



Grau d'Estudis Anglesos

Treball de Fi de Grau

Curs 2017-2018

**Discordia Concors in *Macbeth* (1606): The
Importance of the Wayward Sisters in a
Providentialist Scotland**

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Abstract: Discordia Concors in Macbeth (1606): The Importance of the Wayward Sisters in a Providentialist Scotland

Topic: The relevance of the Weird Sisters in Macbeth, since they challenge the character's values and bring balance and justice in a Providentialist society.

Abstract: This paper aims to analyse the role of the Wayward Sisters in *Macbeth*, taking into account the theories that support the idea of them being voices of justice and balance and the arguments that consider them the embodiment of evil and chaos. This study will prove the Wayward Sisters to be the epitome of lawfulness and duty, and, consequently, feared by a collective ashamed by their behaviour and their own misdeeds. This paper will dismantle the socially established conception of the witches, as well as their supposed rivalry against Fate. The impact of the Weird Sisters will reach the Macbeths, whose values and principles will be constantly tested. Thereupon, this study aims to project the role of the Wayward Sisters and their impact on the main characters in a perspective that differs from the stereotypical image of the witches; considering them avatars that shed light into a faulted transition to modernity.

Key words: witches, illusion, Fate, will, balance

Resumen: Discordia concors en *Macbeth* (1606): la importancia de las Tres Hermanas en una Escocia providencialista

Tema: la importancia de las Tres Hermanas en Macbeth, ya que estas retan los valores del personaje principal y aportan balance y justicia en una sociedad Providencialista.

Resumen: el objetivo de este estudio es analizar el papel de las Tres Hermanas en Macbeth, teniendo en cuenta las teorías que las consideran voces de justicia y balance, así como los argumentos que las consideran la personificación del mal y el caos. Este estudio demostrará que las Tres Hermanas son el epitoma de la ley y el deber, y que, consecuentemente, son temidas por un colectivo que se avergüenza de su comportamiento y sus errores. Este estudio desmantelará el concepto de "bruja" socialmente establecido, así como su supuesta rivalidad con el Destino. El impacto de las Tres Hermanas llegará hasta los Macbeth, quienes verán sus principios y valores en riesgo. Consecuentemente, este estudio tiene el objetivo de mostrar el rol de las Tres Hermanas y su impacto en los personajes principales desde una perspectiva muy distinta a la imagen estereotípica de las brujas; considerándolas avatares que se centran en una transición errónea hacia la modernidad.

Palabras clave: brujas, ilusión, Destino, voluntad, balance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my end-of-degree paper supervisor, Dr. Clara Escoda, whose passion and professionalism in the field triggered my motivation to further learn about Shakespeare and his times. Moreover, her patience, guidance and persistent help in my study have allowed me to fully dedicate myself to it, being as precise as possible and making the necessary changes in order to direct the study in the desired way.

I would particularly like to thank my mother for being by my side along the course of this project and in my professional career, always supporting and encouraging my passion as regards the Bard. She accompanied me in my first experience in Stratford-upon-Avon, which elicited from me a deep enthusiasm in Shakespeare, his times and his plays.

I also received generous support from my friends, especially Thais Mena, who, despite not being fully interested in the field, always kindled my passion in it, giving me constructive comments and warm encouragement as far as this study is concerned.

Last but not least, I would like to thank those academics, writers and critics that dedicate or have dedicated themselves to Shakespeare Studies and that have contributed to the understanding of Shakespeare, his plays and his times. Specifically, I would like to show my appreciation for those who have developed an alternative reading of Shakespearean plays and characters, shedding light on outcast individuals and disrupting one-sided readings. Without them, this study could not have been possible.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Objectives for this study

Providentialism limited the identity of human beings. The social position in which they were born provided their identity, beliefs, rights and privileges as well as delimited their habits and life events. “There is, however, in Shakespeare’s time, a new fluidity” (McEvoy 2005), a fluidity that becomes the centre of Macbeth’s confusion. The fact that he becomes aware of his future, which proves this fluidity that the individual starts experiencing, makes him question the role of Fate and God, and whether they truly exist and determine someone’s future and luck. Even though the Macbeths aim at aspiring to their wishes, the values that they have connected human beings with are improper: for them, it is through blood, anger, fear and despair that individuals can achieve what they truly desire. Being aware of the adoption of such faulty values, the Three Sisters operate in Fate’s name not to re-establish the obsolete Providentialism, but to punish and teach the Macbeths and the future generations that the adoption of values based on resentment and cold blood will lead to the creation of a modern system of values as faulty as Feudalism. Thereupon, this study aims to reject the conception of the witches as traditionally understood, and instead it will consider them as powerful agents that operate in Fate’s name and bring justice and fairness to a decaying Providentialist Scotland. Discerning from Dollimore’s conception of the chaos created by the Three Sisters (“Introduction to the Third Edition” of *Radical Tragedy* 2004), this study will show that the chaos in the play is, instead, lawfulness in disguise: the Three Sisters, the outcast women that perceive how modern corruption is spreading in a Scotland that is experiencing a crumbling of ethical and moral values, will prove how inept Macbeth is for the throne, as well as Lady Macbeth’s greediness. These modern values are dramatized in *Macbeth*, which exposes the “contradictions within the feudal society of medieval Scotland” (McEvoy 2005), that is, the contradictions between the utter providentialist boundedness and obedience towards the king contrasted with the desire and motivation to acquire social mobility, which was, particularly in the cases of regicide, severely punished. The individualist moral values that the new autonomous individuals were adopting were based on violent masculinity, fear and tyranny. As a consequence, The Bard’s Scottish play uncovers not only the conflicts in the already archaic Providentialist system, but also the flawed conception of the individual understood in the newly emerging modern era.

Therefore, the Macbeths are not the result of an evil possession and domination of the witches but the product of their own corruption and excessive ambition, which are tested by the witches. With the support of film adaptations, this study will analyse the effects of the king

on the country in *Maqbool* (2003), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, which is considered to be the perfect blending of Bollywood and classical tragedy; the concept of manhood in *Macbeth* (2015), directed by Justin Kurzel, which is admired for its cinematic effects; the cyclical ending in *Macbeth* (1971), directed by Roman Polanski, which is considered an attempt to make the play as naturalistic as possible; and the role of the witches in Verdi's opera *Macbeth*, which was staged in the Royal Opera House (2018), directed by Phyllida Lloyd, and outstanding for its economic production¹. Thereupon, the different productions of the play will expose the myriad of interpretations the Three Sisters can have.

I.2. Historical Background

The transition from the Elizabethan period to the Jacobean era brought a series of changes, one of the most significant ones being the importance and consideration of witchcraft for King James VI/ I and, therefore, for the English society of the times. The Jacobean period meant a transition from Providentialism to a more modern approach to the individual, who now has a more fluid identity that allows them to improve their societal status and wealth. Nonetheless, this transition also led to a questioning of the Providentialist values regarding God and Fate. Even though society continued to be Christian, the idea that God decided one's Fate started being questioned and put into test. Providentialism, therefore, started to be considered "inoperative in a dislocated world where men struggle for secular power" (Dollimore 1984: 38) and where values pertaining to a more modern, ruthless individualism and a definition of manhood in terms of daring and valour begin to be more predominant. This intricate ideological transition acquired more complexity due to the remaining beliefs in witchcraft. Following John T. Teall's ideas, James I brought with him "an obsession with the magic art" (1962: 21) that spread around the English society. Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) and James I's *Daemonologie* provided all the information for the society to acknowledge who are the witches and which are their true powers. Because of his past traumatic experiences that were to have magical reasons, James I decided to publish his *Daemonologie* (1597), in which he explicitly develops the characteristics of the witches, their habits and their powers and agency, which are understood as being manipulated by satanic authorities. Being linked with the devil and demonic forces, the power of 'The Prince of

¹ *Maqbool* is considered to be the least faithful adaptation to the original text, since it is set in Bombay and sticks to the Indian folklore. Another Shakespearean adaptation by Vishal Bhardwaj is *Omkaara* (2006), the Indian version of *Othello*. Concerning *Maqbool*, it won eight different awards, including the IIFA Award for Best Screenplay and the Filmfare Critics Award for Best Actor.

Darkness' through the witches had to be eradicated. Even though the stereotypical, northern conception of the witch did not take root in England, still its citizens believed in their existence, and believed them to threaten Fortune, society and its order². In this context, *Macbeth* (1606) was staged in order to represent and expose the influence of the Wayward Sisters in Macbeth and in medieval Scotland.

