Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme

in European, American and Postcolonial
Languages and Literatures

Final Thesis

Lady Macbeth as a Female Archetype of Negative Empathy:

An Intermedial Exploration of the Alluring Power of Evil in the Aesthetic Domain

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Stefano Ercolino

Assistant supervisor
Ch. Prof. Shaul Bassi

Graduand
Teresa Biz
Matriculation Number 869671

Academic Year
2021 / 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have tried to find the right words to describe my gratitude to those who have been supportive during this course of studies because each of them, in their own way, has contributed to the realization of this final thesis. Their help has been essential throughout my master's degree and words cannot fully render my thankfulness.

First of all, my most sincere thanks to Professor Stefano Ercolino, my supervisor, for his time, and valuable advice during the drafting of this thesis because this would not have been possible without his help and expertise. I am also grateful to him for his course on negative empathy because it has given me the chance to explore a new aesthetic concept and different theoretical approaches to artworks which, in turn, have inspired this thesis. Likewise, I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Shaul Bassi, my assistant supervisor, for his insightful suggestions and comments on the topic.

Thanks should also go to my family who has made this happen and whose love and belief in me have always reassured and motivated me. To my sister, Elisa, for her inspiring tenacity and confidence. Thank you for being there any time I need you and for your useful tips. I am also thankful to my boyfriend, Sebastiano, who has always believed in me and has stayed with me for all this journey, always ready to support me when I did not feel self-confident enough and to manage to get a smile out of me.

Last but not least, I am also grateful to my classmates and friends, especially Anna. Thank you for having supported and helped me since we unexpectedly met during the first lectures of our bachelor's degree. Thank you for having been my faithful companion during all these university years, it would not have been the same without you.

ABSTRACT

Given that recently there has been a growing interdisciplinary approach to analyze the notion of empathy through, for instance, the lenses of neuroscience, psychology, aesthetics, and cognitive literary studies, the concept of empathic responding has been increasingly investigated by researchers. Although since Theodor Lipps's conceptualization of empathy in the late nineteenth century considerable research has been devoted to positive empathy, less attention has been paid, instead, to the disturbing, yet perversely seductive, power of evil in aesthetic representations. In this light, the aim of the present thesis is to explore how the depiction of an intrinsically negative content, whether it is an overall atmosphere, an object, a fictional character, or even a musical piece, tends to elicit an ambiguous feeling of both attraction and repulsion in the audience. Among the most notable instances of this aesthetic concept, this thesis will focus on Lady Macbeth as a literary prototype of negative empathy because, not only in Shakespeare's original play, but also in the following adaptations of *Macbeth* she maintains her capacity to trigger a disturbing, ambivalent emotional response. Specifically, I will firstly provide a brief critical reflection on the meaning of empathy, from the late nineteenth century to the present day, as well as an overview of the primary characteristics of negative empathy. Secondly, the Shakespearean archetype will be analyzed in order to shed some light on how the witchlike Lady Macbeth, in her repulsive cruelty and attractive human dimension, is likely to cause the audience to experience conflicting emotions. In line with this, the third section of the present study will explore the success of this archetype through a cross-cultural, intermedial perspective because it will provide a series of notable examples showing how in literary, operatic, musical, and cinematographic adaptations Lady Macbeth has continued to disclose, via different media and over time, the repulsive as well as alluring effect of the depiction of an intrinsically negative content in works of art and, therefore, to foster negative empathy in contemporary viewers. Within this framework, this thesis suggests that Lady Macbeth, both in the original play and in its manifold adaptations, seems to encapsulate the defining traits of negative empathy and thus to vividly convey the allure of evil in the aesthetic domain.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ... *1*

1. Negative Empathy: the Power of Evil in Aesthetic Representations ... *9*

1.1 Empathy: History and Contemporary Perspectives ... 9

1.2 The Separation between Positive and Negative Empathy ... 15

1.3 Negative Empathy and Cathartic Identification ... 17

1.4 The Paradox of Evil: between Seduction and Repulsion ... 20

2. 'Fiend-like Queen': Negative Empathy for Lady Macbeth ... *26*

2.1 Declinations of Evil in *Macbeth*: From the Witches to Lady Macbeth ... 27

2.1.1 The Imagery of Darkness and Witchcraft Beliefs ... 27

2.1.2 Lady Macbeth: the Fourth Witch of the Play ... 35

2.1.3 Beyond Lady Macbeth's Domineering Attitude ... 46

2.2 'Frailty, Thy Name is Woman': Lady Macbeth's Inherent Vulnerability ... 49

2.2.1 'Nothing Is / but What is Not': The Emergence of Femininity and Humanity in the Fiendish Lady Macbeth ... 51

2.2.2 Lady Macbeth's Delusions: From the Original Play to Historical Perspectives ... 58

2.2.3 Dramatic Performances: Exploring the Impact of Theatre on Viewers' Negative Empathy ... 66

3. An Intermedial Exploration into the Disturbing Allure of Lady Macbeth ... *73*

3.1 Shakespeare and Adaptation Theories ... 74

3.2 The Enchantment of Visual Representations: the Notion of *Stimmungseinfühlung* ... 84

3.2.1 Philosophical Perspectives on the Expressive Qualities of Visual Stimuli ... 84

3.2.2 Kurzel's *Macbeth* and the Force of Immersive Atmospheres ... 87

3.2.3 The Visual Impression of Entrapment in Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth* ... 93

3.3 Expanding the Horizons of Empathic Responding: Music and Melodrama ... 100

3.3.1 Experiencing Empathy through and with Music ... 100

3.3.2 Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*: a Hybrid of Tragedy and Satire ... 104

3.3.3 Verdi's *Macbeth*: Fragmented Melodies and the Tension between Words and Music 115

Conclusion ***127***

Bibliography ***129***

INTRODUCTION

‘If literature moves away from evil,
it soon becomes boring’
(Bataille 1958, translation mine[1])

Negatively connoted characters, artifacts, musical pieces, performances, and settings which evoke an ambivalent kind of empathic response in viewers are abundant in the history of arts, from ancient Greece up to the present day (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 9-10). The success of this aesthetic experience lies in that there is something, from the standpoint of evil, which overpowers and attracts users of artworks so that their aesthetic response oscillates between feelings of repulsion and attraction, emotional divergence and convergence. The inseparability which seems to exist between literature and evil was emphasized at the end of the 1950s by Georges Bataille, a French intellectual whose conception of the interrelation of literature and evil may serve as a starting point for the relocation of evil at the forefront of the discussion. Instead of assuming that art should be reassuring, his provocative remark ‘if literature moves away from evil, it soon becomes boring’ (Bataille 1958, translation mine[1]) stresses the perturbing as well as destabilizing power peculiar to art as its primary, if not its most interesting, characteristic (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 12). It is precisely the disruptive force of art, which tends to be dismissed by scholars in favor of art as morally edifying, which is able to break the automatism of perception by means of representing radical forms of evil and wickedness (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 12).

Given that this is not the conventional perspective these days, this thesis will follow Ercolino and Fusillo (2022) in their attempt to place once more the subversive power of art at the center of the aesthetic and theoretical debate by resorting to the notion of negative empathy (2022, pp. 12-13). Following their extensive research on this category (2022, pp. 10-11), this study will, at first, retrace the discussion about empathy in philosophical and psychological terms, from Theodor Lipps, its founding father, to new and more recent assumptions about it in order to focus on the less studied and often

[1]‘*Si la littérature s’éloigne du mal, elle deviant vite ennuyeuse*’ (Bataille 1958).

neglected concept of negative empathy as well as on its relevance to aesthetics and the humanities. Then, granted the centrality of empathy through a theoretical analysis, a critical reflection on the limits of empathy and, in the case of its negative counterpart, of the ethical or moral restraints of readers' and spectators' empathic response will follow. This emphasizes a key aspect of this aesthetic experience: that users of artworks may feel a form of emotional involvement, which is coupled with a feeling of repulsion, even when witnessing the depiction of an intrinsically negative aesthetic content, whether it is a fictional character, a painting, an installation, a musical composition, or an overall atmosphere, because, according to Morton (2011), fictionality enables them to overcome those moral, ethical, or social barriers which would, otherwise, inhibit any response other than aversion, as it is likely to occur in real life. Moreover, given that this aesthetic experience is not confined to certain artforms, this analysis will take an intermedial perspective, from literature to theatre, opera and painting, cinema and music, to outline how negative empathy is deeply rooted in cultural products, an approach which is also adopted by Ercolino and Fusillo (2022, p. 13).

However, so as to restrict the scope of this study, its focal point will be Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and, specifically, Lady Macbeth who, among the many instances of male villains (Macbeth, Don Juan, Humbert Humbert, Joker, Diabolik, Walter White, Ciro di Marzio, to name a few), serves as an outstanding example of a female archetype of negative empathy. Thus, like the portrayal of Medea by the Greek tragedian Euripides, the cruel Lady, from Shakespeare to modern-day adaptations, is one of the few heroines to be a source of contrasting emotions in the audience. Within this context, the mechanisms and codes of expression which, depending on the type of medium, are likely to trigger this tension will be explored. In this regard, it seems that the artist may, voluntarily or not, arrange a narration, a painting, a score, or a performance to foster our empathic response. In other words, testing the limits of aesthetic representation and of spectators' ethical barriers, the artist attempts to guide their emotional, though destabilizing, attunement to inherently negative aesthetic contents via a masterful usage of expressive techniques, even though aware of the fact that there is always an ineliminable and irreducible subjective component in their response (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 70). That is, a significant element of negative empathy is that, although enhanced by certain tools, it is an aesthetic experience which cannot be assumed *a priori* because it also depends on the discrepancy of different individual reactions (Ercolino & Fusillo

2022, p. 70). As regards literature and empathy for characters, Eileen argues that the above-mentioned mechanisms 'can be offered as examples only in a suggestive spirit, since empathy is specific to individual reading experiences' (Eileen 2017, p. 308) because '[i]nherited traits play an important role in our disposition to experience emotional contagion, but our personal histories and cultural contexts affect the way we understand automatically shared feelings' (Keen 2007, p. 5). Thus, notwithstanding some typically human inclinations to empathize and some devices which may stimulate this, our empathic response may vary according to our past, cultural beliefs, and other personal as well as socio-political components. For instance, the perception of femininity and, thus, cognitive and affective reactions to despicable female characters tend to change over time, especially with the advent of feminism which led to different ways of interpreting women both in real life and in fiction, as hinted by different interpretations of Lady Macbeth.

In line with this, the concept of 'emotional community' could be a useful system for describing this variation in terms of emotional reactions. This expression, which was partly linked to the notion of 'textual communities' (Lynch 2017, p. 4) elaborated by Brain Stock (Lynch 2017, p. 4), was coined by Barbara H. Rosenwein, a historian of the Middle Ages. Unlike Stock's term which was meant to represent 'how the spread of literacy activated medieval heretical and reformist groups' (Lynch 2017, p. 4), Rosenwein's one was introduced in order to delineate a category which, by avoiding generalizations, recognizes the plurality of emotional responses across time and space. The expert describes this notion in the following way:

> Emotional communities are largely the same as social communities—families, neighborhoods, syndicates, academic institutions, monasteries, factories, platoons, princely courts. But the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them (for it is about such things that people express emotions); the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore. (Rosenwein 2010, p. 11)

Questioning some assumptions of presentism and universalism about the nature and history of emotions, Rosenwein defends the theory of social constructionism and the idea whereby emotions evolve over the course of time (Rosenwein 2010, pp. 5-9). In the historian's words, 'emotions—how they are experienced, expressed, and interpreted—are shaped by the societies in which they are embedded' (Rosenwein 2010, pp. 8-9). Hence, she gives prominence to 'the cognitive, relational and culturally constructed nature of

emotional understanding and expression' (Lynch 2017, p. 3). In line with this, Rosenwein asserts that also social, ideological, and political changes as well as other major events may determine some alterations to both the vocabulary used to name emotions and to the styles employed to express them (Lynch 2017, p. 4). Dealing with her attempt to account for the changes that already existing and new communities undergo over time, Peter Stearns's concept of 'emotionology' (Rosenwein 2010, p. 21) and William Reddy's notions of '"emotional regimes", "emotional suffering," and "emotional refuges"' (Rosenwein 2010, p. 22) may be useful insomuch as they are interrelated. Nonetheless, Rosenwein seems to favor 'a co-existing variety of emotional 'constellations' or 'sets' which include and exclude, privilege and downplay, particular emotions and versions of emotional life' (Lynch 2017, p. 5), among which even Reddy's 'refuges' or 'suffering' groups may be found (Lynch 2017, p. 5; Rosenwein 2010, p. 23).

What is more, the American historian maintains the flexibility and elasticity of this category as different emotional communities may coexist at the same time and place and people may occupy more than one circle at once (Lynch 2017, p. 4). Concerning this point, Lynch (2017) reports Rosenwein's description of this phenomenon (Rosenwein, in Lynch 2017, p. 4):

> Imagine, then, a large circle within which are smaller circles, none entirely concentric but rather distributed unevenly within the given space. The large circle is the overarching emotional community, tied together by fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression. The smaller circles represent subordinate emotional communities, partaking in the larger one and revealing its possibilities and its limitations. They too may be subdivided. At the same time other large circles may exist, either entirely isolated from or intersecting with the first at one or more points.

Rosenwein's approach to emotions as well as some issues raised in these paragraphs would deserve to be discussed at length because, as previously, it would be interesting also to measure those textual, narrative, cinematic as well as compositional techniques which seem to stimulate an empathic response in the audience by considering various 'emotional communities' and their different sensibilities. Although aware of the fact that this category opens up some interesting reflections, the present study aims at investigating those mechanisms which, in the depiction of an inherently negative aesthetic object, evoke a certain aesthetic experience which is peculiar to negative empathy, albeit with the awareness of individual differences. In other terms, it explores how negative empathy, as an aesthetic experience, is orchestrated mainly by means of specific techniques which

vary according to the medium we are considering and which are designed precisely to trigger it, even if it depends on us, on the emotional communities, or on many other factors whether we can actually experience it or not.

Furthermore, given that this analysis focuses on an archetype in Western literature and on its manifold adaptations and appropriations, it is worth recalling how the possibility or not to empathize with a fictional character also depends on whether they can be treated as real-life people whose existence continues beyond the story in which they are inserted, independently of the fact that the medium is a film, a narrative, a poem, a portrait, or an opera. In other words, the resonance of a character's life for the audience depends on a variety of factors, including the feasibility to adopt a kind of psychoanalytical approach to analyze their present behavior, past, precedents, fears, feelings, and beliefs under the illusion that an intimate interaction may bond characters and the members of the audience. As regards Shakespeare, this observation has been raised by Lionel Charles Knights who, in a 1933 essay entitled 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?', argues that, given that the playwright has often been remembered not only for his poetry, but especially for his mastery of character creation, criticism should change its main focus since 'the only profitable approach to Shakespeare is a consideration of his plays as dramatic poems, of his use of language to obtain a total complex emotional response' (Knights 1933, pp. 10-11). Therefore, the critic seems to prefer an alternative reading of, for example, *Macbeth* by favoring an analysis of 'Shakespeare's handling of language' (Knights 1933, p. 17) in light of the main conventions of Elizabethan drama. In this way, Knights stresses those 'themes of the reversal of values and of unnatural disorder' (Knights 1933, p. 34) and 'that of the deceitful appearance' (Knights 1933, p. 34) which, from the opening act, resonate and weave together in the play. Thus, since it is primarily a tragedy and a drama, the verses, rather than solely characters, contribute to the construction of an overall atmosphere (Knights 1933, p. 36) where evil, deceit, and confusion reign. It is also worth mentioning how it is in the lines by the end of act 2, scene 1[2] and especially in their syntactical construction that the English critic finds that tension, 'a mixture of repulsion and

[2]'[…] Thou sure and firm-set earth, / Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear / Thy very stones prate of my whereabout, / And take the present horror from the time / Which now suits with it […]' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.1:57-61).

attraction fusing into "horror"' (Knights 1933, p. 42), which anticipates what will be defined as a major element of negative empathy itself.

Considering the significance of word choice and visual imagery in Shakespeare, the present study also seeks to explore these aspects in order to understand even more deeply Lady Macbeth's facets, from her fiendish to her softer human dimension. Nevertheless, it cannot ignore the corpus of Shakespearean criticism which, at the turn of the eighteenth century but mainly from the second half of that century (Knights 1933, pp. 18-19), focused on an analysis of characters' construction and which, moreover, determined the mainstream approach in reading and interpreting Shakespeare over the following century. This tendency of humanizing characters was, according to Knights (1933, pp. 22-23), the result of eighteenth-century critics' unfamiliarity with Shakespeare's usage of words or of Elizabethan stage conventions, of a strong belief in art's moral purpose, as well as of an increasing development of psychological studies. Notwithstanding Knights's critical stance, this is an important part of Shakespeare criticism which, moreover, has various implications for the present analysis because the latter cannot overlook the ability of the playwright to create, through certain mechanisms, realistic characters and to have a deep understanding of human emotions and desires. Thus, it is mainly this which enables the audience to empathize and bond with Shakespearean villains because, as it will be discussed, psychological complexity and character's past are two key components of identification and mutual feeling. In other words, if they were just words on paper, there would be no empathy. In line with this, also the possibility to delve into a character's background, to fill in some gaps through prequels, sequels, or appropriations and adaptations enables readers and viewers to have a better understanding of them and, especially with regard to villains, to have a glimpse of their possible motivations for any criminal wrongdoing. In this respect, *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832) and *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines; in a Series of Fifteen Tales* (1850) by, respectively, Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke represent the legacy of eighteenth-century criticism over the following century, but they also provide some insights into Lady Macbeth's past and psychological depth, components which facilitate the audience to understand, and not merely despise, her.

Furthermore, given that *Macbeth* is a well-known tragedy, it has been interpreted manifold times from early theatrical performances to present-day intermedial adaptations,

from theatre to cinema, from painting to opera. As anticipated through Rosenwein's concept of 'emotional communities', individual, cultural, and societal differences should not be overlooked when dealing with an analysis of the audience's emotional response. Thus, traces of diverse interpretations over the centuries present themselves as a critical tool to solve the above-mentioned issue of considering every reading according to diverse 'emotional communities.' In other words, they bear witness to the broad spectrum of interpretations across time and, consequently, hint at the variety of emotional reactions to a single work which guided different portrayal of, for example, a character in later versions of it. As for *Macbeth*, Marvin Rosenberg collects significant performances and interpretations of renowned players and directors as well as the corresponding comments of critics and journalists in *The Masks of Macbeth* (1978). For the purpose of this study, Rosenberg's references to Lady Macbeth's 'highly complex polyphony' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 158), which can be inferred from the variety of adjectives used to define her and which are listed by Rosenberg himself (1978, pp. 159-160), are rather noteworthy in as much as they exhibit how the Lady' interpretations range from 'Lady Macbeth as Terrible Woman' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 161) to her image as 'the Loving Wife' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 174), from the fierce Mrs. Siddons to the devoted Helen Faucit or the softer Ellen Terry. To these remarkable actresses and others, some other designs should be added, namely that of 'the Maternal Lady' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 195), 'the Child Lady' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 196), 'the Sensual Lady' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 198), 'the Lady Possessed' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 200), 'the Lady as Barbarian' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 202) and 'the Nerve-Driven Lady' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 202). Following Rosenberg's attempt to 'look at the cultural milieus that nourished partial insights' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 160) of Lady Macbeth's personality, this thesis will explore some adaptations and appropriations where the Lady, according to diverse sensibilities and through different media, is interpreted and performed differently. However, with the aim of investigating the mechanisms which are likely to stimulate a mixture of adhesion and estrangement in the audience, the examples covered serve as a means of specifying how, even though this female archetype has evolved and changed over time, it is still capable of arousing negative empathy.

Briefly, this study aims to define the aesthetic category of negative empathy and to verify some mechanisms and techniques, which allow us to experience it, by resorting to some noticeable instances. Specifically, this thesis develops in three main parts: firstly, a brief theoretical reflection on the notion of empathy, from its coinage to later

interpretations of the term, and of the aesthetic experience of negative empathy; secondly, an examination of the polarities peculiar to the Shakespearean archetype of Lady Macbeth, as it is described in the tragedy; thirdly, a comparative, intermedial, and cross-cultural analysis of adapted artworks where negative empathy for the Lady is key. Though separated, these parts are closely interwoven because the initial critical reflection and the following analysis of both Shakespeare and literary, cinematographic, musical, and operatic reworkings shed light and inform each other. In other words, following an overview of the main aspects of negative empathy, some case studies, namely Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth* (2016), Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (first performance 1934), and Verdi's *Macbeth* (1847), will be analyzed to display the success of this archetypal female villain who, through various media, has never ceased to exhibit and foster that tension, between repulsion and attraction, which is peculiar to the aesthetic representation of evil. In other words, given her early proximity to the world of evil and of black magic and her subsequent mental deterioration, she illustrates the repulsive and fascinating effect of evil in artworks and, therefore, may be deemed a model of negative empathy itself.

1. NEGATIVE EMPATHY: THE POWER OF EVIL IN AESTHETIC REPRESENTATIONS

The recent assimilation of different disciplines, including neuroscience, psychology, aesthetics and cognitive literary studies, into the academic debate on empathy has resulted in an ever-increasing investigation into the representation of the negative in forms of art. Notably, since Theodor Lipps's reflection on the concept of empathy as one of the main sources of knowledge, little attention has been given to the notion of negative empathy and, hence, to the depiction of evil in works of art. Nevertheless, there is a common awareness of the allure of evil both in terms of unwholesome characters and negatively connoted *Stimmung*. In other words, in the history of arts there are many instances of negative characters, objects, performances, spaces, or atmospheres which, though disturbing, may provoke a reaction in which attraction and repulsion coexist. Given that the present thesis will mainly explore empathy for the cruel, 'fiend-like queen' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.7: 99) Lady Macbeth through different media and over time, this first chapter focuses on the concept of negative empathy and its ambivalent, unsettling effect in order to convey the power of evil in the aesthetic domain. Specifically, firstly a brief introduction to the concept of empathy and of its ever-changing labels from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century will be provided and, secondly, a description of negative empathy's main features will be disclosed by resorting to some significant examples.

1.1 EMPATHY: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Even though the representation of the negative has always enriched the history of arts, it is first and foremost important to this analysis to elucidate the meaning of empathy. Specifically, the word 'empathy' is relatively recent because, although its former signifier 'sympathy' has been commonly used throughout the eighteenth century by David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and by Adam Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), it was firstly introduced during the twentieth century by Edward B. Titchener as a translation of *Einfühlung* (Jahoda 2005, p. 161). Notably, it was the German philosopher Robert Vischer who pioneered the German word *Einfühlung*, which literally means

‘feeling into’, in the field of art appreciation (Jahoda 2005, p. 153). Therefore, it can be inferred that according to the German thinker aesthetic appreciation implies ‘the projection of the self into the object of beauty’ (Jahoda 2005, p. 154). In light of this, the concept of *Einfühlung* was later translated into English by Edward B. Titchener as empathy in *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of Thought-Processes* (1909) but it is mainly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Theodor Lipps shed a light on this obscure concept which is supposed to represent one of the three basic means of knowledge, along with perception and introspection (Ercolino 2018, p. 244; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 22-24). What is more, Lipps gradually extended the scope and the meaning of this concept because, although originally it was employed in the aesthetic domain, it was eventually adopted in order to elucidate interpersonal relationships and, therefore, to indicate how we can understand other people’s minds (Jahoda 2005, pp. 155-157). However, despite his interest in interpersonal understanding, the focus of Lipps’s analysis remains empathy for objects since, according to him, these are ‘able to activate a cognitive and emotional loop between the subject and the external world in which they present themselves as a fusional *unity*, in the double movement of the objectification of the self and the subjectivation of the world’ (Ercolino 2018, p. 244; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 24-25). Lipps postulated that *Einfühlung* can be assimilated to a form of inner imitation whereby an unobservable inner resonance occurs when an empathic bond with an object is weaved (Ercolino 2018, p. 244; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 25).

Given that empathy is a fairly recent English word, intellectuals have always been concerned with how to best define it. In line with this analysis, the definition proposed by Eisenberg and colleagues is noteworthy. They describe empathy ‘as an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and which is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel’ (Eisenberg et al. 2006, p. 647). Therefore, empathy seems to refer to an involuntary sharing of affect whereby, by means of a form of emotional mutual recognition, social bonds are both established and reinforced. In addition to a possible association between empathy and altruism, the definition advanced by Eisenberg unveils the fundamental affective dimension of empathy. In detail, as empathy cannot ensure a perfect correspondence between the emotions of the empathizer and those of the empathized and as it is, therefore, nearly impossible to match others’ emotional state, one is more likely to experience an unqualified affective arousal. In *Parables for the Virtual*

(2002) and *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) Brian Massumi and Fredric Jameson, respectively, elucidate the meaning of affect by, first of all, clarifying the distinction between affect and emotion. While the latter denotes a 'qualified intensity' (Massumi 2002, p. 28) or a 'named emotion' (Jameson 2015, p. 29), the former indicates an intensity which is beyond or before perception and cognition, or rather a 'nameless and unclassifiable' (Jameson 2015, p. 33) bodily arousal. In other terms, affect corresponds to an intensity which 'eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names' (Jameson 2015, p. 29). Therefore, in the aesthetic domain readers and spectators are likely to experience 'waves of generalized sensations' (Jameson 2015, p. 28) which, though unqualified and unclassifiable, affect their bodies and constitute a precondition for them to feel classifiable emotions.

Likewise, Susanne Keen suggests that 'empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading' (Keen 2007, p. 4). Notably, this definition stresses some of the main features of empathy because, on the one hand, the adjective 'spontaneous' and the noun 'affect' may refer to the fundamental distinction between empathy and sympathy. Specifically, while sympathy indicates a 'more complex, differentiated feeling for another' (Keen 2007, p. 4), empathy is elicited by an 'affective matching' (Coplan 2011, p. 6) and, therefore, indicates the tendency to feel what we believe others feel in a given situation. Moreover, it specifies how empathy is an intermedial phenomenon which, as such, can be triggered not merely in real-world emotional convergences between people but more significantly in fictional worlds, including novels, operas, pieces of theatre, films, music and TV series where what emerges is that this 'phenomenon of spontaneous matching feelings' (Keen 2007, p. 15) can occur also with reference to nonhuman entities or a *Stimmung* (Keen 2007, p. 68). Moreover, it should be marked how empathic response involves both affect and cognition because, echoing Keen (2007, p. 28):

> aesthetics' empathy describes a projective fusing with an object—which may be another person or an animal, but may also be a fictional character made of words, or even, in some accounts, inanimate things such as landscapes, artworks, or geological features. The acts of imagination and projection involved in such empathy certainly deserve the label cognitive, but the sensations, however strange, deserve to be registered as feelings.

