

Macbeth – key revision

1. Context (AO3)

- Shakespeare criticises the Jacobean **heroic ideal** of being brave, strong and violent in battle as being problematic.
- Shakespeare presents the supernatural as against **Natural Order and the Great Chain of Being**: the witches represent the threat to society by subversive activities.
- Shakespeare represents the threats from uprisings, as a mirror to the Jacobean situation, where the **Gunpowder Plot** was recent and relevant.
- Shakespeare advocates the belief in the **Natural Order (The Great Chain of Being)** and the **Divine Right of Kings** as being stabilising influences in society.
- Jacobean society was based on **strict hierarchies** (status, wealth and gender), which were strictly enforced.

2. Themes (AO1 and AO3)

- Shakespeare warns against the corruptive nature of power and abuse of positions of authority.
- Ambition is presented as being a potentially disruptive influence on natural order.
- The importance of nature and order are presented as being critical over chaos and anarchy.
- Shakespeare questions the nature of kingship and presents an idealistic notion of power.
- The theme of inheritance and the importance of progeny in Jacobean society is explored as a motif in the play.

3. Key events (AO1)

- Macbeth meets witches and receives the prophecies (Thane of Cawdor, Thane of Glamis, King + Banquo's children to be kings)
- Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan.
- Macbeth hallucinates and sees the dagger, then kills Duncan.
- Macbeth doesn't trust Banquo, has him killed, then sees his ghost.
- Lady Macbeth can't calm Macbeth at the banquet scene (Banquo's ghost).
- Macbeth seeks out witches and gets second set of prophecies (Beware Macduff, no one born of woman will harm him, only fear when Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane and Banquo's children still set to be kings).
- Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children killed.
- Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and dies.
- Macbeth faces final battle and is killed by Macduff.

4. Key literary features (AO2)

- A Shakespearean **tragedy** contains a **tragic hero** with a **flaw/hamartia** (ambition).
- A tragedy **resolves** by restoring order from chaos.
- The key **turning point** is when Macbeth decides to kill Banquo to continue his ambition alone.
- **Dramatic irony** is when the audience knows more than the characters.
- A **soliloquy** is when actors speak their minds alone on stage (we hear the truth).

5. Prepared introduction to adapt for the exam question

Shakespeare presents [key focus] to reveal the **corruptive nature of power**. The play warns against the way individuals can abuse and corrupt, manipulating others to establish complete control. Macbeth's **tragic downfall** is presented as the inevitable consequence of ambition and breaking the **Great Chain of Being**. The play is a warning to its **Jacobean audience** of the consequences of betraying the monarchy and disrupting society's order.

6. Vocabulary

Agency: (noun)	The ability to take action and have control over your own life.
Ambition: (noun)	A strong desire to do or achieve something.
Artificial: (adjective)	Something that is fake or not natural.
Barren: (adjective)	Too poor to produce seed or fruit; empty, bleak and lifeless.
Elegy: (noun)	A poem or speech that expresses grief and sorrow for the dead.
Emasculation: (noun)	The act of trying to make a man weak by undermining his masculinity.
Epithet (noun)	A characterising word or phrase accompanying or occurring in place of the name of a person or thing.
Equivocation: (abstract noun)	The use of ambiguous language to conceal the truth about something.
Euphemism: (noun)	A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or rude.
Fragmented: (adjective)	To break into small pieces.
Harmoniously: (adverb)	Working together in a friendly and peaceful manner.
Heresy: (noun)	A belief or opinion that goes against religious beliefs.
Illegitimate: (adjective)	Not authorised; going against the accepted standards or rules.
Introspection: (noun)	The examination of your own mental and emotional processes.
Masculinity: (noun)	The qualities regarded as characteristic of men.
Maternal: (adjective)	Relating to a mother, especially during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth.
Misogyny: (noun)	Feelings of hatred towards women or a belief that men are much better than women.
Neuroticism: (noun)	A mental illness caused by depression, anxiety or obsessive behaviour that causes a radical loss of touch with reality.
Paradox: (noun)	A contradictory statement which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.
Patriarchal: (adjective)	A society that is controlled by men.
Psyche: (noun)	The deep part of your mind where your thoughts and feelings come from.
Reaffirm: (verb)	To state something again strongly
Regicide: (noun)	The purposeful killing of a monarch.
Stereotype: (noun)	A widely held, fixed but oversimplified image of a person or thing
Subversion: (noun)	The act of trying to weaken or destroy an established system or authority.
Tedious: (adjective)	Too long, slow, dull or tiresome.
Tyranny: (noun)	Cruel and oppressive rule by a person or government.
Tyrant: (noun)	A cruel leader who uses their power to rule with fear.
Wake: (noun)	Something that happens in the aftermath of another event.