I.3. Supernatural scepticism

Even though William Shakespeare's definite beliefs on the subject are still obscure, there is no questioning that King James I enjoyed watching a performance of a play that exposed the powerful figure of the witches in society; witches that play with the weather and cause natural disasters, as the king himself experienced. However, the complacency of James I with witchcraft stories started to clash with an increasing popular scepticism and the emergent scientific reasoning. On the one hand, certain citizens started to question the nature of such magical powers and started denying the concepts and ideas that the king exposed in his *Daemonologie*. With his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot attempted to convince Jacobean society of his sceptic view of witchcraft by exposing and giving an objective argument to the apparent conjures that witches used and that people believed to be miraculous or supernatural. Despite the intention, James I decided to burn as many of these copies as possible in order to perpetuate the fear towards witchcraft that society still experienced.

I.4. Science and female hysteria

Apart from the sceptical arguments, scientific reasoning became another enemy for the witch believers: for experts, the witches and the bewitched were hysterical women that suffered from hallucinations. Even though the concepts are different, still the empowered, rebel and outcast figure of the witch became a hysteric woman "who fulfils patriarchal expectations and suffers for it" (Levin 2002: 24). Therefore, both the witch and the hysteric suffered from the accusations of a patriarchal society that points at them as not adept for society: the first for being ambitious and independent and the latter for not adapting well to the societal system. In such a tumultuous ideological transition, the distinction between the witch, the bewitched and

² There was a distinction between Northern or Scottish witches and English ones: the former were considered savages, women that organised covens, had sexual intercourses with the Devil and killed babies for their sabbat. The latter, were considered a "relatively low-key, non-demonic affair" (Sharpe 2013: 164).

the hysteric were still blurred. Indeed, the symptoms were similar, only with a different coining. Supernatural beliefs gave way to a more scientific approach that gave an objective reasoning for what seemed to be the symptoms of a bewitched or a real witch. Probably, James the I felt exhilarated when, in the play, finding in Lady Macbeth symptoms of what would be diagnosed as hysteria, the doctor clearly states: “More needs she the divine than the physician” (V, i, 1.72). Clearly, the king would have been content seeing that probably the scientific field still might acknowledge a true case of witchcraft when seen. In fact, Lady Macbeth evokes spirits to embody her in order to become a witch with supernatural powers (“Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts” (I, v, ll. 39-40)).

I.5. On the witches’ sexual nature

It is important, considering the witches’ influence, to explain how the embodiments of evil are represented in the play. From what Banquo explains, they are androgynous beings, apparently women with beards. This might relate to the ‘unsexing’ that Lady Macbeth desires in order to become, as this study will show, a witch. It is important to remark that the Three Sisters do not consider themselves witches, but Wayward or Weïrd Sisters. In late Middle English, those were the names for Destiny. Therefore, the witches are beings that operate in Destiny’s name, who work in order to project the future and advice the individual affected by it. Consequently, they aim to establish justice in a decaying Providentialist society that was ingraining and developing an excessively violent conception of manhood and the individual. Effectively, they prophesise Macbeth’s future as a king, as well as Macbeth’s death. Even though they do prophesise the future, their power over Macbeth is still unclear: despite him knowing the prophecy, it is only Macbeth who can choose the course of his actions and deeds.

I.6. Macbeth’s malleability

If Macbeth were to be considered dominated by someone, that someone would be Lady Macbeth, who becomes more of a witch as the play progresses. She is the one able to accuse him of ‘not being man enough’, considering his inability to have children. The only way he is able to achieve this manhood, according to Lady Macbeth, is through blood and violence. As the ending exposes, Macbeth is too corrupted as an individual to rule Scotland. In such a case, the witches are not to blame for Macbeth’s death, but to be thanked for bringing him to his end. Despite the cruel ending of Macbeth, the future of the kingdom of Scotland is uncertain: because Malcolm left Scotland and he arrives from England in order to take the throne, he

represents “an anglicising force”, the Scottish’ “submissive role in relation to England”, as Mary Floyd-Wilson remarks (2006: 159). Furthermore, if Macbeth is punished for his violence and malevolence, the celebration of the image of Macbeth’s body and head by the new king is quite paradoxical. In this sense, the play seems to suggest a cyclical move: Macbeth is a violent individual that is replaced by another bloodthirsty man, Malcolm, only this time English, not Scottish. As a consequence, the play’s ending becomes a denunciation of Shakespeare’s society’s transition to modernity. Even though Providentialism started to become an obsolete system, the play is a warning against the eventually destructive tendencies of modernity.

I.7. Lady Macbeth as a powerful female figure

Even though Macbeth would reasonably be the one to blame for his own acts, in the end, Lady Macbeth seems to be the one that should be blamed. In that sense, the play seems to endorse the idea that women are the ones easily manipulated by evil forces, since they are more vulnerable. That may explain why Lady Macbeth’s speech resembles the one of the witches without knowing about their encounter with Macbeth (“Hie thee hither/ That I may pour my spirits in thine ear” (I, v, ll. 42-43). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that it is Lady Macbeth herself who evokes the spirits and asks them to possess her. Thereupon, she is not bewitched because of her vulnerability, but because of her own agency. In that sense, Lady Macbeth embodies the male in the marriage, while Macbeth becomes the vulnerable female. Lady Macbeth’s maleness attacks Macbeth’s vulnerability, which can only be solved through violent acts. Thereupon, following Janet Adelman’s theory, “the play’s central fantasy of scape from woman” provides the incentive for Macbeth’s murders and violent acts (1987: 114). However, because Macbeth’s nature is so fragile and delicate, his acts start to overwhelm his persona, making him suffer from illusions and obsessions. Even though the nature of his illusions have been widely discussed, the fact that it is only Macbeth the one that sees Banquo’s ghost, not even Lady Macbeth, who is part of Macbeth’s plans and deeds, points to the fact that the delicate personality of the king has been affected by the murders he has planned. Similarly, Macbeth’s decay leads to his wife’s destruction, who also suffers from hallucinations. She becomes obsessed with cleaning her hands and enters a paranoid, obsessive stage which she will not be able to escape. Indeed, the doctor is right when claiming that she does not need the help of the doctor, since she is not suffering from the common hysteria diagnosed during Jacobean times: instead, Lady Macbeth suffers from her malevolence (however socially induced), her passions and ambitions that ultimately lead to the destruction of her marriage,

her husband and the kingdom of Scotland³. Considering that, the witches are not the ones that manipulate all characters like puppets, but put their values and morals into test. That is why they are frightening and challenging for a Providentialist society: they are able to expose one's faults and misdeeds, punishing them for their wrongs. In this case, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are the ones who are punished, and probably Malcolm and/ or Donalbain are the next ones.

I.8. Study's overview

This study, therefore, will analyse the impact and the influence of the Wayward Sisters in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, considering their historical context and their relation with Fate. In chapter two: "Historical background for *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1606)", through analysing the historical context, the misogynist approach towards the arts of magic will be exposed, following Alan Anderson and Raymond Gordon's ideas. The importance of the king and the influential witchcraft-related texts will be explored, as well as the different religious approaches to witchcraft. The context will also expose the popular conceptions of witchcraft, which fed the Jacobean citizens with theories and gossips that were rooted in their beliefs. This popular culture will be compared to the depiction of the Three Sisters, who, along with the Goddess of Witchcraft Hecate, constitute the voice of Fate. These voices of Fortune have an impact on Macbeth, who becomes a tyrannical, despot king. Following Bernard J. Paris' perspective, in chapter three: "Macbeth's Malleability Uncovered by the Three Sisters", this study will analyse Macbeth's nature in order to expose his own agency, as he is neither possessed nor manipulated by the witches. Similarly, in chapter four: "The New Witch: Lady Macbeth and Her True Natural Powers" Lady Macbeth's closeness to the witches will be considered, as well as her strong agency and power over Macbeth and, therefore, over Scotland. With Joanna Levin's theories in mind, this study will discard the idea of Lady Macbeth being a hysteric woman and suffering from mere hallucinations. Lastly, in chapter five: "The workers of Fate: the Wayward Sisters as essential Beings in *Macbeth* (1606)", with the Macbeths' fatal end, the role of Fortune in the play will be discussed. Considering Dollimore's theories on Providentialism, this chapter will explore the need for the Three Sisters in a decaying Providentialist society that is approaching modernity the wrong way: through violence and

³ For more information on Lady Macbeth's diagnosis, hysteria and female power see pp. 24-5 from Joanna Levin's "Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria" (2002) and pp. 114-5 from Janet Adelman's "Born of Woman" (1987).

amoral behaviour. This study, thereupon, will prove how the Three Sisters operate in the name of Fortune and consequently, bring order and justice to an unfair and chaotic Scotland.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR *THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH* (1606)