Nevertheless, before investigating empathy for fictional characters or for an overall atmosphere and its alleged connection with prosocial behavior, the present section aims at elucidating the very concept of empathy. Specifically, unlike other forms of emotional responses, empathy's distinguishing feature is its classification as a basic human trait because, 'equipped with mirror neurons, the human brain appears to possess a system for automatically sharing feelings, what neuroscientists call "a shared manifold for intersubjectivity"' (Keen 2007, p. 4). Denoting empathy as a phenomenon whereby a sort of similarity and a sense of recognition is felt not merely with human beings but also with animals or atmospheres, Gallese and colleagues give prominence to the mechanism through which this simulation of actions as well as of emotions may occur; that is, 'the neural matching system constituted by mirror neurons' (Gallese et al. 2002, p. 36). This hypothesis derives from a series of experiments that have been carried out in the field of neuroscience in order to understand how the brain processes perceived and performed actions. Notably, by means of some experiments conducted on monkeys neuroscientists managed to detect an area, the area F5, in the ventral premotor cortex of apes in which 'a particular set of neurons, activated during the execution of purposeful, goal-related hand actions, such as grasping, holding or manipulating objects, discharge also when the monkey observes similar hand actions performed by another individual' (Gallese 2001, p. 35). The discovery of this class of mirror neurons which represents 'a specific neural system matching action observation and execution' (Gallese 2001, p. 36) gave some valuable insights into what has been considered a biological basis for empathic mechanisms. In detail, researchers observed and demonstrated that humans are provided with 'a mirror matching system' (Gallese 2001, p. 37) which resembles the one discovered in monkeys (Gallese 2001, p. 37). Moreover, what has been recently confirmed through fMRI studies (which stand for Functional Magnetic Resonance Imagining; that is, a tool to record neural activity) is that, even during the observation of goal-related actions made with the mouth, the hand or the foot, 'our motor system 'resonates' along with that of the observed agent' (Gallese 2001, p. 38) because both object-related action and observation lead to an activation of the very cortical areas that are operating while performing the same goal-directed movements (Gallese 2001, p. 38). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged how Gallese (2001) assumes that a similar mechanism may provide a new key to an understanding of human capacity to attune to other's emotions and feelings and, therefore, to effectively establish intersubjective relations. In this respect, Gallese (2001, p. 44-46) introduces the concept of 'the *shared manifold* of intersubjectivity' (Gallese

2001, p. 44) as a means of specifying that in order to establish an empathic bond with others it is not the representation of actions that comes into play but rather 'emotions, our body schema, our being subject to pain as well as to other somatic sensations' (Gallese 2001, p. 44). Notably, significant evidence is traceable in a recent study on neurons' activation while both witnessing and experiencing pain. Keen reports how it has been demonstrated through fMRI studies that 'a person perceives that she feels another's pain, while not literally experiencing the identical sensation' (Keen 2007, p. 13) because it is the affective areas of the brain, and not the sensory ones, which echo the emotional state of the empathized (Keen 2007, pp. 13-14). In other terms, the existence of this newly discovered brain areas has been deemed a biological basis for empathic mechanisms because, as the above-mentioned tests suggest, mirror neurons reproduce the same experience of pain we are witnessing in our own mind. Therefore, the very areas responsible for the feeling of pain are firing also when assisting a person who experiences a painful stimulus. Furthermore, Keen clarifies this phenomenon by recalling Preston and de Waal's proposal according to which 'witnessing or imagining another in an emotional state activates automatic representations of that same state in the onlooker, including responses in the nervous system and the body' (Keen 2007, p. 14). This reveals immediacy and spontaneity as two fundamental aspects of matching feelings and, moreover, it alludes to bodily arousal as a defining trait of affective responses to evocative forms of art.

Besides these empirical contributions to elucidate the inner workings of empathy and besides our inherent disposition to feel the emotions of others, it should not be overlooked that, as expounded by Keen (2007, p. 9), our 'instinctive caring' (Keen 2007, p. 9) contributes to reflect on ethics, to recognize others' emotions and, consequently, to value sympathy, fellow feeling, human social relations, morality and sensitivity for the preservation of the common good. According to her, 'the very action of reading fiction—any fiction—supposedly trains people to care for one another' (2007, p. 20) because, by means of imagining and somehow sharing what the observer believes that the empathized subject is feeling, people are more likely to become altruistic, to benefit others' wellbeing and to centralize morality and sociality. In this respect, given that this analysis drags on literary studies, Keen's empathy-altruism hypothesis regarding the power of novel reading or more generally her proposal whereby reading, hearing or viewing a narrative 'might contribute to the cultivation of empathy' (Keen 2007, p. 11) is highly relevant.

Whether empathy may effectively lead to prosocial behavior and, therefore, to a moral improvement of citizenship is quite a controversial topic because there is a lack of empirical data to confirm this hypothesis. Even though for the purpose of this study a thorough analysis of how empathy has received different attention over the centuries is not entirely possible, it is certainly worth mentioning that, according to Keen (2007), this has become an increasingly noteworthy aspect in the literary field. Following both Hume's and Smith's assumption about the value of mutually feeling with another as well as their association of emotional contagion with social renovation (Keen 2007, p. 44), approximately from the eighteenth century 'fiction was especially esteemed for its capacity to extend a reader's imaginative capacity beyond a narrow circle of acquaintance' (Keen 2007, p. 44). This, to some extent, may be the legacy of eighteenth-century cult of sensibility whereby overwhelming sensibility, sympathy for others' emotional states and, thus, a feeling heart were brought to the fore. Subsequently, in the Victorian period writers and reviewers tended to consider fictional characters' capacity to evoke sympathy a requirement for testing the efficacy and quality of a piece of writing (Keen 2007, p. 53). For the present study, it is pertinent to hint at George Eliot's contribution in the debate at least briefly. Specifically, George Eliot in 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856) centers on the relevance of sympathy for readership's moral improvement because, as the following excerpt clarifies, she deems this a means of imagining and enlarging reader's feelings and sensitivity:

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. […] Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (Eliot, in Keen 2007, p. 54)

Notwithstanding the empathy-altruism hypothesis, the Victorian writer's 'stated goals lay in the extension of readers' feelings, not necessarily in any particular real-world action to follow' (Keen 2007, p. 54) and, consequently, she basically suggests that the essence of art is the extension of sympathies which, in turn, expand our knowledge and understanding of the world. This is even more pertinent to this analysis because it sheds a light on how empathy, by means of identifying with characters or figures that might be quite unfamiliar to us, may broaden our perspectives from which to interpret reality. In other words, it can be assumed that empathy allows people to put themselves in somebody's shoes, to penetrate their minds, to seize their motivations and, therefore, to facilitate intersubjective relationships with seemingly very different people.

1.2 THE SEPARATION BETWEEN POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMPATHY

For the purpose of this analysis, it is pertinent to investigate the detectable difference between positive and negative empathy which was, to some extent, introduced by Lipps and subsequently expanded in the academic field. In this respect, Lipps suggests that the aforementioned mechanism of self-activation can be positive or negative, depending on whether the empathic bond between the observer and the object evokes, respectively, a feeling of accord or pleasure or a feeling of discord or resistance (Jahoda 2005, p. 158). Given the all-embracing and harmonious unity that characterizes the experience of positive empathy, according to Lipps, *sympathische Einfühlung*, unlike negative empathy, represents the only authentic form of empathy (Ercolino 2018, p. 245; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 26). Nevertheless, it is necessary to elucidate how Lipps's understanding of empathy changes depending on the nature of the empathized subject; namely, whether they are merely objects or aesthetic objects. In detail, whilst positive and negative empathy for objects in daily situations may be referred to as 'an affirmation and a negation of the life of the empathizing subject (or subjects in the case of interpersonal empathy)' (Ercolino 2018, p. 245; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 27), in the aesthetic domain a life-affirming and positive experience can also stem from the representation of evil in any work of art (Ercolino 2018, p. 245; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 27). Therefore, following Lipps's conception, it seems that negative empathy cannot be experienced while admiring an inherently negative art object because of two features that Lipps ascribes to aesthetic objects: 'the *protective character* and the *sublimating nature* of the aesthetic experience' (Ercolino 2018, p. 246; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 27-30). Specifically, their very aesthetic nature protects the empathizing audience from being overwhelmed by their unpleasurable content and, hence, enables spectators to somehow derive delight even while witnessing the depiction of something intrinsically negative. In this respect, it is worth mentioning how Lipps, unlike the more recent empathy-altruism hypothesis illustrated by Susan Keen in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), argues that the contemplation of works of art cannot implicate any practical agency in real life and, therefore, that its aesthetic character permits only and just safe contemplation (Ercolino 2018, p. 245; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 28). The idea whereby fiction and artworks in general constitute a sort of protective environment where you can establish an empathetic bond with negative, immoral, terrible characters recalls Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Notably, Burke emphasizes that it is possible to enjoy the negative in

the aesthetic domain provided that spectators are at a safe distance from the source of terror and, therefore, the evil content does not involve them personally. Consequently, notwithstanding observers' detection and perception of immorality, moral turpitude, corruption, or wickedness, it is still possible to feel pleasure since the source of dread does not affect the observers firsthand. Briefly, fiction, as well as the aesthetic domain in general, is a sort of protective world where you can empathize with killers without any direct consequence in actual life.

More recently, scholars have delved deeper into this field of study and have suggested a new distinction between positive and negative empathy. Although closely linked, it has been proved that 'empathizing with others' positive versus negative emotions activates distinct additional brain regions associated with the personal experience of those emotions' (Andreychik & Migliaccio 2015, p. 276). In detail, they respectively activate the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is related to positive affect, and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex and the anterior insula, which are associated with negative affect (Andreychik & Migliaccio 2015, pp. 275-276). In addition, Andreychik and Migliaccio (2015, pp. 277-279) briefly mention that positive and negative empathy, despite their similarity in causing a tendency to help others in need, seem to be predictive signs of different kinds of social conduct and emotional response. Unlike negative empathy, it is suggested that positive empathy is 'associated with positivity-enhancing prosocial behaviors directed toward both strangers (random acts of kindness) and relationship partners (pro-relational behaviors)' (Andreychik & Migliaccio 2015, p. 285).

Based on these premises, one can assume that even the representation of evil in works of art results in a life-affirming experience for the spectators because, provided with a protective distance, they are not overwhelmed by a rush of negative emotions but are rather inclined to detect a shared human dimension and, thus, to improve prosocial action in the real world. In this light, it is also to be stressed that, 'art cannot turn the negative into the positive, but it can allow us to perceive negativity as beautiful by bringing its human dimension to the fore' (Ercolino 2018, p. 246; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 31). In other terms, together with the protective and distinctive shelter of aesthetic objects, what enables spectators to experience an intense positive experience even in the representation of whatever is disgusting, repellent, disturbing, or even

immoral is their capacity to call forth our care for humanity. Therefore, in the depiction of evil or negative content it is a human dimension and a concern for the common good which transpires through the power of literature, music, films, and any other form of art.

The affirmation of humanity in disturbing works of art and, therefore, the tendency of the spectator to bond to terrible characters or disquieting atmospheres is decipherable in manifold examples. Among them, it is to be mentioned *Medea* (431 BC), *Macbeth* (1623), the disturbing sense of desolation discernible in the abandoned city of Pripyat, the children in *The White Ribbon*, *Breaking Bad*, or Mapplethorpe's provocative *X Portfolio*. In all these instances, the separation between positive and negative empathy becomes even more clear because, unlike the former, the latter seems to be a mixture of attraction and repulsion since it favors an attitude in-between distancing from a character and getting closer to him. In other words, negative characters, figures or even atmospheres are both fascinating and repelling and, as such, they are able to conquer or even enchant readers and observers as well as to repulse them. Hence, the resulting empathic bond is rather problematic and ambiguous because, in addition to the inner tension which it enhances, it may be elicited even though, as it will be described below, some barriers, including antisemitism, misogyny, or decency, are very likely to prevent any empathic response in real life. This recalls the relevance of the above-mentioned protective realm provided by fiction because it is only in the aesthetic field that one may have a broader outlook and detect a trace of humanity even though the empathic connection which is created with killers or psychopaths requires the empathizer to disregard their moral code.

1.3 NEGATIVE EMPATHY AND CATHARTIC IDENTIFICATION

As briefly outlined, it is possible to empathize not only with the familiar but also with the unfamiliar and, therefore, one's empathy may be elicited by, for example, positive figures as well as negative ones. Notably, in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007, pp. 92-93), Keen identifies in two fundamental features of novel reading, namely character identification and narrative situation, the grounds on which empathy-related responding may be evoked. Even though this analysis is not confined to the efficacy of novel reading for readers' emotional responses, all that Keen unveils about empathy is of relevance for an intermedial study of affective arousal.

On the one hand, the readership may identify with a fictional character and, consequently, may feel empathy by means of characterization techniques, including 'naming, description, indirect implication of traits, reliance on types, relative flatness or roundness, depicted actions, roles in plot trajectories, quality of attributed speech, and mode of representation of consciousness' (Keen 2007, p. 93). Therefore, it could be argued that even though, recalling Foster's separation between flat and round characters, lifelike and nuanced characters are usually preferred over simplified ones, empathic response may be effectively triggered by both and, moreover, the facility to comprehend flat characters may play a major role in enhancing it (Keen 2007, p. 95). On the other hand, Keen specifies that narrative situation encloses both perspective and point of view, or rather 'the nature of the mediation between author and reader, including the person of the narration, the implicit location of the narrator, the relation of the narrator to the characters, and the internal or external perspective on characters' (Keen 2007, p. 93). Given that each differs in the degree of contribution to readers' empathic responses, internal point of view and first-person narration have distinguished themselves throughout the history of literary criticism as the most effective ways to foster easier identification with fictional characters and thus readers' empathy. Notably, Keen's proposal of a possible correlation between novel reading and empathy cannot be overlooked because even though the present study does not center on this genre her analysis may be perfectly adapted to address empathic responses in the art world in general.

Besides, it is worth mentioning how Keen (2007, p. xii) states that empathy-related responses are also dependent, to a certain extent, to one's natural inclination for spontaneous empathy and to the context in which the reading process occurs because the empathic reactions which fictional works may elicit may vary according to specific historical, social and also cultural features which, as a consequence, may favor or inhibit readers' immediate emotional attunement. In this respect, Keen adds that, given the influence of history, culture, and social values on empathy, 'the capacity of novels to invoke readers' empathy changes over time, and some novels may only activate the empathy of their first, immediate audience, while others must survive to reach a later generation of readers in order to garner an emotionally resonant reading' (Keen 2007, p. xii). Likewise, the depiction of characters and atmospheres through means of communication other than novels and their capacity to enchant and empathically engage

observers may depend on the above-mentioned factors. This is why Keen's insightful observations set a benchmark for an understanding of human capacity to empathically relate to others' emotional states not merely through novel reading but more broadly in various art forms, such as music, opera, poetry or even films. Therefore, even though the scope of this analysis is broader in terms of forms of art, Keen's comprehensive review of empathy exerted by novel reading is still valid and useful.

In light of this, character identification and situation may be considered the touchstones of audience' responses to empathy-enhancing content not only in reading novels but also in watching films, TV series, operas or in listening to suggestive music. Notably, echoing Ercolino's (2018, pp. 248-249; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 45-47) reference to Jauss's *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1977), its centrality lies in the fact that character identification seems to be 'the basic mechanism, according to him, for establishing an empathic relationship with a literary work of art' (Ercolino 2018, p. 248; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 45). Specifically, Jauss discloses five principal forms in which it is triggered: namely, the associative, admiring, sympathetic, cathartic, and ironic (Jauss, in Ercolino 2018, p. 248; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 45-46) one. Consistent with the purpose of this analysis, cathartic identification is particularly relevant because of its reference to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, which is addressed by the Greek philosopher in *Poetics* (c. 335 BC). In detail, its main feature lies in 'leading either to tragic relief or comic laughter' (Jauss, in Ercolino 2018, p. 248; Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 45) because of its discharging effect of readers' most negative impulses. In other words, participating in a tragic representation and identifying with terrible characters may purify the onlookers by somehow giving voice to their evil part which otherwise would not be fully expressed in a civilized society. Freud in *Psychopathic characters on the stage* (1905-1906) expanded on this concept stating that the purification and the subsequent feeling of relief resulting from a process of identification with a negative character 'is based on an illusion; that is to say, his suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on the stage, and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security' (Freud 1953, p. 306). Therefore, it is arguable that the capacity to relate emotionally with a tormented hero, which entails fears and struggles, and to achieve catharsis is enhanced by the protective distance which the safe perimeter of fiction provides. This facilitates spectators' enjoyment and 'pleasure instead of simple

aversion from the revelation and the more or less conscious recognition of a repressed impulse' (Freud 1953, pp. 308-309). That is, by recognizing a similarity between the repressed impulse of the hero and the repressed impulse of most men, one may identify with psychopathic characters (Freud 1953, p. 309) and consequently may experience a feeling of release and relief by means of the return and the consequent discharge of their worst emotions and instincts in the protected aesthetic domain.

1.4 The Paradox of Evil: between Seduction and Repulsion

Rather than inhibiting understanding and emotional connections, fictionality favors users of works of art in general to identify with characters, objects and atmospheres even if this means overcoming barriers of, for example, morality and decency. In other words, precisely because they are fictional, they may trigger not only our disgust or repulsion but especially our interest and attention. This is elaborately described by Morton in *Empathy for the Devil* (2011) where the scholar basically elucidates how in order to understand and, accordingly, empathize with others' misdemeanor imagination plays a leading role. Echoing Morton's analysis:

> the fact is, that when we try to find anything like real empathy for people who commit real atrocities we come up against a barrier. We can describe the motives, and we can often even imagine some of what it might be like to do the acts, but there are deep obstacles to the kind of sympathetic identification required for empathy. (Morton 2011, p. 321)

In detail, Morton (2011) clearly advocates for the impossibility to echo the emotional state of malevolent criminals in real life because, as previously suggested, in order to feel empathy for an awful person or for a criminal offender some barriers have to be overcome. These psychological and moral barriers limit empathy for flesh-and-blood fiends by means of creating an unbridgeable distance and a certain estrangement between the observer and the empathized subject. In other words, with reference to evil acts 'there are deep obstacles to the kind of sympathetic identification required for empathy' (Morton 2011, p. 321) because these blocks result in averting spectators from being in tune with real-life perpetrators, since these 'are made of the same materials as the barriers against choosing dangerous, disgusting, or immoral actions' (Morton 2011, p. 321). Nevertheless, these insurmountable barriers are non-restrictive in the case of aesthetic response because their collapse in art appreciation explains why it is possible to empathize with fictional criminals and not with real monsters. Among the most prominent

examples, Medea, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Don Juan, the disturbing subjects of Mapplethorpe's photographs, the children in *The White Ribbon*, and Walter White stand out.

Besides the key role played by the above-mentioned moral limits, in Morton's investigation another noticeable feature of the aesthetic domain is outlined. This refers to the capacity of fiction to evoke character's inner turmoil and also actions' backdrop so much so that readers are efficiently given some enlightening clarifications regarding the specific context in which an action, though awful, takes place. This, in turn, favors character identification and empathic involvement because, as Morton puts it:

> 'a skilful author will direct the imagination to aspects of the fictional situation, including aspects of the fictional character's motivation, that are similar to those of the reader, so that one gets a partial imagination of the motivation of deeds that one would not consider doing oneself' (Morton 2011, pp. 324-325).

Given these insights, in the contemplation of an intrinsically negative aesthetic content it is empathy for the though barely visible humanity which forcefully triumphs because even in the depiction of the most atrocious of acts, namely murder, what emerges is the character's motivations, his being part of a common humanity and, in a sense, his weaknesses. The latter are made available to the observers by the artist who may touch on some weak spots which, by disclosing the otherwise implicit or implied motives, authorize an empathetic gaze. Therefore, it may be inferred that Morton's point of view clashes with a general tendency whereby in conceiving 'an action we focus on a small number of relevant factors, holding others implicit' (Morton 2011, p. 325). In light of this, it follows that, as effectively suggested by George Eliot, one of the major traits of a great artist is their capacity to give a complete picture of not merely characters but also of atmospheres by means of filling in any gap and, therefore, by disclosing anything rather than assuming crucial details. Consequently, the artist guides his users to go beyond what is visible on the surface and, thus, making them able to gather the true meaning which, otherwise, would be unavailable.

Based on these premises, it is possible to state that whether or not any insight into a broader context is provided may be deemed one of the main features separating people's response to real-life situations and fictional realities. This is even more plain in Morton's words:

> We usually keep out of focus factors concerning the general context of action, concentrating our limited imaginative resources on the thinking and motivation that a person experiences in that context. As a result, we are not used to imagining actions performed in significantly different contexts to those in which we find ourselves. So given a repugnant action performed in different circumstances our simple efforts to imagine it, or gain empathy for the agent, fail. (Morton 2011, p. 325)

Whilst it could be argued that in real-life circumstances only a limited portion of, for example, the life of a criminal is available to the observer, in fiction the artist provides the audience with a detailed overview of characters' inner emotions, of the most intimate aspects of their lives and also of the precedents and motivations for their hideous crimes. This is mainly due to the fact that in fiction, unlike real life, it is more likely to spend more time with negative characters, such as killers, drug dealers, alcoholics, rapists or pedophiles because of the safety and comfort provided by the very distance separating actual life and the realm of fiction. By gathering a broader context, readers may catch a glimpse of the fact that these culpable criminals are part of a common humanity and, as such, may be emotionally understood. Hence, given a broader background, an otherwise unacceptable negative theme may invoke an empathic response in the audience. Conversely, it is highly unlikely that an empathic reaction may occur in facing an inherently awful real-life circumstance or monster because some moral inhibition may avert onlookers from imagining the possible motives to act so brutally and, therefore, from taking another's point of view to get a better understanding of their choices and actions. Yet, readers may empathize with awful fictional characters as, for instance, in the case of Jean Floressas des Esseintes, the protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *Against Nature* (1884). In this instance this is achieved through an effective account of the antecedents of the novel in the prologue whereby readers become acquainted with des Esseintes's being an orphan, his *ennui*, his neurosis, his decision to retreat himself from society and civilization, and his total despair. In other words, the narrator suggests a deep psychological suffering which, although carefully hidden, culminates in a final desperate cry towards the end of the novel. Therefore, there are hints of des Esseintes's sincere internal suffering as well as of his utter despair in order to enable readers to pay attention to him even when he commits heinous crimes, such as his plan to turn a good boy, Auguste Langlois, into a murderer. In this respect, it is fairly clear how readers' relationship with des Esseintes is two-sided because, on the one hand, the behavior of someone who, as the title suggests, goes against nature and against morality is unacceptable, and, on the other hand, a sort of attraction to this tormented aesthete may be felt since the narrator

masterfully opens a window on his inner turmoil. The mixture of attraction and repulsion and, thus, the resultant experience of inner tension specifies that readers are capable of feeling negative empathy for this corrupted and corrupting figure.

Furthermore, even though this analysis centers around Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623) and, specifically, around the contemptible murderous figure of Lady Macbeth, for the present introduction, it is pertinent to reveal some modern-day examples in order to make this topic more intelligible. Recalling Ercolino and Fusillo's (2022) detailed intermedial analysis about the power of negative empathy in the field of art, the protagonist of the early-first century American TV series *Breaking Bad*, which was created by Vince Galligan, perfectly embodies the essence of negative empathy. Notably, this television series features the story of an anti-hero, Walter White, who commits a sequence of increasingly unacceptable actions and becomes a powerful meth dealer. In this frame of violence and amorality, negative traits are counterbalanced by some positive characteristics because Walter White is not just a meth cook and a murderer but also a caring father and a good chemistry teacher. Therefore, despite the unforgivable and inexcusable actions whereby he breaks the law, it is still possible to imagine what he has been through, to catch sight of his humanity and kindness so that spectators are left in a state of uncertainty between fascination and nonacceptance, rejection and repulsion. Notably, the empathic attunement to the unjustifiable Heisenberg is, to a certain extent, comparable to what the reader may experience while exploring the fictional world of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Journey to the end of the night* (1932) because both lead to a similar reaction. In detail, like Mr. White, Léon Robinson both enchants and repels readers because at the bottom of his atrocious acts what emerges is his understandable, though despicable, motives and his most intimate human side. In this respect, Louis-Ferdinand Céline masterfully gives the readership an account of Robinson's troubled childhood in such a way to reveal how his terrible actions, including, for example, his attempt to kill Grandma Henrouille in exchange for money, are underpinned by the violence and the misery that left a mark in his upbringing:

> Robinson's childhood had been so dismal he didn't know what to say when he thought of it. Except for the episode with the lady customer, he couldn't find anything, even in the far recesses, that didn't make him sick with despair; it was like a house full of repugnant, foul-smelling objects: brooms, slop jars, housewives and smacks in the face. (Céline 2012, p. 269)

Therefore, given the emphasis on the misery of Robinson's past, in *Journey to the end of the night*, his humanity and his comprehensible motivations transpire through the force of Céline's writing, which culminates in the final words 'like a house full of repugnant, foul-smelling objects: brooms, slop jars, housewives, smacks in the face' (Céline 2012, p. 269). In this climax, the character's distress is almost palpable, or rather concrete. This is enhanced by word choice which powerfully depicts Robinson's misery and wretchedness so that the readership has the chance to explore the scars from his childhood and, thus, to examine the motivations behind his brutal actions. Given that the readership becomes acquainted with his inner turmoil and motives, readers are somehow capable of sharing Robinson's point of view and therefore they experience both repulsion and a certain attraction to this unscrupulous character. This passage and its powerful tone reveal how empathy may be felt not necessarily for an actual person but also and especially for 'a fictional character made of words' (Keen 2007, p. 28). As briefly outlined, the right words significantly contribute to the vividness of characters and scenarios and, as a consequence, to readers' empathic response. In other words, 'character identification with a figure presented in a realistic (if formulaic) frame seemed to disarm suspicion of strangers and open the possibility for an emotional response to a scenario with a compelling relation to contemporary reality' (Keen 2007, p. 32).

Likewise, Vince Galligan succeeds in revealing Mr. White's health problems as well as the financial difficulties of his family to the audience in such a way to provide them with a new key to an understanding of his ever-worsening decisions and actions. Thereby, Galligan is capable of conveying the offensiveness of Mr. White's acts together with a moving undertone which reveals his inherent humanity. In other words, rather than transforming his hideous crimes into something ultimately positive, the director's frequent allusions to the drug smuggler's debility and financial straits betray his being part of a common humanity and this, in turn, adds intelligibility to his atrocious, immoral crimes. *Breaking Bad* may serve as an example of the extent to which an empathic response is much more easily triggered in the fictional world rather than in real life. As previously stated and echoing Suzanne Keen's analysis in *Empathy and the Novel*, in fiction there is an easier access to a character's backstory, to their emotions, feelings, instincts, thoughts as compared to actual life circumstances where fewer are the chances to become acquainted with the events prior awful, spiteful actions. This is even more apparent with respect to inherently negative characters, including murderers, drug

smugglers, criminal offenders, or sociopaths because it is only in the protective perimeter of fiction that fascination and repulsion may coexist in the observers. Therefore, this reference to *Breaking Bad* and its anti-hero owes its importance to its evocative power, since the parallel stories of Mr. White and Heisenberg perfectly embody the duality and ambiguity that stem from negative empathy itself. Moreover, whilst it could be argued that fatherhood, dedication to the family, and teaching chemistry can be counted among Mr. White's most positive aspects, his plan to use his expertise to cook and sell illegally crystal meth and the resulting actions represent a stigma of his alias Heisenberg. Hence, the protagonist's double life serves as a symbol of the inner tension elicited by the experience of negative empathy. In this respect, it should not be overlooked how the fictional world of *Breaking Bad* ensures the audience a safety distance in order to enjoy even negative emotions by giving them full access to all the aspects of the protagonist's personality and life, or rather to both his good and evil sides. In other words, as in Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *Breaking Bad* disclosed a disturbing coexistence of positive and negative aspects, of attractive and repulsive sides which result in, respectively, the characterization of Mr. White and Heisenberg, or rather of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In light of this, *Breaking Bad* effectively introduces the category of negative empathy as the main research topic of this analysis, which ranges from the Shakespearian tragedy of *Macbeth* to its present-day adaptations.

Briefly, this chapter has attempted a brief excursus on the category of negative empathy in the aesthetic domain and on the destabilizing reaction it elicits in the observer. In order to do so, it has focused on the meaning of the recent English word 'empathy' as well as on the separability between positive and negative empathy. Furthermore, it has placed the ambivalent and cathartic power of evil at the center of this analysis by hinting at the depiction of villainy, immorality, or inhumanity through different art forms, from classical tragedies to modern TV series. Notably, this first section has introduced some significant examples of figures, fictional characters, atmospheres or musical compositions that, given their inherently negative content, can elicit a feeling of both attraction and repulsion. The centrality of this opening chapter lies in the description of this tension since it symbolizes a hallmark shared by all the artworks which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

2. 'FIEND-LIKE QUEEN'[3]: NEGATIVE EMPATHY FOR LADY MACBETH

As delineated in the previous chapter, negative empathy is a psychological state whereby an inner tension, or rather, a disharmonious, yet coexisting, felling of both attraction and repulsion is elicited in the empathizer by a negatively connoted aesthetic content. Given the manifold examples of characters, objects, moods, events, and circumstances which, in the aesthetic domain, may effectively trigger an ambivalent empathic reaction, the present chapter aims at elucidating this category via an analysis of a timeless Shakespearean tragedy: *Macbeth.* The relevance of this play in this field of study stems from the fact that the characters of this tragedy are not merely evil, but also nuanced and psychologically complex (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 142) and, therefore, they trigger repulsion and attraction at once. In this, Shakespeare seems to portray in an insightful way evil, which is embodied not only in the protagonist's ambition-driven actions, but especially in the weird sisters and Lady Macbeth. In this respect, even though it could be argued that the bloodthirsty and ambitious protagonist may serve as a meaningful example of negative empathy for a villain, the analysis to follow aims at reading this play through a new lens. That is, it will focus on Lady Macbeth who is a repulsive as well as fascinating female figure because, notwithstanding the fact that the play is primarily based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare expands her role by adding some significant episodes (Tosi 2021, pp. 18-19) and is, thus, able to capture her true emotions, thoughts, and weaknesses. Hence, this tragic heroine may represent a prime literary example of negative empathy since it clearly exhibits and strongly echoes its typical characteristics. Given her initial proximity to the realm of evil powers and of witchcraft and her final plunge into delirious madness, Lady Macbeth clearly depicts the repulsive, engaging, as well as cathartic effect of the representation of evil in works of art.

