)

Her commanding speech structure is used when speaking to Macbeth to demand his focus and implies a lack of emotional stealth. Lady Macbeth is concerned that Macbeth's facial expression reveals his feelings, and for a man, this is a lack of political finesse, but it can easily be reconfigured as emotional fragility and incapability of restraint in a woman. The advice she gives directly correlates to her need for transformation to achieve her goals. Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a cunning and manipulative character in her machinations to execute her plan of regicide. She is responsible for the change in Macbeth's view on murdering Duncan, and the act of feigning innocence while possessing evil intentions reflects the extent to which her actions are deliberately and intentionally villainous. Her words evoke the image of the deadly serpent hidden under an innocent flower. Finally, Lady Macbeth instructs Macbeth on how to mask his plan to dispose of Duncan (Gravina, 2020, p.11).

Janet Adelman (2010) asserts that maternal power in *Macbeth* is not embodied exclusively in a particular mother; it is differentially used in female characters but is evoked primarily by Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's language changes as her husband's murderous intent does. She employs

rhetorical questions as conspicuous expressions of disbelief. She insults his inconsistent bravery and doubts his masculinity to align his conduct with hers. She says,

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:47-54)

According to Antonella Gravina (2020), Lady Macbeth undermines Macbeth to the extent that he feels a compulsion to prove his manhood as she is aware that men's weaknesses are vulnerable to female language, especially since women are exposed to their weaknesses. Maria Howell (2008) claims that although Elizabethan cultural constructions of gender and sexuality are essentially autonomous entities, they are nonetheless interrelated to each other and relevant social, cultural and political practices of the sixteenth century. Lady Macbeth is vicious in her disapproval, she is not only scathing in her attack of his renegation on his promise, but she goes further to destroy his self-esteem and the confidence he has in himself. Howell states that "Lady Macbeth reinforces masculine notions of ambition and desire and at the same time undermines and negates Macbeth's volition and power to act" (2008, p.14). In her acknowledgement of her role as a female, Lady Macbeth is also aware of the extent she has to go to prove her resolve. She declares:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.4:54-59)

She is highly spirited and speaks courageously to convince Macbeth that her plan will be easy to execute. In so doing, she is proving that she has defeminised herself and will display no maternal

affiliation even to her child, although maternal affection is typical of females and mothers. Perhaps, she proclaims her willingness to commit filicide in order to prove her loyalty to her husband thereby manipulating him to abide by his promise to carry out her murderous plots. She expresses her bestial willingness of filicide as a means to substantiate her allegiance to her husband's solemn promise of carrying out her bloody schemes. Raznah (2019) asserts that Lady Macbeth's gruesome description of potential infanticide stems from an awareness of the egotistical complex of males to prove their manhood. She uses this hyperbole as a means of communicating the gravity of an oath taken.

Chelsea Phillips explains that Lady Macbeth's infanticidal language, her willingness to perpetrate violence in order to achieve her ambition, and her manipulation of her husband opens the character "to alignment with some of the worst stereotypes of both masculinity and femininity: violence, ambition, lack of compassion, manipulation, seduction, and ruination" (Phillips, 2013, p.353). Such ambivalence of gendered activity coincides with Lady Macbeth's obsession to be "unsexed" by supernatural powers. Emma King (2019) offers an opposing view that Lady Macbeth's words indicate an uncharacteristic tenderness and love emphasising her role as a mother and a guardian of growth. This view highlights the maternal role she plays in her facilitation of Macbeth's coup. Lady Macbeth is, however, unable to sustain the masculine persona that she portrayed in her claim that she would murder her nursing child. This is shortly exposed as she confesses to Macbeth that her inability to murder Duncan herself is rooted in the resemblance of the sleeping Duncan to her father (Alfar, 2003, p.63). Macbeth listens to Lady Macbeth's plan of murdering Duncan and feels a sense of pride at her bravery and declares:

> Bring forth men-children only!
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.7:72-74)

Macbeth's comment indicates that he recognises his wife's masculine nature and fearless spirit. He alludes to the fact that her unparalleled valour renders her worthy of producing male heirs. Howell (2008) says that this reaffirms his admiration for her sense of masculine virtue and, by implication, confirms his lack thereof. Christina Alfar suggests that "Macbeth recognises in her not only the

fearlessness of a man but the maker of men" (2003, p.127). Lady Macbeth's words serve to re-masculinise Macbeth as he reverts to his initial resolve to commit murder. Lady Macbeth declares,

> Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't. (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.2:12-13)

Her trepidation to commit murder is evidence that despite summoning evil forces to unsex her, she possesses the innate femininity that hinders her from performing such acts. Her cowardice lies in the fact that she refuses to admit to this weakness and uses Duncan's resemblance to her father as an excuse. William Hazlitt argues that her hesitation indicates that "there is murder and filial piety together, and in urging him to fulfil his vengeance against the defenceless king, her thoughts spare the blood neither of infants nor old age" (Price, 2014, p.28). Her inability to execute the murder herself reveals that the fatherhood's enduring power is more dominant than any other male bond to Lady Macbeth.

Raznah argues that "the paternal authority proscribes Lady Macbeth's bloodthirst to assassinate the king" (2019, p.137). This consolidates the notion that Lady Macbeth is very aware of the patriarchal structure of Elizabethan times and has imbued this latently in her behaviour, although she tries to defy the very structure. Dreher states that "patriarchal norms allow women only two choices in life: domination by father figures or defiance and loss of love, yet such repressed and imbalanced women have become models of traditional femininity" (2021, p.11). Lady Macbeth had no reservation in committing regicide and infanticide, but her unwillingness to kill Duncan is actually a hesitation to commit patricide due to his striking resemblance to her father. John Drakakis argues that her reluctance in accomplishing the murder is due to "a residual patriarchal imperative" (2013, p.10) that inevitably causes her earlier resolve to kill Macbeth to be weakened.

Lady Macbeth claimed earlier that her reluctance to kill the sleeping Duncan is due to his resemblance to her father. She contradicts herself in a later scene when Macbeth is unable to muster the courage to return to the scene of the crime to smear blood on the daggers of the guards. She says:

> Infirm of purpose!
> Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead

Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt. (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.1:52-57)

Despite her reluctance to kill the sleeping Duncan due to his resemblance to her father, she now claims that the sleeping and the dead are just pictures. Lady Macbeth lambastes Macbeth for bringing back incriminating evidence. Her words "infirm of purpose" refer to Macbeth's weak resolve as his will is unsteady. She is berating him because he is afraid to take the bloody daggers back to Duncan's chambers. Macbeth was the active agent in the murder of Duncan, albeit goaded along by Lady Macbeth. She chastises him for reverting to an unmanly state since his adherence to their purpose has weakened.

Emma King (2019) asserts that Lady Macbeth emasculates Macbeth and highlights her mental sharpness and superiority as a result of the transfer of agency to her. Thus, she must assume the identity of a man to ensure that they are both exonerated. Emma King (2019) argues further that the 'dagger,' which signifies both Macbeth's masculinity and his ability or unwillingness to act aggressively, must be taken from him and handed to her.

Lady Macbeth perceives masculinity as having the propensity to violence, so by deliberately snatching her husband's daggers, she embodies the role and conscience of a murderer, "becoming metaphorically transgendered, her un–or re-sexing coming to fruition" (King, 2019, p.43). In addition, Macbeth's maternal dependency is once again accentuated in that Lady Macbeth takes on the persona of the mother protecting and taking responsibility for Macbeth's shortfall. Finally, upon the revelation of King Duncan's murder, Macduff, in his response to Lady Macbeth, reveals his perception of women:

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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.3:73-76)

Macduff's reaction to Lady Macbeth being apprised of the news of Macbeth's death indicates his stereotypical view of females as it aligns to sixteenth-century perceptions. Ironically, Macduff is addressing the woman who has consistently shown herself to be cold, cruel, sadistic, remorseless, actually bloodthirsty in a manner that indicates she will not be able to handle the harsh news of Duncan's murder. Furthermore, he believes that women are emotionally fragile and is reluctant to describe what he has just seen because he sincerely believes that Lady Macbeth possesses stereotypical traits of being gentle.

Chakrabuthy (2021) posits that in the context of men ignoring her mental strength, Lady Macbeth's ambition designs can be studied as her efforts to validate her cultural self in a world that treats women as minor. Lady Macbeth utilises Macduff's expectation of her emotional weakness to assist Macbeth. When Macduff questions Macbeth's intentions in murdering the guards, she expeditiously says. "Help me hence, ho!" (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.3:18), strategically monopolising the view of women as being weak and feigns fainting. She confirms the stereotypical view that men have of women to their advantage, highlighting her villainous machinations. In this, like Desdemona, Lady Macbeth proves that her duty as a wife supporting and protecting her husband has been internalised and prioritised.

The inversion of gender roles is steadily undone after Macbeth's coronation. Macbeth's nervousness after hearing of the execution of his instructions to murder Banquo leads him to experience yet another delirium at a banquet that he hosted; he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting at his place at the table.

His state of guilt and nervousness is juxtaposed to Lady Macbeth's ability to take the responsibility of detracting attention by reassuring his guests with her firmness and self-confidence that it is a momentary fit:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.3:54-59)

Upon the ghost's reappearance, Macbeth becomes visibly distressed and is again reliant on Lady Macbeth to assuage the fears or the suspicions of the guests, highlighting Macbeth's maternal dependency on her. She exemplifies this maternal role in encouraging him, like a mother would to her son, to be strong and brave like a man. Gravina (2020) argues that the ease in which she diminishes Macbeth's disjointed phrases “by brilliantly coming up with an illness as an excuse denotes that her strong will and ability at handling a potentially dangerous situation have not diminished” (2020, p.25). Lady Macbeth castigates him for being "unmanned in folly", once again expecting Macbeth to align to her perception of masculinity, a perception that based on societal expectations that she has inadvertently internalised, instead of challenging.

The reinstatement of their gender roles is highlighted with Macbeth's expectation of Lady Macbeth to "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" (Shakespeare, 2005, 3.2:45). He resumes the traditional role of the husband who desires his wife's passivity. His expectations of Lady Macbeth shifts from a role of maternal support to an innocent, complying and ignorant female. What is significant in the shift of his expectations, is that the overriding factor of stereotypical female behaviour persists.

Lady Macduff is a foil to Lady Macbeth in that she is a woman who, though left helpless by her husband's departure, can think and act independently. Lady Macduff is represented as a domesticated wife in her inability to lead the defence of their castle in the absence of her husband. She is portrayed as helpless without her husband's protection. She is easy prey to the assassins who violate her domestic space. However, she is vociferous in expressing her annoyance over the fact that Macduff did not inform her of his departure for England. Her anger, is contextualised as being rooted in the fact that she and the children were left unprotected. Lady Macduff expresses her expectation of Macbeth fulfilling his role as man and father, one of protection and control. This serves to cement her vulnerability. She expresses her total helplessness by lamenting:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.2:6-14)

Lady Macduff's response to Ross regarding Macduff's whereabouts presents a transparent foil for the demonised Lady Macbeth. Greenfield (2013) states that Lady Macduff does not simply accept her husband's political duty; she raises controversial questions regarding his primary responsibility to his family over his political obligations. She voices her disapproval of Macduff's perspective and challenges the political ideology of the play. Lady Macduff foregrounds her duty as a mother, thereby aligning herself to the stereotypical female who places her family's safety above everything else. Irene G. Dash (1997) argues that Lady Macduff's inclusion and contrast to Lady Macbeth examines the reasons for a woman's action and the sharp contrast between her outlook and that of Lady Macbeth's. It focuses on the stereotypical rationale that determines their moral decisions.