7. Techniques

Antimetabole: where the words in one phrase are repeated in reverse order in the next.

Aside: When the character speaks directly to the audience and the other characters on the stage cannot hear them.

Soliloquy: A solo speech given by a character to the audience that reveals inner thoughts.

Antithesis: A person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else.

Hamartia: A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of the tragic hero.

Phallic Image: Any object that may be taken as a representation of the penis or a man's masculinity.

8. Paired quotations

1. The use of paradoxical language reflects Jacobean anxiety about equivocation and manipulations of the natural order.
2. The alliterative phrasing reinforces the supernatural element and sounds like the chanting of a spell.
3. The word 'foul' links with the theme of corruption that runs throughout the play.

WITCHES:
**'FAIR IS FOUL AND
FOUL IS FAIR '**

(A1 S5)



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare's use of paradoxical language demonstrates Jacobean anxieties about the subversive power of witchcraft, capable of revealing an absence of God or moral authority.

1. The adjective 'wicked' is deeply connected with evil, highlighting how far Macbeth has fallen to a Christian audience.
2. The ambiguous noun 'something' suggests a lack of humanity, as if Macbeth is becoming less than human through his actions and suffering a process of alienation or loss of identity.
3. The use of the present tense in 'comes' constructs a tension around Macbeth's arrival, perhaps signalling the predestined and inevitable nature of his corruption
4. The purposeful use of rhyme continues to make the witches speech sound like a spell, further linking them with heretical, supernatural acts.

WITCHES:
**BY THE
PRICKING OF MY
THUMBS,
SOMETHING
WICKED THIS
WAY COMES.**

(A4 S1)



Grade 9 analysis:
Perhaps Shakespeare intended to warn against the psychological corruption and descent into sin that accompanies or emerges as a result of the supernatural. He uses the witches here as icons of subversion, the catalysts that lead to the disruption of the natural order.

1. The use of the epithet 'brave Macbeth' identifies him at this stage as an ideal Jacobean hero, committed to the protection and construction of the nation.
2. The use of the verb 'disdaining' and the allusion to predestination in fortune foreshadows Macbeth's attempts to revolt against and subvert the natural order, unwilling as he is to be controlled by the fates.
3. The grotesque and violent imagery of 'smoked with bloody execution' implicitly critiques the masculine and coercive violence that underpins Jacobean concepts of heroism.

**The Captain: 'Brave
Macbeth ...
disdaining fortune,
with his brandished
steel, which smoked
with bloody
execution.'**

(A1S2)



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare uses the second-hand account of Macbeth's heroism here to hint at its artificial nature. In this way, he intends to critique and undermine Macbeth's character and foreshadows his descent into tyrannical paranoia.

1. The adjective 'dwarfish' implies that Macbeth is less than whole, and its insulting nature indicates that Macbeth's subjects have no respect for him.
2. The simile 'like a giant's robe' alludes to the 'noble' Duncan' and reveals Macbeth's artificial claim to the throne.
3. Angus' suggestion that the title should 'hang loose' not only indicates Macbeth's illegitimacy as King, but also works as a pun in reference to the form of capital punishment used against traitors such as the Jesuits of the Gunpowder Plot of 1905.

**Angus: Now
does he feel his
title hang loose
about him, like
a giant's robe
upon a
dwarfish thief.**

(A5 S2)



Grade 9 analysis:
Perhaps, Shakespeare intends to reinforce concepts of divine right and the great chain of being through this critique of Macbeth's illegitimacy and lack of divine right and authority.