Briefly, this second chapter will delve into the main theme of this thesis by exploring Lady Macbeth's expressive potential in Shakespeare's original play and,

[3](Shakespeare 1994, 5.7:99)

therefore, it will unveil the playwright's capacity to imagine and consequently sketch a multifaceted and controversial character as Lady Macbeth is. In order to do so, it will firstly outline how some noticeable textual references, mainly in the first section of the play, may effectively ascribe evil intentions, ruthlessness, and wickedness to the witchlike Lady. More specifically, after a short excursus on the concept of evil in philosophical terms and on the pervasiveness of the powers of darkness, it will discuss the nature of spite, evil intentions and disregard for any moral barrier which flow within this fiendish Lady. Secondly, with the aim of investigating her potential capacity to trigger readers' and viewers' negative empathy, the analysis to follow will also explore her basic humanity and vulnerability which can be gradually glimpsed in the original version of *The Scottish Play* and in some historical adaptations of it.

2.1 DECLINATIONS OF EVIL IN *MACBETH*: FROM THE WITCHES TO LADY MACBETH

2.1.1 THE IMAGERY OF DARKNESS AND WITCHCRAFT BELIEFS

In the depiction of Lady Macbeth's personality, emotions, and reactions, the renowned English playwright prioritizes the portrayal of the forces of evil which seem to control her ruthless determination and defiant attitude. Therefore, before focusing on the juxtaposition of this female villain with the powers of darkness, it is first and foremost pertinent to the present study on negative empathy to briefly elucidate the concept of evil itself and the forms of its manifestation, including the themes of darkness, demonic forces, and linguistic as well as metric disorder, in the play.

Walter Clyde Curry in *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (1959) provides some philosophical underpinnings of the delineation of evil in the weird sisters and, partially, in Lady Macbeth. Given that the notions of good and evil, which are traditionally associated with, respectively, light and darkness, are not absolute concepts and may intersect, it is relevant to examine, at least briefly, the philosophical nature of evil inserted in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As Curry puts it (1959, p. 58):

> in Shakespeare's time evil was considered to be both subjective and, so far as the human mind is concerned, a non-subjective reality; that is to say, evil manifested itself subjectively in the spirits of men and objectively in a metaphysical world whose existence depended in no degree upon the activities of the human mind.

In this theoretical framework, the forces of darkness feature also in *The Scottish Play* where 'the malignant wills of intelligences—evil spirits, devils, demons, Satan—who had the ability to project their power into the workings of nature and to influence the human spirit' (Curry 1959, p. 58) are embodied by Hecate and the witches, whose nature is primarily devilish because they may be understood as demons in the shape of witches (Curry 1959, p. 60). In other words, these fiendish creatures are the embodiment of evil forces and are, therefore, 'intended to symbolize or represent the metaphysical world of evil spirits' (Curry 1959, p. 59) in the tragedy. Briefly, it may be inferred that, whatever their form may be, the main point of Curry is that they ultimately epitomize a demonic power (Curry 1959, p. 60). Furthermore, the American academic claims (1959, pp. 60-61) that Shakespeare opted for witches rather than demons because, after Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592), devils might hazily indicate the metaphysical world of evil since their representation in the form of devils have progressively tended to comedy, as it is exemplified in *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) by Jonson. In addition, the insertion of the witches in *Macbeth* is not a Shakespearean invention because, according to Tosi (2021, p. 67), they already featured in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which is arguably the playwright's main source text.

Furthermore, even though the witches appear only thrice, their intense dramatic impact is also related to the widespread interest and belief in witchcraft in Early Modern England, among both villagers and intellectuals, as the treatise, *Daemonologie* (1597), written by King James VI of Scotland (and subsequently republished as King James I of England) demonstrates. In detail, their resonance in *Macbeth* is very ample because they touch upon some of the traditional beliefs of the Jacobean since, notwithstanding Curry's understanding of them as 'demons in the guise of witches' (Curry 1959, p. 79), some traits align them with ordinary hags. For instance, as it is discussed in detail by Anthony Harris in *Night's Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-century English Drama* (1980, pp. 36-40), their capacity to vanish into thin air, to foretell the future, to raise storms as well as their outward appearance, their possession of an animal familiar and their tendency to seek revenge are reminiscent of traditional sorcery. In line with this, the weird sisters are showing themselves as village witches in act 1 scene 3 where it may be glimpsed an echo of the paradigm elaborated by Thomas and Macfarlane, also known as the *charity denied* model, whereby an old, impoverished, often widowed woman was accused by neighbors and villagers to curse them after their refusal to help or their lack

of charity (Tosi 2021, pp. 63-64). As anticipated, in act 1 scene 3 this understanding of witchcraft as a result of social tensions is displayed by the third hag who, after having been denied some chestnuts, casts a spell on the sailor's life. Moreover, as Tosi (2021, p. 69) signals, it may be argued that in *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (1959) Curry relates superstitious beliefs in witchcraft with the need to provide an objective interpretation of the nature of evil.

Recalling Curry and the idea whereby demonic spirits are reified with Hecate and the witches, with the aim of reading the tragedy through the lenses of a negatively connoted female character, the connection which both husband and wife weave with evil is fundamental. Specifically, Lady Macbeth unveils her adhesion and proximity to these devilish forces right from the very beginning where, in act 1 scene 5, she summons them or, in other words, sides with them. It is also worth noticing how the figure of the satanic female, because of her gender, was traditionally associated with weakness and frailty (Levin 2002, p. 29), typically feminine traits which are also mentioned in King James's *Daemonologie*, whereby 'women were thought to be more open to satanic influence than man' (Levin 2002, p. 29). Echoing the *Malleus Maleficarum* or the *Hammer of Witches*, a treatise on witchcraft by two Dominican monks, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, Levin (2002, p. 29) recalls the King's following words which refer to the prevalence of female witches rather than warlocks: 'The reason is easie, for as that sex is frailer than man is, so it is easier to be entrapped in these grosse snares of the Devile, as was over well proved to be true, by the serpents deceiving Eve at the beginning' (King James, in Levin 2002, p. 29). Notably, the fact that women were thought to be more susceptible to the dark forces of witchcraft and, thus, to the temptations of the Devil is pertinent to an analysis of the origin of Lady Macbeth's evil because it may be deemed a first key to an understating of her being overpowered by these 'juggling fiends' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.7:49). Nonetheless, it is recognized that 'Lady Macbeth deliberately and with manly resolve placed herself under the control of the Witches' (Williams 2004, p. 246). That is, she intentionally chose evil, and, because of this, she is truly a villain and not a victim of evil forces.

Moreover, before focusing on the Lady's invocation, it is pertinent to this study to briefly illustrate how the opening act effectively anticipates the prominence of evil by setting the dark, sinister atmosphere which will dominate the entire play. As the tragedy

opens, three witches enter a demonic, supernatural setting where, resorting to rhythmic shorter couplets where opposites coexist, they prophesy the future of the kingdom of the trusting and kind King Duncan. Hence, thunder and lightning forestall the threatening presence of 'secret, black, and midnight hags' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:62) not only in the disturbing chaos that, through their unnatural attire and lines, resonates in the natural and political world of the play, but especially in men's 'black and deep desires' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.4:52). Specifically, the apparition of the weird sisters, who are '[s]o withered, and so wild in their attire, / That look not like th' inhabitants o'th' earth' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:40-41), introduces the dominant dark tone of the play because '[c]lothed in *black*, they are identified with the color associated with nighttime deeds of witchcraft, with death and the Devil' (Davidson 2017, p. 129). In addition, the ominous atmosphere, both geographically and atmospherically, of the opening scene may recall witches' alleged power to raise storms whereby it may be argued that they are those responsible for the lightning storm which accompanies their appearances (Harris 1980, pp. 38-39). Among other allusions scattered throughout the play, this belief recalls the pamphlet *Newes From Scotland* (1591) where an account of the North Berwick witches' attempt to shipwreck King James's ship while he was going back to Scotland with Anne of Denmark, his bride, in 1589-90 is inserted (Harris 1980, p. 40). This episode may be related not merely with the portentous storm of the opening scene but, to some extent, also to the third scene where the alliteration 'tempest-tossed' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:25) encapsulates the witches' capacity to control winds and to unleash storms. Furthermore, the stormy weather which precedes their apparition is in line with the disorder that their menacing presence entails. This, in turn, may suggest a possible association between their ominous manifestation and the chaos which the bloody tyrant, driven by his 'cruel, treacherous, and daring' (Jameson 2009, p. 303) wife, causes and which pervades the political and the metrical world of *Macbeth*. As Tosi (2021) properly emphasizes, 'the witches, which, in thunder and lighting, open the play on the heath, appear as manifestations of cosmic as well as natural chaos, which will be reflected in the moral and political sphere where disorder is caused by the murder of the King in the human world' (2021, p. 67, translation mine[4]).

[4]'Le streghe, che aprono il dramma nella prima scena nella brughiera, tra tuoni e lampi, si manifestano come espressioni di disordine cosmologico e naturale, che si rifletterà nel disordine morale e politico causato dall'omicidio del re nel mondo degli uomini' (Tosi 2021, p. 67).

Given the traditional association of darkness and poor weather conditions with evil spirits and, by extension, with the realm of black magic, the predominant absence of light throughout the drama is no coincidence in that it may be an allusion to the main themes of the tragedy; namely, wickedness, ambition, and moral corruption. Notably, the play is mainly set in darkness which, after the King's Men assumed control of the indoor Blackfriars Theater in 1608-1609 (Brooke, in Shakespeare 1994, p. 1), could be conveyed more effectively because, unlike traditional open-air Shakespearean theatres, the dim lights of candles or of torches, together with the usage of image clusters to represent, for example, the opposition between night and day, darkness and light (Tosi 2021, p. 49), could serve this purpose (Brooke, in Shakespeare 1994, p. 2). However, the only effective, symbolic radiance which, in the person of the saintly Edward the Confessor, is able to bring light in darkness, order in chaos and, thus, to cure Scotland is not described until the second half of the play. Therefore, more than half of it has a dark setting in which Scotland, as if it were a suffering female body, is depicted as a country which metaphorically bleeds because of the wounds caused by its ghastly tyrant. Echoing Macduff's line 'Bleed, bleed, poor country' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.3:31), also Malcom, Duncan's son, acknowledges that, as a personified land, 'It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash / Is added to her wounds' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.3:40-41). Therefore, in opposition to the miraculous ability of the English monarch to heal Scotland, the dictator and his wife's bloody ascension to the throne overshadow the whole tragedy in which '[d]arkness and night are signifiers of negation and evil' (Davidson 2017, p. 132). In other words, their violation of the basic principles of human society casts a 'dark shroud' (Churchill 2015, p. 162) or 'a witch-hued light' (Smith 2017, p. 106) over their souls and especially over the overall mood of the play because 'the melancholic darkness which these two cannot escape becomes through the projection of their actions a mournful atmosphere for those around them' (Churchill 2015, p. 162). By extension, the play seems to create an overall atmosphere of violence, deceit, and mystery which repels and attracts spectators at once. This is masterfully conveyed by Trevor Nunn's Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Macbeth* (1979) via a pervasive atmosphere of darkness and gloom or even by Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1948) through the usage of '[e]xpressionist techniques of chiaroscuro lighting to create claustrophobic sets conveying the sense of psychological oppressiveness and anxiety' (Hindle 2007, p. 206).

Therefore, it seems that the absence of light is not merely the predominant feature of the setting but also a meaningful symbol of evil, violence, and blind ambition which in *Macbeth* takes the form of three cunning 'black agents' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:56) and, to some extent, of the demonic Lady. Notably it is dimness and its related symbolic meanings which lead the hero to 'the horrid deed' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:24) because, notwithstanding his initial hesitations, both the witches' prophecy and especially Lady Macbeth's manipulative speech influence his intentions, behavior, and actions. Although Macbeth cannot resist these devilish spirits' soliciting, it should not be overlooked how, following what Curry specifies in 'The Demonic Metaphysics of Macbeth' (1959), demons 'cannot know the inmost thoughts of the human mind except through interpretation of outward bodily signs; and they cannot plant thoughts in the mind' (Curry 1959, pp. 75-76). The scholar's consideration is pertinent to an analysis of the mechanisms which may trigger negative empathy because, even before Lady Macbeth's persuasive lines, Macbeth's desire to be crowned King of Scotland may be already in his mind (Jameson 2009, p. 305-306) and, thus, may be not solely instilled by the witches through Lady Macbeth. This is best expressed by Macbeth's physical reaction to the mere idea of murder, prior Lady Macbeth's appearance (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:135-143):

> '[…] that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not'

Although this excerpt suggests the 'potential for violence within him and his willingness to entertain *unrestricted* fantasies' (Asp 1981, p. 157), in the next scene he affirms 'Stars hide your fires, / Let no light see my black and deep desires' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.4:51-52). Therefore, Macbeth, unlike his truly evil Lady, 'is a man terrified yet fascinated by the power within him' (Asp 1981, p. 157) and, as such, tries to conform to the moral standards of society (Asp 1981, p. 157). In other words, while Lady Macbeth unhesitatingly embraces evil, Macbeth tries to control his actions and thoughts because 'he fears to lose his humanity' (Asp 1981, p. 156) since, as he says in 1.7, 'I dare do all that may become a man, / Who dares do more is none' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:46-47).

Nevertheless, he succumbs to his wife's temptation because, even though demons cannot instill thoughts and intentions in man's mind, Lady Macbeth as well as the demonic spirits that possess her can, at most, 'move the human will both by persuasion and by stirring up passions residing in the sensitive appetite' (Curry 1959, p. 75) by, for example, inducing disturbing and persuasive hallucinations. Therefore, it may be concluded that Macbeth's vision of the dagger in act 2 scene 1, the cry 'Sleep no more; / Macbeth does murder sleep' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:34-35) which he overhears after Duncan's assassination and the appearance of Banquo's ghost may be ascribed not only to his imagination and fear, but also to the machinations of these demonic forces (Curry 1959, pp. 83-84) which try to incite him to violence.

Likewise, as far as Lady Macbeth is concerned, even though she actively leads her husband to pursue the crown through deception and murder, she envisions the 'horrid image' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:136) of regicide only later in act 1, scene 5 when she receives Macbeth's epistle concerning his meeting with the three soothsayers and their future greatness. According to Jameson, 'the letter itself acts upon her mind as the prophecy of the Weird sisters on the mind of her husband, kindling the latent passion for empire into a quenchless flame' (Jameson 2009, p. 306). That is, Lady Macbeth's implicit manipulative powers and 'vaulting ambition' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:27) are incited, like in Macbeth, by these demonic forces which, in Curry's perspective (1959, pp. 75-76), are capable of rousing man's dormant passions. Therefore, it seems that, albeit differently, 'both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are connected to the witches and to witchcraft: Lady Macbeth calls on evil spirits, Macbeth becomes an evil fiend' (Smith 2017, pp. 104-105). Briefly, while the Lady could be conceived as the instigator who, after the weird sisters' prophetic words have stirred her lust for power and unleashed her darkest desires, intentionally establishes a connection with these ghostly apparitions to manipulate her husband, evil powers affect Macbeth's behavior even more effectively because, through the medium of his wife, they will lead him to commit murder. In other words, whilst it could be argued that, though totally committed to the forces of evil, Lady Macbeth is nothing more than 'fiend-*like*' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.7:99, emphasis mine) and not completely demonic (Levin 2002, p. 39), the titular character is the one who is eventually guilty of a series of crimes that, following her advice, he starts to commit in order to anticipate his fate and, thus, to secure his accession to the throne.

Besides the fact that the witches' sinister power to wreak havoc is symbolized from the very beginning by means of an all-pervasive stormy and dismal setting, the pervasiveness of their ambiguous, rhyming lines should not be overlooked because it gives the tragedy an air of mystery, both perturbing and seductive. Notably, following what Tosi signals as '[i]l contagio del male' (2021, p. 44), or rather, the contagious effect of evil forces, from the very beginning the sinister presence of evil constructs the gloomy atmosphere of the play where, even in their absence, their symbolic resonance and their disturbing words seem to persist in the characters' minds. As Banquo specifies in 'he seems rapt withal' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:57), Macbeth appears to be ravished and bewitched by the fascinating, yet appalling, rhythmic and paradoxical lines of the witches so much so that his 'thoughts become dark, subversive, and conflicted, his envy raised to a fever pitch' (Davidson 2017, p. 130). His bewilderment by the sight of these sinister silhouettes and, thus, by their words is reiterated by the repetition of the adjective 'rapt' in, for instance, 'our partner's rapt' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:143) and in 'I stood rapt in the wonder of it' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:5-6). This bond is effectively conveyed by Macbeth's very first line in act 1 scene 3, 'So *foul* and *fair* a day I have not seen' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:38, emphasis mine), since it anticipates his imminent encounter with the witches by means of an expression of duplicity, opposition, and deceit. Hence, it seems that a linguistic affinity with them already existed in the hero (Tosi 2021, p. 44) because, even before their meeting, his first utterance echoes their repetitive and chaotic language. In other words, 'his use of the Witches' terms, linking the Witches and the speaker in vocabulary, intimates that there is a bond between them and him, more significant than mere repetition of diction' (Williams 2004, p. 240). Notably, he recalls the chiasmus '*Foul* is *fair*, and *fair* is *foul'* (Shakespeare 1994, 1.1:11, emphasis mine), whose opposing concepts disclose a recurrent motif throughout the tragedy. In detail, the coexistence of binary oppositions and the recurring language of equivocation, which, like Jesuits' indirect replies, entails an interplay of ambiguous words and an omission of crucial pieces of information (Wills 1995, pp. 93-95), is introduced by the fatal sisters in act 1 scene 1, such as in 'the battle's lost, and won' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.1:4) or in 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.1:11). Subsequently, this is emphasized in the cauldron scene (act 4 scene 1) through the repetition of the term *double* in the trochaic pentameters 'Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn and cauldron bubble' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:10-11), and in the instants preceding Macbeth's death in 'these juggling fiends no more believed / That palter with us in a double sense' (Shakespeare

1994, 5.7:49-50). Recalling Tosi's analysis (2021), the prophetic words of the witches create a world of chaos, of doubles and oppositions which somehow determine the main linguistic metaphors of the play which, like mines, infect characters' utterances and detonate in different scenes of the play (Tosi 2021, pp. 44-46). Considering this, *Macbeth* seems to be constructed around several oppositions and antithesis which, like the destabilizing lines of the witches, portray a reality where 'nothing is / But what is not' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:142-143). The increasingly pervasive interpenetration of illusion and reality, introduced by the equivocal language and ambiguous appearance of the weird sisters, is pertinent to this analysis because, as it will be further analyzed in the following sections, this linguistic chaos is somehow reflected also in Lady Macbeth's speeches and, therefore, may be considered a useful key to an understanding of the nature of her evil dimension. Moreover, this air of mystery, doubles, and deceit, like the pervasiveness of darkness, constructs an eerie atmosphere which, being linked to evil forces, entails mainly sensations of repulsion in the audience.

2.1.2 Lady Macbeth: the Fourth Witch of the Play

Given that the previous section has explored the nature and the pervasiveness of evil in the tragedy, this section will investigate the inherently dark and evil nature of *Macbeth*'s female villain. In other words, an analysis of Lady Macbeth's wickedness and submission to the forces of darkness will follow. Considering that demonic forces cannot implant intentions and thoughts into the human mind but can, at most, stir their latent passions (Curry 1959, pp. 75-76), Lady Macbeth's blind ambition may be read as an inherent, dormant drive unleashed by the witches' lurking presence, both in their apparitions and in their resonant words. Thus, the objective of this second section is to shed light on one of the two elements of negative empathy, naming the negative, repulsive aspect ascribable to Lady Macbeth, by focusing on her harsh words and on her domineering attitude.

On the one hand, Lady Macbeth's adhesion to the dark forces of witchcraft is outlined from her very first appearance in act 1, scene 5 when she enters the scene alone holding a letter in which her husband, on his return from the battle, reveals the witches' prophecy to his 'dearest partner of greatness' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:10). This epithet, through which the husband addresses the wife for the first time, is significant as it

preludes their shared ambitious desires and, especially, Lady Macbeth's leading role in their heinous crimes. Notably, whilst the adjective 'dearest' may refer to their close love relationship, the word 'partner' reveals that, like the weird sisters, she would be an accomplice in orchestrating the crime and in inciting Macbeth to commit murder; whereas, the term 'greatness' may entail not merely their common ambition of achieving 'the golden round' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:27), which stands for the crown, but also violence and dishonesty which are necessary to commit regicide or, in Lady Macbeth's words, to 'catch the nearest way' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:17). Notably, as reported by Curry (1959, p. 100), this association between success and bloody actions and its opposition to goodness, in terms of loyalty and fellow feeling, is suggested also by Croce and may also represent a starting point for an analysis of the evil forces animating Lady Macbeth. Thus, it seems that the Lady enters the scene as an accessory to Macbeth's crime and, additionally, as the leading force of the imminent murder of King Duncan. In other words, her strength makes this woman, who challenges typical gender stereotypes, 'worthy of the equality her husband bestows upon her early in their relationship' (Asp 1981, p. 159). As anticipated, '[h]er valor throughout the play is […] primarily rhetorical' (Asp 1981, p. 159), as it is mainly visible in her words of severe rebuke with which she ridicules and humiliates her husband in the first place, to gain control over him (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:35-45):

> […] Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
> And wakes it now to look so green, and pale,
> At what it did so freely? From this time,
> Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would',
> Like the poor cat i'th'adage?

Lady Macbeth challenges her husband's manliness and bravery not only when she states that he does not lack the ambition to succeed but the wickedness and cruelty that are necessary to secure the throne, as in '[…] yet do I fear thy nature, / It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great, / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it.' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:15-19). Instead, she taunts him also after his first soliloquy where all his fears to be unmasked

and to ruin his reputation are released because, fearing his unmanly nature and cowardice, she compares him to a cat which, according to a proverb, wants to catch a fish without getting its feet wet. Notwithstanding the fact that this adage is used by the Lady to mock Macbeth's being 'blanched with fear' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.4:117), Rhodes (2020, p. 17) suggests that this image may also anticipate the tyrant's resigned sigh 'I am in blood / Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.4:137-139) which, in turn, recalls two other similar popular sayings. This, as it will be further analyzed, may hint at the resonance of Lady Macbeth's manipulating words that, like the weird sisters' chants, contaminate the entire play, and especially Macbeth's actions and thoughts to the extent that he would no longer need the Lady's 'Bloody instructions' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:9) in scheming the murder of Banquo (Asp 1981, p. 163).

Moreover, the Lady exhibits her firmness of purpose and fearlessness also when, just after Duncan's murder, she seems to be the only one able to maintain control over that stressful situation. Unlike Macbeth's fear to look back on what he did, she keeps reprimanding him for his lack of manliness which, especially in the battlefield, was stereotypically associated with violence and boldness (Asp 1981, p. 154). Thus, she addresses him with the following words (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:51-54):

> […] Infirm of purpose;
> Give me the daggers; the sleeping, and the dead,
> Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil.

In these lines, Lady Macbeth seems to taunt her husband, whose 'constancy / Hath left [him] unattended' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:67-68), with harsh words of rebuke which will culminate in 'My hands are of your colour, but I shame / To wear a heart so white' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:63-64). In her ruthlessness, it appears that the spirits of darkness are nested in her soul or, in other words, that the Lady's inherently evil nature is animated and stirred by the weird sisters themselves. As it will be examined in more detail in the following paragraphs, in Lady Macbeth's above-mentioned utterances some hints to the forces of evil *par excellence* may be glimpsed. In detail, she embraces evil to the point that, as suggested, her dark side transpires also through lines which resemble the witches' deceptive riddles because, in lecturing her husband to pursue his ambitions by committing

murder, her reprimands seem to convey 'that daring and courage will overcome all obstacles' (Asp 1981, p. 161), which recalls their suggestion to be 'bloody, bold and resolute' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:93). This is, therefore, a first example of how Lady Macbeth's language is contaminated by the hellish powers which animate her soul, and, to some extent, it suggests the way in which her words may betray her intrinsic wickedness and adhesion to evil.

Furthermore, her cruelty is unveiled since the very beginning, that is right after reading Macbeth's epistle in act 1 where the Lady recites her first lines. This is conveyed, on the one hand, by her proximity to the liminality of the weird sisters and, on the other hand, by her attempt to instill mettle in Macbeth. Firstly, her speech mirrors the witches' deceitful lines because, for example, she addresses her partner by means of the very same three titles which they have used in scene 3 to greet Macbeth as Thane of Glamis, the future Thane of Cawdor and 'King hereafter' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:50), in 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:14-15) as well as in 'Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, / Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:53-54). Notably, she uses the adverb 'hereafter', previously in the witches' lines, which was not in her husband's letter (Williams 2004, p. 241). Therefore, 'just as Macbeth has adopted the phrase of the Witch that he never heard, so Lady Macbeth here adopts the word of the Witch that she never read' (Williams 2004, p. 242). Hence, as previously argued, the witches' prophetic and metrically unstable lines also contaminate Lady Macbeth's mind and words, even though it seems that 'the train of evil, first lighted by hellish agency, extend itself to *her* through the medium of her husband' (Jameson 2009, p. 306) or, in other words, through the letter itself. However, as far as Lady Macbeth's closeness to the weird sisters is concerned, it is worth noticing that she does not only repeat their expressions, but she also contaminates their words on one occasion. In detail, while welcoming King Duncan in their apparently welcoming Inverness Castle, where the Scottish King should find 'double trust' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:12), she utters 'All our service, / In every point twice done, and then done double' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.6:15-16). In this equivocal remark, it seems that the linguistic contaminators in the play are not the witches but rather Lady Macbeth herself because, through her inherent evilness, her reply anticipates the witches' spell as they chant 'Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn and cauldron bubble' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:10-11) around a boiling cauldron. These trochaic pentameters, as argued in the

previous section, are relevant as the repetition of the word 'double' encompasses the theme of chaos and disorder which, through the witches' enigmatic riddles, permeates the play and, more significantly, characters' minds. Considering this, the resonance of this term in both Lady Macbeth's speech and the witches' spell is rather noteworthy especially because she firstly mentions the adverb 'double' right after conjuring evil forces in act 1 scene 5 and because it hints at the coexistence of opposites which, defying logic, forms one of the main effects of the witches' fateful presence. Therefore, Lady Macbeth may be associated with the weird sisters to the point that she may be read as a fourth witch because, as in this example, she appears to replace them when they are absent by echoing their impenetrable, rhyming words. Briefly, both her repetition of witch-like language and her anticipation of the witches' chorus may serve as an example of her closeness to the world of evil and, thus, of her inherently dark dimension which make her a preeminent object of viewers' negative empathy.

Besides the fact that her lines resemble the equivocal language of the witches, with the aim of analyzing the dark forces within Lady Macbeth, it is also worth noticing how her ambiguous femininity could relate her to the realm of witchcraft and of demonic forces. In other words, a subtle affinity between Macbeth's wife and the 'Weïrd Women' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.1:2) may be glimpsed both in their androgynous physical appearance and in the evocative imagery used in the invocation scene. On the one hand, as far as their outward appearance is concerned, the enigmatic figure of the witch occupies a liminal space between the human and the non-human, the natural and the supernatural, the future and the present and between the male and the female. For example, as mentioned above, in *Macbeth* they are shown as both supernatural, demonic apparitions and village witches, or rather, as representatives of both objective evil and village superstitions. Moreover, given that the play asks readers and spectators to explore the threshold between the supernatural and the human, between the masculine and the feminine, between Scotland and England and between morality and immorality, the liminality of the witches plays a key role in an understanding of the fourth witch of the tragedy. Notably, together with their ability to 'look into the seeds of time' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:58) and therefore to know the future, their appearance, which oscillates between traditional masculinity and femininity, is so unnatural that Banquo, who would like to categorize them, addresses them with the following questions (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:39-47):

> […] What are these,
> So withered, and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like th'inhabitants o'th' earth
> And yet are on't?—Live you, or are you aught
> That man may question? You seem to understand me,
> By each at once her choppy finger laying
> Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
> And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
> That you are so.