Lady Macbeth initiates a plan for her husband to seize the Scottish throne although he is not entitled to it; Lady Macduff, however, condemns her husband for fleeing to England and leaving his family in mortal danger. The juxtaposition of their respective modus operandi, the intentions that drive their actions, and their actions prove that Lady Macduff embodies the typical traits of an ideal Elizabethan female. She prioritises her family instead of blindly and maliciously abetting her husband's fulfilment of his political agenda. The characterisation of Lady Macduff in terms of conventional prejudices and stereotypes is supported further by male attitudes towards women, which are intermittently uttered in the course of the play. For example, Ross, in response to Lady Macduff's anger, states:

My dearest coz,
I pray you school yourself. But for your husband,
He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
The fits o' th' season. (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.2:14-17)

His failure to empathise with Lady Macduff's frustration reflects the patriarchal system. He further attempts to manipulate Lady Macduff into thinking that her feelings are not valid by suggesting she "school" herself, intimating that she lacks knowledge about the political order as a female. His

praise of Macduff contrasts his criticism of Lady Macduff and further exemplifies his patriarchal outlook.

Hannah Lee (2019) states that Lady Macduff becomes a pillar of maternal vulnerability as she and her children have been abandoned. Lee nevertheless draws parallels between the two women in that "the maternal and androgynous power within Lady Macduff and Lady Macbeth exposes the uselessness of their husbands and the fatal mistakes that they make" (2019, p.31). Lady Macduff has to watch her children get murdered, and she is eventually murdered as well. Lady Macbeth constantly goads Macbeth and challenges his masculinity to fuel their political desires. Lady Macduff's inability to take effective action in the face of danger indicates her sense of helplessness:

> 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? (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.2:68-74)

Christina Alfa argues that the repeated questioning of why she should flee and the lack of confidence in the rationalisation of her unwillingness to flee points to Goldberg's claim that "masculinity in the play is directed as an assaultive attempt to secure power, to maintain success and succession, at the expense of women" (2003, p.259). Lady Macduff justifiably feels abandoned by Macduff as he seeks support for Scotland. However, the deaths of Macduff's wife and children constitute a significant incitement to action. Malcolm reminds Macduff that he must avenge the deaths of his wife and children like a man would. Malcolm’s words, "dispute it as a man" (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.3:221), emphasises what is typical masculine behaviour, echoing Lady Macbeth's sentiments demanding that Macbeth display behaviour that reflects his masculinity ergo bravery and violence.

It is ironic that despite Lady Macbeth's chastisement of her husband for his weakness, Lady Macbeth succumbs to the guilt over her villainous deeds. Once again, an inversion of roles is highlighted for Lady Macbeth's deprecation is conversely aligned to Macbeth's show of bravado.

The gentlewoman's description of Lady Macbeth accentuates the opposing directions that Lady Macbeth's and Macbeth's characters are taking:

> Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her
> bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth
> paper, fold it, write upon 't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return
> to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep. (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:3-6)

While Macbeth appears to have resumed his persona of the formidable force on the battlefield, Lady Macbeth starts to present behaviour symbolic of her mental instability. The gentlewoman's description of Lady Macbeth's repetitive behaviour indicates her cognitive decline. Lady Macbeth is enfeebled and crippled which is caused by the guilt of her evil deeds. She says:

> Out, damned spot! Out, I say! – One, two. Why, then, 'tis time to do 't.
> Hell is murky! – Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we
> fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? – Yet who
> would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.
> (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:25-30)

She becomes obsessed with carrying light around her constantly, and her obsession with the darkness reveals her fear, which is in stark contrast to her earlier invocation of the " murd'ring ministers" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.5:48). She tries to get rid of the guilt of being instrumental in murder, and she desperately desires to wash off the blood that represents the foul act of murder by literally washing her hands. Instead, she is reduced to sleepwalking through the castle, desperately trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain. This is a clear contrast to her earlier desire to be filled with cruelty.

Lady Macbeth has been reduced to a figure who sleepwalks and talks of murder in her sleep. Michelle Labbe asserts, "Lady Macbeth is no longer able to sleep restfully—because her conscience finally begins to trouble her and because this affliction is perhaps a form of divine punishment for her" (2010, p.16). The somnambulism indicates her decline into psychological disorder and mirrors Macbeth's earlier hallucinations; however, unlike Macbeth, Lady Macbeth cannot draw on her masculinity as the feminine side of her nature eventually overwhelms her.

Lady Macbeth's sensitivity is a weakness, and she is unable to cope. There is a poetic justice in this punishment; having deprived Duncan of peace and rest, she can no longer sleep peacefully, either. Lady Macbeth is increasingly consumed by guilt for her evil acts that she eventually loses her mind. Thus, the tragedy becomes a portrayal of the psychological breakdown of a forceful figure to a feeble one. It is ironic yet not entirely unexpected given the traditional role of the female that the hard-hearted Lady Macbeth eventually collapses under the weight of guilt. Her monologue reflects her obsession with the washing of her hands, yet ironically it is Lady Macbeth that dismisses Macbeth's regret of having blood on his hands earlier by saying:

> A little water clears us of this deed.
> How easy is it, then! (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.2:67-68)

Lady Macbeth faces a similar affliction, but in contrast to her support of Macbeth earlier, she is alone to face her guilt. She rambles:

> The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? –What, will these hands
> ne'er be clean? – No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that. You mar all
> with this starting. (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:31-33)

Even Lady Macbeth, who seems to be the most precise representation of evil at the beginning of the play, painfully discovers her good nature after the murder of Macduff's family, for the guilt it causes drives her mad. She laments the death of Lady Macduff and, although she is speaking incoherently, attaches blame to herself even though Macbeth had excluded her from his plans of murders subsequent to that of Duncan's. Her descent into madness evinces her inability to sustain her "masculine" power. She defines herself in her role as the adviser and consoler of her husband. Lady Macbeth views her exclusion as rejection, but Alfar maintains that "even in her madness, her language remains informed by masculinist structures of power" (2003, p.128). Fuad Nabhan claims that "her womanliness comes out [in] its truest colour" (2020, p.28). Unlike Macbeth, who forges ahead with unparalleled strength, she can no longer handle the guilt of committing a series of murders; she is driven to a state in which she begins to walk and talk in her sleep. Nabhan, therefore, describes Lady Macbeth as the "lesser devil than her husband in the sense that she never instructs or advises her husband to murder Banquo or massacre Lady Macduff or any of her innocent children" (2020, p.29). Lady Macbeth's involvement in Duncan's murder, is enough to

upset the equilibrium of her mind. When her mind finally succumbs to the terrible pressure she has placed upon it, her unconscious utterances reveal a trait of her personality that she has been fighting to eradicate. Her stifled remorse reveals itself in her restless sleep; she sighs thrice, which speaks of her sorely-charged heart. After being unable to sleep due to being guilt-riddled, it is significant that Lady Macbeth's final words are instructions to herself to go to bed. These words show how guilt has crushed her solid and assertive personality. She speaks in her sleep and says:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:49-51)

Emma King (2019) states that Lady Macbeth's rageful and passionate pursuit of violence, as well as her susceptibility to guilt, suggest what Coppelia Kahn identifies as a "typical identification of women with an arbitrary, insatiable, and inscrutable desire that bespeaks a fear of engulfment or absorption by them" (2019, p.8). Lady Macbeth quotes her, and Macbeth's earlier words which mention Duncan's murder, Banquo's ghost and Lady Macduff, enacting her complicity in these acts. According to Ariela Berkman (2019), the text suggests that the amount of power Lady Macbeth wields, destabilises the natural gender order. On the other hand, the destabilisation is corrected when she eventually loses her mind as a result of the shame that was caused by her transgressions. The re-establishment of the normal gender order is made possible as a result of her transformation from a powerful and unnaturally masculine character into a much weaker and more incapacitated woman.

The three witches indisputably play a pivotal role in the catalysis of Macbeth's acts of murder. An analysis of the female-based supernatural powers in *Macbeth* reveals the importance of gender in fitting into society. The witches are used to support the patriarchy and reinforce the notion that women must assume their rightful place within society. The construction of the identity of the witches is established at the very beginning when they say:

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
> Hover through the fog and filthy air. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.1:11-12)

Their regular use of paradoxes indicates their ability bring chaos and corruption. The witches are unequivocally confirmed as the perpetrators of evil. On the way back from the battle, Macbeth and Banquo meet the three witches who give them prophecies about Macbeth's future. The witches shout,

> First witch. All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Glamis!
> Second witch. All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!
> Third witch. All hail, Macbeth that shalt be king hereafter. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.3:49-51)

The witches' reverence and respect for Macbeth indicate their awareness of his superiority, and in their salutation, they acknowledge and accept this patriarchal structure; however, it juxtaposes the utter disregard and lack of esteem given to them. Chakrabarti and Sarkar (2021) claim that the witches have evolved on a spiritual, intellectual and psychological level. This claim is evinced in their initial accurate prediction and use of equivocation to mislead Macbeth. Macbeth and Banquo are ensnared and desire more information from the witches. Ironically, despite their dependence on information from the witches, they do not refrain from insulting them.

When Macbeth and Banquo initially meet the three witches on the heath, Banquo states that he is unsure of what they are. Banquo seeks typical features that will categorise the witches as either male or female, and he cites their beards, which is a physical trait of a male, as the reason he cannot determine whether they are male or female. As a result of their inability to adhere to the prescribed notions of what a female should look like, Banquo announces that the witches "look not like th' inhabitants o' th' Earth" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.3:41).

According to Alfar (2003), the witches' gender instability, mysterious powers and malice towards men represent "typical early modern anxieties about female agency" (2003, p.117). Banquo says upon seeing the witches:

> What are these
> So withered and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' Earth,
> And yet are on't? — Live you? Or are you aught
> That man may question? You seem to understand me,

By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.3:39-47)

The fact that the witches cannot be categorised as female or feminine "naturally categorises them among feminists who are politically active by nature" (Chakrabarti and Sarkar, 2021, p.4). This rings true of the witches since they were aware of the political structure in Scotland and were intelligent enough to manipulate and motivate powerful men like Banquo and Macbeth to act in specific ways. However, unlike Lady Macbeth, the power the witches wield over Macbeth does not diminish. Throughout the story, the witches play a pivotal role in all of Macbeth's decisions, and their ambiguous prophecies coupled with Macbeth's avarice and blind ambition finally lead to his downward spiral. The power that the witches wield, on the other hand, poses a threat to the natural gender order that the author has constructed, and this can be interpreted as the reason for the lack of femininity in their characterisation (Higgins, 2016). In essence, in order for the witches to legitimately keep control over Macbeth, they must be considered male, or at the very least, their femininity must become ambiguous and indeterminate (Higgins, 2016). This is because it is significantly more acceptable according to the norms of society for the male to maintain control. In spite of the fact that this seems to assign power to men, in reality it places power in the hands of women and disrupts established gender hierarchies regarding authority.