Queen Elizabeth I's death forced the English society to transition from an Elizabethan era to a Jacobean period, in which James I became both king of England and Scotland. King James I's ascension to the throne brought a strong importance on witchcraft that influenced the ideology and beliefs of the English society. Even though the "Elizabethans were already fascinated by all kinds of magic" (Ashley 1998: 229), the new King projected a fearful attitude towards witchcraft, a newly spread fear that made Jacobean society aware of the dangers of black magic and the individuals (mostly females) that could potentially be working for the devil. In order to bring such awareness, James I decided to publish his *Daemonologie* (1597), a text that explicitly developed the dangers of witchcraft, its effects, how it affected the individual and how it could be detected. Furthermore, he minutiously described the appearance of witches and their habits: how they looked, dressed, concealed their powers and their common activities and rituals. To these statements, the *Malleus Maleficarum* made its contribution. Written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1487, the book addressed the reasons why witchcraft should be eradicated, while raising awareness on the weakness that the female sex owned, which allowed for the devil forces to be present in the physical realm. Thereupon, the threats and potential chaos that the Jacobean society could face found its seeds in the apparent vulnerability of the female sex. Those contributions not only strengthened a chauvinistic mindset, but also put women on the spot, since they could be easily accused of witches through the Witchcraft Act from 1604, a broadened version of the Elizabethan Act that included penalty to death for invoking evil forces. The significance that was given to witchcraft and the role of the witches in England, therefore, shaped this new society that was experiencing a tumultuous royal transition that implied a myriad of adjustments, one of the most significant being the focus on magic and its effects.

The attention on witchcraft forced the religious groups to set themselves in a specific position. Even though they agreed in the malevolence of witchcraft, they needed to find elements of dissensus that could distinguish them, otherwise their popularity among the English society could be put to risk. One of the distinctions that they shared, according to John T. Teall, is the difference between *mira* and *miracle* (1962: 23). While the latter was executed by God and angelic forces, the former becomes the distortions that the devil is able to execute in the physical realm. In this aspect, Calvinism defended the idea that only those that lacked faith could be easily tricked by the devil and observe the *mira* he is able to project in this world. Therefore, a decision that could eradicate witchcraft would be the strengthening of the religious

aspect in each individual and reinforcement of faith in society. Concerning the Protestants, they maintained the theory that all the activities executed by witches were mere hallucinations. Consequently, they questioned “whether they might justifiably punish the witch for works that were largely illusory” (Teall 1962: 29). Conversely to this perspective, the Catholics strongly supported the idea their fellow believer the King defended: witches should be severely punished, for their acts become a threat to society and the church as institution. Nonetheless, the focus on the blame on women, the apparent weak sex that is easily manipulated by devil sources, distracted the elite and ruling voices from the real causes for this extended problem: “an angry God” (Teall, 1962: 31). In a Providentialist world in which everything is controlled by God, the appearance of darker energies are movements allowed by Him for those sources to punish those who deserve it. As Teall clearly develops in his article, following a Providentialist thought, “if the witches harm us, it must be God’s positive and active justice” (1962: 34). Therefore, the burning and punishing of witches delayed an individual’s punishment that was ultimately executed by God, a punishment that, were it to be impeded, could aggravate someone’s fate.

Given the massive importance on witchcraft and magic, Jacobean society developed their own conception of the witches and of those who invoked dark spirits. This formed a popular culture that became an “‘abject’, something rejected by higher status social groups from which they could not part” (Ellen-Lamb 2000: 280). This popular culture distinguished the English witches from the Scottish ones, since the latter belonged to the northern spirits, considered darker and wilder. While “the idea of the sabbat did not take hold (...) in England” (Sharpe 2013: 64), English society was aware of the distinctive performances that northern witches executed: similarly to the Three Sisters in *Macbeth*, northern or Scottish witches organised sabbats in which they reunited with Satan (often embodied by a goat), had a feast and enjoyed orgies. Because of these striking activities, northern witches were more severely persecuted in northern lands, where witch-hunts were on stake. However, “witchcraft in England, in contrast to what was normally described as ‘continental witchcraft, was a relatively low-key, non-demonic affair” (Sharpe 2013:164). Despite knowing that English witches did not act similarly to the continental ones, the fear that King James I rooted in society made them continuously gossip and fantasise about those witches that could maintain sexual intercourse with the devil. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that King James I, both king of England and Scotland, brought a massive immigration of Scottish citizens to England. As a result, the English citizens saw a reshaping England that might be hosting continental witches without even noticing. Those changes affected the way the English observed the new kingdom,

“a darker period, the Jacobean era so full of ‘dark November days, when Englishmen hang themselves’” (Ashley, 1988: 235). This gloomy conception of the times increased the angst among the population, who conceived the witches not only as a personal threat, but as entities that could utterly destroy the stability and prosperity that they experienced during the Elizabethan era.

The strong distinction between the Scottish and the English witches became a form of English chauvinism that reflected the attitude of the English towards the new northern inhabitants and their concern about the northern women. These belonged to a more matriarchal society that empowered them and that gave them enough strength to contact the Devil but still hide it from society. As Mary Floyd-Wilson explains: “King James himself viewed the Highlanders as intemperate barbarians, known for their detestable, godless, and possibly cannibalistic ways” (2006: 141). With that conception of the new neighbours, no doubt that the Scottish witches became the most feared and detested individuals among the English.

In this tumultuous historical situation, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* was firstly staged in 1606. Even though King James I expressed his admiration for the theatre, he was considered to be a person that could not bear long plays, and that might explain why *Macbeth* is the shortest play written by the Bard. The play contains historical hints that might resonate to the King, since some references to his own life are present. For instance, the First Witch’s claim that a sailor shall “dwindle, peak and pine; / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed (I, ii, ll.23-5) becomes a clear reference to a ship accident that the king suffered, who he himself blamed to the witches and spirits. Apparently, the depiction of the witches in the play is the ideal illustration of what Scottish witches would have looked like: horrendous entities that reunited in covens and that worked in Satan’s name. The fact that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Scottish citizens that fall into the witches’ claims and tricks, experience a fatal ending might have pleased the King, who maintained a contemptuous view of the Scottish and that desired for the malevolence of the witches to be fully uncovered. However, in the end, the Three Sisters are not mere agents of evil, rather, they operate in Fate’s name in order to execute justice in a crumbling Providentialist society that used violence, blood and tyranny in order to achieve its desires in approach to modern times.

Despite the king’s appreciation of *Macbeth*, the terror spread among society affected the way citizens received the play. For reasons unknown, the staging of *Macbeth* was accompanied by a myriad of accidents, such as riots, accidental deaths during the staging, fires, etc. Those fatal events made people speculate and find reasons for those catastrophes and voices started to spread the rumour that the actors that played the witches used real spells,

which affected anyone that was present at that moment. Other voices claimed that the play was cursed, since Shakespeare's use of spoken spells might have angered the real northern witches. Those rumours became solid facts, and the 'Curse of *Macbeth*' was being publicly acknowledged. People even refused to mention *Macbeth*; instead, they would call it 'The Scottish Play'. These ideas reached the King, who decided to ban the play for five years, since he could not bear the idea of real invocations during a play.

However, it is the 'Curse of *Macbeth*' that has made the play famous throughout centuries. It not only reveals the attitudes of the Jacobean public, but also how the Three Sisters were conceived. Even though Shakespeare might have introduced some information in order to please the King, the truth is that the play allows for alternative readings in which the Wayward Sisters are not atrocious, weak women, but strong agents that operate in Fate's name and bring fairness and justice to a corrupted society, a society in which faith in Fate, justice and God was decaying, whilst individuals like the Macbeths were thirsty for power and were determined to achieve it through their own violent and tyrannical manners.

III. MACBETH'S MALLEABILITY UNCOVERED BY THE THREE SISTERS

The individuality of one of the main characters in the play, Macbeth, as well as the influence of the Three Sisters on him have been previously discussed. Even though it needs to be acknowledged the fact that Macbeth's "so foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I, iii, 1.38) resembles the witches' "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I, i, 1.11), the Wayward Sister's prediction does not alter Macbeth's plans. Despite the fact that he is told that he will become thane of Cawdor and, afterwards, king of Scotland, he does not feel determined to employ violence in order to achieve these positions⁴. However, his psychological and emotional wellbeing starts being shattered by the presence of the Three Sisters, since they unsettle Macbeth and threaten his weak nature. Macbeth's thoughts start to play with him, creating hallucinations as the play progresses. Just after the encounter with the Sisters, he already reflects upon his personality: "why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair/ And make my seated heart knock at my ribs (...)" (I, s. iii, ll.135-37). At this point, "He already admits 'a suggestion' which can have no origin outside his own mind" (Gooder 1999: 221). This statement depicts the true personality of Macbeth, saving Lady Macbeth from all the blame, a preconception that falls into a chauvinistic reading of Macbeth's wife in the play. Thereupon, the first presence of the witches not only foretells the future to Macbeth and Banquo, but also uncovers the true nature of Macbeth: an easily influenced one not fitted for the crown.