Whilst it could be argued that some of their features, including their chapped hands and beards, hint at the traditional depiction of witches, this fragment unveils how these figures of otherness are shrouded in mystery because, as Tosi (2021, p. 76) signals, they delineate a form of female deviance in that they associate witchcraft beliefs, masculine traits, and postmenopausal symptoms. This perversion of womanhood is defined by, for example, superfluous facial hair which shows that these bearded women are not gender specific and, thus, defy any easy categorization. At that time, it was commonly believed that excessive hair on the face was caused by menopause because it would be an alternative way, in lieu of menstrual blood or breast milk, for the female body to expel excessive bodily humors (Tosi 2021, p. 76). Nevertheless, a theatergoer of that time would be likely to recognize in these ambiguous, unnatural features those traits that were traditionally attributed to the witch-figure (Harris 1980, p. 38) which, as mentioned above, exists on the border between womankind and mankind, present and future, myth and reality. Likewise, the Lady shares their hybridity because '"Masculine" and "feminine" impulses struggle in her' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 159) and 'she is unable either to fuse them or to polarize them' (Asp 1981, p. 160). This tension derives from the fact that, in order to take control over her husband, she has to distance herself from femininity and the stereotypical ideas about it. In other words, Lady Macbeth is inclined to dissociate herself from her female identity to acquire more masculine traits, such as violence and resoluteness, and, therefore, to somehow share the hybridity of the witches. Hence, it seems that the above-mentioned excerpt may shed light on how Lady Macbeth, in response to the hitherto unknown prophecy, conjures the 'murd'ring ministers' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:47), which have previously appeared in the form of three witches, to unsex her, or rather, to be divested of her typically female traits, mainly weakness and imperfection. More specifically, it could be inferred that the Lady participates in the liminal world of the fatal sisters because, by means of her desired defeminization, a

coexistence of male and female, demonic and mortal dimensions emerge in her. Thus, even though she does not adhere to the typical description of an old, widowed, wrinkly hag, she does not embody the model of an ideal woman and wife because, by refusing her womanliness and her fertility, she, like the weird sisters, threatens the patriarchal order (Tosi 2021, p. 75) and, as such, represents femininity in a perverse way. Therefore, as Tosi (2021, p. 76) signals by recalling Carroll's *"Macbeth": Texts and Contexts* (1999), the two ways in which the female body is depicted in *Macbeth*, namely the demonic and maternal, converge in the masculinized figure of Lady Macbeth.

Considering this brief introduction to her proximity to the realm of evil, it seems that it is in the dark and stormy setting of the first act that the manipulative power of the Lady emerges as a determining factor in her decision to embrace evil and, specifically, to guide her husband to commit the murder of King Duncan. Notably, in her first speech, Lady Macbeth, unlike her husband whose nature and resoluteness she fears, appears ruthless and totally committed to carry out an act of treason in order to accelerate time and become Queen. Therefore, in an attempt to 'feel now / The future in the instant' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:56-57), she calls for the powers of darkness to dehumanize and defeminize her in order to acquire masculine traits as follows (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:39-53):

> […] Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever, in your sightless substances,
> You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
> That my knee knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
> To cry 'Hold, hold'.

Besides the fact that the imperative form of the verb 'to come' used by the Lady may anticipate further details about her domineering attitude that will follow, some critics have argued that Lady Macbeth may be considered a fourth witch because she replaces the three bearded soothsayers when they vanish into thin air and, moreover, because in

this instance, according to the Witchcraft Act of 1604 (Tosi 2021, p. 77), summoning evil spirits was considered a typical practice of black magic as well as a capital offense. In any case, even though there is no evidence in the play that she is performing acts of witchcraft and that the summoned demonic forces are more than merely ‘sightless substances’ (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:48), Lady Macbeth seems to be conjuring spirits and to be possessed by demons while pronouncing this speech. These demonic powers are, therefore, allowed to penetrate and control Lady Macbeth’s soul so ‘that the natural inclinations of the spirit toward goodness and compassion may be completely extirpated’ (Curry 1959, p. 87) and, consequently, replaced with blind ambition, resoluteness, and aggressiveness (Tosi 2021, p. 59). In simpler terms, as suggested by Tosi (2021, pp. 77-78), she is asking to be filled with ‘cruelty’ (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:42) in order to be unburdened of a sense of remorse and of humanity and be able to turn her darkest intentions into action.

Moreover, her desire to be infused with wickedness and unkindness stems from the fact that she challenges her husband’s manliness, his courage and, to some extent, his love for her because ‘[t]o be the heroic warrior, to be king, he must first act the man with her’ (Asp 1981, p. 160). For this reason, she appears fully committed to do whatever is needed to be crowned Queen of Scotland, even if it implies a ‘fruitless crown’ (Shakespeare 1994, 3.1:60) or a ‘barren sceptre’ (Shakespeare 1994, 3.1:61) and, thus, no heir to the throne. To put it differently, her desired masculinization is functional to her capacity to effectively control Macbeth’s decisions and actions because, by distancing herself from typically feminine traits that would associate her with the ‘weaker vessel’, she wants his husband to model her. In other words, ‘Lady Macbeth consciously attempts to reject her feminine sensitivity and adopt a male mentality because she perceives that her society equates feminine qualities with weakness’ (Asp 1981, p. 153). This is even more plain in the lines which precede the invocation because, like her desire to be instilled poisoned milk, she would like Macbeth’s abundant ‘milk of human kindness’ (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:16), which stands for ‘those energies of restraint (fear, human respect, conscience) to which he conforms his outward behavior’ (Asp 1981, p. 157), to be substituted with bile, meaning violence and wickedness. Thus, the Lady, by equating masculinity and violence and by suggesting that ‘manhood is not a constant, fixed quality but one which must continually be proved by manly deeds’ (Asp 1981, p. 155), uses some metaphorical expressions to persuade him to adopt a certain behavior to be a great, worthy man. In

other words, she would like him to adhere (Tosi 2021, p. 59) to the very model of masculinity that, after the plea she made, she at least tries to symbolize. This prototype, as previously mentioned, justifies deception and dissimulation which, in the disjointed blank verses that anticipate the tension of Duncan's murder, is reiterated by means of an imagery that recalls the biblical story of Adam and Eve and to which the Lady resorts to advise her husband to resemble 'th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:64-65). In this respect, in Tosi's analysis (2021, p. 76), Lady Macbeth may as well bear a resemblance to Eve because, like the first woman created by God according to *Genesis*, she plays the role of the instigator of the crime. Likewise, the image of the serpent, in opposition to the innocence of the flower, 'strongly suggests an allusion to Satan' (Brooke, in Shakespeare 1994, p. 114) and, therefore, may be a means to unveil Lady Macbeth's deceitfulness and tendency to dissemble true intentions. Hence, her villainy may be disclosed from her attempts to instigate her husband to deceive, to dissimulate or to pursue evil instead of the common good. All these negative qualities, which may be ascribed to her character, are key because, together with the invocation scene, they disclose her inherent wickedness. However, it is her very masculinization that serves the purpose of inducing negative empathy since it hints at that 'dichotomy between role and nature which ensues ends with her mental disintegration and suicide' (Asp 1981, pp. 153-154).

Furthermore, the ambitious Lady seems to distance herself from both the traditional association of femininity with 'weakness, passivity, submission, decoration, beauty, softness, and so forth' (Phillips 2013, p. 354), and from her female biological sex which, throughout the play, is associated with maternity, breast milk and menstruation. In other words, as Phillips (2013) notes, her famous lines depict her quest for masculine traits and for amenorrhea as a psychological as well as a biological desire to become estranged from the traditional status of women (2013, p. 355). Notably, Lady Macbeth's invocation contains several references to fertility and femininity in, on the one hand, the reference to the 'visitings of nature' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:44) and, on the other hand, to maternal milk. In particular, the first expression is a euphemism (Fox 1979, p. 129) employed to refer to the menstrual blood because, with the aim of being defeminized, she calls for a thickening of it ('Make thick my blood' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:42)) to induce amenorrhea which, in turn, would deprive her of the period and of fertility. Nevertheless, this may also be interpreted as a desired premature menopause whereby Lady Macbeth,

unlike the way a Queen should behave to secure succession, renounces to her capacity to procreate and, in her rejection of motherhood, threatens the patriarchal order. Conversely, Alice Fox (1979) suggests a different interpretation in that she maintains that, according to gynecological treatises, at that time a connection was thought to exist between the female sex and blood viscosity. In this regard, the scholar argues that, in Lady Macbeth's attempt to eliminate anything that could thwart her attempt to murder the King, 'the blocked menses [may be read as] her metaphor for blocked conscience' (Fox 1979, p. 129). This, as the academic indicates (Fox 1979, p. 129), is clarified in the line which follows the above-mentioned euphemism; that is, in 'That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:44-45). Similarly, the reference to breast milk is noticeable because, after reprimanding her husband for his excessive goodness, the Lady appeals to the forces of darkness to 'bewitch her milk' (Fox 1979, p. 128), to substitute it for gall, or bile, which, in contrast to the sweetness of maternal milk, is a bitter liquid secreted by the liver. Thus, in line with her rejection of motherhood, she is constructing an image of a witch-like 'antimother' (Levin 2002, p. 33) with poisoned milk which, for this reason, is more likely to recall the image of a witch feeding her familiars (Tosi 2021, p.78) by means of an extra nipple (which was traditionally believed to be a witch's mark) (Levin 2002, pp. 40-41) rather than that of a loving mother breastfeeding her newborn. In order to investigate the liminality between maternal and deviant nurture, Levin (2002) suggests that, according to Adelman, it seems that she 'may not be asking the spirits to *exchange* her milk for gall so much as she instructs them to take her milk *as* gall' (Levin 2002, p. 40). This perverse portrayal of motherhood is readable also in the words of Lady Macbeth who, by resorting to the symbolic image of maternal milk and to the imagery of babies which are scattered throughout the play, creates a fantasy of infanticide (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:54-59):

> […] 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.

This discordant juxtaposition between the maternal and the devilish is reiterated by the very representatives of evil in the tragedy, that is, the weird sisters themselves. Specifically, while they sing their enchantment in act 4, they conjure the image of a

strangled baby who, together with some scraps of dead animals and humans, boils in a cauldron filled with chaos and anti-life. Therefore, in the brew they are concocting 'Finger of birth-strangled babe / Ditch-delivered by a drab' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:30-31) emerges as a fantasy of perverse mothering and infanticide which, by recalling Lady Macbeth's previous lines, seems not only to make the pervasive imagery of childhood and of deviant motherhood a recurring motif of the play, but also to bring the Lady closer to the demonic nature of the weird sisters. Thus, in line with the disgusting ingredients that the three witches are stirring in their hellbroth, the allusion to infanticide emerges as a key element to an analysis of Lady Macbeth's liminal position between the natural and the supernatural, the maternal and the devilish because it uncovers 'the continuity between the monstrously maternal and the demonic' (Levin 2002, p. 41) which may be ascribed to her. Accordingly, Lady Macbeth's infanticidal delusion, in relation to her evocation of evil spirits, recalls the image of breastfeeding and, specifically, of a newborn nursing bitterness or, in Macbeth's own words, 'undaunted mettle' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:74), whose sourness should 'Bring forth men-children only' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:73). Given that she desires to instill her hesitant husband, who is initially terrified of murder and bloodshed, with her 'spirits' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:25), it seems that she is nurturing him with the courage and resoluteness which he lacks. Therefore, it is as if she is introducing a perverse image of motherhood again when she tries to remove his excessive 'milk of human kindness' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:16) and impress, in its place, a poisonous nymph. In simpler terms, the Lady's manipulative words attempt to replace Macbeth's natural tender disposition and cowardice with malice, cruelty, and bravery, which are necessary traits to perform regicide and, thus, to achieve their blind ambitions. In this respect, Macbeth himself may be considered the product of his wife's perverse mothering because it is through her manipulations that she tries to make him act like a man or, in other words, embrace violence through bloodcurdling actions. This is also suggested by Levin who writes that created 'by Lady Macbeth's maternal imagination, the monstruous Macbeth becomes the offspring of a disorderly feminine imagination' (2002, p. 42). In light of this, her very first words acquire a precise meaning because, by means of her invocation of demonic spirits, the Lady yearns, on the one hand, for the worst characteristics of both men and women, such as ambition, callousness, brutality, deceit, and resoluteness (Phillips 2013, p. 353), and, on the other hand, for those typically negative masculine traits, first of all violence and bravery, in order to instill those very same qualities in Macbeth (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:25-29):

> 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.

2.1.3 Beyond Lady Macbeth's Domineering Attitude

Besides her being a manipulative woman, it may also be suggested that in her private conversations with her husband the Lady is also evoking the image of the so-called curtain lectures in the mind of the audience. Notably, notwithstanding the fact that political as well as historical issues are central in *Macbeth*, the private sphere is equally important because the castle's private quarters serve as the setting for several of the play's key scenes because, in an attempt to avoid detection, the Macbeths favor secret, private conversations (Rhodes 2020, pp. 1-2). Moreover, the expression to 'pour my spirits into thine ear' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:25) may be read as an allusion to curtain lectures because, as the woodcut inserted in Heywood's *A Curtaine Lecture* (1637) shows, the curtain-lecturing woman assumes an authoritative, dominant position in the relation to her lying husband when, in the private space marked by the draped curtains of a four-poster bed, she reprimands, lectures, and manipulates him (Smith 2017, pp. 19-27). More specifically, the so-called 'curtain lecture is a representation of a woman's persuasive speech, most typically a wife speaking to her husband in bed, in which the wife is shown to be taking control of the marriage bed in order to persuade her husband' (Smith 2017, p. 9). Moreover, it seems pertinent to this study to add that the curtain lecture features also in Early Modern Drama because it 'suggests not only wifely speech in bed but also a speech made from the stage' (Smith 2017, p. 32) since the curtains which delimit private from public space may refer both to the bed and to the stage (Smith 2017, p. 32). Therefore, given that this tradition maintains that women assume a position of power by means of their rhetoric, the powerful and manipulative Lady Macbeth may be aligned to a curtain-lecturing wife on the stage because, by means of her persuasive speeches, she lectures and scolds her husband for his lack of virility, and she also controls him.

Furthermore, in both instances, the position of impotence and dominance of, respectively, husband and wife conflicts with the traditional distribution of power in marriage. In other words, this form of private conversation seems to 'provide a

problematic depiction of women's agency, for they suggest women's ability to exercise power through their speech independent of their husbands' control' (Smith 2017, p. 41). Thus, in a topsy-turvy context which may, to some extent, resemble that described by Smith (2017), Lady Macbeth's persuasive force is related to her rhetorical ability, which is conveyed, for example, in her attempt to assert 'the valour of [her] tongue' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.5:26) as superior to Macbeth's hesitations and fears. In this respect, word choice is significant since the verb 'to chastise', which is a synonym for 'to punish' or 'to rebuke', implies that the ambitious and cruel Lady, like the lecturing wife, has power over her insecure husband because, despite her gender, she controls her hesitant partner through her eloquence and attitude. This is masterfully conveyed in Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1948) where, in an adaptation of the play, the American director managed to show the relation between characters through montage, camera use and different angles and, therefore, even without resorting to any kind of dialogue between them (Hindle 2007, p. 210). In this particular case, Wellesian effective use of the camera captures the relation that exists between husband and wife 'by the vertical position of one to the other—the character looming above suggesting dominance over the lower one' (Hindle 2007, p. 210). Notably, until the murder of Duncan, the camera shows an inflexible Lady who looms over a perturbed, disquieted Macbeth, implying a sense of dominance and control (Hindle 2007, p. 210). Likewise, after an instant of control when, in descending the stairs and standing above his lady, he utters the words 'I have done the deed' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:15), the tyrant exhibits his lack of resoluteness and his sense of regret by being overshadowed by a domineering wife who, in his place, puts the bloody daggers away and, thus, stands on the stairs and continues to exercise her power over her reluctant partner (Hindle 2007, pp. 210-211).

Additionally, as *Macbeth* is infused with supernatural and witchcraft beliefs, Lady Macbeth's persuasiveness may not only align her with the figure of the lecturing wife, but also with the figure of the witches who, like her, were traditionally believed to be 'powerful speakers' (Smith 2017, p. 97). This is related to the fact that, as anticipated in the first section of this chapter, the weird sisters' prophecies have a powerful resonance because their riddles, rhythms, and words contaminate the whole drama and haunt characters' minds (Smith 2017, p. 105). Likewise, the powerful influence of the enigmatic utterances of these evil and 'imperfect speakers' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:70) may be attributed to the ruthless Lady Macbeth of the first acts who asserts her position as the

dominant partner from the very beginning through both words of rebuke and a position of power. Consequently, it may be said that, like the witches' equivocations and conundrums, Lady Macbeth ensnares her husband in her ambitious schemes through her manipulative words.

This section has attempted to delineate how the Lady may be considered a daunting character who, in her position of power and in her powerful rhetoric, may recall both the tradition of the lecturing wife as well as that of the witch. Concerning this, it should also be mentioned how in both instances the Lady seems to experience the liminal space between the male and the female, the hellish and the natural because the power ascribed to Lady Macbeth, or to the witches and the wives of the curtain lecture tradition, was not typical of their gender and, therefore, it somehow suggests this chaotic interpenetration of different realms. However, even though there are also other reasons to believe that Lady Macbeth is associated with the fatal sisters, the next section will prove that she is not one.

To conclude, this first section has tried to expound how the suspension of human desires and human sensibility and the resulting revelation of the devilish feature in the words and attitudes of Lady Macbeth. As previously discussed, despite a murderer's repulsive and unacceptable behavior, in the protective perimeter of fiction the audience can participate in the 'great storm of passion,—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred,—which will create a hell within [the murderers]' (De Quincey 1897, p. 392) or, in other words, in an inward hell where 'the human nature,—*i.e.* the divine nature of love and mercy, […]—was gone, vanished, extinct, and that the fiendish nature had taken its place' (De Quincey 1897, p. 392). This impression of suspended life and arrested basic human values is, as mentioned above, detectable in Lady Macbeth's words and attitudes whereby her female, human dimension is overpowered by her fiendish, non-human energy so much so that she seems unsexed and deprived of her womanhood. Hence, it has been examined how in her attempt to manipulate her husband's intentions and to lead him to commit a dreadful murder the audience can feel nothing but repulsion, nonacceptance and rejection for this fiendish woman. However, in this dark suspension of life, De Quincey notices that the knocking at the gate that the Macbeths hear just after the murder of Duncan could trigger an emotional impression, a certain effect which goes beyond his cognition (1987, p. 390) and which, therefore, implies a spontaneous, unqualified affective sensation. This

consideration is quite relevant to this study of negative empathy because, as discussed in the first chapter, it may be considered a defining characteristic of empathy itself. In detail, the essayist's personal impression of the repetitive knocking that the murderers hear in 2.2, after the murder was committed, suggests that this sound may metaphorically imply that 'the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world […] makes [them] profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them' (De Quincey 1897, p. 393) and, consequently, is followed by the gradual reemergence of their basic humanity and goodness. Therefore, the following section will uncover the 'recommencement of suspended life' (De Quincey 1897, p. 392) in Lady Macbeth and, in other words, those hints of humanity and vulnerability which gradually resume after her adhesion to the dark, unnatural world of evil.

2.2 'Frailty, Thy Name is Woman'[5]: Lady Macbeth's Inherent Vulnerability

As briefly outlined in the introductory chapter, the category of negative empathy entails the coexistence of a feeling of both attraction and repulsion towards a negatively connoted character or atmosphere. Therefore, given that the previous section has explored the main repulsive aspects of the ruthless Lady Macbeth and of the overall gloomy atmosphere of the play, the present section will unveil those positive, attractive traits that, unlike duplicity and cunning, are less visible at first reading. Nevertheless, the human dimension of the Lady is highly relevant to this analysis because its combination with her evil side depicts her as a negative character, or rather, 'an evil genius' (Jameson 2009, p. 304) with whom readers and spectators may somehow identify and, thus, establish an ambivalent empathic bond. As Jameson puts it (2009, pp. 304-305):

> Lady Macbeth's amazing power of intellect, her inexorable determination of purpose, her superhuman strength of nerve, render her as fearful in herself as her deeds are hateful; yet she is not a mere monster of depravity, with whom we have nothing in common—nor a meteor, whose destroying path we watch in ignorant affright and amaze. She is a terrible impersonation of evil passions and mighty powers, not so far removed from our own nature, as to be cast beyond the pale of our sympathies; for the woman herself remains a woman to the last,—still linked with her sex and with humanity.

[5](Shakespeare 2003,1.2:146)

Although this complex female character is not broadly described by Shakespeare as it 'resolves itself into few and simple elements' (Jameson 2009, p. 301), for the purpose of this study it is pertinent to investigate how she evolves throughout the tragedy and, therefore, how her humanity emerges by the end of the play. In other terms, this section aims at revealing her as 'an individual conception of amazing power, poetry, and beauty' (Jameson 2009, p. 302) and, hence, at uncovering her often-neglected likeable, human dimension. This is intensely conveyed in one of the main turning points of the play: the sleepwalking scene (act 5 scene 1). Thus, although Shakespeare firstly introduces her as the hero's ghastly instigator, she ends up being racked by guilt over causing the death of Duncan. In this instance, it may be inferred that, even though her figure is generally associated with evil forces and, by extension, with the invocation scene, she should also be remembered for her vulnerability, a trait which clearly transpires through her 'slumbery agitation' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:11). The latter, as it will be further examined, may imply both inner motion or mental turmoil, and disquiet or unrest.

Briefly, recalling the previous quotation (Jameson 2009, pp. 304-305), Lady Macbeth appears to be not merely a remorseless fiend who tempts Macbeth to commit a sinful act, namely murder, but also a vulnerable woman who, endowed with those very female traits which she has initially rejected to welcome man's worst qualities, frets over her villainy and guilt. That is, whilst in the opening act she rails against Macbeth's kind nature and, thus, seems to be totally committed to favoring evil, towards the end of the tragedy, in lieu of suppressing and, therefore, instead of pretending not to own those typically female weaknesses, she unleashes her feminine side and her human dimension. For this reason, it may be argued that she exemplifies the very notion of negative empathy in the aesthetic domain to the point that Jameson proposes a definition of this category by referring to this fictional character: according to the scholar, her boldness and unscrupulousness 'absolutely make us shrink before the commanding intellect of the woman, with a *terror* in which *interest* and *admiration* are strangely mingled' (2009, pp. 307-308, emphasis mine). In line with this, the present section will disclose this tension and how the initial feeling of nonacceptance and repulsion which the audience is likely to feel in response to Lady Macbeth's witchlike, evil dimension is coupled with a feeling of attraction to this female fiend. To do so, it will focus on how the Lady's lurking vulnerability gradually transpires through her own words and silences, and then it will examine her delusions and the nature of her sleep disorders.

2.2.1 ‘Nothing Is / but What is Not’[6]: The Emergence of Femininity and Humanity in the Fiendish Lady Macbeth

Notwithstanding the fact that Lady Macbeth seems heartless and fearless because of her strong ambition and indifference to murder, it is nevertheless possible to glimpse ‘a touch of womanhood’ (Jameson 2009, p. 309) in her words, silences, and hallucinations. In other words, in opposition to the self-image of masculine strength and resoluteness that she tries to build, and which may align her with the demonic powers of witchcraft, her femininity gradually shines through because she unconsciously and silently betrays her fears, until her vulnerability prevails and becomes tangible in her final delirium. Consequently, as discussed by Smith, her ‘oft-noted regret for her actions indicates that she fails to perform as a witch; not a supernatural being, she collapses under the weight of her guilt over her involvement in the murder of Duncan’ (2017, pp. 105-106).

Notably, some traces of her unforeseen proneness to empathy and fellow feeling as well as a hint of her womanhood may be gradually glimpsed in both her words and reactions. This is noticeable, for example, in act 2 scene 2 when the Lady counterbalances her husband’s soliloquy and, thus, his hesitations and fears in ‘Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done’t’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:13-14). That is, the very same woman who has ridiculed her partner for his insecurities and has attempted to eradicate all her psychological as well as biological female identity reveals a modicum of feeling or pity for a meek, unsuspecting, old King who reminds her of her father. In this instance, Lady Macbeth’s lines reveal her real nature mainly because, even though she deeply desires to show indifference to murder and to distance herself from that human compassion that hinders Macbeth’s thirst for power, she insinuates that behind a façade of unwavering conviction lies a woman who, unlike the three ‘secret, black, and midnight hags’ (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:62) that she wants to resemble, is capable of feeling a wide range of human emotions. In other words, this may be considered only a dim example of how her basic humanity, though stifled by the Lady herself, is increasingly visible in the play. In this respect, Prins mentions (2001, p. 131) her fainting fit (Shakespeare 1994, 2.3:120) after the crime was discovered as the most vivid evidence of her vulnerability because, even though, in line with her attempt to instruct her husband on how to pretend

[6](Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:142-143)

and deceive, other critics question whether this syncopal episode was authentic or not, her temporary loss of conscience may represent her human benevolence and, thus, her inability to stab a fellow human being. In detail, Prins's hypothesis that this is the natural reaction of a woman to such a heinous crime is confirmed by Macduff's anticipatory lines which include, *inter alia*, traditional gender assumptions (Shakespeare 1994, 2.3:85-88):

> […] O gentle lady,
> 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
> The repetition in a woman's ear
> Would murder as it fell.

Therefore, even though Lady Macbeth may easily be deemed a villain and an evil temptress, some hints of her humanity are scattered throughout the play. Moreover, although it is not always easy to decipher whether these are genuine or feigned, they eventually appear to be the premonitory manifestations of her fragile soul which she unleashes only in the final act through her mental collapse.

However, before analyzing her final delirium, it should not be overlooked how, among several instances in which her words provide an outlet for unconsciously showing her true colors, silence is key to an understanding of her emotional turmoil. Echoing Jameson's detailed analysis (2009, pp. 314-315), this may be glimpsed in act 3 scene 4 when, during the first banquet that Macbeth and his lady hosted in Forres after having been named the new King and Queen of Scotland, 'the very painting of [Macbeth's] fear' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.4:61) overpowers him and made him unable to restrain himself from disclosing his distressing emotions, including remorse, fear, and guilt, in front of his guests. The above-mentioned expression refers to the appearance of the bloody ghost of Banquo which, despite the protagonist's attempt to preserve the castle from his bloody action by ordering that ''t must be done tonight, / And something from the palace' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.1:131-132), interrupts the harmony and the joviality of the moment (Tosi 2021, pp. 37-38). At first, Macbeth's hallucination makes his wife question his masculinity once again with 'an intenseness, a severity, a bitterness, which makes the blood creep' (Jameson 2009, p. 314). Notably, she reproaches her insane husband with the following words (Shakespeare 1994, 3.4:61-68):

> This is the very painting of your fear,
> This is the air-drawn dagger which you said

> Led you to Duncan. O these flaws and starts,
> Impostors to true fear, would well become
> A woman's story at a winter's fire,
> Authorized by her grandam—shame itself,
> Why do you make such faces? When all's done
> You look but on a stool.

Notwithstanding her palpable ruthlessness which has been previously described, just after the guests are dismissed, she falls silent and stops criticizing her husband. These brief moments of silence that follow are far more relevant to this analysis than solely her rebukes because they hint at the fact that, even though she would like to be assimilated into the male prototype of violence and indifference, 'conscience must wake some time or other, and bring with it remorse closed by despair, and despair by death' (Jameson 2009, p. 315). As Jameson masterfully conveys, '[t]here is a touch of pathos and of tenderness in this silence' (2009, p. 315). Hence, even though her initial severity and strength of mind seem to protect her from being overwhelmed by terrifying visions, she would eventually fall prey of despair, remorse, and guilt in the same way as Macbeth is haunted by his fears from the very beginning. Therefore, also in the case of Lady Macbeth appearances can be deceptive so that 'nothing is / But what is not' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.3:142-143). Similarly, even though she seems to share many facets of the supernatural world of evil forces '[h]er failure to see the ghost indicates that she has no real affinity with the realm of the inhuman' (Asp 1981, p. 163).