Chakrabarti and Sarkar (2021) cite Pam Grossman's claim that witches are regarded as terrifying beings that exist beyond the bounds of society. Even female critics like Carol Atherton argue that the witches are malevolent forces in the plot, and that their characters perfectly synchronise with the myths that surrounded witches in those days (Atherton 2017). On the other hand, Chakrabarti and Sarkar (2021) argue that the witches are exploited beings that engage in mischief in order to gain greater significance.

According to Chakrabarti and Sarkar's explanation, females are more likely to employ poetic language, therefore a feminine quality of witches can be deduced from the fact that they use poetic language. The language that is spoken by the witches in Macbeth is distinct from the language that is spoken by the majority of the play's other characters. The witches speak primarily in rhyming

couplets like: “Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble” (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.1:77-78). The way they speak emphasises that they are different from other characters; they exist outside of the natural order, so they speak unnaturally. The porter who speaks in prose uses this manner of speaking, which indicates his lack of sophistication and education. The porter is a minor character; however, he faces unique struggles that can be attributed to inebriation and delirium. The porter is responsible for opening the gate to the castle. He is awoken from a drunken slumber upon hearing knocking at the door and believes it to be his imagination:

> Knock, knock, knock! Who's there,
> i' th' name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer that hanged himself on
> the expectation of plenty. Come in Time! Have napkins enough about you,
> here you'll sweat for't. (Shakespeare, 2005, 2.3:2-5)

Lady Macbeth, in her madness, speaks in prose –even descending to doggerel with the rhyme of **'Fife'** and **'wife' (**Shakespeare, 2005, 5.1:30). According to David Krantz, the queen's duplicated diction, rhyme, and alliteration are compulsive and illogical, highlighting her descent into madness (Krantz, 2003).

Lady Macbeth is intrepid and controlling initially, but her husband gradually alienates her as he reverts to the expectation of her submissiveness and passivity. Lady Macbeth's death is not enacted onstage in comparison to the dramatics associated with Lady Macbeth's evil thoughts of infanticide, gender neutering and her loss of sanity. It is merely reported. Lady Macbeth, who orchestrates such a cataclysmic social and political upheaval, has an anticlimactic death, announced implicitly by the distant cries of women in the castle. Seyton's report that "The queen, my lord, is dead" (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.5:16) is key in unpacking the importance of Lady Macbeth's death in the backdrop of an imminent usurpation of the King's power. An announcement that reveals the death of a queen ought to be momentous; however, it is made public in six quick words. In so doing, the absence of language just as effectively as the presence of language serves to entrench the subservience and lack of eminence associated with women. Lady Macbeth never escaped the confines of her gender.

8. Chapter: 5: The manner in which male foils accentuate the weaknesses of the leading female characters in *Othello* and *Macbeth.*

In Shakespearean literature, a recurring factor of separation between individuals in a society is gender. The societal expectation was that men were the dominant figures in the relationship, while women were more submissive. Diane Elizabeth Dreher describes the Elizabethan society as an:

> interlocking succession of social strata, each level looking up in obedience to the authority above: children to parents, wives to husbands, men to magistrates, and through them up to God. (2021, p.21)

During the Elizabethan era, men were granted dominion over women; men were expected to be the heads of the households and demanded obedience from their wives and children. Bravery and intellect were expected of all men. According to C Greer, "the Elizabethan society of Shakespeare's day was entirely dominated by masculine thinking that governed all aspects of daily life" (2003, p.185).

Female characters were, therefore, significantly constrained by notions of male domination. In discussing the subordination and the inevitable demise of the leading female characters in *Othello* and *Macbeth*, the role played by their male foils in accentuating the females' weaknesses will be explored with emphasis on their individual struggles for independence.

Unlike the other female characters in *Othello*, Desdemona belongs to a high-class family as her father is a senator for the Venetian court; as such, her life is full of restriction and control. She dedicates her life to obeying and to being submissive towards her father at first, and later, her husband. Siti Hardiyanti Amri (2020) states that a woman from a high social class is expected to fulfil the social standard and value as a wife in terms of self-honour and purity. She must be subordinate to her husband; hence Desdemona tends to be passive in the face of oppression by men. Desdemona is in constant battles. First, she has to struggle to claim her independence from her father, Brabantio, and later she struggles to be heard in a battle for her life with her husband, Othello. However, Martha Clare Brinkman (2020) lauds Desdemona's assertiveness, and loyalty at the beginning of the play, yet concludes that Desdemona is killed for her naivety and ignorance. She desires to consistently tell the truth and even accepts her duty to her husband by claiming the

blame for her imminent death. Desdemona's initial defiance of her father may portray her as one of Shakespeare's unique female characters who defends the rights of women; however, her story eventually aligns with the expected narrative of females in the Elizabethan era. Brinkman (2020) cites Michael Slater, who suggests that “Desdemona's status as a lady of the court is the source of her dissimilar speeches and her simultaneously coy and submissive attitude, and it is also the cause of her downfall” (2020. p.7). The paradox of Desdemona's assertiveness versus her submissiveness hinges on the agency that she has or is deprived of as a result of the control held by Brabantio, Iago and Othello.

Brabantio's rage upon hearing the news of Desdemona's elopement with Othello is influenced by the social norm that daughters are regarded as their father's possessions and secondly by the expectation that women will accept the dominion by the male figures in their lives. Dreher purports that Brabantio embodies "the agony of fathers tormented by their daughters' rejection or betrayal" (2021, p.15). A father whose daughter has married without his permission is regarded as being dishonoured. Brabantio's presupposition of being able to dictate whom Desdemona can marry is reinforced in his words to Roderigo: "In honest plainness thou hast heard me say/My daughter is not for thee" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.4:100-101).

Brabantio, in his reference to his daughter, reveals his need to control and treat Desdemona like she is a possession of his. He reveals his belief that the determination of his daughter’s spouse will be entirely his responsibilty. Brabantio’s reaction to Desdemona’s elopement with Othello is therefore rooted in his loss of power and control. His refusal to allow to stay at his house whilst Othello is fighting the Turks is Brabantio’s attempt of reclaiming power and control. The notion of daughters being a possession is alluded to when Iago says:

> Awake! what, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves! thieves!
> Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!
> Thieves! thieves! (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:77-79)

Iago places Desdemona as a passive agent, defenceless in the face of the thievery that has befallen her. When Brabantio reproaches Othello for fleeing with Desdemona without his consent, he alleges Othello is a "foul thief" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.2:64). Furthermore, Brabantio accuses Othello of stealing his daughter, which indicates that he views Desdemona as a piece of

property that has been illegally taken away from him: "O, thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.2:64-65). He detaches any element of decision-making from his daughter and by extension, from females.

In Brabantio's perception of how the events transpired, he construes Desdemona's role as being passive. He is convinced that Desdemona is a victim and Othello has forced her hand in marrying him. Brabantio further alleges that his daughter Desdemona is too fragile to have chosen Othello as her husband, and the only plausible reason for this elopement is that Othello used witchcraft to lure her. Even in his initial reaction to the realisation that Desdemona has indeed left his home, his focus moves interchangeably between himself and Desdemona. His daughter has left home sans his permission, and he is uncertain of her whereabouts and her safety, yet he still manages to consider in the short period subsequent to his realisation, how he will be affected by this act:

> It is too true an evil. Gone she is.
> And what's to come of my despisèd time
> Is naught but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
> Where didst thou see her? —Oh, unhappy girl! —
> With the Moor, say'st thou? —Who would be a father?
> How didst thou know 'twas she? (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:159-164)

His immediate response is the question of what will become of his years ahead as he too has a dependency on Desdemona. In the absence of his wife, who has died, Desdemona takes care of domestic chores and fulfils the duty expected of a female. His existential question of who would want to be a father after this extent of deceit by his daughter, reflects his adamancy in adhering to patriarchal structures whereby the father's existence is defined by his daughter's adherence to his dominance. His words reveal the extent of Desdemona's confinement, for he asks: "Oh, heaven, how got she out? Oh, treason of the blood!" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:69).

These words indicate the entrapment and confinement that Desdemona would have experienced in that Brabantio asks how she might have left their home, indicating that she was being watched and restrictions were in place.

He further states,

> Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
> By what you see them act. Is there not charms
> By which the property of youth and maidhood
> May be abused? (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:70-73)

Desdemona's act of defiance portrays her as deceitful and rebellious. She rebels against the patriarchy of that era, yet how she executes this rebellion is indicative of her submission in that she does not confront Brabantio. Pragati Das states that Desdemona initially pacifies Brabantio and thereafter justifies her disobedience ironically on the very grounds of patriarchal obedience and duty. Desdemona naively contextualises her action in the expectations of the patriarchal Elizabethan society. Furthermore, she chooses to escape the confines of her home secretively as her actions are governed by her knowledge of the strictures placed on her as a female.

Brabantio further alleges that his daughter Desdemona is too fragile to have chosen Othello as her husband. He accuses Othello of engineering this plan by using witchcraft to lure her, thereby employing two stereotypes: that of racism whereby he associates witchcraft with black people, and secondly the stereotype of the female who is unable to make bold decisions, so Desdemona's act of defiance has to be a result of witchcraft. In this way, he detaches any form of agency or power from Desdemona and places her in a position of meekness, being manipulated and controlled, which he deems as a more viable explanation for her circumstances.

Iago's obsession with military stature and recognition of his prowess on the battlefield is indicative of the male obsession with ego. His sole rationalisation for his protracted plot of revenge is Othello's decision to promote Cassio as lieutenant instead of him. Iago becomes subsumed with anger due to the injury to his ego, and through his evil machinations, he plots his course of action. Like the other males in the drama, Iago is cognisant of females' fragility, limitations, and passivity, so he uses Desdemona as a pawn to exact revenge on Othello.

Other characters believe Iago's fabrication of events because they are plausible—to Roderigo, Brabantio, the Senate, and even Othello. Iago describes the notion that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio as "apt and of great credit" (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:282) Peter Stallybrass

analyses Iago's ability to manipulate the minds of other characters as not being because he is "superhumanly ingenious but, to the contrary, because his is the voice of 'common sense', the ceaseless repetition of the always-already 'known', the culturally given" (1996, p.139).

The preconceived notions of typically male and atypical female behaviour make Iago's narrative plausible. Stephen Greenblatt concurs as he explains that Iago's ability to possess others lies in his empathetic manipulation of their lives without their understanding that they are being so manipulated in what he calls a "process of fictionalisation that transforms a fixed symbolic structure into a flexible construct ripe for improvisational entry" (2012, p.234). That is, the ability to see the seemingly solid structures of culture and identity and the authority of the Venetian state. Desdemona then becomes the victim of two overbearing dominant males: Othello and his ensign, Iago. Iago claims the authority to mould his identity by taking sole responsibility for its formation. Iago's use of dialogism is intended to easily manipulate people to suit his selfish purpose. His language is deeply rooted in the social context where he might be temporarily situated. Iago alludes to this in his words to Roderigo:

> It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
> Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
> In following him, I follow but myself. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:56–58)

Iago admits to feigning allegiance and loyalty to Othello, for he plans on following him only to win his trust to exploit his master thereafter. He will, in this way, exact revenge from a man he suspects of having slept with his wife. He declares that his act of following Othello is in an effort to satisfy his own desires. He aims to form a bond with Othello, whereby he can win Othello's trust in order to be in suitable position to strategically manipulate and to a certain extent control Othello. According to Greenblatt (2012), Iago manipulates Othello by identifying his emotional need for empathy and in so doing manipulates him. Greenblatt (2012) is persuasive in his argument that Iago thrives by adopting multiple identities which for a long period of time, remains unnoticed. Iago switches from the purveyor of evil to the empathiser, indicating his dominance over the characters. Iago has no reservations in using Desdemona to catalyse his plan in avenging himself.