This malleability, however, is paradoxical, that is, even though Macbeth is emotionally and psychologically easily persuaded, the witches do not interfere in his deeds. Were the Three Sisters to have complete control over Macbeth's acts, he would neither ponder about each of his taken steps, nor doubt the decisions that Lady Macbeth takes. Macbeth's delay in planning murdering Duncan ("We will speak further" (I, v, l. 69)) as well as his desire to stop the assassination ("We will proceed no further in this business" (I, vii, l. 31)) springs from his own will and determination. Macbeth, in the play, lives in two worlds: his outer world, namely his social role as a husband and vassal of the king; and his inner world, which is haunting him constantly. This inner sphere, however, is not the fruit of any enchantment, but the result of an unbalanced, delicate and fragile personality that is disturbed by any event from the outer domains. As Gooder clearly puts it: "For Shakespeare reality is always impinging, interrupting the haunted world of Macbeth's mind" (1999: 224). This 'haunted mind', therefore, is not

⁴ The title of "thane" was considered equal to the one of the "son of an earl". A thane was a territorial administrator of the King's land. Therefore, in Macbeth's case, he is named administrator of the parish of Cawdor.

created by the Three Sisters, but uncovered by them in order to prove how unsuited Macbeth is for the throne, for an unsettled king leads to an unsettled country.

One of the elements that influence his changeable nature is a feeling of inferiority for not being able to bear any children. Even though Lady Macbeth subtly states that: “I have given suck, and know / how tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me;” (I, s.vii, ll.54-55), Macduff is clear when saying: “[Macbeth] has no children” (IV, s.iii, l. 215). These contradictory statements lead only to one possible conclusion: Lady Macbeth had children in a previous marriage, then became a widow and remarried Macbeth. Because Lady Macbeth is aware of Macbeth’s impossibility of bearing children and knows how embarrassing that is, she uses that as her weapon that would make Macbeth do whatever she desires. As Dennis Biggins clearly states: “Her attack is saturated with sexuality, and her main weapon is clearly a kind of sexual blackmail” (1975: 255). If this is the case, Macbeth aims at validating his manhood by any means, and is ready to demonstrate that, even though he is not able to have an heir, he is as manly as any other Scottish. Analysing different film adaptations, it should be highlighted that this aspect is completely concealed in the 2015 *Macbeth* by Justin Kurzel and played by Michael Fassbender, who is depicted as revengeful for his son’s death. Even though in this film Macbeth has a reason for accessing the throne, since he feels empty after burying his dead son, he does not embody the real Macbeth: in this adaptation, Lady Macbeth is the one to blame, since Macbeth does not feel the need to prove his manhood by any means. Instead, he is devilry convinced by his wife, who seems so disturbed by her greediness that causes the marriage’s fatal ending. Even though this adaptation omits Macbeth’s feelings of inferiority, in the play, Macbeth’s wife is well aware of Macbeth’s docility and inferiority complex: “yet I do fear thy nature, / It is too full o th’ milk of human kindness” (I, v, ll.15-6). As a consequence, Macbeth’s wife becomes a rock to which the future king can hold to. Were Lady Macbeth not present in the play, he would not have been able to take the situation that far: even his accession to the throne would be a much more difficult step to take. Despite these strongly opposed personalities, the Macbeths’ marriage works because of such dichotomy: Macbeth embodies the female qualities while Lady Macbeth “herself becomes virtually male, composed of the hard metal of which the armored male is made” (Adelman 1987: 115). If Lady Macbeth is considered male, by making “the murder of Duncan the test of Macbeth’s virility” (Adelman 1987: 114), the king-to-be aims at demonstrating his manhood to another male, a masculine power that needs to observe a Macbeth that is capable of achieving his desires at any cost. Nonetheless, Macbeth’s internal world starts to decay as Lady Macbeth approaches her finale. Even though throughout the whole play he had his wife’s support and encouragement,

Macbeth's internal world starts appalling him, distancing him from his wife and from the external world. *Macbeth* proves that "violence brings destruction, social disintegration, and personal damnation" (Biggins, 1975: 272). However, Macbeth's deep connection to his wife is constantly present until their ends, with Macbeth affirming that Lady Macbeth "should have died hereafter" (V, v, 1.18), for now she is not able to support him in battle against the English. Macbeth's dependence on Lady Macbeth can also be noticed in his answer to Sayton. When he states that: "Life's but a walking shadow (...) signifying nothing" (V, v, ll.24-8), that "nothing" can either mean 'no-thing' or female sexuality. In that sense, Macbeth's life was full of meaning with Lady Macbeth's presence, but now with her gone, there is nothing to be gained in battle. In other words, Lady Macbeth provided Macbeth with the resolution and the ambition that he lacks in order to become what he wishes.

Being Lady Macbeth such a strong influence on Macbeth, the impact of the Three Sisters on him is quite unclear. While they are purposely waiting for him at the beginning of the play ("There to meet with Macbeth" (I, i, l. 7)), they do not inquire in the ways he is supposed to access the throne. The moment Macbeth is told he will become the king of Scotland, he is presented with two options, one being the ethical decision to wait and work hard in order to achieve the title rightfully for his own merits. Nonetheless, he could also opt for the quickest track: annihilate anyone that becomes a challenge for the throne in order to be named king of Scotland as swiftly as possible. Even though at the beginning of the play he feels startled by the predictions, his wife easily convinces him to opt for the last option, since the ethical one might postpone his accession to the throne, and Malcom is the one to deserve the title. Because Duncan's son is the one supposed to become king after Duncan, the Three Sisters probably foresaw Macbeth's malleability, affected by his virile traumas, and which might had led him to perdition. Because the Wayward Sisters work for Fortune, and Fortune brings fairness to the world, the Sisters' aim is to uncover Macbeth's complaisance so as to make his future as king as short as possible, reducing the damage he can inflict on the country while, at the same time, punishing him for his misdeeds. However, in order to reduce this mishap, the damaging agent should be utterly revealed, which brings to light the much discussed chaos by critics like Dollimore. As Gooder clearly explains: "[Macbeth] is a play where paradoxes meet. It is the guilty who perceive their guilt with greater clarity even than those who suffer from and oppose them, and it is through the most guilty that we have the strongest sense of what innocence might be" (1999: 230). Therefore, the witches need to expose Macbeth's passivity so as to make society aware of his misdeeds and faulted nature, while publicly punishing them for their misbehaviour. This punishment should supposedly work as

a warning to a society transitioning to modernity and that seems to have lost the ethical values so preserved in Providentialist times.

Macbeth's mind is the one that is constantly punishing him throughout the play, as well as uncovering his abhorrence towards his own acts. One of the episodes that Macbeth experiences the most is hallucinations. Even though he is constantly wondering about his nature and the power of his own mind, his first imagination appears after killing Duncan. Just after executing his first horrible deed, his mind starts interfering with his wellbeing: "Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but / a dagger of the mind, a false creation / proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?" (II, i, ll. 37-40). This dagger that he imagines is only one of the myriad of tricks that his mind plays and that disturbs him until his end. Because his mind exposes all of Macbeth's terrors, the dagger he imagines represents phallic power, pointing to "Macbeth as terrifyingly pawn to female figures" (Adelman 1987: 112). Because his mind exposes all of his fears, his obsession on proving his virility is represented through his imagination. His fears are also exposed during the royal dinner, when he sees Banquo's ghost. The fact that Lady Macbeth is not able to see the ghost highlights the idea that it is Macbeth's mind that is fooling him. Were Banquo's ghost a creation of the witches, they would have affected Lady Macbeth as well, since she is considered full of greediness and ambition. Even though Macbeth says: "Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that / Which might appal the Devil" (III, iv, ll. 48-9), blaming dark spirits is his strategy to position himself as the victim, even though it is his own persona that is destroying him both as a king and as a sane individual.

As a consequence, even though at the beginning Macbeth is presented as a noble man that worked for the good of Scotland, the witches are present in order to show that, under this façade, a fragile and malleable personality is hidden. Macbeth's feelings of inferiority and lack of virility allow for Lady Macbeth to convince him to prove his manhood through killing Duncan, Banquo, Macduff's family and trying to kill Macduff. Even though there is the tendency to blame Lady Macbeth for her husband's acts, it is only his faulted nature that makes him easily influenced, a disgraced personality that proves he is not fitted to be king. In such a case, the Three Sisters succeed in unmasking Macbeth's true temper, one that would lead to a damaged and corrupted Scotland.