1. The epithet "butcher" implies that Macbeth is incapable of pity: he treats his subjects like animals.
2. "Butcher" suggests that Macbeth has a job, as opposed to ruling as a king should.
3. "Fiend-like" highlights the supernatural element associated with Lady Macbeth and emphasizes her monstrous qualities, at odds with the Jacobean archetype of femininity.

**Malcolm: 'dead
butcher and his
fiend-like
queen'**

(A5 S9)



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare uses the metaphorical references to highlight the contrast between Malcolm and Macbeth's kingship: Macbeth disrupts nature's equilibrium. The dehumanising of the protagonists leads us to devalue the downfall of the Macbeths – we are led to believe that the animalistic behaviours makes them beyond sympathy.

1. Macbeth's gentle and loving language illustrates the strong marital bond between the couple at the beginning of the play.
2. The superlative 'dearest' reinforces the devotion and commitment present in their relationship.
3. The noun 'greatness' parallels the witches' predictions that have triggered his ambition and acted as a catalyst for the journey towards his tragic downfall.

MACBETH:
**"My dearest
partner of
greatness"**

(A1 S5)



Grade 9 analysis:
By referring to Lady Macbeth as his 'partner', Macbeth subverts the patriarchal attitudes of the Jacobean period, including beliefs about the Great Chain of Being. This foreshadows Lady Macbeth's later involvement in the murder of King Duncan and the subversive power that she wields over her husband.

1. Macbeth distances himself from Lady Macbeth when he plans the assassination of Banquo.
2. This imperative marks a dramatic shift in their power dynamic in comparison to the beginning of the play.
3. Macbeth's language here reconfigures the relationship into one typical of the patriarchal Jacobean society.

MACBETH:
**"Be innocent of
the knowledge,
dearest chuck"**

(A3 S2)



Grade 9 analysis:
A sympathetic interpretation could think that Macbeth is trying to spare his wife from experiencing further violent horrors. More likely, Macbeth fears the 'seed of Banquo' and there is a resentment towards Lady Macbeth and their 'barren sceptre' which renders his wife's presence immaterial.

1. The image of 'milk' associates Macbeth with the maternal, undermining his patriarchal and masculine authority.
2. The adjective 'full' implies that Macbeth is overwhelmed and controlled by a governing morality and feminine instinct that disempowers and controls him.
3. The verb 'fear' reveals Lady Macbeth's coercion and control over Macbeth. She determines and controls his identity.

**LADY MACBETH:
'YET DO I FEAR THY
NATURE; IT IS
TOO FULL O' THE
MILK OF HUMAN
KINDNESS.'**

(A1S5)



Grade 9 analysis:
Perhaps, Shakespeare intended here to reflect Jacobean anxieties about absence of male and patriarchal authority. Macbeth's emasculation reflects James I's own anxieties about the relative nature of his own authority.

1. Macbeth's confession reveals 'ambition' as his overt motive for murder, but his euphemistic language suggests he dreads the thought.
2. Continuing the link between masculinity and violence, Macbeth's absence of the phallic 'spur' hints at his impotence and feminine weakness.
3. The adverb 'only' and adjective 'vaulting' hint at the nebulous nature of Macbeth's ambition having its 'only' origin in baseless treachery.

**MACBETH: 'I HAVE
NO SPURS TO PRICK
THE SIDES OF
MY INTENT ONLY
VAULTING AMBITION'**
(A1 S7)



Grade 9 analysis:
The image of 'vaulting ambition' fuses ambition and pride casting Macbeth in the classical role of an over-reacher. Shakespeare thus foreshadows his fall warning a Jacobean audience of the dangerous consequences and sinful nature of ambition in accordance with the Great Chain of Being.

1. The personification of the "virtues" begging for Duncan suggests that Macbeth understands the moral and ethical implications of regicide.
2. There is an implied contrast between Macbeth's transgressive and treasonous thoughts and Shakespeare's use of heavenly imagery to describe Duncan.
3. The semantic field of the divine: "virtues" and "angels" links with the belief in the Divine Right of Kings.

**MACBETH: 'HIS
VIRTUES WILL PLEAD
LIKE ANGELS,
TRUMPET-
TONGUED.'**

(A1S7)



Grade 9 analysis:
Perhaps, Shakespeare intended here to warn the Jacobean audience about the consequences of regicide and subverting The Great Chain of Being following the recent assassination attempt of James I. However, Macbeth's "vaulting ambition" overpowers his moral conscience.