His view of women as being lecherous and sexual creatures is reinforced with his words:

> Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul.
> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
> Is tupping your white ewe. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1:90-92)

Iago's graphic and demeaning description of the union between Othello and Desdemona reflects the lack of respect he has for females as well as his racially-prejudiced attitude toward Othello. In this comparison, Iago reduces both characters to animals, with their colours meant to be an object of outrage and disgust. Furthermore, in Iago's comparison, Desdemona is not only a passive white ewe being mounted by an old black ram, but she is also her father's property as he uses the word "your" in referencing Brabantio's ownership of Desdemona.

Iago describes her as a "white ewe". He needs to convey the urgency in Brabantio effecting a plan to rescue her from the hands of lascivious thieves. His metaphor of the ewe further reiterates the gullibility of women as they are easily deceived. The word 'thief' is repeated four times to stress the idea that Othello has stolen Desdemona, further reinforcing the notion that women are perceived as possessions. Desdemona is removed from any control, authority, or agency as a result of the word "tupping" being used to describe sexual relations between Othello and Desdemona. It portrays her as an inanimate object that is subjected to action; she does not take part in the act of sex on an equal footing, and as a result, she is degraded. Salahat (2017) further asserts that rams are perceived as lascivious animals, and they are used to describe people who have these attributes. Iago sustains his view of women as sexual creatures, and this is illustrated in a playful dialogue with Desdemona when he says,

> Come on, come on. You are pictures out of doors,
> bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens,
> saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
> Players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds. (Shakespeare 1998, 2.1:108-111)

Iago epitomises the misogynistic attitudes of male characters. He firmly believes that women are untrustworthy and sexually deviant. His description mirrors the expectation of women as being

seen in their domestic sense. Iago outlines his view of women as elusive, duplicitous, and deceitful. He also perceives women as weak:

> O gentle lady, do not put me to 't,
> For I am nothing, if not critical. (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:24-25)

His reference to Desdemona as a gentle lady juxtaposes his earlier description of her as a wild-cat in the kitchen; however, he can gain dominance over the characters with these multiple identities. In addition, his reference to Desdemona highlights his perception of her as fragile and passive. Nae Andrei puts forth that *Othello* further reflects "early modern anxieties with respect to women's fickleness, inconstancy, and tendency to yield to the passions" (2018, p.80). When discussing Desdemona's love for Othello, Iago claims that:

> Her eye must be fed;
> and what delight shall she have to look on the
> devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of
> sport, there should be, again to inflame it and to
> give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour,
> sympathy in years, manners and beauties. All which
> the Moor is defective in. (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1.205-211)

According to Iago, Desdemona's attraction to Othello is driven by her desire to please her senses. Iago feels that Desdemona, being a woman, has a carnal love that cannot last (Nae Andrei, 2018); hence she will move on to the next lover once her appetite is satiated. Iago's portrayal of Desdemona suggests that she has no control over her sexual appetite, further reinforcing his earlier reference to women as wild-cats in that she is a slave to her passions. Nae Andrei (2018) states that this description of Desdemona is in keeping with the prejudice against women as sensuous, fickle and inconstant beings.

Iago is a master manipulator and wields power and dominance by identifying characters' weaknesses and using them to bring about their demise. He asserts dominance over the narrative he creates of Desdemona's extramarital affair with Cassio by identifying Cassio's low alcohol tolerance. He, therefore, pours liberal helpings of alcohol in the name of celebration of the victory

over the Turks. Iago is the mastermind that engineers the plan to incite animosity between Montano and Cassio, resulting in a street brawl. Othello, desperate to resolve another conflict, so soon after the war with the Turks, angrily stops the fight and insists on an explanation. This is when the extent of Iago's wickedness and evil is revealed and his plan proves to be successful: neither Montano, who is wounded, nor Cassio, who is inebriated, can present Othello with a cogent explanation of what has happened. Othello must rely on Iago to give an account of what transpired. At this stage Othello exudes confidence and acts unilaterally in his military capacity based on the information that he gathers from Iago. Iago is aware that neither Othello's Venetian affiliation nor his perceived personal prejudices will taint his view. Iago benefits from this particular sequence of events and garners Othello's trust by being "objective" in his report of the cause of this situation to insinuate himself further into Othello's trust. Iago cleverly employs the use of reverse psychology to sustain the trust of Othello. He feigns hesitation to implicate Cassio, saying:

> I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth
> Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio. (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.3:84-85)

Othello's reaction is precisely what Iago expected since Othello proclaimed that Iago is guilty of not desiring to implicate Cassio. He is able to manipulate the situation that he created, and like a puppet master, he preempts and controls the reactions of the characters that play into his plan of revenge. Similarly, after advising Cassio to solicit Desdemona for help, Othello questions if it was Cassio that was in a conversation with his wife. Iago responds in a suspicious manner, appearing to be reluctant to cause trouble and putting on a pretence of trying to be an honest friend, he says:

> Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it
> That he would steal away so guilty-like
> Seeing you coming. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:37-39)

According to Jeanne Gerlach et al. (1996), men in Renaissance society had to be involved in public service by being the decision-makers, soldiers, politicians, and by mobilising the action. Their lives were duty-bound to the state and were aggressive and self-satisfying. Women, by contrast, were valued for their beauty and qualities, such as being modest, humble, temperate, and kind. A good woman was also obedient, virtuous and chaste. Iago's scrutiny of the characters' weaknesses and the brilliant execution of his evil plot embodies the stereotypical Renaissance male and, in so

doing, draws a stark contrast to Desdemona's subordination and lack of confidence. Iago leads Othello to suspect that something is amiss in the relationship between Cassio and Desdemona. He is able to manoeuver skillfully between characters since he is aware of Desdemona's kindness and her willingness to help a friend, which he deems a weakness. Iago constantly appeals to Othello to exercise patience and to be calm. He declares that he may be mistaken, but his comments serve to fuel Othello's anger and he becomes increasingly convinced that there may be some truth in the rumours about his wife's affairs, which is precisely what Iago hoped to achieve. In so doing, he starts to convince Othello that Desdemona is cuckolding him. In a male-dominated world, it is more plausible that Desdemona is having an affair than it is that Iago's honour is questioned. Othello places value on the honour of men, for with minimal effort on Iago's part and questionable evidence in the form of a handkerchief, he is convinced that Desdemona has been unfaithful, yet he does not allow Desdemona the opportunity to defend herself:

> By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.
> O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart,
> And mak'st me call what I intend to do
> A murder, which I thought a sacrifice!
> I saw the handkerchief. (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:70-74)

Othello does not entertain the probability of the evidence being circumstantial. His confrontation with Desdemona is a direct accusation. Othello chooses to believe Iago's narrative over his wife's truth not because he is genuinely convinced that she is unfaithful, but because it is a word of a man over that of a woman. He refers to Desdemona as a liar and voices his intention to murder her, knowing that she has very little capacity to stop him as a female. His male dominance and egotistical nature are brought to the fore in his description of Desdemona's murder as a sacrifice. He then becomes the active agent who is performing an act of selflessness whilst Desdemona is passive and has to accept her fate. Desdemona's victimisation and abuse are protracted and comprise emotional, physical and verbal mistreatment, false accusations, and eventually result in her murder. Ironically Desdemona, who plays no part in instigating her own victimisation, blames herself. In keeping with Othello's expectation, Desdemona shows total submissiveness even at the point of death.

A deep-seated fear of Renaissance men was cuckoldry, for it labelled women as whores, and men as victims. Coppelia Kahn views cuckoldry as a “mockery of male virility” (Kahn 1993, p.122). Shakespeare highlights this pervasive Renaissance male fear and its impact on marriage in using this as the primary vehicle that mobilises Iago's act of revenge. The relationship between Othello and Desdemona illustrates that women are reliant on their husbands for stability, level headedness and faithfulness, notwithstanding that the male ironically fears cuckoldry and a loss of pride.

Greenblatt (2012) argues that a known character trait of a male is his active submission to a story necessitating the crafting of one's own narrative rather than the female accepting a passive role or not having agency, like Desdemona, who moved directly from paternal domination to domination by her husband.

It is this very submissiveness of women that allows yet another male to manipulate the narrative. Although Othello is characterised as an honourable soldier, his claim of being passive in the wooing of Desdemona is an attempt to manipulate the narrative. He, too, used his masculine traits to manipulate Desdemona. He identified Desdemona's interest in his narrative and seized this as an opportunity to reel her in. Greenblatt (2012) states that there is evidence of an intimation of this fate in that Othello recalls fantastical experiences during his adventures, and he proudly yet anxiously explains that Desdemona was active in her pursuit, albeit subtle and implied, since she would come,

> and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:151-152)

Othello is cognisant of Desdemona's submission to his story. The deep-seated aversion that the Elizabethans may have harboured against Othello is negated since they respect and appreciate his position in the Venetian military. Nevertheless, Othello is identified as worthy by both the Venetian state and the characters. The senators describe him as a "valiant Moor" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.1:35), Moreover, Cassio will claim:

> For I have serv'd him, and the man commands
> Like a full soldier. (Shakespeare, 1998, 2.1:47-48)

Othello's reputation was accrued due to his bravery on the battlefield. As a result, he earns respect and is held in high esteem. However, by contrast, Desdemona is not afforded this luxury, for despite having a reputation as an honest and pure woman, with little hesitation, Othello accepts the aspersions cast on her character:

> Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
> Put out the light, and then put out the light.
> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> I can again thy former light restore
> Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,
> Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume. (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:6-13)

Othello claims that he is selfless in his attempt to save other men from falling victim to Desdemona's "infidelity", this is an attempt to detract attention from evident jealousy and wounded pride after believing that he has been cuckolded. Like Iago, he displays self-centred qualities; his intention is to seek revenge. Both Iago and Othello have sustained injuries to their egos, and in fulfilling their masculine role, they are adamant in their mission to regain power and control.

Falconer (1998) offers an opposing view in analysing Othello's hasty distrust of Desdemona. He feels that Othello and Desdemona were married without adequately knowing each other. The manifestation of the lack of trust and doubt within the marriage results from superficial knowledge that the couple had of one another. Alan Sinfield offers a critical perspective that avoids the racist implication; Sinfield writes that,

> in the last lines of the play, when he wants to reassert himself, Othello 'recognises' himself as what Venetian culture has really believed him to be: an ignorant, barbaric outsider—like, he says, the 'base Indian' who threw away a pearl. (1992, p.745)

Despite his reference to himself as a barbarian, he maintains his dominant role in Desdemona's life by placing himself in the active position of the one that threw away a jewel. Representing

Desdemona as the pearl is indicative of her lack of agency in being discarded as Othello's wife and reinforces the assertion made by Brabantio wherein he perceives his daughter Desdemona as a possession, in the same manner that Othello has.