IV. THE NEW WITCH: LADY MACBETH AND HER TRUE NATURAL POWERS

Throughout the whole play, Lady Macbeth is the one that is in a powerful position within the marriage. Even though this has been traditionally read as a malevolent attempt to manipulate Macbeth and use him for her own benefits, her compelling status is due to her Scottish blood: her character, therefore, “evoke[s] the ancient Scots’ matriarchal structure” (Floyd-Wilson, 2006: 152). Reading her attitude as extremely authoritative thus implies that the critic is adopting an English perspective, which might eventually evolve into English chauvinism, an aspect that the play seems to reflect and that was present during the Jacobean period. Because the play opposes the Scottish nature against the English character, Lady Macbeth is prone to be read as exceedingly malicious and as too dominant and manipulative.

Nonetheless, Lady Macbeth becomes the embodiment of a true Scottish Highlander: she is in contact with spirits and possesses the nurturing and caring traits that a powerful, female agent should own. Despite the fact that the play is perceived through an English perspective, an alternative reading of the play uncovers the positive and beneficial peculiarities of Lady Macbeth. One of the aspects that characterises Lady Macbeth the most is her nurturing, considerate and compelling position in her marriage. She is the one that is aware of Macbeth’s weaknesses: “yet do I fear thy nature” (I, v, l. 15), and is resolute to aid him in achieving what she considers he deserves: “That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,/ and chastise with the valour of my tongue/ all that impedes thee from the golden round, / which Fate and metaphysical aid doth seem/ to have thee crowned withal” (I, v, ll.23-7). Even though Lady Macbeth’s conception of Fate is faulted, since she believes that her husband should attain what Destiny would give him by force and through violent means, she is intended to nourish Macbeth as if he were a baby, feeding him with the courage and strength that she possesses and that her husband lacks. Accordingly, Lady Macbeth functions both as a wife and a mother: a sexual figure that wants Macbeth to prove his manhood and a nurturer that needs to control and constantly feed her husband with assertions and security that might protect him from his hallucinations: “you lack the season of all natures, sleep” (III, iv, l.142). Even though Lady Macbeth experiences a fatal ending, such death is not a result of unbearable thoughts nor of ‘The Mother’ (hysteria); rather, it is a punishment from Fate, since her misconception of how merits should be attained leads to myriads of deaths and a massive terror spread around

Scotland⁵. However, Lady Macbeth's death is by no means due to her inability to handle societal demands, her innate weakness due to her sex.

One of the connections that Lady Macbeth establishes with the Three Sisters is through her well-known evocation of spirits, which takes place before Duncan's arrival. Even though Joanna Levin claims that "Shakespeare does not provide Lady Macbeth with any (...) signs" (2002: 39) that might physically transform Lady Macbeth into a real witch, this evocation does have an impact on both Lady Macbeth, her husband and, consequently, their plotting to achieve the crown. One of the things that she asks for in her invocation of spirits is an unsexing: "unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full/ Of direst cruelty" (I, s.v, ll.40-1-2). She asks for an attack on the characteristics that make her female. When she continues asking "Make thick my blood" (I, v, l.42), she desires "to stop the menstrual blood that is the sign of [her female] potential" (Adelman 1987: 111). Lastly, her "Come to my woman's breasts /And take my milk for gall" (I, v, ll. 46-7), could be read in two different manners: on the one hand, the spirits might exchange her milk for gall or, on the other hand, they might take her own milk as gall, "to nurse from her breasts and find in her milk their sustaining poison" (Adelman 1987: 112). Taking the latter as the preferred reading of the passage, Lady Macbeth would then embody the dangerous mother, the powerful female agent that merges witchcraft with the powerful nature of motherhood. From this perspective, Lady Macbeth would embody all of Macbeth's fears towards motherhood and female capabilities: not only is she able to reproduce and feed children, but she also becomes the mother of "spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts" (I, v, ll.39-40). Because Lady Macbeth is aware of Macbeth's uncontrollable fear towards female powers, whenever Macbeth is doubtful or does not want to proceed further in their plans, she reminds him of her own capabilities: "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" (I, vii, ll.54-9). In this passage, she depicts all that Macbeth lacks: female agency and the audacity to exert violence in order to achieve one's desires. Because Macbeth is so fearful of those characteristics, he feels compelled to prove his value in order not to contradict Lady Macbeth, who owns both her strength and the one that Macbeth lacks. Aware of the true power of his wife, he decides to follow her advice, considering her a skilful planner that could enable

⁵ 'The Mother' was a synonym for female hysteria, which refers to the 'suffocation of the mother', the critical mental state that women could suffer from if they could not bear being a housewife, a mother and accomplish all the societal expectations. For further information, see "Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria", by Joanna Levin.

him to access the throne through the best means. Conclusively, because deep down he is aware of his own inabilities, he surrenders all dominance to Lady Macbeth, who then seems to be responsible for both her own acts and Macbeth's. This aspect is reinforced in Kurzel's *Macbeth*, from 2015, in which the invocation of spirits becomes a complete ceremony that provides Lady Macbeth with the strength necessary to use her husband's weaknesses for her own benefit.

Because of her initial invocation of spirits, Lady Macbeth should not be considered to be manipulated by the witches, since she is the one who decides to become one through her own willingness. The most common reading of *Lady Macbeth* has considered her a prey for the witches: the Three Sisters using her and toying with her identity, manipulating, at the same time, Macbeth's. However, the text offers a distinctive proof, depicting Lady Macbeth as a powerful agent that is at its most, her own enemy. From the very beginning, Lady Macbeth decides to use supernatural powers in order to achieve her desires. Her invocation ("Come, you mortal spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts" (a.1, s.5, ll. 39-40)) becomes the clear representation of what she aims at becoming. As Levin claims, "her words become a performative utterance" (2002: 39), which directly categorises her as a witch, though Shakespeare does not give her such title. What is important to consider, nonetheless, is the fact that Lady Macbeth is dreadfully regarded, for "the witch, the bewitched, and the hysteric were synchronic categories brought together" (Levin 2002: 22). Therefore, the debate on whether Lady Macbeth is a hysteric woman or a witch should be translated into one regarding whether Lady Macbeth is too feeble for the society she lives in or too authoritative, claiming a large amount of power which, living in an early modern society, a deeply patriarchal one, she could not otherwise obtain because of her gender. In the latter case, such power should be eradicated, since women were considered fearful agents that should be subjugated. Consequently, the fact that Macbeth is so fearful of women is not random: he embodies the patriarchal society that, frightened by the female capabilities, aims at destroying anything related to this sex. This might explain why Macbeth roundly states: "Bring forth men-children only: / for thy undaunted mettle should compose/ Nothing but males" (I, vii, ll.74-76).

This fear towards women is present throughout the play and, since he is well aware that there is no alternative that might prevent one from being born of a woman, his ego increases when the Wayward Sisters state that: "none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (IV, i, ll.94-5). Macduff, however, challenges this aspect: even though he is born of a woman, the fact that he was ripped from the womb exposes that a detachment from the mother is possible. Therefore, the play's end could be read as a utopian closure for patriarchy: the fear towards

women disappears with Macbeth killed, along with the triumph of a man that is detached from his mother.

When considering film adaptations, however, it can be seen that Polanski's *Macbeth* from 1971 breaks with this utopia: Donalbain, Duncan's son, can be seen approaching the witches as Macbeth and Banquo did at the beginning. Therefore, this points to the appearance of a new Macbeth, an ongoing fear towards women and a powerful female agent that might desire power as any men would. Similarly, Kurzel's *Macbeth* provides a cyclical ending, though a more subtle one. In this adaptation, in the end, a child armed with a sword is seen running into the fields, the same fields in which Macbeth and Banquo encountered the witches. This ending, therefore, could be read as the unavoidable presence of the Three Sisters, the beings that guide and punish those who act unethically and bring corruption to the kingdom of Scotland.