Notably, in her hallucinatory state some other utterances movingly convey her unexpected empathic concern for others, her feeling of remorse and, thus, her humanity. For instance, while evoking the image of the blood-soaked corpse of the murdered King, she wonders 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:36-38). Likewise, being not only a woman but also a wife, in her mind-wandering she also recalls the massacre of Macduff's family which, like Duncan's assassination, harass her soul and, thus, led her to express her emotional distress in 'The Thane of Fife, had a wife—where is she now?' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:40-41). In this regard, her feeling of sorrow for Lady Macduff's death seems genuine because, even though she instigates her husband to commit murder at the beginning, she ultimately appears to be an instigator more than an ally to Macbeth because, after having secured the throne with the death of the King, she does not spur him to commit other crimes. This may be inferred, for example, from the fact that, after the invocation of evil spirits and

regicide, Lady Macbeth momentarily disappears from the scene and, thus, Macbeth is left alone to carry out his murderous plans of which the Lady is unaware, as her question 'What's to be done?' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:47) preceding both Banquo's and Lady Macduff's murder suggests. Additionally, this is also conveyed by the protagonist's own words when, in act 3 scene 2, he says that 'there shall be done / A deed of dreadful note' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:46-47), but that his 'dearest chuck' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:48), an expression of endearment to refer to his lover, should remain 'innocent of the knowledge' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:48). Lady Macbeth is, therefore, innocent not only because she does not know his intentions but also because, even though she has urged her husband to anticipate their prophesized future of greatness, she has never committed murder herself. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, Lady Macbeth does not seem to be the only one responsible for Macbeth's heinous crimes because, even though it is not clearly stated by Shakespeare, it may be that the very first idea of killing the King in order to fulfil the prophecy was already in Macbeth's mind before his wife entered the scene (Jameson 2009, pp. 305-306). In other words, Macbeth's predisposition for violence and evil may, to some extent, absolve Lady Macbeth of all blame because, even though she appears to be the main instigator of his crimes, guilt is rather more evenly shared between husband and wife (Jameson 2009, p. 306).

Additionally, it should not be overlooked how Shakespeare's complex sentence construction may, to some extent, mirror characters' states of mind and, thus, affect readers' emotional reactions. Notably, in the final highly pathetic scene, Lady Macbeth's conflicting emotions and haunting recollections are reflected in disjointed and incoherent phrases (Tosi 2021, p. 47) as well as in unclear, indefinite terms which effectively convey her perturbed state of mind. As briefly anticipated, in this tragedy word choice is significant in that, in line with Shakespeare's masterful usage and interpenetration of words, rhythmic patterns and vivid imagery, its recurrent vocabulary conveys what Tosi signals as 'il linguaggio dell'ineffabile' (2021, p. 46). This refers to the widespread usage of reticence, a figure of speech which favors milder terms and less direct expressions, especially in relation to grief and distress. In this case, the Macbeths' tendency not to name 'murder' mirrors their feeling of guilt and remorse because reticence effectively conveys the indescribable brutality and, thus, the ineffability of the tyrant's unjustifiable crimes. In other words, it seems that the deliberate vagueness of the word 'deed' and the expressions associated with it both conceal and imply the bloody action of murder whose

dreadful name, given its immorality, cannot be articulated (Tosi 2021, p. 46). For instance, in opposition to the recurrent examples of this word and its derivatives, the more direct term 'assassination' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:2) appears only once in the tragedy and is never mentioned by Lady Macbeth herself. However, despite this notable exception, the combinations of the word 'deed', 'done' and 'undone' are varied and manifold because, as anticipated, the language of ineffability prevails throughout the tragedy and guides our perception of characters. For example, in 'I have done the deed' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:15) it is evident how Shakespeare renders the incapacity to name murder and the tendency to overshadow the immorality of this horrific crime with the euphemistic term 'deed' as well as with its derivatives, including the verb forms 'done' and 'undone' (Tosi 2021, p. 46). That is, together with reticence, euphemism is employed to replace unpleasant words, such as murder, and their upsetting related meanings with a milder or less expressive locution or phrase. Therefore, it could be said that Macbeth uses euphemism to announce his crime because, after committing it, he is conscience-stricken to the extent that he cannot mention not only the murder but also the word 'amen', in 'I could not say 'Amen' / When they did say 'God bless us'' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:27-28). Therefore, all these instances exemplify the impossibility to articulate the word murder and the horror it entails in characters' tortured souls.

What is more, it seems that reticence is introduced in the cauldron scene (4.1) by the pervasive lines of the fatal sisters who, being the main linguistic contaminators in the play, in response to Macbeth's question 'What is't you do?' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:62), utter this ambiguous reply 'A *deed* without a name' (Shakespeare 1994, 4.1:63, emphasis mine). However, the Macbeths' refusal to describe the unspeakable somehow retraces not only the equivocal riddles of the witches, but also Jesuits' use of equivocation during trials and under oath to defend themselves from accusations (Wills 1995, pp. 93-95). In detail, they were believed to omit or to form a kind of '"mental reservation"' (Wills 1995, p. 95) whereby they would not tell the entire truth and, thus, would deceive others (Tosi 2021, p. 11). This association, from a linguistic point of view, between witches and Jesuits is traceable also, for example, in act 5 when Macbeth begins 'To doubt th'*equivocation* of the *fiend* / That lies like truth' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.6:43-44, emphasis mine).

Nevertheless, it is pertinent to this analysis to signal that the language of the ineffable is also employed by Lady Macbeth herself who, notwithstanding her desired

strength of mind and of purpose, displays her weaknesses in her inability to utter a word for the murder she is responsible for both in the first acts of the play and mainly in the final one. Thus, even in her reassuring tone, her refusal to name such a horrific act is traceable in ‘These deeds must not be thought / After these ways: so, it will make us mad’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:32-33) or in ‘A little water clears us of this deed’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:66). Moreover, the language of the ineffable is all-pervasive in the tragedy since it may be detected also in other characters’ lines, such as the Old Man’s and Ross’s ones in, respectively, ‘’Tis unnatural, / Even like the deed that’s done’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.4:10-11) and in ‘Is’t known who did this more than bloody deed?’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.4:22), as well as in the following acts of the play. Hence, in act 3 the bloody Macbeth, by referring to the imminent murder of Macduff’s family (4.2), declares that ‘there shall be done / A deed of dreadful note’ (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:46-47) but that his wife will learn about it as soon as she will be able to ‘applaud the deed’ (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:49). Despite its diverse references, the word ‘deed’ reappears for the last time in the sleepwalking scene where, by means of Lady Macbeth’s fragmented thoughts, the doctor infers the truth about Duncan’s murder because ‘unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles’ (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:69-70). Notably, in this scene the language of the ineffable echoes also in the Lady’s almost unconscious argument when she, bereft of hope and on the edge of an abyss, cries her last words ‘what’s *done*, cannot be *undone*’ (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:65, emphasis mine). Additionally, it should also be acknowledged that, unlike the resoluteness, unscrupulousness and reassurance infused by a similar line, ‘Things without all remedy / Should be without regard—what’s done, is done’ (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:12-13), the usage of euphemism and reticence in her last utterance reveals her state of utmost despair which may be deemed a harbinger of suicide and eternal damnation. In line with this, Herschel Prins (2001) reads Lady Macbeth’s line ‘it will make us mad’ (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:33) as a foreshadowing of her inability to deal with feelings of guilt because her resoluteness ‘was a ‘will’ that was going to dissolve in mental confusion, decline and suicide’ (2001, p. 132).

Moreover, in line with the euphemistic words deployed to refer to Duncan’s murder, the extensive use of the pronoun ‘it’ and of the definite article ‘the’ is, according to Tosi (2021, pp. 48-49), quite significant because it may be regarded as another linguistic pattern which, by favoring imprecision and indefiniteness, contributes to the language of the ineffable. On the one hand, as Tosi effectively argues, ‘the construction of a linguistic

world of the unspeakable, by mirroring the fear to name and the desire to, both linguistically and morally, distance oneself from criminal offences, implies that even nouns should be replaced with pronouns' (Tosi 2021, p. 48, translation mine[7]). For example, in Macbeth's first soliloquy, his lines become increasingly more monosyllabic and ambiguous as the anaphora, or rather, the repetition of the pronoun 'it' without resorting to any antecedent suggests: 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.7:1-2). On the other hand, the scholar (Tosi 2021, p. 48) refers to Hope and Witmore's *The Language of "Macbeth"* (2014) to dwell on the fact that, even though the play favors indefiniteness, the definite article appears more frequently than the indefinite one. As the academic reports, according to the critics, in *Macbeth*'s density and complexity of language, the recurrent use of the definite article, instead of entailing a sense of definition, creates a distancing effect, such as in the words uttered by Lady Macbeth on the night of Duncan's murder (Tosi 2021, pp. 48-49). Arguably, in 'It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman / Which gives the stern'st good night' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:3-4) the usage of an indefinite article would be more accurate since the owl, which may also be associated with the realm of witchcraft, is a newly introduced element but, despite this, in the paradoxical world of the tragedy it assumes the opposite value (Tosi 2021, pp. 48-49). This paradox is more readable in Macbeth's lines 'The eye wink at the hand—yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see' (Shakespeare 1994, 1.4:53-54) since the usage of the definite article in lieu of the possessive adjective, which generally accompanies body parts, seems to indicate, through an unusual grammatical pattern, Macbeth's need to distance himself from his guilt from both a psychological and a moral point of view (Tosi 2021, p. 49). In other words, it may be assumed that the definite article seems to attribute an identity of its own to each of the above-mentioned body parts, that is 'the eye' and 'the hand', so that they apparently detach themselves from their owner, namely Macbeth (Tosi 2021, p. 49). This paradoxical use of grammar is pertinent to this analysis because, though its complexity, it somehow hints at the couples' fears in that the attempt to distance these body parts from its owner may also imply Macbeth's and, by extension, Lady Macbeth's desire not to assume their own responsibilities and, specifically, the culpability of an eye which witnessed regicide and a bloody hand which committed murder (Tosi 2021, p. 49).

[7]'La costruzione di un mondo fonico dell'indicibile, riflettendo la paura di nominare e il desiderio di distanziarsi, linguisticamente e moralmente, dagli atti criminosi, prevede anche che i nomi siano sostituiti dai pronomi' (Tosi 2021, p. 48).

Considering this, the language of the ineffable seems to complicate, rather than to simplify, the act of reading and interpreting the Shakespearean text because, echoing the witches' evocative and ambiguous language, the tragedy favors linguistic ambiguity, reticence, and vagueness to delve into the boundaries between morality and immorality, human and supernatural or the common good and the devilish.

Notwithstanding the obscure complexity of language and imagery in the tragedy, the English playwright is capable of masterfully depicting his characters in every respect and especially of humanizing a villain and an instigator, as Lady Macbeth is, by conveying the conflicting emotions which torment an evildoer. Consequently, it seems that, for the purpose of this thesis, it is also relevant to read between the lines or, in other words, to detect the underlying significance of single words, figurative language or unusual grammatical constructions in order to have more than a literal understanding of Shakespeare's play. In this way, readers would more easily gather characters' multiple facets to be more likely to unmask criminals' basic humanity and thus identify with and feel empathy for a negatively connoted fictional character.

2.2.2 Lady Macbeth's Delusions: From the Original Play to Historical Perspectives

Besides the fact that both silences and words may hint at the gradual awakening of Lady Macbeth's guilty conscience, her hallucinations, which may be read as the manifestation of her repressed emotions and of her psychological distress, convey her vulnerability, meaning her basic inability to cope with their murderous actions. Nevertheless, before analyzing the Lady's delirium of act 5 scene 1, it seems appropriate to this study to delve briefly into Macbeth's delusions for the purpose of providing some insights of Shakespeare's masterful ability to develop deeply human characters, instead of uncomplicated flat characters, whose psychological complexity may determine reader's empathic response. This is noticeable, for example, in act 3 scene 4 because, like the scene of Lady Macbeth reading her husband's letter (act 1 scene 5) (Tosi 2021, p. 18), the appearance of Banquo's bloody ghost is an invention of the genius of Shakespeare (Tosi 2021, p. 19) who, by resorting to his character's visual and auditory hallucinations, gives voice to the tyrant's tormented soul because 'Macbeth does not fear the ghost itself but what the ghost signifies: the extent and limits of his own power' (Asp 1981, p. 163),

meaning 'how far he has stepped beyond his humanity' (Asp 1981, p. 163). In other words, delusions somehow allow readers and spectators to enter the deluded mind of a violent villain and to read his innermost thoughts from within. Recalling Tosi's analysis (2021, p. 8), it seems that Shakespeare is urging readers to emotionally identify with an evildoer by letting them into their deranged, insane mind via, as the previous example illustrates, the insertion of figments of their imagination which, being visible only to the concerned character and to the audience, enable viewers to experience some sort of emotional identification with him. Thus, the playwright makes some notable changes to Holinshed's depiction of Macbeth (Tosi 2021, pp. 17-18) because, on the one hand, he omits the ten years of good rule that followed the protagonist's access to the throne and, on the other hand, he adds some key emotional scenes, such as Banquo's ghost appearance, which shed light on the character's psychological dimension and, hence, contribute to a more vivid description of the protagonist's inner feelings. Likewise, Shakespeare's delineation of Lady Macbeth includes not merely her complete depravity but especially her internal conflict because, even in this case, the playwright tends to favor psychological complexity through the insertion of, for instance, the sleepwalking scene which powerfully shows what has been defined her 'descent into madness' (Churchill 2015, p. 163). Therefore, the psychological depth which Shakespeare prioritizes serves as a prime example of how the aesthetic domain, by granting a protective distance, enhances the audience's access to the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of villains. Thus, the fiendish Lady Macbeth does not elicit simple aversion, as she would be expected to do in real life, but also a feeling of attraction or pleasure through the gradual emergence of her inner demons and, thus, of her humanity in the form of, for example, 'thick-coming fancies' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.3:37). The latter, according to Prins (2001, p. 142), may be a reminder of how her distress increasingly reflects her description of Macbeth's initial mental breakdown in (Shakespeare 1994, 3.2:20-24):

> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly.—Better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy.

In light of this, the recurrent juxtaposition of physical and mental world not only in Macbeth's soliloquies but especially in Lady Macbeth's insomnia 'paradoxically manages

to trigger a startling form of empathy in the audience' (Tosi 2021, p. 8, translation mine[8]). This seems, in turn, to derive from 'the breakdown of congruence between the role she is playing and the person she is' (Asp 1981, p. 162) because '[t]o attain tragic identity, such a Lady needs to find a self behind the mask, the […] repressed dimension of womanliness' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 171). Consequently, the sleepwalking scene is arguably the climactic moment of her inner drama because it effectively reveals 'the depths of that inward hell' (Jameson 2009, p. 316) and, precisely, the feelings of aimlessness and emptiness which cast a shadow over her already devastated heart (Churchill 2015, p. 162).

Notably, given that dissociative disorders as well as parasomnia episodes do not enable us to control our emotions, demons, weaknesses, and gestures, it may be argued that the female protagonist vents her unfiltered thoughts and fears not merely in her words, but especially in a perturbed activity which stems from both visual and olfactory hallucinations. In other words, in her final state of unconsciousness Lady Macbeth unveils her vulnerability as woman and wife by means of obsessive repetitions of movements which convey the state of her plagued, tortured heart and, thus, make her true nature prevail. This is also signaled by De Quincey because, according to the scholar, 'a sight and a stirring' (1897, p. 392) serve as means of expressing the reawakening of Lady Macbeth's human basic emotions, which are resumed after the contagion of evil and darkness. Considering this, it should not be overlooked that, together with 1.5, 2.3 and 4.2, this is one of the few scenes in which Shakespeare writes in prose and not in blank verses, or iambic pentameters, because the latter would sound contrived or unnatural in all these informal situations (Tosi 2021, pp. 40-41), such as the lady's sleep talking which powerfully illustrates the flow of her most intimate emotions. Specifically, in her nightly sleepwalking she talks to herself, wanders the Dunsinane castle in her nightgown and compulsively grubs her murderous hands in an attempt to wash an invisible stain to purify her soul and, thus, to achieve inner peace. However, in an ending which may recall that of a cautionary tale (Tosi 2021, pp. 81-82), Lady Macbeth proves that she is no longer able to pretend and to repress her female nature because 'she plunges with her husband into the abyss of guilt' (Jameson 2009, p. 310). Echoing Macbeth's delusions, in this scene her decline is tangible because, while reliving the nightmarish night of Duncan's murder, she unconsciously imagines that her hands are still covered with the King's blood. Its

[8]'riescono paradossalmente a far scattare una forma stupefacente di empatia nel pubblico' (Tosi 2021, p. 8).

haunting memory torments her not only because this indelible 'damned spot' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:33), which alludes to her manipulative and immoral behavior, will scar her for life, but also because the stance she enters is so pervasive that she may even detect its lingering smell and confess that 'all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten [her] little hand' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:48-49). This stands in stark contrast to the initially strong and ruthless Lady who, instead, in act 2 scene 2 is indifferent to their blood-stained hands and reassures her hesitant husband. However, like the sleepwalking lady, Macbeth doubts that their murderous hands would never be clean, and, in this, he unconsciously mirrors and anticipates the Lady's delirium (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:59-62):

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No—this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

Lady Macbeth's following conforming reply, 'A little water clears us of this deed' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:66), should not be overlooked because it portrays a malevolent and unscrupulous lady who in the end, despite her strong-willed desire to appear resolute and emotionless, eventually cannot cope with this burden. For this reason, she becomes obsessed with blood which, after the murder, forcefully reappears in the sleepwalking scene as a haunting reminder of her guilt and of her amoral actions.

However, with the aim of analyzing negative empathy in *Macbeth*, it seems pertinent to illustrate the most significant historical perspectives on the nature of sleepwalking and mental disorders. These interpretations hint at the ways in which Lady Macbeth's hysterical fit could be understood in light of cultural, social, as well as philosophical patterns and, hence, they provide readers with a new key to a better understating of her basic vulnerability. On the one hand, like Macbeth's unbearable suffering expressed in his final speech, his wife's delirium and existential despair is readable through the lenses of psychoanalysis because, as reported by Churchill (2015), in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) Freud, the father of this discipline, specifies that [i]n mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself' (Freud 1917, in Churchill 2015, p. 162). The self-destructive feeling of hopelessness which stems from the experience of melancholia also entails the sensation of being frozen in time and thus in the haunting 'nothingness of the present' (Churchill

2015, p. 169). Considering this, the pervasiveness of darkness in the tragedy seems to be even more significant to this analysis because, in addition to its allusion to evil and demonic forces, it may also elicit the feeling of emotional stasis in which the couple feels stuck (Churchill 2015, p. 163). This is even more clear in Churchill's image of 'the maze of melancholia' (2015, p. 164) which, according to him, 'represents a loop perpetually backward into stasis and depression rather than forward into solace and change' (2015, p. 164). Thus, the sleepwalking scene mirrors the nightly suspension of time of the first act and, in this way, Lady Macbeth's despair becomes tangible not only because her restlessness and sleeplessness are visible symptoms of her tragedy, but also because the gloomy atmosphere she cannot escape seems a projection of her feeling of emptiness.

Alternatively, the Lady's disturbed sleep may also be ascribed to the medical condition of hysteria which was associated with demonic possession even before the advent of Freudian psychoanalytic therapy in the nineteenth century (Levin 2002, p. 21). Notably, from the beginning of the seventeenth century scholars attempted to provide a scientific rationale for demonic possession and this consequently led to 'the transformation of a bewitched demoniac into an hysteric' (Levin 2002, p. 21). This change and the resulting decrease in the practice of witch-hunts and witch trials occurred in the Early Modern Period, specifically in 1602 when, in conjunction with the case of Mary Glover, the earliest English-language etiology of hysteria to be recorded in English was the outcome of a discussion about the line separating the natural and the supernatural world (Levin 2002, pp. 21-22). In Jorden's *Briefe Discourse of A Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603), the physician argues that the symptoms of the natural disorder of *hysterica passio*, as known as 'the Mother', seem to resemble those of spirit possession and that the evil energy which insinuates itself both in the bewitched and in the witch may be associated with female reproductive organs (Levin 2002, p. 22), just as hysteria was traditionally deemed to be 'a uterine pathology based on the wandering womb […] and the bodily production of vapors' (Levin 2002, p. 30). In other words, the similarity between the diagnostic signs of hysteria and of possession led the scholar to elaborate an alternative rational understanding of demonology by resorting to the traditional beliefs about the frailty of the female body whereby women were considered to be more liable not only to hysteria but also to forms of bewitchment (Levin 2002, p. 28). Given the continuum between the hysteric woman and the demonic, it seems that both suggest an image of perverse womanhood and monstruous maternity: two features

that, as anticipated in the previous section, coexist in Lady Macbeth. Therefore, this historical transformation of the witch into the hysteric provides another interesting perspective to a deeper understanding of the Lady's mental collapse. Notably, the Lady herself shows this shift in that she 'begins the play by invoking evil spirits and ends in a fit of hysterical somnambulism' (Levin 2002, p. 38). In detail, even though the word hysteria or the expression *hysterica passio* is never mentioned in *Macbeth*, her state of wakefulness and restlessness may be understood in terms of the 'Mother' (Levin 2002, p. 43) and, therefore, her tragedy may be read as a description of the link between 'the satanic female and the hysterical mother' (Levin 2002, p. 22) as well as an illustration of the witch's metamorphosis into the hysteric (Levin 2002, p. 38).

However, there is still another perspective which seems even more pertinent to this analysis because it considers a very important aspect for triggering negative empathy in the aesthetic domain: the audience's possibility to access characters' past. As already discussed in the first chapter, in the protective realm of fiction readers and spectators may have a broader outlook on characters' motivations and precedents so that they may at least try to understand villains' unacceptable and unforgivable actions. In detail, according to Freudian psychoanalytic theories (Levin 2002, p. 43), it can be argued that Lady Macbeth's hysterical fit may be the outcome of her childlessness, which might be brought on by the loss of a child who she conceived in her marriage with Macbeth or in a previous one. Therefore, even though Shakespeare does not mention her backstory, it is worth remembering that in the author's primary source, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, it is reported that the historical model for the Lady, whose name was Grouch, had a child, called Lulach, from a previous marriage (Tosi 2021, p. 79). Holinshed's account of her infant may serve as a starting point for a better understanding of maternity and femininity in the tragedy because, as anticipated, the allusion to a child's passing or to the couple's empty nest may refer to traumas and fears related, respectively, to her past and to her gender. Notably, following Fox's detailed analysis (1979) on the imagery of gynecology and obstetrics in the play, it seems that, according to the medical assumptions of the time, in both Lady Macbeth's and Macbeth's words a shared 'preoccupation with pregnancy, miscarriage, and abortive births' (1979, p. 130) may be glimpsed. In other words, the Macbeths appear to be obsessed with progeny because, even though the wife invokes a terrible image of infanticide and of anti-mothering, the all-pervasive imagery of babies throughout the play betokens the value they, especially the Lady, give to motherhood and

to a nursing child (Fox 1979, p. 138). Therefore, whether or not Lady Macbeth had a previous dead infant, the scholar concludes that in this compulsive usage of gynecological language what may emerge is viewer's perception 'of the protagonists as human beings who want to have children' (Fox 1979, p. 138). Nevertheless, given that there is no clear indication of this in the tragedy and that, therefore, this cannot be stated with certainty, what stems from Shakespeare's word choice is that their lack of children may somehow affect their feelings and behavior because of their basic humanity. In this, the ambitious couple seems to elicit a form of empathic bond with the audience because the juxtaposition of both their lack of compassion and their possible past creates a feeling of mutual understanding which, given its ambiguity, derives from negative empathy itself (Fox 1979, p. 138). Thus, the possibility to delve into character's past gives us the chance to gain a deeper understanding of, for instance, the Lady whose childlessness may be regarded as another reason for deeming her a 'vulnerable individual' (Prins 2001, p. 131) who, behind her shell of indifference, hides insecurities and weaknesses which are utterly human. In other words, viewers' possibility to grasp characters' hidden nuances and significative backstories may contribute to complete their dramatic portrayal because, as Prins (2001, p. 133) points out, Lady Macbeth herself is aware of the past misdeeds in her life and their adverse and indelible impact on her as, in her severe depression, she hopelessly utters her last words: 'what's done, cannot be undone' (Shakespeare 1994, 5.1:65).

Therefore, although her murderous machinations and her dark desires may prevent readers and spectators from exploring the Lady's inner self in depth, the safe perimeter of fiction allows us to investigate her past and, thus, to extrapolate hidden sorrows and fears, which, in turn, may lead the audience to experience a form of appreciative mutual understanding (Prins 2001, p. 133). In other words, despite the possibility to 'ignore a person's vulnerability born of past traumas because their *current* behavior horrifies us by its malignity' (Prins 2001, p. 131), it should not be overlooked how evil intentions may disguise basic human frailty and past traumas (Prins 2001, p. 131). In this respect, Mary Cowden Clarke's *The thane's daughter* serves as another meaningful example of the relevance of characters' past to grasp deeply rooted motivations to understand their present behavior, even if this is extremely disturbing. Specifically, as its title, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines: In a Series of Tales* (1850), suggests, this three-volume book contains fifteen novellas which tell the imagined biographies of some of

Shakespeare's heroines that, from the margins, are taken to the center of the narrative (Tosi 2013, pp. 78-79). Moreover, by adding new characters and episodes to the original play, these tales, as in the case of Lady Macbeth, open a window on characters' possible precedents for their unjustifiable negative attitudes. In light of this, *The thane's daughter* would deserve a more detailed analysis which, for the purpose of this thesis, will mainly focus on how some adverse childhood experiences may have determined Lady Macbeth's despicable behavior. In detail, Mary Cowden Clarke speculates on the girlhood of Lady Macbeth by, firstly, calling her Grouch in memory of the historical name used by Holinshed and, secondly, by presenting some unhappy past events that foreshadow her future behavior in *Macbeth*. For instance, the author imagines that Lady Macbeth's fantasy of infanticide and perverse mothering as well as her ambition drive stem from her own mother who, like the heroine, favors 'a masculine spirit' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 107) and shows her bitter disappointment at having a daughter instead of a son. Consequently, little Grouch seems to be a carbon copy of her female parent because, like the latter does not harbor any tender emotion for this girl who is 'non-boy, this embodied disappointment, this mortification, this perplexity, this child that was no child,—to her' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 103), she would be disappointed with her husband's cowardly behavior (Tosi 2013, p. 80). In line with this, after the girl's birth during a stormy night, which will anticipate her evil-mindedness and cruelty, a perverse image of motherhood features also in this adaptation (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 104, emphasis mine):

> mother's breast heaved repiningly, in lieu of yielding its balmy treasures lavishly and lovingly; and thus the babe gazed wondering up into those dark unfathomable eyes with naught of maternity in their irresponsive depths; and thus *the babe sucked bitterness, perverted feeling, unholy regret, and vain aspiration, with every milky draught imbibed*.

Therefore, it seems that the Lady's dark side may derive from having been raised by a despotic mother who, like her, imagines feeding her offspring with poisoned milk which may instill ambition, resoluteness, and ruthlessness to the newborn. Notably, the author also expands on an episode which may be thought of as a first example of Lady Macbeth's horrific ambition-driven actions which, also in the Shakespearean tragedy, share a common origin: 'rule and sovereignty being the dominant desire of her nature' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 109). Specifically, before her mother's death, little Grouch squashes a tiny moth, or rather, 'the victim of her success' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 107) for no reason and gives her mother the chance to believe that eventually she was the unfeminine spirit she has hoped for, so that she exclaims: 'Resolute in achievement! Firm

of purpose even unto death! That should be a masculine spirit!' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 107). These are defining characteristics also of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth and, therefore, Mary Cowden Clarke's creative material may be deemed as a meaningful example of how past traumas and past actions may determine our present behaviors and modes of interaction with the others. However, the complexity of her nature may be glimpsed also in this adaptation because, together with her 'unfeminine inflexibility' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 110), the sudden death of her 'bland, kind, and gentle to a fault' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 98) father who, like the trusting and kind King Duncan, she has neglected and somehow despised because of his meekness, 'added a sting to the pain and grief which she began to fear might await her' (Cowden Clarke 2009, p. 117). In other words, following Shakespeare original play and Lady Macbeth's acknowledgment of an affinity of character between Duncan and her father, this may be regarded as an anticipation of the sense of despair and guilt that will torment her after the regicide.

Briefly, the different historical perspectives which merge in this pathetic scene, and through which this syncopal episode may be interpreted are pertinent to this analysis of negative empathy because they hint at alternative readings of Lady Macbeth' incapacity to deal with her guilt. In other words, in view of historical and psychoanalytical beliefs, they provide readers with a deeper understanding of Lady Macbeth's fears and weaknesses. Therefore, given this broader context, these interpretations seem also to enhance viewers' empathic attunement to fictional villains.

2.2.3 Dramatic Performances: Exploring the Impact of Theatre on Viewers' Negative Empathy

Notwithstanding the centrality of words and imagery in Shakespearean tragedies, plays are essentially written in order to be performed and, thus, spectators' visual experience is of paramount importance. In other words, given that a play does not merely consist of the written text but also of the theatrical performance, it is also pertinent to this analysis to illustrate how non-textual elements may codify alternative ways of reading the drama, as compared to those which may be inferred just from the text and stage directions. Consequently, it should not be overlooked how viewers' perception of a character may vary according to the actor's interpretation of the role. In detail, since the main objective of this thesis is to investigate the extent to which the contemptible Lady Macbeth may

effectively elicit an ambiguous emotional reaction in viewers, this third section will move further because, after a close analysis of the text, it will now explore how this female villain's vulnerability and basic humanity may emerge according to different theatrical performances.