Othello uses dialogic instances of language to arouse a specific response from Desdemona. Othello's intention in using dialogism prior to his questions regarding the handkerchief shows that he associates the moistness of her hands as an indication or in this case, evidence of the presence of a "young and sweating devil" (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.4:48), which he uses intentionally to reference her sexual appetite. Othello implies that she is sexually charged, alluding to her supposed infidelity. He hopes to elicit a reaction indicative of her guilt; however, Desdemona's naivety about men's natures does not allow her to analyse his words in the context of his malicious intention. Othello's tendency to use repetition when making derogatory references to Desdemona becomes apparent in their exchange once again when Desdemona cries upon believing that Cassio has been killed and will not be able to vouch for her innocence:

> Desdemona: Alas, he is betrayed and I undone.
> Othello: Out, strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my face?
> Desdemona: Oh, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!
> Othello: Down, strumpet! (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:86-89)

His reference to Desdemona as a prostitute with the word "strumpet" confirms his retrogression toward mimicking Iago's language and his perception of women as sexual creatures. Marianne Novy (1991) asserts that the Shakespearean male characters often portray anti-feminism views. In *Othello*, male suspicion of cuckoldry overrides Desdemona's innocence despite the evidence favouring Desdemona's infidelity being circumstantial and questionable. Desdemona's act of defying her father Brabantio does not fall within the limits of patriarchal thought, making her vulnerable to male scrutiny. Brabantio warns:

> Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see
> She has deceived her father and may thee. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3:289-290)

Marianne Novy elaborates on this concept stating that the male is presented such that his suspicions earn the audience's sympathy. Despite his inferiority complex about his race, Othello

feels a desire to sustain hegemony over his wife. In this way, he is aligning himself with the behavioural pattern of Iago and Brabantio, who operates in the framework of patriarchy.

Similarly, Othello, upon hearing Desdemona express the joy that Cassio has been appointed as the Governor of Cyprus, perceives her reaction as an overt display of her once hidden love for Cassio, and to him, it is the confirmation of his cuckoldry. Othello angrily refers to Desdemona as a "Devil!" (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:240) and strikes her. Othello, however, does not pity Desdemona's tears. He says:

> O devil, devil!
> If that the earth could teem with woman's tears,
> Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile. (Shakespeare, 1998, 4.1:240-242)

Crocodiles were thought to shed hypocritical tears as they ate their victims. Othello uses the metaphor of crocodiles to expose what he believes to be Desdemona's false expression of sadness.Othello demands absolute loyalty from Desdemona; he is, therefore, prepared to cast her aside upon the first suspicion of her unfaithfulness, as is seen when he states:

> If I do prove her haggard,
> Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings
> I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
> To prey at fortune. (Shakespeare, 1998, 3.3:262-265)

The image is of Desdemona as a hawk, subject to the control of her tamer, Othello. If he is unable to retain sexual control over her, he is prepared to assert his superiority by throwing her out "to prey at fortune." He is well aware of his masculine power over her, as her father is. Cohen (1987) commented that this image is in reference to Othello's jealousy. All these images of Desdemona as a "devil", a "strumpet", and a "jewel" reflect his attitude towards his wife and his need to retain dominance in their relationship. Nonetheless, she tends to be passive to what Othello does to her and does not even try to save her life. Desdemona's tragic death due to her inability to resist the domination of Othello implies that men in a marital relationship also oppress women of the highest social class. Her submission to her husband is reiterated in her dying words, "Commend me to my kind lord" (Shakespeare, 1998, 5.2:38). Desdemona's unparalleled loyalty is shown when Emilia

asks her who had murdered her; she protects Othello's reputation and claims that she had done it to herself, transforming her murder into suicide. The extent of passivity is exposed when she absolves Othello from blame, and further refers to him as her "kind lord". Martha Clare Brinkman argues, however, that Desdemona's final moments are an indication, not of her obedience to her husband, but of her taking control of the narrative to give herself some agency in the play (2020, p.9). In so doing, however, Desdemona acknowledges her lack of agency in her marriage and further attempts to fulfil her duty as a wife adhering to societal expectations of females.

Macbeth does not exclusively use male foils to accentuate the weaknesses of the leading female characters. Instead, the male identity is used as a vehicle for repressing the female identity, bringing the female's weakness to the fore.

Foucault disagrees with the notion that people or groups wield power through 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion; he sees power as dispersed and pervasive. "Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere so in this sense, is neither an agency nor a structure" (Foucault 1998: 63). Therefore, power is not only about what an individual possesses in terms of physicality. Instead, it is determined by the cultural, socio-political, historical, social, and economic context in which an individual finds himself/herself.

When a cultural context dictates an ideal or typical masculinity, the male is forced to follow the standard norms. These parameters are what determine the thoughts and actions of individuals in search of power and control. According to Elenany, every man ultimately desires or dreams of being honoured and shown respect that he believes is due to him as a result of his bravery, strength and boldness. His worst fear, however, is to be disdained or “criticised for failing to comply fully with these ideals" (2015, p.6).

In *Macbeth*, the actions, language and intentions of the male characters reinforce the dominance of the male identity and conversely, the acts of restraint or avoidance of behaviour that is deemed typically female accentuates the weakness of the female characters. Through Macbeth, Shakespeare represents the male's struggle to conform to an ideal of manhood endorsed by culture and society.

Positive reinforcement of typically masculine behaviour contributes to creating the male identity. Christina Alfar (1998) propounds the idea that Shakespeare uncovers the gender trouble behind the prescriptions that constitute femininity as compliance, masculinity as violence and violence as power (1998, p.180). Men in this play gain power through political and military means. Intelligence is expected from a male character and aligns with his male identity. The intelligence of the male is therefore deemed advantageous; however, patriarchy defines Lady Macbeth's intelligence as a flaw and an indication that she is unnatural. Lady Macbeth initially defies adhering to the prototypical behaviour of females; however, this defiance acts as a catalyst for her destruction.

Lady Macbeth has little exposure to women, and her world is influenced primarily by her dead father, King Duncan, her husband, and other male figures. She, therefore, draws her perception of power and dominance exclusively from the male figures around her. Masculine dominance in *Macbeth* is established and sustained through the ideal of men fighting bravely in war, shedding the blood of enemies and defending the kingdom. Upon Duncan's query regarding the man covered in blood, Malcolm responds:

> This is the sergeant
> Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
> Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
> Say to the king the knowledge of the broil.
> As thou didst leave it. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.2:4-8)

Malcolm's understanding of manhood is tempered by the cultural and political era of patriarchy and war. Malcolm identifies the ability to defend one's country and other men as a factor determining bravery and goodness. Ironically the captain, in his response, admonishes Macdonwald for his treachery, yet Lady Macbeth will manipulate Macbeth into believing that treachery against the king will prove his manhood. The captain reinforces the notion of masculinity:

> For brave Macbeth —well he deserves that name—
> Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel,
> Which smoked with bloody execution,

> Like valour's minion carved out his passage
> Till he faced the slave;
> Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
> Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops,
> And fixed his head upon our battlements. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.1:16-23)

The captain's portrayal of Macbeth as a brave soldier and a war hero as he praises Macbeth's valour in the account of the battle between Macbeth and Macdonwald and later Macbeth and Norway, the captain considers brutality and stoicism as traits that are indicative of a man's bravery. Positive reinforcement in the form of Duncan's approval congeals the notion that masculinity is associated with bravery, murder, total defense of one's country and the ability to execute this responsibility in a cold, calculated and callous manner.

Elenany (2015) claims that:

> As brutal as the murder appears, Macbeth conforms to a heroic image that is applauded by the Scottish warrior culture of the play where the more blood is shed, the more manly and heroic the warrior is. (2015, p.9).

Duncan's reference to Macbeth as "valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!" (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.1:16-17) bespeaks his approval and admiration of Macbeth's brutality on the battlefield. The positive reinforcement of violence is repeated in Duncan's response to the captain:

> So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
> They smack of honour both. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.1:44-45)

Duncan delineates the concept of masculinity as including honour attained after selflessly sustaining injury. The accrued perceptions culminate in a protracted definition of power and masculinity. For this reason, the narrative of an ambiguous gender being assigned to the witches is far more acceptable if Macbeth is to allow their prophecies to dictate his actions. They are referred to as witches, yet they appear to have beards atypical of the feminine appearance. Ferdous claims that "The faces of witches are covered with hair, that is an allegory to their masculine natures" (2017, p.22). The power they possess as supernatural beings result in Banquo's need to question their identities in terms of gender:

You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.2:45-47)

The witches deliver prophecies that effectively change the course of the play; however, Banquo is unable to judge their gender accurately. Determining the fate of a man correlates with the possession of power; however, according to Higgins (2016), the fate of the future king is relayed to him not by his equal but by witches who operate outside of gender norms. The beard was a significant aspect in the construction of masculinity, separating men from boys in early modern England. Therefore, the validity of the prophecy would, in effect, determine their power; however, "bearded women would not have had any place within the male hierarchy, and their presence produces a destabilisation of gender" (Higgins 2016, p.1).

The importance of the beard in determining one's manhood is intensified when the English forces assist Malcolm and Macduff to defeat Macbeth. Lennox, a Scottish nobleman, announces that among their men:

There is Siward's son,
And many unrough youths that even now
Protest their first of manhood. (Shakespeare, 2008, 5.2:9-11)

In Lennox's reference to "unrough" youths, he means young males that have smooth faces, ergo, no facial hair. Higgins adds that the "youth cannot be identified as men because their very manhood is quantifiable only by having a beard" (2016, p.2). Without beards, these individuals will be ranked with women in the patriarchal constructs of Elizabethan England. It is ironic that when Banquo reaches the realisation that the witches' predictions could have resulted in Macbeth's untimely acquisition of the crown, he then refers to the witches as distinctly female:

Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for 't… (Shakespeare, 2008, 3.1:1-3)

He refers to the witches as weird women after suspecting that their predictions are the root of Macbeth's expeditious rise to being king and the evil they have caused. In their prediction of

Banquo's future, the witches perpetuate the patriarchal concept in their focus on the male lineage of Banquo's being kings. By omission, female progeny is less significant. The rhetoric of patriarchy in Macbeth is not restricted to Banquo; the entirety of the play is constructed around the lineage of kings and heirs. This is something that is passed on from fathers to sons, so ensuring the perpetuation of male dominance, which is the framework of patriarchy itself. These sentiments are echoed by Macbeth when he responds to Lady Macbeth's plan of ensuring the guards are inebriated so that they can murder the unguarded Duncan so that the Macbeths can place the blame on the drunk chamberlains. Macbeth proudly declares:

> Bring forth men-children only,
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.7:72-74)

Macbeth communicates the value attached to male progeny as opposed to females. He associates her fearless spirit with that which is worthy of producing male children only. Adelman states, "Macbeth imagines Lady Macbeth, the mother to infants sharing her hardness, born in effect without vulnerability" (2010, p.43). It becomes apparent that the corollary of his assertion would be that had she displayed weaknesses and fears, producing female progeny would directly correlate to these traits. If females were to possess traits indicative of weakness, it would be less significant as females could not inherit the throne. He identifies a strength in his wife as a result of her renunciation of her feminine nature. Lady Macbeth can be placed in a category of ruthlessness that is not characteristic of females. The masculine image of his wife challenges his faltering masculinity and drives him to feel the need to preserve his self-image.

Macbeth deliberates over the witches' prediction of Banquo having a lineage of kings. Through Banquo's son Fleance, his legacy will live on, bearing generations of kings. This revelation causes Macbeth to be perplexed that his reign as king cannot be carried onto further generations:

> Upon my head, they placed a fruitless crown
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. (Shakespeare, 2008, 3.1:60-63)

He is envious of Banquo's dynasty and deeply enraged at his cruel fate in which he has been denied sons, and the longevity of his dynasty is threatened because having sons "constitutes extending one's manly identity beyond one's lifetime" (Kahn 1981, p.184).