For one thing is certain: Lady Macbeth uses her husband's weaknesses in order to achieve her ambitions. Nonetheless, unbeknownst to her, she is in fact performing the same task as the witches – uncovering Macbeth's nature. It is through Lady Macbeth that the spectator is able to notice the fault lines in Macbeth's character as well as his apparent inability to access the throne. Because Lady Macbeth becomes a new witch, her uncovering of Macbeth's true character includes her in the chorus of witches that push Macbeth to his limits to prove his life motive, his ethical reasoning and his courage. While the Wayward Sisters use what Macbeth desires in order to test him, Lady Macbeth uses his lacks. The fact that he has not been able to bear any children enables Lady Macbeth to use that as an excuse in order for Macbeth to prove his manhood by different means. She challenges him by saying: "Wouldst thou have that / which thou esteem'st the ornament of life/ And live a coward in thine own esteem?" (I, vii, ll.41-3). Because she knows that Macbeth feels like a coward already and 'not man enough', she knows that such statement will trigger the behaviour she desires: obedience.

Lady Macbeth seems to be older than Macbeth. Even though there is no reference in the text, supposedly she had a previous child in a previous marriage and then remarried Macbeth. That might explain her double role as mother and lover: because of her experience, she is able to counsel Macbeth in any business he may find troublesome. However, ironically, it is this wisdom that Macbeth relies on for his survival that leads him to death: Lady Macbeth, in this case, proves to be as wise as Destiny, helping the Wayward Sisters uncover Macbeth's nature. The fact that Lady Macbeth is always by her husband's side allows for the spectator to compare both behaviours: while she is serene, calm and dutiful, he is doubtful, fearful and violent. The climax of this opposition is found in the dinner scene, when Macbeth sees

Banquo's ghost. While Macbeth desires to position himself as the victim, blaming the darkest forces ("Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that/ Which might appal the Devil" (III, iv, ll. 58-9)), Lady Macbeth is more focused on appearing composed and undisturbed by Macbeth's yells. She knows that this appearance "is the very painting of [Macbeth's] fear", like "the air-drawn dagger" (III, iv, ll.61-2). Even Macbeth recognises and admires his wife's composure and ease: "You make me strange/ Even to the disposition that I owe/ When now I think you can behold such sights/ And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,/ When mine is blanched with fear" (III, iv, ll.114-8). Consequently, Macbeth's admiration for his wife positions her as the agent, the powerful woman that, by feeding her husband's fears, is able to achieve what she desires.

Definitely, Lady Macbeth is not a victim of hysteria or 'The Mother', since, throughout the play, she is not subjected and influenced by the chauvinistic English society of the Jacobean times. Female hysteria, as Levin puts it: "signifies the woman who fulfils patriarchal expectations and suffers for it" (2002: 24). Nonetheless, Lady Macbeth is not de idyllic depiction of the docile, servant-like wife: she is, instead, the epitome of the matriarchal wife that was present in northern areas, especially in the Scottish Highlands: "It is, of course, Lady Macbeth who revives her husband's resolution by nurturing and toughening his temperament in ways that evoke the ancient Scots' matriarchal structure" (Floyd-Wilson 2006: 152). Thereupon, it would be inconsequential to have a matriarchal hero at the beginning with the ending of what would be the death of a submissive English wife. In fact, it is the Macbeths' distance from the English manners what causes English chauvinism throughout the play: the Scottish (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) are attacked by the English (Duncan's sons, MacDuff and the warriors). That might explain why Macbeth refers to his neighbours as the "English epicures" (V, ii, l. 8), with disdain.

The main reason for the English (and men in general) to hate Lady Macbeth is her tenacious and courageous attitude, which, along with her female power and the help of the dark spirits she invokes, strengthens the image of the unstoppable and forceful queen. In short, "she was a disturbing threat to phallic power" (Levin 2002: 25). Thus, because of her resolute manners, Lady Macbeth's fatal death lacks explanation. Even though this end has been read as the result of common female hysteria, the doctor is clear when stating: "this disease is beyond my practice" (V, i, l.46) and "More needs she the divine than the physician" (V, i, l.72). With that diagnosis, the idea of Lady Macbeth suffering from 'The Mother' should be totally discarded. Even though the doctor is unaware of Lady Macbeth's previous practices of witchcraft, he recognises that her symptoms are not the ones of the hysteria sufferers.

Interestingly enough, this scene is omitted Kurzel's 2015 version of *Macbeth*, in which there is no presence of any doctor. In such case, Lady Macbeth dies as if she were experiencing a bout of hysteria, without the specialist asserting otherwise. However, in Polanski's 1971 adaptation, this scene is utterly explicit, with the representation of Lady Macbeth's suffering and death, along with the diagnosis of the doctor. Therefore, even though in this adaptation the physical image of Lady Macbeth is too angelic to represent such a strong agent, her ending is so explicit that it clearly recalls the message of punishment inflicted upon her: her mental health, sovereignty, and therefore, prestige, have all disappeared, ripping from her hands all that she desired and fleetingly attained.

Thereupon, Lady Macbeth's end is executed as a punishment from Fate, which castigates her for her excessive greediness. Contrary to the conception that Lady Macbeth's death is a result of the weakness of her own sex, developed into hysteria, what Lady Macbeth receives is a reprimand for her wrongdoings. Paradoxically, even if she decides to use supernatural forces and introduces herself to the world of witchcraft, this does not redeem her from Fate's punishments: she needs to be castigated for her excessive greediness and desire for power. Therefore, because the Wayward sisters operate in Fate's name, their duty was to push Lady Macbeth until she revealed her whole nature, what she is able to do and what she is able to risk. Working along with her husband, she becomes the mastermind, the one who embodies all the bravery to execute all the arrangements without looking back. In fact, she asks for that courage when invoking the spirits: "Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark/ To cry, 'Hold, hold'." (I, v, ll.52-3). Throughout the course of the acts, she does not want to be reminded of the appropriate ethical thinking: she already knows she will be executing sinful acts, but still, she does not want to regret them, for they will pave the path for her gold.

In conclusion, the Wayward Sisters trigger such behaviour from Lady Macbeth. Even though they do not have direct contact with her, they know that Macbeth, being so connected to and dependent on his wife, will tell her what they have foreseen and what to do about it. Such situation will work in order to explore Lady Macbeth's true character and her deep desires. Along with her physical punishment, what destroyed Lady Macbeth internally is observing her empire decaying, being destroyed and being nearly handed over to the English. She is probably the first one to die because she is the source of strength for Macbeth: she needs to disappear in order for Macbeth to fully crumble before the English forces. Consequently, Lady Macbeth's death is an indicator of her true power: she was so utterly strong that she needed a severe punishment from Destiny, ruled by God, in order to impede her greediness and misdeeds from becoming greater and, consequently, more dangerous for the Scottish kingdom.

V. THE WORKERS OF FATE: THE WAYWARD SISTERS AS ESSENTIAL BEINGS IN *MACBETH* (1606)

Against all preconceptions, the Three Sisters do not favour the devil, but work in the name of God. According to Providentialist beliefs, all events happening in the world are ruled by Fate (God). This force imposes good over evil, justice and fairness in a world that, were to be handled purely by human beings, it would become a disastrous and corrupted organisation. Even though, as Christians, society acknowledged the existence of the devil, “Satan worked with God’s permission and the results he achieved in concert with the witch were *mira* not *miracula*” (Teall 1962: 25). In other words, God allows for the witches to work through Satan in order to punish those who he considers have not behaved appropriately or need a reprimand. Therefore, even though the witches are linked with Satan due to proximity, in the end, Satan allows them to use their abilities to punish those who God desires. Consequently, it could be stated that, in the end, Satan and the witches worked for God. Even though thinkers of the time argued that “to say Satan worked with God’s permission insulted His omnipotence” (Teall 1962: 34), there is no point in establishing a connection between the Devil and the witches and God and the witches without linking the two. Indeed, it was threatening for a community to acknowledge that the God they were praising allied with the devil force they were fighting against. Nonetheless, the only way to explain the existence of the witches through a Providentialist reasoning is a linking of the Devil with God. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that society secretly acknowledged that connection: were they to believe that the witches worked only for Satan, they would have known that God’s omnipotence is far stronger than the devil, erasing the need for a witch-hunt. On the other hand, were the witches to work in the name of God, they should have been respected and valued, as if they were angels.