On the one hand, even though the Lady's restlessness may be inferred by readers on the basis of the intensity and tension of her flowing thoughts, the symptoms which are traditionally associated with the somatization of a perturbed state of mind are arguably more tangible in the performance rather than in the written text. Notably, repetitive gestures, compulsive movements and visible trembling are more discernible in the performance rather than simply in the disjointed words and incoherent sentences (Tosi 2021, p. 47) of the Lady. Therefore, it may be inferred that Lady Macbeth's basic humanity and femininity emerge more clearly on stage where viewers' empathic response, which may also be a collective form of emotional attunement, is enhanced by two main characteristics of a dramatic performance. Namely, the physical space of the theatre, which allows spectators to share a common area with characters, and the peculiar perception of time which this experience entails (Ercolino and Fusillo 2022, pp. 115-117). Additionally, as regards the category of negative empathy, it should not be overlooked how, while in reading readers must imagine characters' body, tone of voice, setting, and costumes, 'in theatrical performances the audience can live in real time and in physical proximity, which may be fascinating or even uncanny, the life of characters which are seemingly very far from us' (Ercolino and Fusillo 2022, pp. 119-120, translation mine[9]). In other words, at the theatre observers are provided with an easier access not only to positive characters' emotions, but especially to villains' basic humanity because, together with their lines, their inmost thoughts emerge also via their physical appearance, gaze, voice and garments because besides 'costume, make-up, mask, props, set, music, sound, lighting, and special effects' (Phillips 2013, p. 354), the performer's physical body is a non-textual element which may have a significant impact on the audience's emotional response (Phillips 2013, p. 354). This is masterfully conveyed by, for instance, Mrs. Siddons's 'psychologically subtle and intensely moving' (Brooke, in Shakespeare 1994, p. 43) portrayal of Lady Macbeth's distress which, according to critics, is exemplary in that the famous eighteenth-century tragedienne effectively displays the coexistence of

[9]'Il teatro ci fa dunque vivere in tempo reale, e in una vicinanza fisica che può essere coinvolgente e persino perturbante, la vita di personaggi anche molto distanti da noi' (Ercolino and Fusillo 2022, pp. 119-120).

opposites, including the male and the female or the human and the supernatural, by means of facial expressions, gestures, and costumes. Notably, as Bernstein reports (2002), Sarah Siddons began performing this part in 1785 (2002, p. 32) with such an intensity that her interpretation may be deemed one of the best in history, especially for her powerful rendition of the sleepwalking scene. Her outstanding performance may derive from her observation of real-life somnambulists (Bernstein 2002, p. 32), which allowed her to be acquainted with their behavior and obsessive movements, and, therefore, to perfectly convey the Lady's delirium through two main alterations that she made to the original scene. In detail, her change of costume (Bernstein 2002, p. 33), which is illustrated by George Henry Harlow (1814) (see Fig. 1), initially in a dress of white fabric and, later, in 'a white shroud-like material with a bandage around her chin' (Bernstein 2002, p. 33) had a lasting impact on the audience. Notably, while in the eighteenth century a character's white costume could easily be associated with madness (Bernstein 2002, p. 33; Burden 2017, p. 59), in this case it presumably fulfills another purpose. As Burden's detailed analysis (2017, pp. 57-59) suggests, in line with Marie Antoinette's fashion to wear a simple garment of thin white muslin, also known as '*chemise à la reine*' (Burden 2017, p. 58), instead of the clothes that were traditionally worn by French courtiers, Geltruda Rossi, a successful eighteenth-century dancer who also performed as Lady Macbeth in the ballet of *Macbeth*, adopted the 'manteau a la reine' (Burden 2017, p. 58) for her dance performances. Rossi's debut in this informal, plain garment signals how 'new assumptions that costumes should have a realistic effect even when, as in this case, they have a loaded history' (Burden 2017, p. 59) started to spread also in the world of theatrical performances. Burden (2017, p. 59) mentions this shift in the usage of costumes by reporting an account of Siddons' performance, which is inserted in the *Public Advertiser* of the 7th of February 1782:

> "Why,"' say some of the critics, "should Mrs Siddons wear a white dress in her last scene of Lady Macbeth? She is supposed to be asleep, not mad." What reason except custom can be given for a mad heroine appearing in white we know not. Yet there is an obvious reason why a person walking in their sleep should wear a white dress of the loose kind worn by Mrs Siddons. … It is the nearest resemblance which theatrical effect will admit, to the common sort of night-dresses.
>
> (*Public Advertiser*, in Burden 2017, p. 59)

Figure 1 (Harlow, 1814)

Notwithstanding the impact of her change of costume, Mrs. Siddons distinguished herself in the interpretation of Lady Macbeth's insomnia because, unlike previous performances in which the actress used to hold the taper until the end of the scene, she decided to put the candle on the table 'to free both her hands so that she could compulsively wash away the imagined blood throughout the entire scene' (Bernstein 2002, p. 33). In other words, by putting the light down, she managed to uncover the inner turmoil of a woman succumbed to a sense of guilt and of utter despair by means of her uncontrollable compulsion to wash, or rather, cleanse her hands. Moreover, hers was not a delicate gesture, as that of Mrs. Prichard (who performed with David Garrick starring as Macbeth in the second half of the eighteenth century), but rather an impetuous, violent movement (Tosi 2021, pp. 97-98). This is also linked to the fact that, given the intensity of her interpretation, she 'popularly represents the archetypal image of Lady Macbeth as Terrible Woman' (Rosenberg 1978, pp. 160-161). In detail, she overshadows Macbeth, played, for example, by her brother John Kemble, by reducing him to a simple tool and she also heightens her grandeur through some cuts, especially the elimination of her fainting fit in 2.3 and of Lady Macduff (Rosenberg 1978, pp. 162-163) whereby 'the Terrible Woman seems [the] only important female inhabitant [of the tragedy]; and some of the most delicate notes in Shakespeare's polyphony are silenced' (Rosenberg 1978, p.

163). Nevertheless, Mrs. Siddons added an unprecedented tinge of sensibility and sympathy to the character of the Lady to the extent that, even though she 'survives as a touchstone of the Terrible design' (Rosenberg 1978, p. 161), she is less cruel than other actresses (Rosenberg 1978, pp. 163-164). In doing so, the famous actress managed to soften Lady Macbeth as well as to perfectly embody a tortured soul who was, thus, haunted by some traumatic events and obsessed with a specific detail, in this case Duncan's bloodstains (Prins 2001, p. 132). Moreover, given the intensification of her cruelty and grandeur, it seems that the tension between her fiendish and human nature, which also informs the audience's empathetic response, may be glimpsed more clearly. However, given that a theatrical performance is visual more than simply verbal, the intensity of this scene may be imagined more effectively by a modern-day reader through eyewitnesses' descriptions of this historical performance. These are gathered by one of Mrs. Siddons's biographers, and are reported by Bernstein (Ffrench, in Bernstein 2002, p. 32) as follows:

> 'She entered suddenly… dressed in white, rather rapidly went to the table… [and set] down the candle… Then with restless gestures began to rub her hands in the air, seeming at intervals to scoop up water with the one and pour it over the other. Her great eyes were blank and glazed as they fixed into space or glared straight at the house. Her 'Out damned spot' was said in hollow, tortured tones, and then she appeared to be listening eagerly, '*One! Two!*' followed by a strange unnatural whisper, 'Why then 'tis time to do 't'.

On the other hand, with the aim of examining *Macbeth* and, more specifically, the figure of Lady Macbeth through the category of negative empathy, Phillips's article '«Unsex Me Here»: Bodies and Femininity in the Performance History of Lady Macbeth' (2013) is rather noteworthy as it delves into the illustration of how, as anticipated, the 'bodies of the actors, upon which the character appears (or from which the character is revealed), alternatively enhance or alienate the audience's perception of the character' (Phillips 2013, p. 359). Therefore, it seems that although when dealing with the text Lady Macbeth may be considered 'a tangible and immutable character, […] in performance we must wrangle with the reality of a real body through which the character appears' (Phillips 2013, p. 354). Hence, viewers' understanding of Lady Macbeth may depend not only on the actor's interpretation of the part, but also on their physical body. This is even more significant in this play because, as discussed above, its main semantic field refers to the female body with references to, for example, a woman's breasts, maternal milk, menstruation, pregnancy, and miscarriage. Notably, in the historical archive of *Macbeth*'s

productions, this section will zoom in on two different instances: the pregnant Mrs. Siddons and Shakespeare's original boy actor. While the latter performed approximately in 1606, Sarah Siddons reappeared on stage towards the end of the eighteenth century while she was pregnant. In detail, according to Phillips's analysis (2013, pp. 355-357), with the biologically masculine body of the male actor, which cannot welcome feminine anatomic features, viewers cannot but imagine, or abstract the imagery of gynecology and procreation and, subsequently, project those qualities that are mentioned by the Lady herself onto the male actor's body. Notwithstanding the fact that his anatomy is somehow 'unsexed' in order to embody female physical characteristics, his manliness moves him closer to the character of Lady Macbeth because her desire to be deprived of her femininity, from both a psychological and biological point of view, draws her near this young male (Phillips 2013, p. 357). Conversely, the pregnant Mrs. Siddons provides an alternative reading of the Lady's femininity because hers is visibly and unambiguously a fertile, female body which can perfectly convey the imagery of womanhood and pregnancy inserted in the play. In other words, '[w]here the male body creates an abstraction of the bodily signs of femininity, Siddons' body brings those abstracts into reality' (Phillips 2013, p. 358) and, consequently, she also challenges the couple's bareness and childlessness, with reference to a possible dynasty of future kings. Likewise, the imagery employed by the Lady in the invocation of evil spirits acquire meaning in her interpretation because, unlike the male actor's body, her pregnant belly visually displays the possibility of miscarriage, of losing milk, blood or even of turning milk into gall (Phillips 2013, p. 358). In this way, Mrs. Siddons's hyper-feminine body exhibits much more effectively than simple words how the character's denial of her biological gender turns 'her body monstrous, cruel, and unnatural' (Phillips 2013, p. 359). Therefore, contrary to the creation of abstract symbols of femininity within the male body of the original actor, Mrs. Siddons's iconic performance is enhanced by the fact that these metaphors are palpable and visible in her physical appearance.

In conclusion, this second section has attempted an analysis of how textual, non-textual elements as well as social and cultural traditions intersect in a deeper understanding of negative characters. In other words, it has explored the possibility to feel a form of empathic concern or emotional contagion for an intrinsically negative aesthetic content because, notwithstanding its apparent unacceptable side, some positive elements may be glimpsed. Notably, in relation to the apparently fiendish Lady Macbeth,

it has been argued that some basic human weaknesses and values emerge in the original play and, even more prominently, in live performances or portraits where the density of Shakespeare's lines is intensified by several aural as well as visual stimuli. These, as previously discussed, facilitate the audience's involvement and empathic response. Therefore, in line with this, the following chapter will consider some prominent adaptations and appropriations of *The Scottish play* in order to examine how, through different media, Lady Macbeth is still able to evoke negative empathy in modern-day audience members.

3. An Intermedial Exploration into the Disturbing Allure of Lady Macbeth

Following the analysis of the Shakespearean archetype of Lady Macbeth as a literary example of the experience of negative empathy in the second chapter, the present section will investigate the success of this model through an intermedial perspective because, by focusing on some significant adaptations, it will explore how not only the Shakespearean tragedy, but especially the character of the Lady has been transported to different media, cultures, geographical and historical settings. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to examine the aesthetic category of negative empathy from Shakespeare to the present day and to highlight the mechanisms which may stimulate this aesthetic experience in different media, including literature and theatre, opera and cinema, music and painting. Given that the corpus of adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's literary work is extended and that the present analysis is circumscribed to the witchlike Lady Macbeth, the cross-disciplinary and intermedial study to follow will provide some notable instances in which the creative, intertextual transposition of Lady Macbeth's archetype to other modes maintains and, somehow, enhances her capacity to arouse conflicting emotions even in modern-day viewers. In other words, it will investigate the travel of the fiendish Lady through time, space, and new socio-cultural contexts and, thus, examine a series of masterful adaptations of the archetypal female villain where negative empathy plays a fundamental role.

Specifically, in order to have a better understanding of how the cruel, remorseless Lady Macbeth is still likely to evoke readers' and spectators' emotional attunement and how the experience of negative empathy may be enhanced or inhibited through different media, this chapter will incorporate a brief, albeit adequate, investigation into adaptation theories. Then, it will zoom in on some significant literary, cinematographic, and operatic adaptations to explore the notion of *Stimmungseinfhühlung*, or empathy for atmospheres, which is a key factor in activating and delineating spectators' emotional responses to a work of art, even though inanimate.

3.1 SHAKESPEARE AND ADAPTATION THEORIES

Adaptation theories are relevant to delve into the creative reworkings of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* because, even though intermedial, cross-cultural practices of adaptation are widespread today, this is not a recent phenomenon, but it has existed throughout history. As Linda Hutcheon emphasizes (2013, p. 2), the process of adaptation predates the current era because, albeit ubiquitous nowadays, it has always been a component of Western civilization. Notably, by looking at the history of arts it seems that 'art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 2) which, therefore have been reinterpreted, reshaped, transformed, and blended several times. Shakespeare himself, whose works and characters are valued as classics of the Western literary canon, was an adapter and not only one of the most famous English playwrights. In detail, as Hutcheon reports (2013, p. 2), he brought the stories of his culture on the stage and, therefore, transposed them to a different medium. For instance, the tragedy of *Macbeth* is itself a mosaic of different source texts or, echoing Gérard Genette's metaphor inserted in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), a palimpsest. This word is quite telling because in philology it refers to a manuscript whose previous text has been partially erased in order to be reused for a new transcription. Therefore, the literary theorist compared the adapted text to a palimpsest where traces of a previous writing coexist with a more recent one and, in this way, powerfully conveys the idea whereby adaptations consist of a web of references, both 'visible and invisible, heard and silent' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 21), to other works at the same time. Notably, in the Shakespearean tragedy of *Macbeth*, among the chronicles and legends that recount the story of the eponymous valiant man, the primary source text is Holinshed's *Chronicles*. However, given that adaptation implies 'both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 8) of the adapted text, the latter is not simply embedded in the play, but also changed and modified. In addition, as it is common in the best adaptations, in *Macbeth* there is not merely a single source text, but rather a complex mosaic of intertextual references which weave together. Besides the alleged interpolations of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* in 3.5 and 4.1, Tosi (2021, pp. 20-23) signals that Shakespeare is likely to have sourced information for this tragedy from his own *Richard III* , the second part of *Henry VI* , *The Rape of Lucrece* as well as from Seneca's *Medea*, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Montaigne's *Essais*, translated by John Florio in 1603, especially the one entitled *Of the Force of Imagination*. Concerning Lady Macbeth, this intertextual web may be glimpsed, for example, in some parallels between

Madea, the protagonist of the eponymous Greek tragedy by Euripides, and the Lady; in detail, besides the image of perverse mothering and the fantasy of infanticide, Shakespeare seems to have inserted, for instance, the invocation of evil spirits which features also in *Medea* when the woman appeals to Hecate to increase the potency of the poisons she used to impregnate Jason's bride's gown to avenge herself (Tosi 2021, p. 21). Nevertheless, Tosi (2021, pp. 22-23) specifies that it should be acknowledged that the intertextual layers of contemporary culture's stories which the English playwright weaves together in *Macbeth* may, to a certain extent, be the result of an unconscious absorption of cultural heritage. In other words, the juxtaposition and blend of various works of art, especially those that are part of a shared cultural heritage of specific places and ages, may not always be a deliberate, intentional but sometimes an unconscious decision of adapters because of the impact of the context of writing on the artists themselves.

Moreover, the way in which Shakespeare reinterprets and adjusts other sources signals one of the main features of adaptation; namely, variation. That is, '[a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 7) because, like some instances described in the previous chapter, Shakespeare as an adapter incorporated some source texts into his tragedy in a new, creative way to make them suitable for a new audience and medium. In other terms, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* may be regarded as an example of the very process of adaptation which 'is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 20) because , given that both the context of production and reception change over time, it is the adapter's job to alter their sources and, thus, make them appropriate for a new audience and a new background.

Considering the complexity of adaptation both as process of creation and as final product, it seems pertinent to an analysis of Shakespeare's transpositions to clarify that, despite the hierarchy that this procedure creates, the proximity to the adapted text should not be considered the evaluation standard. That is, an adaptation is not 'secondary or inferior' (Hutcheon 2013, p. XV) as compared to an original source text because 'versions exist laterally, not vertically' (Hutcheon 2013, p. XV). Therefore, *Macbeth* itself, given its combination of explicit and hidden echoes of different stories, proves that an adaptation rather than being a derivative, debased copy of a sacred, authoritative source text is a creative transposition of an aesthetic work into another medium or genre in order

to create an autonomous work (Hutcheon 2013, p. 6) for new audiences which, like the adapter, live and interpret artworks in a particular socio-cultural, political environment. In addition, even though 'knowing' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 121) audiences, who are acquainted with source materials, are likely to experience the adapted work as a palimpsest of a previous one or, following Gérard Genette words, as a work in the 'second degree' (Genette, in Hutcheon 2013, p. 6) which, therefore, exists in the shadow of a prior one, 'unknowing' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 121) audiences are not prevented from understanding an adaptation as if it were any other piece of art, which is valuable in and of itself (Hutcheon 2013, pp. 120-121). Nevertheless, it may be argued that those who are acquainted with the source text are equipped with more tools for a greater appreciation of an adaptation as adaptation because their pleasure 'comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 4) and not merely from the text in itself. However, as previously, *Macbeth* demonstrates that, in spite of being an adaptation, it is a great classic which retains its autonomy to the extent that any reader would be able to read and enjoy it even without knowing and, thus, even transcending its intertextual web. In this regard, Julie Sanders (2016) distinguishes between two main types of processes involved in reinterpreting a source text; namely, adaptation and appropriation. Specifically, while the former refers to a 'transpositional practice' (Sanders 2016, p. 22) whereby, despite the revisions, alterations, additions, or cuts, the source text is still resonant and recognizable (Sanders 2016, pp. 22-25), the latter implies 'a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain' (Sanders 2016, p. 35) where references to source materials are, therefore, not as visible or marked as in adaptations (Sanders 2016, pp. 35-36).

Furthermore, it is no coincidence that adapters who belong to different ages or cultures opt for specific ways to rework a text because, as Hutcheon (2013) emphasizes in her thorough analysis, their 'decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 108). Likewise, viewers interpret and understand a work of art in a socio-cultural, ideological, and political background which entails their own familiarity with and interpretation of an updated, revised source as well as their knowledge of the adapter (Hutcheon 2013, p. 111) because, as Benjamin (1963) vividly conveys, 'the traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel'

(1963, p. 87). In other words, like with artworks in general, also in the case of adaptations some touches of the artist and of their ideology remain visible in their new creations. Notably, in the process of adaptation adapters' choices determine the form in which a content is transmitted because, in the three main modes, telling, showing, and interacting (Hutcheon 2013, p. XVI), in which the audience can get involved with stories, they can select which elements, characters or themes to transpose and, moreover, which media and genre to use. This is a key aspect of adaptation studies because the structural limitations of each mode accentuate and, at the same time, hide various facets of the same story (Hutcheon 2013, p. 10). For example, as the analysis to follow will illustrate, evil characters' psychology and humanity, which is a fundamental component for triggering viewers' emotional attunement, is rendered differently in each media and genre because of those very possibilities that each of them offers. For instance, in stage performances, even though the physicality of the stage itself has some limits, the body, appearance, costume or even accent of actors may guide the audience' empathic response and, thus, elicit emotional contagion not only with positive characters but especially with villains, which dominate a play like *Macbeth*. Instead, while in drama members of the audience are, throughout the performance, free to select what to focus on, in film the camera guides viewers' gaze on certain details and, therefore, determines their knowledge and perspective on the action (Hindle 2007, p. 6). Nonetheless, cinema, thanks to the ever-increasing development of cinematic techniques in the last decades, manages to vividly convey evildoers' psychological depth, both in its manifestations and its motivations, through the usage of gestures, facial expressions, camera, close-ups, music, lights and shadows, touches of colors as well as of frames of characters' imagination. In other words, in the cinematic mode the visual in itself reveals the inner turmoil, and the stirring of a character's emotions even without resorting to speech or any other form of verbal expression (Hindle 2007, pp. 12-13). Thus, given the visual and auditory stimuli available on screen, Hutcheon (2013, pp. 130-131) recalls Bruce Morrissette's rhetorical inquiry '[h]as the novel ever evoked, even in its most intense action sequence, the physical empathy affecting the muscles, the glands, the pulse, and breathing rate that chase, suspense, and other extremely dynamic sequences in film bring about in most, if not all, viewers? (Morrissette, in Hutcheon 2013, pp. 130-131). This is a noteworthy comment in that it bespeaks the potential of visual and auditory components of, for instance, screen adaptations to arouse empathy in the audience. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this form of emotional attunement is linked to the functioning of mirror neurons or, in

other words, to the capacity of the human mind to reproduce through the neuron system the experience of performed or perceived actions as well as of feelings, including pain, of the empathized on the onlooker (Gallese 2001, pp. 34-46). In view of this, it seems that the physicality of the body of actors, their gestures and physical appearances are key in the audience's emotional response because their view, both on stage and on screen, activates an automatic mechanism of matching feelings, emotions, and bodily sensations. Conversely, in reading one must read between the lines, be acquainted with the sociocultural, historical context in which a given text was written in order to grasp its nuances and its deeper meanings because, given that they are not provided with visual and aural elements that would trigger their emotional response more easily, they have to rely solely on their imagination and their understanding of the text. For instance, it may be argued that, even though negative experiences and their impact on one's behavior and choices may be alluded to by significant word choice or narrative techniques, it is far more difficult and less intuitive to imagine characters experiencing pain in order to feel an emotional attunement with that very same person. In films, instead, the audience is provided with an explicit manifestation of that emotion through quivers, movements, gazes, tears, and tones of voice which, through the mechanism of mirror neurons, accelerate and simplify the process of empathic responding.

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that not only the act of reading and interpreting a written text but also that of watching a film is by no means a passive activity because both the mode of telling and of showing 'are imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally active' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 23). This, as far as Shakespeare's tragedies are concerned, is emphasized by Charles Lamb who, in his essay *Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Representation* (1811), favors the private experience of reading since, according to him, Shakespeare is not appropriate for *mise-en-scène* because the essence of his writings can be completely grasped only through the imagination, which the individuality of the activity of reading implies (Tosi 2021, p. 107). Notably, imagination as the primary source of engagement in the telling mode is also mentioned in Hutcheon's detailed analysis (2013, p. 23) where the critic specifies that, as readers, the words on the page do not limit our interpretation at all; whereas, the direct experience of the visual and the auditory in the showing mode, which guide our perception, may, to some extent, limit and inhibit imagination (Hutcheon 2013, p. 23). In view of this, it may be inferred that each mode has its own language to tell stories and

this determine how the audience can perceive and, thus, actively interpret a narrative. Following Hutcheon (2013, p. 24), every mode of engagement has its own distinct characteristics and, as a consequence, each of them has access to a variety of expressive techniques which may be exploited to achieve some goals more effectively than others. Therefore, even though it may seem that performances and representations on screen are able to create a more immersive experience because of the impact of visual and auditory stimuli on the audience's affective, bodily response, 'the complicated verbal play of *told* poetry or the interlinking of description, narration, and explanation that is so easy for prose narrative to accomplish' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 23) cannot be compared to the showing mode by no means. Therefore, despite the proliferation of screen adaptations as well as of new interactive tools, the powerful complexity of words, of shades of meaning and, thus, of the telling mode should not be overlooked.

What is more, Hutcheon emphasizes that, unlike reading or looking at a painting which are individual experiences, drama and opera may entail a collective form of emotional response because the audience experiences time and space within a group and in real time (Hutcheon 2013, p. 131). Thus, even though the emotional reaction of each member of the audience is personal, theatregoers, unlike moviegoers, are likely to experience also a form of '*collective* interactive experience' (Hindle 2007, p. 6) which will shape and affect their own perception and interpretation (Hindle 2007, p. 6). This is also reiterated by Ercolino and Fusillo (2022, pp. 115-117) who specify how the joint presence of actors and spectators in a shared space as well as the overlap between the time of story and that of discourse implicate the experience of collective empathy and, more broadly, are the main factors which trigger empathy at the theatre. Therefore, the scholars maintain (2022, p. 117) that drama, unlike any other form of art, has a unique impact on the audience's response. Notably, it should not be overlooked how this emotional reaction is most likely to be different in each encore performance because 'every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 39), in accordance with the interpretation of both actors and the director.

Furthermore, theorists' perspectives on these modes of engagement may also depend on a broader general context because, as anticipated, both adapters' and readers' interpretations of an artwork depend also on the context in which it is accessed. As for

Macbeth, it seems pertinent not to consider solely Charles Lamb's perspective on the matter because, based on the views introduced by the twentieth century and by the advent of Freud's psychoanalysis, critics have been led by a different sensibility to favor some other aspects of the Shakespearean tragedy and to rework it accordingly. For instance, Tosi (2021, pp. 109-113) dedicates a section of her book on *Macbeth* to delve briefly into how from the thirties to the present day there has been a growing interest in, for example, the usage of language, the recurring imagery, and the main themes of the tragedy which replaced close observation of characters. Likewise, from the ensuing decades the scholar (Tosi 2021, pp. 110-113) acknowledges a tendency to retrace the historical and political context, the contradictory chaos of the tragedy as well as the influence of psychoanalysis, of feminism, and of racial discourse. These allusions to diverse perspectives in literary criticism are relevant to the present analysis in so far as they, somehow, illustrate the development and the notable changes that the character of Lady Macbeth has undergone throughout history. In other words, since both critics and adapters, being readers themselves before being creators, are influenced by a broader background in their interpretation of a given text (Hutcheon 2013, p. 109), they are very likely to mirror those very same sociocultural, historical trends that accompany literary studies in their critical and creative productions. This is conveyed, for instance, in some screen adaptations of *Macbeth* where the figure of the Lady and her story change in line with the impact of different sociocultural backgrounds on adapters. For example, Justin Kurzel adapted the play for the screen in a 2015 film where, despite its Scottish setting, the film director expanded the boundaries of that region and the violence of the tyrant to encompass the preoccupations and fears of the post-9/11 'world whose media landscape has been perpetually bombarded by the news of war and terrorist attacks in Syria, Turkey as well as major European cities from Berlin, Brussels, and Paris to London and Manchester' (Rasmus 2018, p. 121). In other words, Kurzel has managed to elaborate and enrich a Shakespearean classic, such as *Macbeth*, by embedding a modern perspective in it and, in detail, by transposing the main themes of ambition, lust for power, and violence from a 1606 narrative to a current historical and political backdrop by means of colors and meaningful frames. By doing so, the adapted text seems to be more easily accessible by present-day viewers than the Shakespearean hypotext because they are led to glimpse a slice of 'the current political climate with its growing nationalism and radicalism spanning from the Middle East, through Europe to the US' (Rasmus 2018, p. 127) in a text which is seemingly very far from them. Likewise, the film director William Oldroyd

and the screenwriter Alice Birch, through a far more complex intertextual interplay, appropriated Leskov's novella *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865), itself an appropriation of *Macbeth*, for the screen in *Lady Macbeth* (2016). Notably, these titles suggests that in both instances adapters aimed at transposing the fiendish Lady Macbeth, rather than the overall plot of the tragedy, to a new medium and sociocultural, historical background. In detail, Oldroyd's variations are manifold since, on the one hand, the film is neither set in eleventh-century Scotland nor in nineteenth-century Russia (as in the case of Leskov's novella), but in the second half of the nineteenth century in rural England and, on the other hand, its narrative arc does not recount the story of ambition and power of the Macbeths. Conversely, this movie, following Leskov's prior appropriation, departs from Shakespeare to tell a story in which a quest for women's freedom as well as racial discourse are threated together. This is emphasized also by Birch herself in that, as Semenza (2022, p. 293) retraces the screenwriter's comments, 'the film is more interested in expanding the ever-changing social and cultural contexts which inform how literary characters are written and read, than it is in replicating archetypes or perpetuating notions about literary universals' (Semenza 2022, p. 293). Notably, Semenza (2022, p. 294) emphasizes that there is a single direct reference to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* when, immediately after the murder of Teddy, she echoes Macbeth's lines 'I go, and it is done: the bell invites me. / Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell / That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.1:63-65) or his words following Duncan's murder 'I have done the deed' (Shakespeare 1994, 2.2:15) in asserting 'It is done' in the film (*Lady Macbeth*, 2017). Apart from this notable exception, the tendency to incorporate current social issues and to create an intricate web of intertextual references, which also include other film productions and paintings, seems to prevail in Oldroyd's adaptation of the Russian novella. This may be glimpsed, for example, in that both Sebastian and Anna are played by Black actors, respectively Cosmo Jarvis and Naomi Ackie, who, being both poor servants, hint at class and racial problems in nineteenth-century North-East England where, as Semenza reports (2022, p. 297), it was common for wealthy households to have dark-skinned maids and workers. Nevertheless, it seems that, despite these historically accurate details which confer historicity to the representation of this region of England, Oldroyd's actors and actresses serve another main purpose (Semenza 2022, p. 297):

> casting decisions have the effect of amplifying the story's interest in numerous hierarchies of gender, class, and race that imprison individuals and turn them against one another—but

> it also suggests the ways in which its own localizing alterations of Leskov have the effect *of increasing the film's relevance* for modern day viewers, in spite of its period setting.