1. 'untitled' and 'bloody-scepter'd' both indicate the illegitimacy of Macbeth's reign.
2. The personification of Scotland emphasises how far-reaching Macbeth's corruption is.
3. 'Bloody-scepter'd' is symbolic of Macbeth's reign, as the image of a sceptre stained with blood serves as a metaphor for his corruption of the monarchy.

**MACDUFF:
O NATION MISERABLE,
WITH AN UNTITLED
TYRANT BLOODY-
SCEPTER'D**

(A4 S3)



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare is defending the Divine Right of Kings by indicating the negative effects of perverting the natural course: misery and violence. Shakespeare continues the motif of 'blood' to highlight the guilt, violence and brutality of Macbeth's reign. Macbeth's downfall as a tragic hero is complete from "brave" warrior to treasonous "tyrant".

1. Macbeth's evil intent is revealed early in the play-'black desires' symbolically link him with evil and ambition.
2. Macbeth uses the imperative verb 'hide', believing that he can control nature and the stars. This hubris eventually leads to his downfall.
3. This phrase alludes to the idea of heaven and hell, instantly recognisable to a religious Jacobean audience, with its reference to 'light' and 'black'. Shakespeare uses this semantic field to demonstrate how deluded Macbeth is regarding his own powers.

**Macbeth: 'Stars
hide your fires!
Let not light see
my black and
deep desires.'**

A1S4



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare intends here to evoke contemporary associations of God with the structures of the universe. Macbeth subverts these structures and Shakespeare warns against transgression against the Divine Right of Kings.

1. The **hyperbole** suggests no amount of water in the world will take away the **guilt, symbolised** by the blood on Macbeth's hands.
2. The **rhetorical question** suggests Macbeth is powerless to get rid of his guilt.
3. The **classical allusion** to Neptune emphasises the **irredeemable** nature of Macbeth, the **futility** of pursuing **salvation**.

**MACBETH: WILL
ALL GREAT
NEPTUNE'S OCEAN
WASH THIS BLOOD
CLEAN FROM MY
HAND?**

A2 S2



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare juxtaposes Macbeth's trauma here with Lady Macbeth's resolve, using her character to model the ambition and power Macbeth lacks while also warning against the subversion of patriarchal authority.

1. The contrasting 'serpents' and 'innocence' would remind a Jacobean audience of the Garden of Eden and place Lady Macbeth in the role as tempter.
2. A Jacobean audience would understand the reference here to a medal commemorating the Gunpowder Plot, further linking the Macbeths with treason.
3. Shakespeare again uses a metaphor that creates an opposition between public performance and personal intent.

**Lady Macbeth:
Look like the
innocent flower
but be the
serpent under
it.**

A1S5



Grade 9 analysis:
Shakespeare employs a direct allusion to Genesis here in order to draw comparison between the Macbeths' regicide and the fall itself. Scotland, much like Eden, is corrupted and descends into sin as a result of the regicide.

1. 'Wade' emphasises the depth and breadth of the blood. It also has connotations of toil, as if Macbeth is being dragged down and/or struggling to succeed and move forward
2. 'Should I wade' is tentative and highlights the unlikelihood of these actions. Macbeth is not seriously considering turning back from this destructive path.
3. The way back is equally 'tedious' - he is stuck now. He cannot save himself or truly repent.

**MACBETH:
I AM IN BLOOD STEPP'D
IN SO FAR THAT,
SHOULD I WADE NO
MORE, RETURNING
WERE AS TEDIOUS AS
GO O'ER**

(A3 S4)



Grade 9 analysis:
The play, like Macbeth, is 'stepp'd in' blood and violence, reinforcing Shakespeare's message about the chaos that awaits when the natural order is disrupted.

Contextual Articles

James I and Witchcraft

The witch-hunts that swept across Europe from 1450 to 1750 were among the most controversial and terrifying phenomena in history – holocausts of their times. Historians have long attempted to explain why and how they took such rapid and enduring hold in communities as disparate and distant from one another as Navarre and Copenhagen. They resulted in the trial of around 100,000 people (most of them women), a little under half of whom were put to death.