Because the presence of the witches finds its seeds in “an angry God” (Teall 1962: 31), Jacobean society opted for a witch-hunt that might prevent the punishment they deserve from God. In order to promote this event among their citizens, they opted for a chauvinistic reading of the witch that might conceal the true reasoning of their presence, which threatens the individual’s peaceful life and even their existence. The idea that “women were inherently impure and more easily influenced by evil forces than men” (Anderson and Gordon 1978: 174) perfectly fit the standards, since “there were few Protestant theologians who preached sexual equality or who would permit women to join the ranks of their ministries” (Anderson and Gordon 1978:174). Thereupon, with such argument, they would diminish women’s importance in society while considering witches to be agents that solely operate in Satan’s name. Consequently, it is important to consider whether film or stage productions of the play offer

other types of readings of the witches' role. Verdi's *Macbeth*, directed by Phyllida Lloyd in The Royal Opera House in 2018, depicts the witches as Frida-like heroines that help those individuals who need it. For instance, they help Banquo's son, Fleance, hide, in order to save his life from the murderers. That might be the reason why they are present throughout the whole opera: they are always present in order to bring justice to any situation that occurs. As Daniel Albright puts it: "Tragedy depends on some sense that Fate has dignity, even if human beings have none" (2005: 239). Therefore, the presence of the witches represents this constant dignity that individuals do not have anymore. Furthermore, it is also important to remark the fact that Kurzel's *Macbeth* from 2015 might also discern from this popular conception of the witches, since they appear as female agents, mainly young and dressed according to the times. In addition, the presence of four women might suggest the presence of Hecate, the Greek Goddess of witchcraft that breaks with the conventional image of the witches in the play.

Hecate's presence towards the end of *Macbeth* disrupts the prototypical image of the witch. The conception of the witch as an old, decrepit ugly woman, present in the 1971 *Macbeth* by Polanski, is inexistent in Shakespeare's play as Hecate appears. Embodying a Greek goddess, she disrupts the conception of witches as revengeful beings that envy other's physical attributes. This conception is also partly broken at the beginning of the play, when Banquo states that: "You should be women,/ And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/ That you are so" (I, iii, ll. 45-7). The fact that the witches are gender-unspecific already erases the possibility of a chauvinistic reading of them. By Hecate calling herself: "the mistress of [the witches'] charms" (III, v, l.6) the idea that they are working for Satan is discarded. With Hecate's presence, the witches are directly linked to a classical goddess, who, at the same time, is working in Fate's name. When Macbeth visits the witches for the second time, he witnesses what could be considered a coven, an activity that Northern witches were said to practise. This is fostered by Hecate: "And now about the cauldron sing/ Like elves and fairies in a ring,/ Enchanting all that you put in" (IV, i, ll. 41-43). Nonetheless, in the play, "We have nothing like the fully developed concept of the sabbat as developed by learned demonologists" (Sharpe 2013:175), since there is no presence of the devil being embodied in a goat, for instance, or in the existence of sexual intercourse among them. Rather, this scene becomes a reunion of 'Wayward Sisters', preparing a magic recipe without knowing what would be the actual use for it in the play. Because of this, this coven seems to be a mockery of the common beliefs of the sabbat attached to the Northern witches: while at the beginning of the play the Wayward Sisters are mysterious beings, they progressively lose that power and, at the point of the sabbat scene, they even become comical child-like beings being nagged by their 'mother', Hecate.

This scene uncovers the true powers of the Three Sisters. They are not that powerful in the sense that they are able to create anything they desire. Instead, they are only able to create the *mira* that Hecate or, ultimately, God desire: they are operators of Fate that do not act from free will and pure playfulness.

The Wayward Sisters are the only capable forces of re-installing a Providentialist order in an ideologically decaying Scotland. As Dollimore clearly explains and as mentioned in the introduction: the Elizabethan-Jacobean period witnessed “the sceptical disintegration of providential belief” (2004: 38). Nonetheless, it should be noted the fact that the witches do not aim at going back to the past nor re-establishing Providentialism: - their ultimate goal is to re-awaken the ethical beliefs present in Providentialism and lost in a society whose transition to modernity holds the seeds of what could be a violent future. One of the aspects that motivates Macbeth’s doubts and fears is due to the disintegration of the Providentialist belief and the growing conception, more typical from modernity that human autonomy existed aside from God’s powers. Lady Macbeth embodies the conviction that human identity is not fixed but fluid, that humans can achieve what they desire through their own means, without the need of Fate. However, in *Macbeth*, “violence is the means by which power is achieved and held” (McEvoy 2012:207): Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Macduff and Duncan’s sons are constantly engaged in violent acts to prove their value and their superiority amongst the Scottish society. Observing this, The Three Sisters aim at imposing fairness in a Scotland that, were it to follow this unstoppable chain of violent acts, it would destroy society’s prospects of human improvement and prosperity for the country. Their punishments, therefore, should act as warnings for Shakespeare’s audience, the Early Modern audience, who are, in the end, the forthcoming modern individuals.

Even though Denis Biggins claims that “The Weird Sister’s proposed sowing of discord between the spouses looks forward both to Macbeth’s murderous acts of disorder and to their ultimate issue in barrenness and estrangement between his wife and himself” (1975: 260), the truth is that they do not create this discord deliberately, but it was rooted in the marriage’s confusion of what exists and what does not, their dissonance in how Fate operates or even in whether Fate exists at all. Lady Macbeth, on the one hand, feels determined to achieve everything through her own aims: she does not rely on Fate or God to bring the marriage what she believes it deserves. Macbeth, on the other hand, experiences an ideological crisis throughout the whole play: due to his excessive malleability, his mind is divided between Lady Macbeth’s beliefs and his Providentialist thoughts. Even though he, in the end, is convinced by Lady Macbeth, the mere thought that Fate could reprove him for all the acts he

has committed haunts him throughout the whole play. As J. Paris clearly puts it: “His attempt to master fate leaves him more rather than less exposed to ‘saucy doubts and fears’” (2005: 14).

Consequently, the presence of the Three Witches acts in the play as almost a compulsory one. They need to show the Macbeths that their new ideology is an unethical one, that Fate is always present in order to bring justice to society even if it has evolved into a modern one and punish those who act amorally. Therefore, because Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have threatened the Providentialist order through violence and force, they ought to be castigated through a fatal death.

However, the witches’ job does not finish with the Macbeths, since the new king’s attitude towards Macbeth’s death might indicate a perpetual threat to the Providentialist justice. If the 2003 *Maqbool*, by Vishal Bhardwaj, clarifies that the future of Macbeth (*Maqbool*) equals the future of Scotland (Bombay), with his death Scotland is now in the hands of Malcolm. Despite depicting Macbeth as a usurper and arrogant individual that does not deserve the throne, Malcolm is not the ideal new king either. If Macbeth was despised for his violence, Malcolm’s appreciation of Macbeth’s head when dead indicates that this violence has not been eradicated with Macbeth. Furthermore, the fact that Macduff is praised for his acts might denote that the Three Sisters have still work to do in the new kingdom of Scotland, for someone that has killed a king should not be praised, but disregarded and punished by God. In addition, there is no indicator of why Malcolm has been proclaimed king: even though he is Duncan’s son, in medieval Scotland kings were also elected. In addition, the ending might represent the idyllic kingdom for a chauvinistic community that fears women. As Adelman puts it: “Malcolm embodies utter separation from women and as such triumphs easily over Macbeth, the mother’s son” (1957: 122). With Macduff’s wife killed (and previously abandoned by her husband) and Lady Macbeth dead, the powerful women are erased from the Scottish landscape, a whimsical male space utterly detached from female powers.

The 1971 *Macbeth*, by Polanski, provides a complete cyclical ending that uncovers what might happen in Malcolm’s reign: at the end, Donalbain, Malcolm’s brother, appears encountering the witches in the same place Macbeth and Banquo encountered them in the first place. Since in Medieval Scotland kings were also elected, Donalbain had the same rights as his brother to be king. Therefore, this ending suggests that Donalbain, hearing the Weird Sister’s predictions, might use force in order to achieve the throne. Nonetheless, he might not do that alone: probably, he will have a female agent by his side, a woman that will bring the strength necessary to eradicate Malcolm from the throne and achieve the success they desire.

If that is the case, Malcolm would be punished for accessing the throne through violence and regicide, while Donalbain, the probably upcoming king, would also face another fatal death, a punishment from the Three Sisters (Fate) for not relying on the course of Nature and the force of God, opting instead for violence, blood and tyranny.