Lady Macbeth accepts her role as the wife of a noble soldier and internalises the patriarchal conceptualisation of manhood. She has come to understand that a bravado and a propensity for violence establishes power in Scotland, and she utilises this knowledge in her evil plan of regicide. Macbeth displays trepidation over the impending act of murder that he would be committing. Nevertheless, Lady Macbeth acts swiftly as she knows that attacking his ego will spur him into action. She challenges his manhood by contrasting her ability to align to the prescriptions of masculinity which forces Macbeth to prove himself not only as a male but as being more masculine than Lady Macbeth:

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.7:46-47)

He agrees to do anything that a man can do and reaffirms Lady Macbeth's gender identity by stating that any person claiming to do more is not a man, emphasising the limits that circumscribe human action. Macbeth's ego was hurt, and in order to establish his superior masculinity over his wife's potential to portray masculine qualities, he reiterates that her ideal of masculinity is not one that she can attain.

The juxtaposition between what Duncan values in a female and those traits that he values in a male is made clear in Banquo's message to Macbeth from the king:

> This diamond he greets your wife withal,
> By the name of most kind hostess. (Shakespeare, 2008, 2.1:15-16)

Just as he gave Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor for bravely defending Scotland against the Norwegians, he now presents Lady Macbeth with a diamond to acknowledge her hospitality during their stay. He places honour and bravery in a man as qualities worthy of acknowledgement. However, domesticity and the ability to be a good hostess are yardsticks to measure a woman's value. The association of masculinity with bravery and honour is echoed when Macbeth is given

the epithet of "Bellona's bridegroom", a powerful fighter, skilled in battle, who would sacrifice everything else to fight in a war.

Macbeth's attempts to dissuade Lady Macbeth from her evil soliciting indicates his steadfast resolve to identify manhood with morality, patriotism and honour:

> We will proceed no further in this business.
> He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon. (Shakespeare, 2008, 1.7:31-35)

Macbeth relishes the praise he has received and is hesitant to be stripped of his honour and high esteem by being associated with murder. Higgins (2016) states that Macbeth is morally aware that to some extent, his honour and identity stem from his obedience to King Duncan and respecting his place within the structure of Scottish nobility. When approached by Macbeth to show allegiance to him, Banquo responds by highlighting that he can do so as long as this does not impinge on his integrity:

> So I lose none
> in seeking to augment it, but still keep
> my bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counselled. (Shakespeare, 2008, 2.1:27-30)

Banquo's focus on maintaining a clear conscience is reminiscent of Macbeth's initial refusal to kill Duncan in order to maintain his reputation of being honourable; however, unlike Banquo, Macbeth becomes so overwhelmed by his ambition and his wife's psychological taunts that he abandons his desire to maintain his honour and good reputation. Piotr Sadowski asserts that:

> Banquo's initial role is to provide a positive, heroic foil for his more opportunistic companion and to illustrate the sort of honour and good name that Macbeth has forfeited by moving away from the mean of static honesty. (2003, p.293)

Banquo's loyalty and integrity serve as a foil to Macbeth's treachery and treason. Banquo's presence constantly threatens Macbeth's self-image, masculine autonomy and heroic conception of himself.

Macbeth recognises his wife's weakness after she fails to murder the sleeping Duncan. However, he realises that Lady Macbeth, like other Elizabethan females, is governed by the patriarchal strictures of the Elizabethan era in which the father and husband retained dominion over the woman. This explains Lady Macbeth's alacrity to murder her nursing child, yet she could not muster up the courage to murder a man bearing no blood ties to her. Based on his resemblance to her father, she was rendered incapacitated as a murderer. Stephanie Chamberlain (2005) claims that Lady Macbeth rejects the masculine power that allows her to wield a dagger when allowed to take on the male identity, which indicates her need to respect the dictates of a patriarchal social-cultural context.

Thus, Macbeth addressing Donalbain ironically reiterates the importance of adherence to orderly succession:

> You are and do not know 't.
> The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
> Is stopped; the very source of it is stopped. (Shakespeare, 2008, 2.3:88-90)

As the father, Duncan is referred to as the source of the fountain. This implies that the royal bloodline should flow from King Duncan to his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. The father's death is like the drying up of a spring or fountain. Duncan "is the centre of authority, the source of lineage and honour, the giver of name and gift; but he is also the source of all nurturance" (Adelman, 1987, p.94).

Macbeth’s decision to have Banquo killed is taken without consulting Lady Macbeth. In this act, he restores the power that he surrendered during Duncan's murder. In Macbeth's act of suborning murderers, he is once again the empowered, bold and resolute male with solitary control over his action. Although this very act of Macbeth suborning murderers to kill Banquo may also reflect his attempt to avoid committing the crime himself but is also a reflection of his flailing confidence in

the strength of his wife after her failure to kill King Duncan. This is indicative of violence, blood and murder being atypically female.

Macbeth, however, does recognise Lady Macbeth's mental capacity to spur him into action, as is revealed in his endeavour to incite the murderers, leading them to believe that Banquo is solely responsible for being held back. Macbeth asks if they are willing to forgive Banquo, to which the murderer responds that they are men. Macbeth, following the rhetoric of Lady Macbeth's success in goading him to murder Duncan, challenges their masculinity:

> Ay in the catalogue ye go for men,
> As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
> Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept
> All by the name of dogs. The valued file
> Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
> The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
> According to the gift which bounteous nature
> Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive
> Particular addition, from the bill
> That writes them all alike. And so of men.
> Now, if you have a station in the file,
> Not i' th' worst rank of manhood, say 't,
> And I will put that business in your bosoms,
> Whose execution takes your enemy off,
> Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
> Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
> Which in his death were perfect. (Shakespeare, 2008, 3.1:91–107)

Macbeth mocks their claim to be men and suggests that all men are not alike, like dogs that may belong to one species yet have many categories. Macbeth repudiates the masculinity of the murderers by comparing their behaviour to the behaviour of dogs, suggesting that, like dogs, yet unlike real men, they lack an innate killer instinct (Ferdous, 2017).

Upon the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth becomes perturbed and addresses the apparition. Macbeth's actions seem to be driven significantly by the witches' predictions. The witches' predictions, however, remain passive. The witches do not give Macbeth instructions, and in that relationship, Macbeth retains control. According to Bloom (2010), Macbeth is merely told what is to be—his kingship. Macbeth, then driven by ambition and his wife's manipulations, converts this prediction of his sovereignty to "an active invitation to kill a king" (Bloom, 2010, p.8). Despite their supernatural status and their physical appearance as being masculine, Macbeth, in his treatment of the witches, displays a domineering attitude since he views the witches as females, which explains his expectation of their subordination:

> I conjure you by that which you profess—
> Howe'er you come to know it—answer me. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.1:50-51)

Macbeth, accustomed to the subordination of women, commands the witches to answer him. The witches' prediction serves to reaffirm Macbeth's masculine identity in that they ask him to be bold, violent and strong-willed, which are traits associated with masculinity:

> Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.1:79-81)

Childbirth is an act exclusive to women; however, it is made less significant by the witches' prophecy. Adelman states, "repeated seven times, the phrase 'born to woman' with its variants begins to carry for Macbeth the meaning 'vulnerable', as though vulnerability itself is the taint deriving from woman" (2010, p.45). Being born of a woman will render any man powerless to defeat Macbeth. Adelman further asserts that Macduff becomes a "super-human man because he came into the world without the help of a woman" (2010, p.45).

This prediction of the witches cements the Elizabethan view of women as weak and submissive. Moreover, it fills Macbeth with a false sense of invincibility. Macduff's display of loyalty to his country and his act of prioritising his political duty over his family reflects the aspects of masculinity that he displayed when he fought bravely in the war against Norway. Macbeth is shadowed by Macduff, who is a father and husband and acts as a foil to him. Upon receiving news

that Macduff has fled to England, Macbeth decides to strike Macduff where he is most vulnerable. In his identification of attacking Lady Macduff and her children, Macbeth reveals that the lack of physical prowess and the inability to defend their family are characteristic traits of women. Lady Macduff is scathing in her analysis of Macduff's act of fleeing to England:

> 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. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.2:6-9)

She demands answers from Ross and is explicitly critical of her husband for his action. Hannah Lee states that Lady Macduff "becomes a maternal and moral powerhouse that refuses to accept answers without question" (2019, p.31). She construes his action as that of cowardice and reiterates that Macduff lacks the natural instinct that man should possess to protect his family. In the absence of her husband, Lady Macduff is unable to protect her children and their castle, affirming Macbeth's perception of her being unable to take on a role that a man fulfils. Ross disagrees with Lady Macduff's anger at her husband and defends Macduff:

> He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
> The fits o' th' season. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.2:16-17)

His use of descriptors emphasises the traditional traits of a male in Elizabethan times, referring to Macduff as noble, wise and judicious. Despite abandoning his family, Ross claims that Macduff knows best, ascribing to the notion that decisions made by men are beyond reproach. The stereotypical male identity is reinforced when Malcolm suggests that he and Macduff find a quiet place and allow themselves time to cry for the tyranny in Scotland; Macduff responds:

> Let us rather
> Hold fast the mortal sword and, like good men,
> Bestride our downfall'n birthdom. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.3:2-4)

Macduff equates male identity with honour and the ability to fight for one's country. He disagrees that good men will wastefully utilise time and energy mourning a problem. Ironically the roles are reversed upon Macduff's receipt of the news of the murder of his wife and children. He is

distraught, but Malcolm says, "Dispute it like a man" (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.3:226), alluding to Macduff's earlier description of a man's behavioural expectations. Macduff responds:

> Oh, I could play the woman with mine eyes
> And braggart with my tongue! But, gentle heavens,
> Cut short all intermission. Front to front
> Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself.
> Within my sword's length set him; if he' scape,
> Heaven forgive him too. (Shakespeare, 2008, 4.3:230-235)

Macduff insinuates that if he were to cry, he would be enacting the reactions typical of women. He says that a woman would brag extensively and cry; however, as a soldier, a father and a husband, he will not spare Macbeth's life after his heinous crimes. The same notion recurs when Ross informs Old Siward that his son has “paid a soldier's debt” (Shakespeare, 2008, 5.8:39-40) and died a man. Siward does not immediately mourn his son's death but requests details about the location of his son's injuries, for this proves either his heroism as a man or his cowardice. Saiful Islam claims that honour and nobility "provides the essential morality and courage which in their progression defeat the evil and restore the natural order of things" (2010, p.1).

The measure of his son's worth depends on how he died. When Ross confirms that young Siward sustained injuries to the front of his body, Old Siward is satisfied that his son died an honourable death and pronounces his son God's soldier. He attaches much importance to the male identity of bravery and honour and adds that if he had other sons, he would not wish them a more honourable death; this, for Siward, is the heroic death worthy of heroic manhood.