One of the most active centres of witch-hunting was Scotland, where perhaps 4,000 people were consigned to the flames – a striking number for such a small country, and more than double the execution rate in England. The ferocity of these persecutions can be attributed to the most notorious royal witch-hunter: King James VI of Scotland, who in 1603 became James I of England.

Mesmerised by magic

In 1597 he became the only monarch in history to publish a treatise on witchcraft. *Daemonologie* (literally, the science of demons) was the result of painstaking and meticulous work on James's part, and must have taken years to complete.

The purpose of *Daemonologie* wasn't only to convince the doubters of the existence of witchcraft – it was also to inspire those who persecuted witches to do so with new vigour and determination. James described witchcraft as "high treason against God", which meant that all manner of horrors were justified in wringing confessions from the accused. Though lacking in original or profound ideas, the fact that it had been written by a king made it enormously influential. It is no coincidence that cases of witchcraft in his kingdom multiplied at an alarming rate thereafter.

Macbeth Brief Summary:

Three witches tell the Scottish general Macbeth that he will be King of Scotland. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth kills the king, becomes the new king, and kills more people out of paranoia. Civil war erupts to overthrow Macbeth, resulting in more death.

Act 1:

On a bleak Scottish moorland, Macbeth and Banquo, two of King Duncan's generals, discover three strange women (witches). The witches prophesise (predict) that Macbeth will be promoted twice: to Thane of Cawdor (a rank of the aristocracy bestowed by grateful kings) and King of Scotland. Banquo's descendants will be kings, but Banquo isn't promised any kingdom himself. The generals want to hear more, but the "weird sisters" disappear.

Soon afterwards, King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his success in the recent battles. The promotion seems to support the prophecy. The King then proposes to make a brief visit that night to Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Lady Macbeth receives news from her husband about the prophecy and his new title. She vows to help him become king by whatever means are necessary.

Act 2:

Macbeth returns to his castle, followed almost immediately by King Duncan. The Macbeths plot together to kill Duncan and wait until everyone is asleep. At the appointed time, Lady Macbeth gives the guards drugged wine so Macbeth can enter and kill the King. He regrets this almost immediately, but his wife reassures him. She leaves the bloody daggers by the dead king just before Macduff, a nobleman, arrives. When Macduff discovers the murder, Macbeth kills the drunken guards in a show of rage and retribution. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee, fearing for their own lives; but they are, nevertheless, blamed for the murder.

Act 3:

Macbeth becomes King of Scotland but is plagued by feelings of insecurity. He remembers the prophecy that Banquo's descendants will inherit the throne and arranges for Banquo and his son Fleance to be killed. In the darkness, Banquo is murdered, but his son escapes the assassins. At his state banquet that night, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and worries the courtiers with his mad response. Lady Macbeth dismisses the court and unsuccessfully tries to calm her husband.

Act 4:

Macbeth seeks out the witches who say that he will be safe until a local wood, Birnam Wood, marches into battle against him. He also need not fear anyone born of woman (that sounds secure, no loop-holes here). They also prophesy that the Scottish succession will still come from Banquo's son. Macbeth embarks on a reign of terror, slaughtering many, including Macduff's family. Macduff had gone to seek Malcolm (one of Duncan's sons who fled) at the court of the English king. Malcolm is young and unsure of himself, but Macduff, pained with grief, persuades him to lead an army against Macbeth.

Act 5:

Macbeth feels safe in his remote castle at Dunsinane until he is told that Birnam Wood is moving towards him. Malcolm's army is carrying branches from the forest as camouflage for their assault on Macbeth's stronghold. Meanwhile, an overwrought and conscience-ridden Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep and tells her secrets to her doctor. She commits suicide. As the final battle commences, Macbeth hears of Lady Macbeth's suicide and mourns.

In the midst of a losing battle, Macduff challenges Macbeth. Macbeth learns Macduff is the child of a caesarean birth (loophole!), realises he is doomed, and submits to his enemy. Macduff triumphs and brings the head of the traitor Macbeth to Malcolm. Malcolm declares peace and goes to Scone to be crowned king.

The Divine Right of Kings.

The Christian kings of Europe once believed they were answerable to no one except God. This idea became known as the **divine right of kings**.