What has been traditionally read as the witches' intrusion into the characters' life are, in fact, warnings against what Fate holds for them. As stated before, witches are not able to perform miracles, but simply *mira*. In other words, their powers are not omnipotent, they do not have the abilities to intrude someone's mind and manipulate it completely. Even though at the beginning one of the witches states "I'll drain him dry as hay" (I, iii, l.18), referring to the sailor, they have no intention to intervene maliciously in Macbeth's life: they fix no purpose in intentionally destroying either Macbeth's marriage or political career. Instead, what they solely claim is that: "There to meet with Macbeth" (I, i, l.7) is their only duty. It needs to be pointed out that they do not consider Macbeth an enemy or someone that should be harmed, but a "wayward son" (III, v, l.11). By using the word 'son', Hecate attributes to the witches the nurturing, caring attributes of a mother. Nonetheless, they cannot be overly protective, for they need to execute Fate's wishes: if the Macbeths are to be punished, they have no other option but to realise what God desires. As a consequence, their only option left is that of warning Macbeth. As Hecate puts it: "security/ Is mortals' chiefest enemy" (III, v, ll.32-3). What they have to do is to warn Macbeth of what is to come. Nonetheless, because their duty is to awaken Macbeth's true nature, their warnings become fruitless. Even though they tell him to "beware Macduff" (IV, i, l.87), because they also tell him that "none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (IV, i, 94-5) Macbeth's utter fear of female powers spring, reassuring him that no one cannot be not born of a woman, since birth is the ultimate power that gives utter agency to women. That fear, therefore, feeds his overconfidence as well as his ego, making him feel as the already triumphant king. It could be stated, thereupon, that, even though the witches try to help Macbeth control himself, performing the role of mothers, in the end, everything they do uncovers Macbeth's true character, one that brings him to destruction. Nonetheless, the apparent supernatural events that Macbeth experiences throughout the play are not a product of the Wayward Sisters per se, but the result of Macbeth's true character uncovered by the witches.

It is also important to conceive Lady Macbeth as a new Wayward Sister that helps Fortune despite herself. Even though she invokes spirits to help her: "Come, you spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts" (I, v, ll. 41-2), she might not be aware of the consequences of such invocation. After this episode, she seems determined to execute all acts that might lead her to

success. However, these acts also uncover Macbeth's malleability, her determination to act maliciously and the controversies that that might arise in the marriage. Unwittingly, Lady Macbeth is helping the Three Sisters discover her true intentions and Macbeth's internal crisis and inferiority complex. Moreover, Lady Macbeth's use of Macbeth's weaknesses strengthens them, making Macbeth's fear towards women and his incapability of bearing children a more relevant aspect in the construction of Macbeth's true nature. Nonetheless, being a new Wayward Sister does not save her from punishment: she still needs a reprimand from Fate, since her greediness and ambition have sacrificed innocent lives as well as the stability of Scotland.

Conclusively, the Wayward Sisters do not intend to re-establish the Providentialist system, since in Jacobean times it started to be considered an obsolete one that needed to be replaced by a more modern approach to society, in which individuals could aim at improving their social status and their own identities. Thereupon, the Three Sisters are present in the play in order to bring fairness and justice to a society that is transitioning from Providentialism to modernity through violence, tyranny and corruption, as the Macbeths show. The witches, therefore, punish Macbeth for his regicide, tyranny and use of force in achieving the throne. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is castigated because of her excessive greediness and desire for power achieved through blood. The end of the play, however, demonstrates that punishing the Macbeths is not enough, since Duncan's sons seem to be approaching the modern times the same manner as the previous king; that is, by doubting Fate's fairness and deciding to achieve their desires through violence and unethical acts.

VI. CONCLUSION

The transition from the Elizabethan Era to the Jacobean period brought new changes to the British society and the conception of the individual, especially women. The latter evolved from female agents that could lead the throne and dominate a whole kingdom to agents of evil that, due to their innate weaknesses, became portals of darker spirits that damaged the utopian, chauvinistic world created by males. This new kingdom delimited women's freedom, since they could be easily accused of witchcraft and, as a consequence, sentenced to death. With this, women felt the need to meet the patriarchal, societal expectations in order not to be outcasted by male members of society. This constant pressure and fear that women experienced developed into 'The Mother' or female hysteria, a common illness during Jacobean times that proved how damaging and torturing these social demands were. Thereupon, King James I represented a backlash in gender aspects compared to the Elizabethan Era. As an example, while marriage was a compulsory event before starting a family in the Jacobean times, in the Elizabethan Era, since creating this new family asked for a new household and a large amount of society experienced certain precarity regarding this aspect: "all young people ordinarily had to wait before they married (...) Therefore the age at marriage would necessarily tend to be high" (Greer 2008: 110). This meant that a couple could live with their parents and even have children before getting married and forming a new family in a new household. Furthermore, it was common for young women to opt for celibacy and work for their masters, living in the same home as them and dedicating their lives to work and to earning their own salary without the need to marry and depend economically on their husband. This social trait of the Elizabethan Era changed dramatically in the new Jacobean period. Women started being treated as merely housewives, mothers and wives and, if they opposed to that, they would become the so much feared witches or hysteric women.

Considering the transition from an enlightened era to a darker period, *Macbeth* belongs to a set of plays that reflect upon the obscurity experienced at that time. While feminist Portia, autonomous Katherine, transgressive Viola and contentious Titania belong to a smooth and peaceful period in which women that contravene the law, like the Queen herself disobeying the social expectations as regards marriage, become the triumphant characters, *Macbeth* belongs to a set of plays, mainly tragedies, that depict women through the common dichotomy of the saint and the witch, both metaphorically, as in *King Lear*, and literally, with Lady Macbeth and the Three Sisters. Lady Macbeth might resemble Goneril and Regan, King Lear's malevolent daughters, being interpreted at the beginning as mere 'whores' that use their sensuality and

sexual powers to achieve their power. However, “The whore (...) has moved from signifying ‘nothing’ to becoming means to teach Lear to become more humane” (Santon 2000: 110). In other words, though depicted as malicious agents, it is characters like Regan, Goneril or Lady Macbeth that help the main characters. In this case, King Lear and Macbeth, destroy their idealistic conception of a world ruled purely by men by “condemning male scapegoating of the female” (Santon 2000: 110). As a consequence, Lady Macbeth’s unconventional behaviour leads Macbeth into realising that belonging to the throne does not make one untouchable – human beings are equally vulnerable and achieving one’s desires does not make one invincible. Consequently, it is the way –ethical or not- through which the individual attains their wishes that determines their ending and ultimate success. In fact, it is Lady Macbeth who ponders about the common, shared humanity of all individuals when stating: “Yet who would have thought the old man [Duncan] to have had so much/ blood in him” (V, i, ll.37-8), and by saying “Here’s the smell of blood still – all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (V, i, ll.48-9). This knowledge is trespassed to Macbeth, who, in the end, acknowledges that “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player/ that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/ and then is heard no more” (V, v, ll.24-6) for all humankind, despite the social status they belong to.

Conclusively, *Macbeth* becomes a reflection on a social and ideological transformation occurring during the Jacobean Era. The play is not so much about alienated facts experienced by the Macbeths but about an ongoing epistemological frame that spread amongst society and that conceived humankind erroneously. The introduction of a more fluid and mobile conception of the individual led to the belief that through violence, pressure, tyranny and cold blood the individual was able to attain their desires. Nonetheless, this conception of society would eventually develop into a system as faulty as Providentialism. Therefore, the Three Sisters in *Macbeth* are the agents that operate in Fate’s name, thus, ultimately, in God’s name, in order to uncover this damaging new system to the Macbeths and the forthcoming autonomous individuals that ought to act according to different values. Consequently, the Wayward Sisters work as warnings for the Early Modern spectatorship to notice the faults in this new system, so as to avoid a corrupted modern system that could shatter the kingdom’s stability.

Even though the play was firstly staged for King James I, not all the details contained in the play might have pleased him if he were to have noticed them. Even though the play contains a myriad of allusions to the King’s life, such as the experience of a shipwreck and the presence of the witches which the king truly believed in, there are certain meticulous details

that might be a critique to the King's reign. Since Shakespeare was so fond of Queen Elizabeth, he himself might have noticed the transition from a queen that admired his longest play, *Hamlet*, to a king that could not bear long plays, forcing him to make *Macbeth* the shortest in his portfolio.

There is no doubt that the Bard might have detected a transition to a darker period led by an overly suspicious king. Since King James I was overtly considered a tyrannical king, for he himself proudly emphasised his total power to rule, the audience might have questioned why he did not identify himself with the tyrannical Macbeth, who also experiences supernatural affairs with witches. The reasoning for that lies in the King's beliefs: he truly defended the Divine Right of Kings – a political doctrine of loyal legitimacy that claimed that the King received the right to rule directly from God, making him 'untouchable' to the law. Therefore, he might have felt more identified with Duncan, observing Macbeth as a mere usurper that should be severely punished, while reading the Three Sisters and Lady Macbeth from the chauvinistic popular reading. Nonetheless, as has been proven in this study, the Wayward Sisters, with the help of Lady Macbeth, intend to uncover the faults of a system that, were not to be corrected, could develop into a crumbled society ruled by violence and tyranny. They not only punish the Macbeths for their misdeeds and misconception of mankind, but the cyclical ending of the play serves as a caution for the forthcoming autonomous and mobile individuals not to follow the path of violence and tyranny but to try to found new ethical values which may give answers to the new challenges of modernity.

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