Therefore, in opposition to the insistence on fidelity to the original as a criterion for evaluating adaptations, Oldroyd and Birch managed to tailor Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth to nineteenth-century rural England by means of a multilayered adaptation in which the coexistence of both Shakespeare's archetype and a more modern female figure makes it a masterpiece. In this respect, it is pertinent to at least mention the contribution of Turgenev who, as Semenza mentions (2022, p. 289), released a seminal essay entitled 'Hamlet and Don Quijote' (1860) shortly after the publication of Leskov's novella. The Russian writer asserts the timelessness of some of Shakespeare's characters, such as Hamlet, and thus their universality across both time and space. In detail, Turgenev claims that both Hamlet and Don Quixote, who debuted early in the seventeenth century in, respectively, the first publication of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the first part of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, symbolize 'two contrasting basic tendencies, the two poles of the human axis' (Turgenev 1965, p. 93). Hence, although they may be perceived as opposing types, their validity as a method of classifying all men is somehow eternal (Turgenev 1965, p. 93). In other words, they seem to embody two types, in terms of inclinations and principles, to which humans adhere because, according to the Russian essayist, all tend to fit into one of the two categories (Turgenev 1965, p. 93). These, in turn, refer, on the one hand, to 'self-abnegation and undeviating worship' (Turgenev 1965, p. 94) because of a conviction or a faith in an everlasting truth and, on the other hand, to self-centeredness, skepticism, and mistrust (Turgenev 1965, pp. 95-96). Within this framework, Turgenev concludes that the dualism he theorizes reveals 'a law basic to all human life. That life consists in reality of perpetual reconciliation of two perpetually contending forces, two unremittingly opposites' (1965, p. 102) which are nothing but extremes of fundamental human tendencies which are never fully achieved (Turgenev 1965, p. 107). Briefly, this essay sheds light on the universality not of Shakespeare's plots, and contents, but rather of his characters who, like Hamlet, convey typically human attitudes and dispositions. Therefore, even though these archetypes are transformed across time and space by adapters, they remain a useful means to represent basic human forces. What is more, their 'eternal vitality' (Turgenev 1965, p. 93) is intensified when adapters creatively experiment with a given text. This concept is also expressed by Semenza who argues that it is when the 'power of the eternal, the unchanging, and the

universal is brought into deliberate juxtaposition with the power of the particular or singular, the impermanent, and mutable' (Semenza 2022, p. 289) that an adaptation is most successful. This, as mentioned above, recalls Hutcheon's conception of the adapting process as a mechanism which entails both repetition and change to be more appreciated by a new audience who access it in a new sociocultural, historical environment (2013, pp. 108-109).

Moreover, given that variation appears to be a key element in adaptation studies, this introduction will conclude by briefly considering a noteworthy insight into the nature of the adapting process. This is suggested by Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon who, in 'On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically' (2007), claim that a similarity or 'a homology between biological and cultural adaptation' (Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007, p. 444) may be noticed. In other words, they attempt to analyze the act of adapting through the perspective of evolutionary biology because, like organisms need to adapt and, thus, change in response to new environments and to changing cultures, narratives are altered and reshaped over the years (Bortolotti & Hutcheon 2007, pp. 444-445). In other words, the mechanism of evolution, and not merely replication, of a source text over time and, thus, the resulting astonishing diversity of adaptations which exist seem to resemble the way in which organisms naturally change and evolve from one generation to another. This concept was also addressed by Richard Dawkins who in 1976 coined the term 'meme' to name cultural units which, being the counterpart of genes, determine both transmission and mutation of narratives in relation to a specific environment (Hutcheon & Bortolotti 2007, pp. 446-448). In other words, '[e]volving by cultural selection, traveling stories adapt to local cultures, just as populations of organisms adapt to local environments' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 177) over time.

Briefly, this first section has attempted a brief overview of the meanings and mechanisms which define adaptation as product and as process of an ever-changing social, political, historical, ideological, and cultural context. As briefly outlined, similarity and difference, traditionalism and progress, or familiarity and novelty are coexisting, though opposing, features of successful and enjoyable adaptations. Based upon these premises, the following chapter transcends questions of fidelity to a prior, original artwork, which in this case is Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, insofar as it aims at

exploring how different media and genres, including cinema, painting, opera and others, appropriate the Shakespearean archetype of Lady Macbeth and transform it in line with a new space and time in which they are created. This is why the analysis to follow will favor a thematic approach over a chronological one because, while priority in terms of time simply refers to the order in which two works of art occur (Hutcheon 2013, p. 177), a transverse approach is more likely to make the most of these adaptations which, through different means, managed to make *Macbeth* suitable for modern audiences as well as new sociohistorical, cultural dimensions.

3.2 The Enchantment of Visual Representations: the Notion of *Stimmungseinfühlung*

3.2.1 Philosophical Perspectives on the Expressive Qualities of Visual Stimuli

As suggested in the first introductory chapter, the experience of negative empathy for a fictional character stems not only from the character itself, but also from the general atmosphere which a work of art evokes because a negatively portrayed fictional character is not the only factor that is involved in our empathic responding. In detail, our emotional reaction may be stimulated by the sensations triggered by an overall mood which, in turn, may derive from style, sentence construction, or even from the power of certain auditory and visual stimuli. The empathic connection which is supposed to exist between an aesthetic object and the body of the spectator has been introduced by Robert Vischer in a treatise he wrote in 1873, which has subsequently influenced other academics, including Theodor Lipps, in their aesthetic reflection (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 193-194), and has led to an ongoing debate on the origin of *Stimmung*, or rather, on whether it is the aesthetic object which possesses certain features, or an agency (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 188), able to communicate us a particular emotion or whether it is just us that project our emotions onto the object (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 203). Even though there is no certain answer to the origin of empathy for artworks, this theoretical discussion, which is extensively analyzed by Ercolino and Fusillo (2022, pp. 187-206), has contributed to the conceptualization of empathy and identification as aesthetic experiences which are not restricted to forms of art, such as literature, which put at the center human beings, but which may also be applied to, for instance, lines, colors, rhythms, or atmospheres

(Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 193-196). The relevance of visual and aural components of a work of art and their construction of an overall atmosphere, which is particularly significant in films, was speculated by Lipps in the concept of *Stimmungseinfühlung* and in its relation to perception and empathy for colors and musical rhythms (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 196). Specifically, Lipps postulates that, in the contemplation of a color or a musical composition, observes experience a *Stimmung*, which seems to stem from the very hue and musical form contemplated, and, in such a state of mind, find their mood in the object and empathize with it (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 196-197). In other words, according to the German philosopher, there is a mechanism of association by similarity at the basis of this process whereby we are led to consider our perception of a certain state of mind as deriving from the work of art or musical composition we are witnessing and, once in this mood, we are able to objectify or project ourselves onto the object, finding and empathizing in it our state of mind (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 197). Therefore, he maintains that, while an aesthetic object seems to possess some characteristics that may provoke a certain frame of mind, we also tend to instill our own emotions in the object itself (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 197-198). Likewise, in the early twentieth century the Russian painter Kandinsky reiterated the expressive power of color and form, a view similar to that of Lipps, in that, like geometrical shapes, colors have both an immediate physical effect on the eyes of the observers and a deeper, psychic effect deriving from its intrinsic characteristics (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 198-199). Thus, colors and forms may be easily associated with a *Stimmung* (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 198-201).

In 1911, the German philosopher Moritz Geiger, a pupil of Lipps, built on the notion of *Einfühlung*, proposed by his master, and expanded on the dilemma of empathy for atmospheres (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 202-203). Thus, he made a major contribution to the discussion and distinguished between two ways in which we may associate, for example, a color with happiness, or melancholy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 203). In detail, while the 'theory of the effect [*Wirkungstheorie*]' suggests that we are responsible for those emotions because we tend to attribute the sensations we are experiencing to the very landscape or color we are observing, the 'theory of vivification [*Belebungstheorie*]' sustains, instead, that these sentiments are proper to those objects (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 203). As he distances himself from those forms of psychologism which informed Lipps' notion of *Stimmungseinfühlung*, Geiger favors the second theory and, therefore,

believes that each color has its own intrinsic *Stimmung* which is independent of the observer's projection of their emotions onto the aesthetic object (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 204). Nonetheless, he also acknowledges that, in the endless interaction and exchange between the mood of the subject and that of the object, there still may be a subjective component which, to some extent, determines both perception and aesthetic experience and, moreover, that empathy provides observers with the possibility to gather the correspondence between the *Charakter* of the aesthetic object and its *Gefühlston* (Ercolino & Fusillo 2002, p. 205). This form of attunement is, according to Geiger, the result of a feeling of tension, or desire which is ultimately ascribable to a feeling of nostalgia, a conception which echoes Lipps' juxtaposition of empathy and longing for life (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 206). Within this theoretical framework, there is at least another philosopher, Wilhelm Worringer, whose theories created a lasting impression on the development of European art and history over the twentieth century. His ideas run counter to Lipps's theory because he postulates that empathy and abstraction are two contrasting impulses (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 208) and that there is a feeling of anguish, and not nostalgia, for life at the foundation of art, which is meant to satisfy the needs of men depending on the historical moment they live in (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 210-211). Even though the dichotomy between empathy and abstraction would deserve a far more detailed analysis, for the purpose of this thesis, it is pertinent to emphasize how the alignment of Lipps's and Worringer's understanding of empathy as, respectively, a form of nostalgia and anguish prompts Ercolino and Fusillo (2022) to define the notion of negative empathy as follows:

> 'an aesthetic experience which entails a certain tension, a coexistence of euphoria, and dysphoria, pleasure and distress, and which consists in an ambivalent identification of the empathizing subject with a negatively portrayed fictional character or in an empathetic response to a certain atmosphere—*Stimmung*—peculiar to a given artwork and mainly associated with negative emotions, whether basic (sadness, fear, anger, disgust), social (embarrassment, guilt, etc.), or background (uneasiness, tension, agitation, instability, lack of equilibrium or harmony, etc.). (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 218, translation mine[10])

[10]'un'esperienza estetica *tensiva, euforica e disforica, piacevole e angosciosa allo stesso tempo*, consistente nell'identificazione ambivalente dello spettatore con una figura negativa rappresentata, o nell'empatizzazione da parte sua di una certa atmosfera—*Stimmung*—caratteristica dell'opera, associata a emozioni negative primarie (tristezza, paura, rabbia, disgusto), sociali (imbarazzo, colpa, ecc.), o di fondo (malessere, tensione, agitazione, instabilità, mancanza di equilibrio o armonia, ecc.)' (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 218).

In light of this, the following sections will explore the tension or friction which is at the basis of some visual artworks, such as *Macbeth* (2015) by Kurzel, *Lady Macbeth* (2016) by Oldroyd, and which stimulates an empathetic response in the observers. Thus, they will investigate those mechanisms and tools that enhance an ambivalent empathic reaction in the audience, even though, as in reading, there is always an ineliminable individual component in any response (Eileen 2017, p. 308). Specifically, this perspective will be applied mainly to the observation of an intrinsically negative character, specifically the fiendish, yet attractive, Lady Macbeth. Given the pivotal role of colors, musical rhythms, and *Stimmungseinfühlung* in understanding the concept of empathic responding in the aesthetic domain, the adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which will be considered show how an overall atmosphere, resulting from an intermingle of visual and auditory stimuli, contribute to an unnamable form of bodily arousal.

Moreover, an analysis of *Macbeth*'s screen adaptations seems to be relevant because, given that adaptation entails modernization through the influence of the context of production, adapters tend to bring the Shakespearean female archetype closer to a modern sensibility and, thus, to simplify viewers' identification process. Notably, by granting Lady Macbeth a more modern dimension, they are able to depict, in different ways and through different means, her deep internal suffering which makes a lasting impression on spectators' emotional response. This is also granted by the fact that 'cinematic empathy' (Stadler 2017, p. 317) implies 'both cognitive-imaginative and affective-experiential forms of empathy because audiences are able to share in the sights and sounds of the story world and to mirror characters' emotional expressions, whereas literature primarily facilitates cognitive empathy' (Stadler 2017, p. 319). In other words, films may foster complex forms of emotional attunement by granting access to both aural and visual cues for catching the inner life of a fictional character on screen.

3.2.2 KURZEL'S *MACBETH* AND THE FORCE OF IMMERSIVE ATMOSPHERES

As far as the transformation of this character over time is concerned, screen adaptations make the most of significant visual elements to vividly convey that, despite her wickedness and remorseless, Lady Macbeth belongs to the same humanity to which viewers belong and, thus, may be considered an object of empathy. This is overtly expressed by Justin Kurzel's 2015 film where the film director expands on the theme of

childlessness and infertility to enhance empathy for the cruel Lady Macbeth by means of an all-pervading atmosphere of distress, suffering, and unrelenting violence. Thus, he constructs a claustrophobic, suffocating world, which, besides Cotillard's masterful interpretation, amplifies viewer's empathy for a female villain like Lady Macbeth and, in this, stimulates empathic responding.

As introduced in the previous chapter, the couple's infertility should not be underestimated because, even though the adverse psychological impact of this condition on the thoughts and actions of Lady Macbeth is not explicitly stated in *Macbeth*, this circumstance may refer to one of the reasons behind the behavior of a maligned lady who, despite everything, remains a woman and a wife. Hence, Justin Kurzel seems to start from the impact that this state may have not merely on a political level, provided that the absence of a male child, or rather, of a direct descendant is associated with the futurity of the reign, but especially on a personal level in order to add psychological depth to the Lady. Notably, the film opens with a funeral, an extra segment about the Macbeths mourning their dead infant, against a background of violence and war. Therefore, from the very first scene the motif of the child is introduced and, in the wake of the recurring imagery of babies and motherhood inserted in the Shakespearean tragedy, the Australian film director represents it in a new way, where lost babies and child soldiers coexist. Furthermore, the emotional impact of the wrenching opening shot is enhanced by Lady Macbeth's words following the funeral because, shortly after the burial of her infant, she says that she would fracture the head of the baby she milked to prove her fierceness and strength of purpose to her hesitant husband. Thus, Kurzel is able to evoke from the very beginning contrasting emotions in the audience because, by showing her in the throes of unremitting grief and, thus, as a vulnerable individual, her demonic as well as evil nature attract viewers' attention and shape their ambivalent emotional response.

Moreover, unlike the limits of the written text or even of theatrical performances to effectively render figurative language, the cinematographic medium allowed Kurzel to vividly convey Lady Macbeth's mental disintegration through the motif of childlessness or miscarriage as its main cause. Thus, according to Miller (2017), the visual representation of childhood dominates the overall atmosphere of the movie (Miller 2017, p.62) and, as such, opens a window on what torments the Lady's soul and what triggers her heinous crimes. In addition, as it is customary in the process of adaptation, this trope

exists in relationship with a web of intertextual echoes of other adaptations of *Macbeth*. In this respect, the parallels that Miller draws between Kurzel's version and previous film productions, including *Macbeth* (1971) by Roman Polanski, are pertinent in so far as, despite some similarities, the scholar identifies a change in the portrayal of babies as a consequence of the different sociohistorical, cultural contexts in which the two versions were created. In other words, his comparative analysis verifies how the context of creation, which influences adapters' choices and interpretations, is key for a better understanding of a new adaptation and of its main underlying themes. In detail, Miller (2017) states that both Polanski and Kurzel 'take eleventh-century Scotland as their historical setting, although the issues they explore are firmly grounded in the socio-cultural context of the 1970s and 2010s, respectively' (2017, p. 52). For instance, while in Polanski, in response to a general horrific background of wars and assassinations as well as to his own personal tragedy[11], the figure of the child is mainly associated with innocence, vulnerability, and victimhood (Miller 2017, pp. 55-57), in a later production (1986) by Adrian Noble the motif of the child seems to represent the triggering cause of the Macbeth's crimes because this film explores how the death of an infant may result in a constant need to fill this void with something else (Miller 2017, p. 58) or, in other words, how the ambition-driven resoluteness of the manipulative Lady Macbeth is presumably dictated by 'the self-destructive existentialism of a grieving mother' (Miller 2017, p. 58). More broadly, Rasmus reiterates this by stating that '[t]he Macbeths' grief informs the protagonists' actions as they try to give meaning to their life and translate their pain into action' (Rasmus 2018, p. 123). Hence, according to Miller (2017, p. 57), Noble's *Macbeth* marked an important change in the representation and conception of children, from innocent victims of war to a single absent infant, in the following adaptations of the tragedy. Nevertheless, it is only with Kurzel (2015) that the figure of the child is made a focal point because, through the insertions of four other children, both living and dead, earthly and supernatural, in the film, Kurzel managed to go beyond the eleventh-century surroundings to develop, from an ideological and psychological perspective, a new twenty-first century *Macbeth* (Miller 2017, p. 62).

[11] It refers to Polanski's loss of his pregnant spouse, Sharon Tate, at the hands of the Mason Family in 1969, an event that marked both the personal life of the film director and the end of the counterculture and hippie movement of the sixties. Hence, Polanski tried to represent this abrupt change in his life in his version of *Macbeth*, where children are mainly portrayed as vulnerable victims (Miller 2017, pp. 55-57; Rasmus 2018, pp. 115-116).

In the depiction of Lady Macbeth, the pervasive presence of children and lost babies which, since the very first scene, populate the film is of prime importance because the insertion of a possible backstory at the beginning of the movie allows Kurzel to alter the climactic moment of the tragedy, the sleepwalking scene, and to turn it into a much more emotionally powerful scene. In detail, in a frame where everything reminds of family life and maternal desire, a childless Lady Macbeth collapses onto the ground and thus, in opposition to an upright position which signals power, ambition, strength of mind, and resoluteness, she now assumes a position of inferiority, vulnerability, and defenseless and, directing her tearful gaze at something or someone which is not immediately visible to the audience, recites some moving words until the camera reveals the ghost of her dead infant. Thus, Kurzel privileges the Lady's perspective 'through a shot-reverse-shot sequence that alternates between images of what the character is looking at and close-up reaction shots' (Stadler 2017, p. 318) and the so-called Kuleshov effect. In this way, he prompts not only a form of cognitive understanding of another person's emotions, ideas, or objectives, but also a kind of 'affective mimicry involving the simulation or resonance of bodily states' (Stadler 2017, p. 324). This suggests that this heart-wrenching scene depicts a grief-stricken mother who still longs for her dead child, on whose face some stains may refer to a deadly infection caused by smallpox (Rasmus 2018, p. 124), because the interweaving of different cinematic techniques, mainly close-ups and eyeline matches, facilitates viewers to explore her inner being, to understand her subjective experience, and thus to have empathetic responses (Stadler 2017, p. 324). In line with this, it seems that her humanity and vulnerability is powerfully symbolized by the haunting presence of the phantom of her dead child who, after the opening scene, reappears in perhaps the most intense scene of the film. That is, in this hallucinatory state Kurzel replaces the blood-stained hands of an anguished Queen with the unearthly appearance of a dead baby and, in that, he seems to favor the emergence of the Lady's most intimate past traumas and possible motivations to the extent that she appears to be not only a cruel, remorseless Queen, but especially a frail mother who suffers from and is haunted by the loss of a child. Hence, it seems that Kurzel humanizes the fieldish Lady in that, by uncovering her most human and feminine side, she appears to be a bereaved mother before being a villain (Bladen 2017, p. 129).

Nonetheless, Kurzel starts from the initial close-up of the dead infant, whose pose and foliage adornment might recall child victims of war in Syria (Rasmus 2018, p. 123),

to give spectators access to a broad spectrum of the Lady's emotions, including malevolence, spite, bitterness, distress, torment, remorse, and insecurity. This is achieved gradually because, before the final high point of her desperation, there is at least another hint of her utter, though initially hidden, despair. This is the case, for example, of an interpolated scene in which, just after the coronation, Macbeth lunges at his wife with the point of his dagger on her empty womb in an attempt to menace and blame his wife for not having given him an heir (Bladen 2017, p. 133), but rather 'a fruitless crow' (Shakespeare 1994, 3.1:60). This is conveyed through the juxtaposition of Macbeth, who sits on the floor lamenting his heirless condition, and Lady Macbeth who, instead, is still trying to persuade her husband of his role as King by adoring him with the crown. His sitting position, which will be assumed by a devastated Lady Macbeth near the end of the film, may be deemed another cinematic element which fosters emotional attunement because it uncovers his feelings and desires in that situation. Moreover, the allusion to his distress, which will culminate in a tear and in the haunting memory of a dead child soldier, in front of his wife and not, like in Shakespeare, in an aside is a significant change which provides the impression that someone is to blame, namely the Lady (Bladen 2017, p. 133). Therefore, even though this scene seems to hint at the inherent fragility of the titular murderer, the 'tear that rolls down Macbeth's cheek is a physical reminder that grief for the lost children is at the core of the violence, in this interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy' (Bladen 2017, p. 133) and, thus, it somehow anticipates the Lady's delirium. The overall atmosphere of sorrow, despair, hopelessness, and unhappiness which stems from this disturbing scene is also enhanced by the presence of families and children which, contrary to the royal couple, are endowed 'with a sense of abundance and fertility' (Bladen 2017, p. 134).

In view of all this, it may be argued that the film by Kurzel is itself a succession of atmospheres as it describes a world of unrelenting violence and, thus, where the grief of a mourning woman and Queen emerge from a world in flames. This film is visually powerful as the predominance of shades of red, orange, and yellow evokes a hellish world which is totally subverted by evil. Violence and wickedness are, therefore, pervasive up to the end, where the final battle is fought amidst flames, fog, and soot. However, among the recurring shots of a burning battlefield and their evocation of a boundless darkness, which is intensified when Macbeth burns the family of Macduff at the stake (Bladen 2017, p. 133), an equally powerful setting surfaces as it encompasses the humanity which may

still be glimpsed even though the world is pervaded by the flames of hell. Therefore, by emphasizing this motif, the movie is able to affect viewers' emotional response to the seemingly remorseless Lady Macbeth (Bladen 2017, p. 129), whose evilness is mirrored in the world that surrounds her. However, the safe perimeter of fiction allows the audience to enter this hellish world, to enter in her evil mind and, thus, to participate not only in her scheming, but also in her sorrow. This occurs especially when, dissociating herself from violent thoughts of death and infanticide, she '[corrodes] inwardly from the effects of repressing natural human empathy' (Bladen 2017, p. 132). Kurzel shows that Lady Macbeth experiences the wounds of childlessness and infertility not only through the insertion of four other children, but especially through the atmosphere which prevails in the chapel where Lady Macbeth appears both in her invocation of the spirits of darkness and in her final delusional state of mind. Unlike the all-pervasive evil forces which dominate the outside world, the general mood which this setting entails is crucial to establish an empathic relationship with her negative character because it hints at possible motivations for her unacceptable behaviour. As anticipated, this is conveyed via a masterful usage of visual stimuli whereby Kurzel uses all the cinematographic tools he has at his disposal to enhance viewers' response. Notably, the '*mise-en-scène* resonates with the theme of the Macbeths' sterility, their lack of a continuing family tree, and their status as a withering branch that will end with their deaths' (Bladen 2017, p. 132) because, as the camera lingers on some details of the chapel, the room appears to be paneled with trees, which, in the Christian tradition, symbolize life, family, and fertility. When Lady Macbeth, dressed in dark, first enters this gloomy chapel, her invocation of the forces of darkness as well as her fantasy of infanticide seem rather blasphemous and sacrilegious (Bladen 2017, p. 132). Therefore, the overall *Stimmung*, which derives from the contrast between the witch-like Lady and the Christian place of worship and prayer is disturbing and distressing but, at the same time, intriguing because in its revolting dimension there is, however, a sense of desolation and loneliness. In other words, notwithstanding the fact that the dominant atmosphere in this scene is unacceptable because it asks viewers to transcend their moral and religious code, Kurzel manages to tell, indirectly, that for Lady Macbeth, being first of all a woman and a wife, consolation from the pain she is experiencing cannot come from religious belief and, therefore, she turns to the forces of darkness to find a radical alternative to her utmost despair. Hence, though carefully hidden, these details suggest that there may be a deep psychological suffering behind her terrible choices.

Furthermore, the disturbing effect that this scenario creates is due to the powerful juxtaposition of Christian symbols of life and family with a demonic Lady who, at the very beginning, may also recall the association, introduced by Shakespeare through the image of the serpent, between her deceiving tendencies and Eve because the latter, like the former, causes the death of her progeny, meaning humanity, by virtue of original sin (Bladen 2017, p. 132). In other words, this scenario may function as a visual reminder not only of her loss and desperation, but also of her perverse mothering which, though repulsive, elicits viewers' curiosity. Specifically, like in Shakespeare's tragedy, the sinful image of the anti-mother is verbally expressed in the Lady's fantasy of infanticide and is visually depicted in the very same panels in which, through the portrayal of souls falling into Hell, she is associated 'with the sin, death and sterility of the tree of knowledge side of the paradigm' (Bladen 2017, p. 132). Therefore, Kurzel seems to favor the disturbing coexistence of different spheres, including life and death, fertility and bareness, virtue and sin, family and perverse nurture, light and darkness in order to emphasizes Lady Macbeth's ambiguity and, thus, the duality which is at the core of negative empathy itself. For this reason, it seems no coincidence that the film director sets both the invocation scene, with its references to cruelty, wickedness, remorseless, and anti-mothering, and the touching sleepwalking scene in this chapel paneled with symbols of both life and anti-life. Accordingly, the dominant hue of Lady Macbeth's costume changes from black, as if she were a demonical spirit, to white, like the innocence of the strangled child she imagines. In light of this, Kurzel manages to enhance viewers' ambiguous emotional attunement with Lady Macbeth not only through Cotillard's masterful interpretation, but also through a subtle web of visual elements which, recalling the complexity of Shakespeare's language, hint at how Lady Macbeth is a victim of overwhelming emotions and fears which are ultimately associated with her humanity and womanhood.

3.2.3 THE VISUAL IMPRESSION OF ENTRAPMENT IN OLDROYD'S *LADY MACBETH*

As previously, films can construct intense atmospheres which, though disquieting, enable viewers to enter the complex psychology of horrible characters not only by means of colors, but also through lines, or forms. Given that it has been hypothesized that these have both intrinsic, geometric properties and psychological, emotional meanings (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 201-202), lines and forms may contribute to the creation of an overall atmosphere which will affect the audience's empathic response, even to

despicable characters and their unacceptable actions. This is masterfully conveyed, for instance, by William Oldroyd in his 2016 screen adaptation of Leskov's novella, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865) where, together with the British screenwriter Alice Birch, Oldroyd uncovers the deep suffering of a witch-like temptress through an effective use of geometrical shapes, mainly in the décor, and thus by endowing the fictional environment with a *Stimmung* able to stir viewers' emotional reaction.