The divine right was an ancient idea that began with Europe's medieval kings. They claimed that they had been chosen by God and were his representatives on Earth. These kings had absolute power and could do as they liked. They expected total obedience from the people they ruled and no-one could question them because to question them was to question God, and this would be blasphemy. Furthermore, if someone was to usurp a king, they would be committing a crime against God himself.

James I was a strong believer of the Divine Right of Kings. He wrote two books on the subject- *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and a treatise called *Basilikon Doron* (1599). These books outline his beliefs that a rightful king is only answerable to God and has absolute power over his people (including over their life and death). However, he also suggests that a good king rules not only over his people, but over himself. The books emphasise that a good king is a good Christian and not a tyrant.

The Great Chain of Being

During Elizabethan and Jacobean times people believed in the **Great Chain of Being**, a natural order ordained by God in which every living creature had its proper place as a link in that chain. This idea is also related to a hierarchy of life according to which everything had its special place, from God, Angels, Saints, King and Nobles down to the lowest life forms such as serfs, rats, snakes and spiders. Essentially so long as this natural order was not disturbed society or the State would function harmoniously. However, the balance or equilibrium in society is upset when this natural order is interfered with by the conduct of human beings. For example, when Macbeth gives into his "vaulting ambition" and murders the rightful King this damages a major link in the Great Chain of Being and results in the corrosion or corruption of other links in the chain. Hence society and the natural order is thrown into chaos.

The Gunpowder Plot: Historical Context

This Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was a conspiracy that resulted from severe oppression of Catholics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The Protestant Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 to 1603, passed anti-Catholic laws naming herself the secular and spiritual leader of England, to which Catholics naturally objected. Perceived traitors were beheaded, drawn and quartered, hanged, or a combination of these. Catholics had expected King James I, Elizabeth's successor, to be more lenient, but they were mistaken.

To stop the oppression, a small group of Catholic men plotted to blow up the House of Lords on November 5, 1605, when James and his administration would be inside, and replace them with a Catholic government. Led by Robert Catesby, they rented a house next to the Houses of Parliament and smuggled thirty-six barrels

of gunpowder into the cellar of the House of Lords. The most famous conspirator and explosives expert, Guy Fawkes, went there to light the fuse. A warning letter exposed the plot, however, and he was caught before he could act. Fawkes was arrested and tortured until he gave the names of the other conspirators. All involved were tortured and executed.

Jacobean Masculinity

In the Jacobean Era, like today, there were certain cultural definitions that went alongside masculinity. First and foremost, Men were expected to be physically and mentally strong. As well as this, men were also expected to be powerful, respected, honourable, courageous (brave) and chivalric (respectful towards women).

If men were seen not to be exhibiting these character traits, they were considered not a man at all; in cases such as this, men were seen to be weak and therefore not respected.

Jacobean Gender Roles

Men assumed a dominant position in the society. It was the man of the house who worked and fetched for food to keep his family alive. Apart from being the sole bread earner of the family, the eldest male member was the head of the house. Everyone had to obey him and do as was being told. Marriages were normally decided by elders or parents of the bride or bridegroom.

The young couple getting married had no say in selecting their spouse. Jacobean men had property rights as well as voting rights. The property was either passed down from father to son or from brother to brother. This superior position of men in society was also reflected in the Jacobean theatrical plays. Most of the characters were played by men. Even the role of a woman was played by a young man. Boys were given preference as far as education was concerned.

Jacobean women continued to live a life that was subordinate to men. They were supposed to obey what was told to them. The main responsibility of married women was to take care of the household matters and raise children. Before marriage, a girl was under the control of her father, after marriage her husband and after the death of her husband, her son. Thus, women were made to depend on their male relatives throughout their lives. Young girls were groomed for later life. Since childhood they were trained to take care of the house apart from sewing.

The concept of equality between the sexes would have seemed very foreign to most in Shakespeare's day: Adam was created first, and Eve from his body; she was created specifically to give him comfort, and was to be subordinate to him, to obey him and to accept her lesser status. A dominant woman was unnatural, a symptom of disorder.

Lady Macbeth is a powerful yet sinister figure: at the very outset she deliberately tries to suppress her feminine qualities in order to exercise power.