Macbeth illuminates gender stereotypes on one level, associating particular virtues of bravery, honour, violence, loyalty and nobility with masculinity and defencelessness, emotional weakness and dependence with femininity. Patriarchy in *Macbeth* makes the woman subordinate while allowing the male to keep the authoritative power and dominate the female. In their adherence to the stereotypical masculine traits and in their implicit expectations and perceptions of the ambit within which females operate, male foils highlight and intensify the weaknesses of the leading female characters in *Othello* and *Macbeth.*

9. Chapter 6: Conclusion

The objective of the study was to illustrate that Shakespeare's presentation of female characters in his plays demonstrates more than his perception of women; it is a reflection of the impact of society and time on the female characters. Shakespeare's female characters are by no means feeble, weak and powerless. On the contrary, he successfully created characters like Lady Macbeth and Desdemona, who display a degree of assertiveness but simultaneously mirror the Shakespearean era. Thus my research focused on the correlation of his female characters, in the tragedies *Macbeth* and *Othello*, with the time and society in which the play was written as well as the role of the language used by male foils and the leading female characters, in augmenting the notion of an expected behavioural pattern for women.

Perceptions of Shakespearean females are often based on contemporary attitudes; however, Shakespeare's dramas are bound by the rules and conventions of the patriarchal Elizabethan era. Shakespeare may therefore be analysed as supporting the English Renaissance stereotypes of genders; however, female characters in Shakespearean plays assert themselves in very different ways. Lady Macbeth and Desdemona fall prey to the inevitability of being vulnerable and dependent after their respective initial characterisations, of potentially breaking the mould. The negative characteristics of Lady Macbeth are justified by her attribution of strength that was not accepted by society during the Elizabethan era. Shakespeare permits these two characters to exist entirely outside of conventional norms. While their social roles restricted them, they displayed the potential of women to influence the men around them. Women are characterised as "possessions" passed between fathers and husbands. Female characters are typically coerced and controlled by the men in their lives, if not owned by husbands and fathers. In retrospect, despite the fact that the female characters in the greatest tragedies garner less critical attention than the male characters, the women contribute to the vital movement of the tragic action in the plays. In the tragedies, it is the women who end up playing an important role in the denouement of the plot. The roles played by Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* are essential in order to expose the nefarious activities of Iago. In a somewhat different way, the fact that Lady Macduff is aware of their predicaments brings to light the abuse that the male in authority metes out to the helpless female who does not have agency of her own. Even Lady Macbeth, whose aggressive actions illustrate the extreme measures women must take to express any control in their lives, indirectly contributes to the

downfall of corruption. Her actions show that women are forced to take these extreme measures in order to have control in their lives.

Even though the extensively perceptive women share the same fate as the females acting with less awareness, the importance of the female with an agency should be judged by her inevitable inability to survive in a patriarchal society. The ingenuity and determination that the women possess in contesting the restricting forces in their lives substantiate the strength of their characters; however, the power portrayed by the female with an agency is transformed to adherence to stereotypes in her act of assimilating into the patriarchal system.

The idea of the existence of a prototype further determines what conditions are in place at a particular moment to define the concept (Hacker et al., 2009). In keeping with feminist critics, particularly Lynda E. Boose (1987) and Carol Thomas Neely (1998), the female identity appears to be something fathered upon women by patriarchy. Marianne Novy's notion is that women were seen as a part of power relations between the sexes (2017, p.7). The role of women in these power relations is amplified by Cristina León Alfar, who suggests that it becomes clear that when women fail to perform their femininity through submissive behaviour, they are accused of monstrosity and manliness (2003, p.25).

Both Sally McConnell-Ginet's (2011) assertions and the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin have offered a valuable framework for the study of language and its impact on the construction of the female identity as distinct from that of the male identity. Bakhtin's argument runs parallel to McConnell-Ginet's assertion as he states that the meaning of spoken words will be determined by circumstantial and unstable conditions of that specific time and place (Holquist, 2010). Lady Macbeth rejects her femininity in order to amass power, only to have that power eroded as males feel threatened by the sexuality and control of women. Women in Shakespeare are forced to make such momentous choices in order to accomplish what they set out to do. Lady Macbeth would kill her first-born son if she was granted power in exchange for her commitment to do so. The ability of the three witches to wield power over Macbeth and, to an extent Banquo, seems rooted in their gender ambiguity; having beards complied with the expected physical attribute of men, which rendered them adequately male to be afforded the power of control. With feminine qualities being associated with weakness, rejecting or masking those qualities offered a new chance for women to

reclaim control of their lives. Lady Macbeth does not define herself by any gender role and prefers to remain genderless when embarking on her plot of murder. Lady Macbeth shames Macbeth for murdering Duncan; although these women can obtain power, it is only temporary. Once Macbeth gains confidence, he leaves Lady Macbeth out of the rest of his plans, thereby ascribing to gender norms attached to female characters; Lady Macbeth proves to be successful at temporarily suppressing her gender. Similarly, Desdemona, who defies her father and elopes with Othello, falls prey to an unjustified accusation of adultery, proving that she cannot mask her femaleness for good. By virtue of their inherent femininity, Shakespeare's heroines reinforce a societal stereotype that still viewed women as inherently domestic, maternal, essentially uneducable, religious, selfless, and having appropriate emotional expressions of love.

Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth to murder Duncan. A pattern that emerged is a distrust of women with power through the insinuation that they have questionable morals. For example, Lady Macbeth goads her husband into regicide, displaying a lust for power that is often equivalent to or surpasses that of the male characters around her. Lady Macbeth especially is seen as transgressing the boundaries between masculine and feminine attributes. She forgoes typical 'feminine' traits like motherly compassion for more 'masculine' ones like ambition, which leads to the ruin of her family. For these women, the penalty for their scheming ways is usually death.

The prototype theory outlines that instances of a natural concept are defined by their resemblance to a trait that is the most typical. My study of Shakespeare's tragedies reveals that negative qualities temper women's most typical character traits. Pragati Das (2012) states that the Elizabethan era was a time when women were portrayed to be weaker than men, but in Shakespeare's tragedies *Macbeth* and *Othello*, females display "great intelligence, vitality, and a strong sense of personal independence" (2012, p.36). The paradoxical nature of Lady Macbeth's and Desdemona's power and defencelessness has led me to explore the notion of the construction of a prototypical identity. Desdemona is initially portrayed as a strong woman; as the play progresses, she weakens.

Desdemona may be lauded for her apparent rebelliousness but is also blamed for her passivity. This depiction of the passivity in Desdemona and emotional weakness in Lady Macbeth aligns with the 'typical attribute' highlighted in the prototype theory. This dissertation has presented evidence to support the argument that Shakespeare characterised his female characters against a

social backdrop of patriarchy, and through the use of the different characters' gender–laden language, he accentuates the subordination, the overriding negative perception and expectations of females in the Elizabethan era.

10. References

1. Adelman, J., 2010. “Born of Woman”: Fantasies of Maternal Power in Macbeth. *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth*, pp.33-60.

2. Adelman, J., 2012 [1992]. *Suffocating mothers: Fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. New York: Routledge.

3. Alfar, C.L., 1998. 'Blood will have blood: 'Power, Performance, and Lady Macbeth's Gender Trouble. *Jx: A Journal in Culture and Criticism*, *2*(2), pp.179-207.

4. Alfar, C.L., 2003. *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: University of Delaware Press.

5. Alhiyari, I., 2019. Female Struggle and Triumph: The Cases of Antigone, Desdemona, and Erminia. *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies, 3(1*), pp.35-53

6. Alyo, M.W.J., 2019. 'And What's He then that Says I Play the Villain': Understanding Iago as a Histrionic. *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies,3*(4).

7. Amri, S.H. and Maylani, I., 2020. Paradoxality of Women Positions in Othello by Shakespeare. *JELITA*, *1*(2), pp.12-20.

8. Atherton, C., 2017. Character Analysis: The Witches in Macbeth. *The British Library, The British Library. Retrieve from www. bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/character-analysis-the-witches-in-Macbeth*. Accessed 13 May 2020.

9. Balestraci, M., 2012. Victorian voices: Gender ideology and Shakespeare's female characters. Doctoral dissertation. Northeastern University, Boston.

10. Bartels, E.C., 1996. Strategies of Submission: Desdemona, the Duchess, and the Assertion of Desire. *Studies in English Literature,1500-1900*, *36*(2), pp.417-433.

11. Baskkaran, R. and Tamilarasan, P., 2020. Female masculinities in Shakespeare. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, *17*(6), pp.5575-5583.

12. Berkman, A., 2019. *Rethinking Shakespeare’s Macbeth in South African Educational Settings: An African Feminist Analysis of Reading, Teaching and Assessing the Text to Challenge Patriarchal Discourses* (Doctoral dissertation, School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ariela-Berkman/publication/358564480_Rethinking_Shakespeare's_Macbeth_in_South_African Accessed 12 September 2020.

13. Boose, L.E., 1987. The Family in Shakespeare Studies. *Renaissance Quarterly*, *40*(4), pp.707-742. Retrieved from JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2862449. Accessed 12 September 2020.

14. Bradshaw, G., 2018. *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the materialists*. New York: Cornell University Press.

15. Brannigan, J., 2016. *New historicism and cultural materialism*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education.

16. Brinkman, M.C., 2020. *Living Words; Dying Flesh: The Truth and Testimonies of Desdemona in Othello and Pompilia in The Ring and the Book*. University of Denver.

17. Buckley-Crist, E.E., 2019. *Undone by Adaptation?: Tracing Desdemona and Emilia in Othello and Otello (s)*. State University of New York at Albany.

18. Callaghan, D. ed., 2016. *A feminist companion to Shakespeare*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

19. Carroll, W.C., 1999. Macbeth: Texts and Contexts. *New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press,117*(153), pp.159-61.

20. Cavanagh, S.T., 2019. Shakespeare and Feminist Theory. *Renaissance Quarterly*, *72*(1), pp.407–409.

21. Chakrabarti, R. and Sarkar, S.A.M., 2021. The Weird 'Others': An 'Alternative' Understanding of the Witches of Macbeth from a Feminist Perspective. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, *13*(1).

22. Cohen, D., 1987. Patriarchy and Jealousy in Othello and the Winter's Tale. *Modern Language Quarterly*, *48*(3), pp.207-223.

23. Coleman, L. and Kay, P., 1981. Prototype semantics: The English word lie. *Language*, *57*(1), pp.26-44.

24. Cook, A.J., 1980. The design of Desdemona: doubt raised and resolved. *Shakespeare Studies*, *13*(1), p.187.

25. Crawley, J.D., 2010. *On Gender and Identity in Three Shakespearean Texts. Georgia*: Georgia State University.

26. Das, P., 2012. Shakespeare's Representation of Women in his Tragedies. *Prime University Journal*, *6*(2), pp.37-56.

27. Dash, I.G., 1997. *Women's Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays*. London: University of Delaware Press.

28. DeLamater, J.D. and Hyde, J.S., 1998. Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism in the study of human sexuality. *Journal of sex research*, *35*(1), pp.10-18.

29. Dollimore, J., 1990. Shakespeare, cultural materialism, feminism and Marxist humanism. *New Literary History*, *21*(3), pp.471-493. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/469122. Accessed 22 April 2020.

30. Doody, J.A., 2017. *Defending Desdemona, Reclaiming Cordelia: A Woman-Centric Defense of Shakespeare's Heroines in Othello and King Lear*. (Doctoral dissertation. Harvard University, Cambridge).

31. Drakakis, J. and Townshend, D., 2013. *Macbeth: a critical reader*. London: A&C Black Press.

32. Dreher, D.E., 2021. *Domination And Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

33. Eagleton, M. ed., 2010. *Feminist literary theory: A reader*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

34. Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S., 2003. *Language and Gender*. New York: Cambridge.

35. Eckert, P., 2000. *Language variation as social practice: The linguistic construction of identity in Belten High*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

36. Elenany, H. M. (2015). *The paradox of masculinity in Shakespeare's Macbeth*. (MA thesis, The American University in Cairo). Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8092/b8cd6918ca3ce4470fe1d7f97c7af00533fe.pdf. Accessed 12 March 2020

37. Ellis, S.S., 1845. *The women of England* (Vol. 1): London, HG Langley.

38. Erickson, P., 1987. Rewriting the renaissance, rewriting ourselves. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *38*(3), pp.327-337.

39. Flowerdew, J. and Richardson, J.E. eds., 2018. *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies*. London: Routledge.

40. Foucault, Michel (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. London, Penguin.

41. Fox, M.J., 2011. Prototype theory: An alternative concept theory for categorizing sex and gender. *KO knowledge organization*, *38*(4), pp.328-334.

42. Francis, B., 2012. Gender monoglossia, gender heteroglossia: the potential of Bakhtin's work for re-conceptualising gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *21*(1), pp.1-15.

43. French, M., 1983. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. New York: Summit.

44. French, M., 2011. *The women's room*. London: Hachette UK.

45. Fuss, D., 2016. *Essentially speaking: Feminism, nature and difference*. London: Routledge.

46. Gerwig, G.H. and Gerwig, G.W., 1995. *Shakespeare's ideals of womanhood*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

47. Goldberg, J., 1985. Shakespearean inscriptions: the voicing of power. *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory 130*(1), pp.118 -134.

48. Goldberg, J., 2003. *Shakespeare's Hand*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

49. Gravina, A., 2020. Macbeth and The Changeling: greed, murder and the destructive power of guilt. University of Padua, Padua.

50. Greenblatt, S. ed., 1982. *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma.

51. Greenblatt, S., 2012. *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

52. Greenfield, A., 2013. D'Avenant's Lady Macduff: Ideal Femininity and Subversive Politics. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, *37*(1), pp.39-60.

53. Greer, C., 2003. To Be A Woman: Shakespeare's Patriarchal Viewpoint. *The Corinthian*, *5*(1), p.14.

54. Grosz, E.A. and Grosz, E., 1994. *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

55. Hacker, P., Schulte, J., and Wittgenstein, L., 2009. *Philosophical investigations* [Translated by Anscombe, G.E.M., Hacker, P.M.S. and Schulte, J.]. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

56. Hamamra, B.T., 2020. The misogynist representation of women in Palestinian oral tradition: a socio-political study. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *29*(2), pp.214-226.

57. Higgins, C.H., 2016. “But I must also feel it like a man”: Redressing Representations of Masculinity in Macbeth. The Review: *A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research, 17*(1), p.6.

58. Higgins, J., 2013. Raymond Williams: literature, marxism and cultural materialism. London: Routledge.

59. Hill, C.A., 2008. *Human sexuality: Personality and social psychological perspectives*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

60. Holmer, J.O., 2005. Desdemona, Woman Warrior: "O, these men, these men!"(4.3. 59). *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, *17*(1), pp.132-164.

61. Holquist, M. (ed) and Bakhtin, M.M., 2010. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* [Translated by Emerson, C. and Holquist, M.]. Austin: University of Texas Press.

62. Hopkins, L.,1997. The representation of narrative: what happens in Othello. *Journal X: a journal in cinema and criticism*, *1*(2), pp.159-174.

63. Howell, M.L., 2008. *Manhood and Masculine Identity in William Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Macbeth*. New York: University Press of America.

64. Islam, M.S., 2010. Nature of Evil in Macbeth. *Arts Faculty Journal*, pp.185-194.

65. Jameson, Anna Murphy. 2005. *Shakespeare's Heroines*. Toronto: Broadview.

66. Kahn, C. and Kahn, C., 1981. *Man's estate: masculine identity in Shakespeare.* Berkeley, University of California Press.

67. Kakkonen, G.G. and Penjak, A., 2015. The nature of gender: are Juliet, Desdemona and Cordelia to their fathers as nature is to culture?. *Critical Survey*, *27*(1), pp.18-35.

68. King, E., 2019. Furious: Myth, Gender, and the Origins of Lady Macbeth. Master's thesis. City University of New York, New York.

69. Kranz, D.L., 2003. The Sounds of Supernatural Soliciting in" Macbeth". *Studies in Philology, 100(*3), pp.346-383.

70. Kruse, F.E., 1991. Luce Irigaray's" Parler Femme" and American Metaphysics. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, *27*(4), pp.451-464. www.jstor.org/stable/40320346. Accessed 17 June 2020.

71. La Belle, J., 1980. "A Strange Infirmity": Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *31*(3), pp.381-386.

72. Labbe, M. A. (2010). "Corruption and Theories of Kingship in Macbeth." *Student Pulse*, *2*(02). Retrieved from http://www.studentpulse.com/a?id=155. Accessed 3 March 2021.

73. Labbe, M.A., 2010. Corruption and Theories of Kingship in Macbeth. *Inquiries Journal*, *2*(02).

74. Lakoff, G., 2008. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.

75. Lee, H., 2019. *The Productivity of Women's Anger in Shakespeare's Tragedies.* Doctoral dissertation. Northeastern University, Boston.

76. Lindsey, L.L., 2015. The Sociology of Gender Theoretical Perspectives and Feminist Frameworks. *Gender Roles*, *1*(4), pp.23-48.

77. Loomba, A. and Sanchez, M.E. eds., 2016. *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race, and Sexuality*. New York: Routledge.

78. Macaulay, M., 2005. When chaos is come again: Narrative and narrative analysis in *Othello*. *Style*, *39*(3), pp.259-276.

79. MacDonald, J.G., 2016. Black Ram, White Ewe: Shakespeare, Race, and Women. *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, pp.206-225.

80. Mahajan, N., 2015. The Repressed and the Silenced Self of Desdemona and Ophelia. *Critical Space Journal*, *4*(1), pp.47-53.

81. Manicom, D.P., 2010. *Gender essentialism: a conceptual and empirical exploration of notions of maternal essence as a framework for explaining gender difference* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg). Retrieved from https://ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/7524 Accessed 13 February 2020.

82. Martin, A., 2003. Introduction: Luce Irigaray and the culture of difference. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *20*(3), pp.1-12.

83. Matchinske, M., 2018. Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race, and Sexuality ed. by Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez. *Early Modern Women*, *13*(1), pp.216-220.

84. McConnell-Ginet, S., 2011. *Gender, sexuality, and meaning: Linguistic practice and politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.7-8.

85. Moi, T., 1995. *Sexual, textual politics*. London: Routledge.

86. Murray, J., 1992. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, Eds. "Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe"(Book Review). *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, *16*(2), p.85.

87. Nabhan, F., 2020. Lady Macbeth between Ambition and Femininity in William Shakespeare's Macbeth. *Bulletin of Advanced English Studies (BAES)*, *4*(2), pp.27-31.

88. Nae, A., 2018. Adapting Shakespeare Around the Globe. *English Literature*, p.77.

89. Neely, C.T., 1988. Constructing the subject: feminist practice and the new Renaissance discourses. *English Literary Renaissance*, *18*(1), pp.5-18.

90. Nimavat, S., 2017. Shakespeare‘s Concern about Women: Feminist Perspectives in Shakespeare‘s Plays. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, *4*(2), pp.145-150.

91. Novy, M., 1981. Demythologising Shakespeare. *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *9*(1), pp.17-27.

92. Novy, M., 2017. *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books.

93. Olson, R., 2015. "Too Gentle": Jealousy and Class in Othello. *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, *15*(1), pp.3-25.

94. Ortiz, S., 2019. *Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein's Repurposing of Feminine Domestic Language through the Lens of Bakhtinian Heteroglossia and Dialogic Theory*. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds/391/. Accessed 02 May 2020.

95. Parton, N., 2009. Reflections on the Social Construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge1. *Inspiring books for practice*, pp.24-24.

96. Prentice, D.A., and Miller, D.T., 2007. Psychological Essentialism of Human Categories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *16*(4), pp.202–206. www.jstor.org/stable/20183197. Accessed 14 May 2020.

97. Price, J.G., 2014. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays. In *Hamlet: Critical Essays* (pp. 227-236). Routledge.

98. Rai, R.P., 2016. Jealousy and Destruction in William Shakespeare's Othello. *Crossing the Border: International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *4*(1), pp.53-58.

100. Rosch, E., 1999. Reclaiming concepts. *Journal of consciousness studies*, *6*(11-12), pp.61-77.

101. Sadowski, P., 2003. *Dynamism of character in Shakespeare's mature tragedies*. Newark, University of Delaware Press.

102. Sarkar, M., 2018. Heteroglossia in Browning's Monologues: a Dialogic Perspective. *Annals of Language and Literature*, *2*(3), pp.38-41.

103. Schapiro, B.A., 2003. Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating "Othello" in the Classroom. *American Imago*, *60*(4), pp.481-499.

104. Shakespeare, W., 2001. *Othello* (Vol. 6). London; New York: Classic Books Company.

105. Shearmur, J. and Stokes, G. eds., 2016. Popper's Politics and Political Thought *The Cambridge Companion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

106. Sinfield, A., 1992. *Faultlines: cultural materialism and the politics of dissident reading*. Oakland, University of California Press.

107. Sinfield, A., 2006. *Shakespeare, authority, sexuality: unfinished business in cultural materialism*. New York: Routledge.

108. Snow, E.A., 2015. Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in Othello. *In Othello* (pp. 213-249). Chicago: Routledge.

109. Stallybrass, P., 1986. Patriarchal territories. *Rewriting the Renaissance: the discourses of sexual difference in early modern Europe*, pp.123-44.

110. Toril M., 2002. *Sexual/textual politics: Feminist literary theory*. London: Psychology Press.

111. Tyson, S., 2013. Reclamation from Absence. Luce Irigaray and Women in the History of Philosophy. *Hypatia, 28*(3), pp.483-498.

112. Veenstra, J.R., 1995. The new historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On poetics of culture and the interpretation of Shakespeare. *History and Theory*, *34*(3) pp.174-198.

113.Wehrs, D.R., 2006. Moral physiology, ethical prototypes, and the denaturing of sense in Shakespearean tragedy. *College Literature, Cognitive Shakespeare: Criticism and Theory in the Age of Neuroscience*, *33*(1) pp.67-92.

114. Witt, C., 2011. What is gender essentialism? In *Feminist Metaphysics* (pp. 11-25). New York: Springer Dordrecht.

115. Xu, M., 2019. *Contradictory Shakespeare: An Investigation of Female Protagonists in Othello, Measure for Measure, and Pericles*. CUNY Academic Works.

116. Young, B.W., 2008. *Family life in the age of Shakespeare*. California: ABC-CLIO-Greenwood Press.

117. Zhong, C.B. and Liljenquist, K., 2006. Washing away your sins: Threatened morality and physical cleansing. *Science*, *313*(5792), pp.1451-1452.

118. Ziegler, G., 2013. *Accommodating the virago: Nineteenth-century representations of Lady Macbeth* (pp. 135-157). London: Routledge.

119. Zimmern H. Translation 2008. *The Women of Shakespeare*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.