Nevertheless, it is first and foremost pertinent to this analysis to signal how this movie, like the novella on which it is based, departs from Shakespeare's tragedy and portrays a fiercer and more passionate Lady Macbeth. Notably, unlike the Shakespearean ultimately innocent, ill-fated Queen, Katerina, because of the love she has for the newly-hired stableboy Sebastian (Sergei in the novella), is responsible for a series of crimes, including the murder of her father-in-law with poisoned mushrooms, of her husband with a cast-iron candelabra, and of a young heir to the family estate by suffocation. Therefore, while in Shakespeare violence was a sign of manhood, in the novella, as in the film, it rather results from the sentiment of love and unquenchable desire (Bellmunt-Serrano 2019, p. 20). Specifically, in Leskov's rewriting the narrator, like a dethatched observer, recounts the life of the heroine who, forcefully repressed by the social constraints of nineteenth-century Russia, cannot give vent to her physical pleasure and sexual desire, which is symbolized at first by a mill dam burst (chapter 2) and then by the oneiric appearance of a grey tomcat with whiskers (Wigzell 1988 p. 625; Wells 2001, p. 166) which rubs itself against the adulteress. In this objective report of her crimes, these few references to her hallucinations appear to be Katerina's most psychologically developed moments because, on the one hand, the cat, echoing the analogies between animals and her sexual intercourse with Sergei (Wigzell 1988, p. 627), is a symbol of her animal lust and, thus, of her inner voice and, on the other hand, dreams are usually means to uncover a character's deepest, unconscious desires and innermost thoughts (Wigzell 1988, p. 626). What is more, at that time the interpretation of dreams was popular in Russia among both illiterate (such as in Aksinya's understanding of Katerina's dream about the moon) and partly educated people through, respectively, popular superstitions and dream books (Wigzell 1988, p. 626). In both instances, for example, dreams of a male cat with grey, black, or ginger fur were believed to denote sadness or an imminent catastrophe, such as 'a sign of the breaking of marital vows' (Wigzell 1988, p. 628), and, among other beliefs, the instance of a married woman stroking an animal was thought to be a harbinger of

infidelity (Wigzell 1988, p. 629). However, even though these allusions to the allegorical meanings of the protagonist's dreams may not be fully grasped by the readership, these nightmares appear to be the only attempts on the part of the author, who eschewed the typically European analysis of characters (Wigzell 1988, p. 625), to add a psychological dimension to Katerina or to provide a psychological profile that hints at the resolution and temerity of a Lady who is not dishearten even by these terrible dreams (Wigzell 1988, pp. 629-630).

In line with these allegorical parallels between Lady Macbeth and cats, Katerina, guided by her sexual drive as well as by her desire of freedom, seems to be not merely a temptress, like in *Macbeth*, but, instead, 'the insatiable sexual and criminal aggressor' (Wells 2001, p. 166), a multiple murderess who, unlike the Shakespearean heroine, is not weighed down by feelings of remorse and guilt (Semenza 2022, p. 291). Thus, while in Shakespeare the recurring imagery of blood, which haunts the Lady in her delusions, is used to emphasize how she is eventually overwhelmed by contrition, in Leskov it is not an indelible mark of her guilt, but it rather inspires a feeling of liberation in Katerina (Bellmunt-Serrano 2019, p. 21):

> Under his head, on the left side, there was a patch of blood which had, however, stopped flowing; it originated from a small wound which had already hardened and congealed under the matted hair. […] Meanwhile, Katerina Lvovna, who had rolled up the sleeves of her blouse and had rolled up the hem of her skirt high above her knees, was giving the patch of blood that Zinovy Borisych had left on the floor of his bedchamber a thorough scrub with soap and bast […] and the stain washed away easily without a trace. (Leskov 1987, pp. 120-121)

Given that, together with other details, this may suggest that Katerina does not closely resemble Lady Macbeth, the narrator explicitly states, not without irony, this intertextual reference in the very first paragraph of the novella. Specifically, the storyteller introduces the protagonist as an evil woman who, because of her general malignity and fierceness, is nicknamed Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by her neighbors and who, therefore, cannot but bring repulsion in the readers (Bellmunt-Serrano 2019, p. 19):

> In these parts one occasionally comes across individuals of such character that, no matter how many years may have passed since one's last encounter with them, one can never recall them without experiencing an *inward tremor*. An example of this type was Katetina Lvovna Izmailova, a merchant's wife who once enacted a drama so awesome that the members of our local gentry, taking their lead from someone's light-hearted remark, took to calling her 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk'. (Leskov 1987, p. 89, emphasis mine)

As this excerpt suggests, the Lady Macbeth of Leskov stands out as a woman whose cruelty and remorselessness stir an inner tension in the characters who inhabit the world of the story and, by extension, in the readers of the tale. This impression is also created by the Shakespearean Lady because, in her ruthlessly manipulative behavior, she raises a feeling of non-acceptance and repulsion in the audience, a sensation which is also associated with curiosity and attraction in the tragedy. Similarly, even though the objective mode of narration of Leskov limits itself to recount the facts in a rather straightforward way and does not clearly explore the heroine's thoughts and emotions in a sympathetic way (Emerson 1989, p. 68; Emerson 2011, p. 347), the Russian writer portrays a woman whose violent actions, spurred by her unquenchable love desire (Bellmunt-Serrano 2019, p. 20) and by the strict bourgeoise Russian society, imply a deep dissatisfaction and desperation. Thus, even though the Russian storyteller captures only the early stage of her life (Emerson 1989, p. 68), or rather 'condemns his heroine by stylizing her outer surface, denying the reader access to anything but her appetites and the record of her murders' (Emerson 1989, p. 78), her internal suffering is, to some extent, outlined by the narrator in the very first chapter through word choice. Notably, he introduces the female protagonist as a young lady forced to live in a 'barred and bolted tower of a house' (Leskov 1987, p. 90) where desperation, monotony, boredom, and tedium (Leskov 1987, pp. 90-91) reign. In this way, from the very beginning the narrator creates 'a realistic story of human entrapment' (Emerson 1989, p. 65) and evokes an overall gloomy atmosphere of desolation and melancholy which anticipates how Katerina may have been led to subvert the imposed order of society by her deep internal suffering. In her feeling trapped and disempowered by society, Katerina is not dissimilar to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth who does not see herself in the definition of womanhood of the time and is, thus, ready to get rid of her most feminine dimensions, including the possibility of bearing children, for her lust for power (Semenza 2022, p. 292). Nevertheless, even though this type of narration does not make it easy to feel sympathy or understanding for this purely evil woman, readers may identify and feel empathy for the overall mood which transpires from the initial description of the house. Hence, it may seem that 'Leskov's Lady Macbeth is no natural born killer; she is, instead, a woman whose passions and abilities are so thoroughly quashed by the society she inhabits that she is faced with two options: die miserably in her cage or attempt to break out of it' (Semenza 2022, p. 292). In this respect, Leskov's appropriation of this female villain seems, following Semanza's (2022) thorough analysis, to recreate a character that readers

may relate to and whose sympathy, after the cold-blooded murder of little Teddy, is reestablished towards the end where she is betrayed by Sergei and, paralleling Lady Macbeth's suicide, drowns in the Volga with her rival Sonetka (Semenza 2022, p. 291).

However, while the novella is not a study of interiority, Oldroyd's revision restores Shakespeare's psychological depth and character evolution through a masterful deployment of symbolic visual stimuli which, unlike the dethatched and objective narrative voice of the novella, reflect the Lady's inners life more immediately. This was basically one of the film's main objectives because, as it is reported by Semenza (2022, p. 293), Alice Birch and the film director wanted to reestablish a feeling of empathy for this cruel Lady. Moreover, given that viewers have become more tolerant of morbid images throughout the last decades, especially after Tarantino's films (Rasmus 2018, p. 116), the uncensored portrayal of acts of violence, such the brutal suffocation of a little boy, on screen was more commonly accepted by viewers. This detail is highly relevant in an analysis of negative empathy because the spectacle of violence created by the Russian Lady's bloody actions is not merely disturbing but also, at least to some extent, attracting. As previously, this component of our reaction to the depiction of bloodcurdling actions is enhanced, in this particular case, by an overall atmosphere which, despite its brutality, encompasses a broad spectrum of sensations in the audience, including a sense of desolation, loneliness, anguish, confinement, isolation, and melancholy, which are more evident in the movie than in the novella. These are evoked by a masterful usage of symmetrical lines which in a recurring frame of the film display the claustrophobic reality in which, constrained by social norms, women lived under patriarchy back in mid-nineteenth-century England. In detail, Katherine is shown to sit perfectly still 'at the perfect centre of a long sofa which is, in turn, perfectly centred within an uncomfortably formal sitting room' (Semenza 2022, p. 294). The regular shapes, mainly squares and rectangles in, for example, the doorcase which physically surrounds the Lady, the pendulum clock, and the frame of a painting, not merely embellish the room but, more significantly, endow it with a sense of desolation and constraint. In line with this, Semenza (2022) suggests how '[e]ach box can be figured as a synecdoche for the house itself, that box in which Katherine is imprisoned by her husband and father-in-law, who both insist on her staying indoors at all times' (Semenza 2022, p. 295). Thus, the overall sensation that this oppressive room implies is of a 'boxed-in Katherine' (Semenza 2022, p. 295), a woman who seems to be kept captive in the new suffocating life she has just entered

through marriage. In other words, the young protagonist strikes viewers as a woman severely burdened by the sterile environment in which she is compelled to live.

Moreover, as previously suggested, the Lady's physical and psychological imprisonment and the resulting impression of suffocation and isolation is intensified by the color palette which he favors throughout the movie and, in this particular case, by the stark color contrast of the frame. Notably, the bright blue color of her voluminous hoop skirt as well as red hair, which may suggest the influence of *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) by John Singer Sargent or the actress Francesca Annis who starred as Lady Macbeth in Polanski's 1971 *Macbeth* (Semenza 2021, p. 295), clash with the dreary décor (Semenza 2022, p. 295) of a house in which the shades of drab colors, mainly brown, dominate.

Furthermore, in screen adaptations sound plays a role as fundamental as that of lines, colors, and costumes because, like these components, it may serve as a means to portray characters' inner emotions and to create an overall atmosphere which, in turn, enhances a certain emotional reaction in the viewers (Hutcheon 2013, p. 41). This results from the fact that, while the telling and the interacting mode of engagement entails, respectively, imagination and a physical as well as kinetic dimension (Hutcheon 2013, p. 133), the showing mode immerses viewers in the aural as well as visual world of the story. Therefore, soundscape contributes to the creation of an immersive experience where emotions and feelings are expressed not merely in dialogues or voice-overs, but especially in their combination with music, noises, or even silence. This also applies to Oldroyd's film because, as suggested, not only the presence of sound, but also the lack of it affects the cognitive and emotional responses of the audience. The silence and perfect stillness which reign in the country house is meaningful because, like the dominant palette, it contributes to the creation of a mood of desolation, entrapment, desperation, and hopelessness which dominates not only the household but, by extension, Katherine's mind and soul. In detail, the deafening silence that fills the rooms of this household as well as her motionless position seem rather uncanny and perturbing because they appear to symbolize not the vitality of a living creature, but the pain of a tormented soul whose life is stifled by the inorganic objects which, like the house she inhabits, entrap her. Thus, in a tightly laced corset and sitting like 'a lifeless statue' (Semenza 2022, p. 299), she is nothing but part of her husband's drab pieces of furniture.

The poignancy of the above-mentioned frame is enhanced by the fact that Oldroyd and Birch, following the juxtaposition of opposite elements and concepts in Shakespeare, portray the duality of the Lady through two settings: the oppressive rooms and the wild moors of England. The latter, though desolate, express her longing for a different kind of life and, specifically, the kind freedom she experienced during childhood when, as she comments at the beginning of the film, she used to spend time outside with her mother. In this, it seems that the film is not solely based on *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which is arguably its main intertext, but that it is also informed by the novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë. In both instances the windswept, wild moorlands of England represent freedom and unquenchable love for, respectively, Sebastian and Heathcliff, who may be another case study of a tormented character able to elicit negative empathy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 98). In addition, the conditions of the homonymous protagonists, Katherine Lester and Catherine Earnshaw, resemble each other (Semenza 2022, p. 296). This similarity is even more apparent in *Wuthering Heights*, the 2011 screen adaptation by Andrea Arnold, because its naturalistic representation of the female protagonist in the moors and its almost entirely silent long takes may have contributed to Oldroyd's revision (Semenza 2022, pp. 296-297).

In this way, in *Lady Macbeth* Oldroyd and Birch managed to open a window onto the Lady's mental turmoil and, thus, to give viewers access to the precedents and possible motivations for her unacceptable behavior. It is as if the film, through stifling atmospheres and the vastness of nature, inhabited the protagonist's soul so that, within this fictional environment, the Lady's heinous crimes are, to a certain extent, justifiable or at least understandable. In other words, the film appears, through chromatic contrasts, regular lines, and silence, to enter the protagonist's inner realm and, by eliciting a sense of desolation, sadness, and entrapment, to favor viewer's empathic attunement to a cruel, remorseless, and attractive murderess.

3.3 Expanding the Horizons of Empathic Responding: Music and Melodrama

3.3.1 Experiencing Empathy through and with Music

As previously, the showing mode, which includes, for example, films, theatrical performances, and operas, can provoke spectator's empathic response not merely through, for instance, the usage of certain visual cues, but also through music and pervasive soundscape. This stems from the fact that, unlike the telling mode and the sole use of written language, to show a story entails that the audience is directly involved with the visual as well as auditory story world (Hutcheon 2013, pp. 25-26). Recalling Geiger's perspective, all colors, landscapes, and, more broadly, aesthetic objects are tinged with a mood, or 'a feeling tone [*Gefühlston*]' (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 204) which, to some degree, may be also ascribable to the subjective component of a perceptive as well as aesthetic experience (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022 pp. 204-205). Therefore, also musical compositions may be deemed to evoke a specific mood, or rather, an atmosphere which, in turn, stimulates listeners' empathetic reactions.

With respect to the correlation between music and empathic processes, it should be acknowledged that in *Leitfaden der Psychologie* Lipps postulates a phenomenological approach to study empathy for not only colors, but also musical rhythms (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 196) and, as discussed in the previous section, introduces a new form of empathy for moods or atmospheres, called *Stimmungseinfühlung*. Given the inherent capacity of music to convey emotions in their purest forms (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 137), the philosophical perspectives on the expressive powers of music in history are rather complex and would deserve a far more detailed analysis. Broadly speaking, there are two main views on the location of emotions in music: the one which supports that emotions and feelings are located in the music itself (cognitivism) and the other which, instead, argues that they are in the listener (emotivism) (Di Bona 2019, pp. 166-173). In any case, besides the above-mentioned philosophical stance and subsequent useful contributions to it, it seems that those mechanisms at the basis of empathy in general, namely 'low-level perception-action processes, involving mimicry of expressive behavior, and high-level affective empathy, involving "higher" cognitive processes' (Robinson 2017, p. 293), may be used to describe reactions to music as well (Robinson 2017, pp. 293-294). On the one hand, resonance or simple contagion through music

occurs, for example, in interactions between babies and parents, or caregivers, because the recourse to baby-talk or singing, which, according to O'Neil, are both marked by 'higher pitch, greater pauses between phrases, slower tempo, and simpler structures' (Robinson 2017, p. 295), may be considered an early form of emotional response, prior to language acquisition (Robinson 2017, p. 296). Likewise, music can also arouse those very emotions that it expresses in the listener through a mechanism of contagion because, since 'music (or most western music at least) essentially involves motion' (Robinson 2017, p. 297) in that melodic phrases consist of a sequence of notes which rise or fall in pitch level, have a different duration, and follow a certain *tempo*, listening to music induces the activation of the motor areas of the brain of the listener, who is likely to reproduce those movements internally or outwardly and, if the movements of the music mirror those ascribable to a given emotion, to feel it (Robinson 2017, pp. 296-298). On the other hand, Robinson suggests that a higher form of empathy happens when the resonance of musical gestures is accompanied by an attempt, on the part of the listener, to assume a certain emotional state expressed by music and, thus, imagine what it may feel like on, for example, the singer's behalf (Robinson 2017, p. 300). This applies even better to, for example, operas where the audience is more likely to feel empathy through and for musical compositions since, as it is peculiar to the showing mode, performers' movements and expressions contribute to our interpretation of instrumental and vocal music. The latter, in opera, stimulates empathy because 'the *words* typically tell us about the situation in which the protagonist finds him or herself and it is the words and music together which enable us to understand *what it is like* to be in that situation' (Robinson 2017, p. 302).

In view of the possible empathic responses to music and the basic processes involved, the sections to follow will delve into opera music to explore how it powerfully contributes to immerse spectators in the fictional world and to point out some mechanisms which may allow composers to induce empathic attunement in the audience. Specifically, within a comparative framework, the present analysis aims at investigating how in operas, even though 'the unrealistic conventions of singing act to distance us, […] the music counters that by provoking identification and strong affective response' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 134). Moreover, given that this thesis centres on the ambivalent, or two-sided, reaction that the depiction of an intrinsically negative content elicits, the examples that will be investigated show how 'music offers aural "equivalents" for characters' emotions and, in

turn, provokes affective responses in the audience; sound, in general, can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal aspects' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 23). Two prime examples of this tendency will be analyzed: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1932) by Shostakovich and *Macbeth* (1847) by Giuseppe Verdi. These are, respectively, a rework of a previous transposition of the character of Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare to a more modern novella, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865) by Nikolai Leskov, and an operatic adaptation of the Shakespearean tragedy.

However, it is first and foremost important to introduce some features of these operas because the resulting emotional reactions may not be identical for all, but rather manifold because, depending on the sensibility and cultural beliefs of those who observe or enjoy a work of art, there is always an inevitable subjective component whereby they may vary. Accordingly, given that not only the members of the audience but also the adapters themselves belong to specific cultural areas and historical eras, it may be argued that both their reactions and decisions depend on, respectively, a broader context of reception and of creation (Hutcheon 2013, pp. 108-111). Notably, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, itself a reworking of Leskov's 1895 novella, and Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* are two very different operatic adaptations of *Macbeth,* mainly because their contexts of creation and of reception differ radically from each other and thus imply a different aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, even though these operas reinterpret and rework a shared precursor text according to the sensitivity of the period in which their creators operate, both instances manage to musically depict the tension, or rather, the oscillation between repulsion and attraction which is peculiar to the experience of negative empathy because Lady Macbeth is portrayed both as evil and human, ruthless and vulnerable. That is, even though there is always an ineliminable subjective component in our emotional response, in music there are, like in visual art, some mechanisms which may stimulate listeners' emotional attunement.

With respect to opera, the experience of empathy is enhanced not merely by the physical presence of actors on stage which, as in the theatre, is the primary source of identification and empathy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 140), but especially by musical compositions which are not solely musically superb, but especially accurate descriptions of human nature. This is achieved through a masterful usage of some mechanisms which opera composers may favor in order to trigger a disturbing, yet enjoyable, aesthetic

experience in the listeners. For example, Shostakovich captures the inner turmoil of a nineteenth-century Russian woman who, like Leskov's Katerina, is trapped in a loveless marriage and tries to find her way out. Likewise, Verdi in his *primo ottocento* opera, relocating the story back to eleventeenth-century Scotland, attributes to Lady Macbeth hollow and almost musicless melodies to vividly convey both her demonic dimension and her human frailty. In other words, both composers musically depict the emotions and basic human traits of an evil perpetrator, Lady Macbeth, in a unique and recognizable way. In this way, music seems to contribute to the evocation of an overall atmosphere in which, despite her evil intentions and crimes, emerges deep desperation, tension, and fragmentation. This, in turn, evokes a sympathetic emotional response in the spectators because, according to Lipps's concept of *Stimmungseinfühlung*, the audience is able to extend the scope of their sympathies to the ruthless Lady Macbeth through the emotions that music is able to arouse in them. Moreover, as regards negative empathy, Levinson in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* argues that we tend to listen to melodies which arouse negative emotions, including sadness, gloom, or fear, because, like the process of catharsis in dramaturgy, these may allow us to purge our minds of these negative emotional states (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 138-139). Nonetheless, Paul Hindemith's contribution to the debate is rather noteworthy as he specifies that, in the impossibility to talk about musical emotions because in music emotional registers change too rapidly, in order to talk about negative empathy in music a dense, concrete, and unequivocally recognizable expression of a certain negative emotion is needed (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 139). However, as previously argued, there is a clear distinction between purely instrumental and vocal music considering that, unlike the exclusive use of instrumental accompaniment, vocal music of operas can brilliantly depict characters and stories which are themselves inexhaustible sources of empathy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 140).

Furthermore, it should not be overlooked how opera is a composite work based on a complex intertwine of literature, theatre, music, dance, and visual arts and that its capacity to elicit an empathic response in the audience depends on its multiple components, including the librettist, the musician, the scenographer, the director, and the opera singers (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 140). Among these major elements, the piece of music which is usually deployed to depict interiority is the vocal aria (Hutcheon 2013, p. 60) because, whether it is accompanied by instrumental music or not, it suspends time

in that it interrupts the external dramatic action (Hutcheon 2013, p. 65) in order to show a character's inner reality. In this respect, Linda Hutcheon emphasizes that, even though operatic adaptations, in the passage from the telling to the showing mode, need to compress the literary source because singing a line requires more time than simply reciting it (Hutcheon 2013, p. 38), their characters are not flat or uncomplicated because music gives voice to 'their unverbalized subconscious' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 60) and is, therefore, a means to express the complexity which lies behind a fictional persona. Therefore, it may be indeed that in operas music is equally important as words because, thanks to 'its manifest affective and even mimetic power' (Hutcheon 2013, p. 41), together with lines, it appears to be a key element to guide spectator's empathic responding.

In light of this, the usage of music and arias to construct an overall mood and, specifically, to depict the contradictory human dimension of a cruel Lady Macbeth will be investigated. Verdi and Shostakovich are notable examples of this because they construct masterful vocal melodies and orchestral accompaniment to direct viewers' empathy toward Lady Macbeth because, albeit differently, both make a particular use of vocal arias and, through recognizable musical patterns, portray Lady Macbeth's fragmented state of mind to address, respectively, nineteenth-century Italian and twentieth-century Russian audience. In this regard, the following paragraphs will closely examine, firstly, the Russian variant and, secondly, the Italian adaptation.

3.3.2 SHOSTAKOVICH'S *LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK*: A HYBRID OF TRAGEDY AND SATIRE

Like the film director Oldroyd and the screenwriter Alice Birch, another artist who attempted to bring into focus a female disturbing and disturbed character, Lady Macbeth, in the shadows of Leskov's creative adaptation is Shostakovich, a twentieth-century Russian composer. In his opera, the episode is relocated to a small province in nineteenth-century Russia and, despite his indebtedness to Leskov, Shostakovich reworks the source text from his social, political, and historical context in order to address the social issues of a period of discontent, violence, revolutions, and change. Thus, he tries to provide a complete picture of life, especially for women, in Soviet Russia. Notably, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, written in collaboration with the librettist Alexander Preis and performed for

the first time in 1934, was part of a larger project to create, starting from a revision of Lady Macbeth, a series of operas, initially a trilogy and then a tetralogy (Fay 2000, p. 78), on how Soviet women have changed over time (Edwards 1998, p. 163). This, however, remained uncompleted and unrealized because, given the strict cultural policies of Stalinism which censored any artistic expression which did not conform to the official culture, the 'innovative musical style' (Mulcahy 1984, pp. 72-73) of Shostakovich's opera as well as its explicit references to sexual arousal were condemned (Mulcahy 1984, pp. 72-73). In detail, they caused the official editorial of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *Pravda*, to publish anonymously an article entitled 'Muddle instead of Music' in 1936, two years after the first performance of the opera. According to the unknown author, in this operatic adaptation '[t]he singing on the stage is replaced by shrieks' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 205), 'a wilderness of musical chaos—in places becoming *cacophony*' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 205, emphasis mine) is its main feature, and '[t]he power of good music to infect the masses has been sacrificed to a petty-bourgeois, "formalist" attempt to create originality through cheap clowning' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, pp. 205-206).

Besides the repressive cultural climate of the Stalinist era, Shostakovich's version of Leskov's novella stands out as a prime example of how music seems to be a source of *Stimmungseinfühlung* and, specifically, of negative empathy. Considering the importance of music in operas, this may be inferred from the fact that in operatic adaptations of a literary text the orchestra substitutes the narrator (Hutcheon 2013, p. 75) because, instead of a narrating voice, the composer lets the music speak for itself. In this case, this replacement is rather significant because the dethatched narrator of Leskov who, in 'the objective narrative tone of a criminal report' (Wells 2001, p. 165), recounts the crimes of a non-redeemable, purely evil female and, thus, 'demonstrates little sympathy for (or even interest in) the heroine' (Emerson 1989, p. 67) is substituted by an orchestra which, instead, always sides with Katerina. This is a viable alternative because 'an orchestral 'narrator', freed from the constraints of the word (and of the event as well), need not be bound by justice, logic or ethics' (Emerson 1989, p. 70). Therefore, a form of 'musical justification' (Emerson 1989, p. 70) is possible and seems to originate from the fact that Shostakovich fashions for Katerina intensely poetic vocal lines which, to some extent, weaken her previous criminal charges, including murder, poisoning and adultery, and make her violent deeds pitiable and justifiable (Emerson 1989, p. 69). This may be

glimpsed, for instance, in the passacaglia between the fourth and the fifth act, where Shostakovich is able 'to render the heroine's acts of violence pathetic and defensible' (Emerson 1989, p. 69). In this way, Shostakovich and Preis 'transform her from a cold-blooded killer to a tragically betrayed heroine' (Wells 2001, p. 179). This stance has also been acknowledged by the *Pravda* article which reads that '[t]he author has tried, with all the musical and dramatic means at his command, to arouse the sympathy of the spectators for the coarse and vulgar leanings and behavior of the merchant woman, Katerina Ismailova' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 207). That is, Shostakovich portrays a character who deserves sympathy and, thus, who makes the members of the audience likely to feel contrasting emotions, between adhesion and detachment.

His treatment of Katerina seems to be affected both by the oppressive political and patriarchal context of pre-revolutionary Russia and by the sexual revolution of the 1920s. On the one hand, she appears to be a tragic heroine because, belittled and ill-treated by Russian middle-class society, she nearly seems to embody the wounded spirit of pre-revolutionary Russia itself (Wells 2001, p. 179) or rather, a suffering victim of this past (Emerson 1989, p. 76). On the other hand, she may be associated with a new version of the Soviet woman who, according to Kollontai, tries to attain freedom and liberty both in society and in love. Thus, in the stifling and suffocating atmosphere which this pre-revolutionary setting evokes, Shostakovich covers some societal issues, mainly related to the sexual revolution, that affected Russia from 1917 to 1936 when new assumptions about love, sex, gender roles as well as about women's emancipation from traditionally oppressive family households began to circulate in the Soviet Union (Wells 2001, pp. 176-177). These, in turn, have been reflected by the composer not only in the account of Katerina's attempt to break free from the oppressive chains of patriarchy or of her adulterous love affair with Sergei, but especially in recurring musical interludes which explicitly refer to the sexual intercourse.

Before exploring the mixture of tragedy and satire in the opera as a basic mechanism to evoke sympathy for the murderous protagonist through music, it is pertinent to justify how Katerina recalls not simply 'the brutish, callous, and disrespectful attitudes to women and sexuality, which corresponded to everyday life' (Wells 2001, p. 179), but also the revolutionary ideas and feminist stance of Alexandra Kollontai. She was the first woman to be an active member of the government in contemporary history when, following the

October Revolution, she was nominated the People's Commissar of public welfare (Wells 2001, p. 178). Notably, Katerina, in her passion as well as desire for freedom, seems to recall Kollontai's ideas about the new Soviet woman and the concept of the ''Winged Eros,' an enriching and enrapturing experience of emotional and physical eroticism' (Wells 2001, p. 178). According to Wells (2001, p. 180), the influence of Kollontai's ideology on Shostakovich's portrayal of Katerina may be inferred from the analogy which seems to exist between the new woman which is portrayed by Shostakovich and Kollontai's depiction of a new female figure, Theresa, who does not try neither to quench the flames of passion nor to hide her emotions by pretending to be a virtuous woman, but, instead, indulges in the love she has chosen and is somehow liberated by it (Wells 2001, p. 180). This is also suggested by a description of Katerina inserted in an essay by Shostakovich himself and which appeared with the first performance of the opera (Shostakovich, in Wells 2001, p. 180, emphasis mine):

> Ekaterina Lvovna is an outstanding, colorful person and her life is sad and drab. But a powerful love comes into her life, and it turns out that *a crime is worth committing for the sake of that passion*, since life has no meaning otherwise anyway.

Therefore, she seems to embody the model of a woman who, placing trust in the power of love to bring freedom, is eventually liberated by this form of affection. Following Kollontai's ideas, the Russian composer tends to differentiate the Wingless Eros of those who surround the heroine and, especially, of Sergei's passion, which is personified by both the powerful and almost lecherous timbre of the brass instrument and by the physical form of its tuning slide (which is completely extended when playing high-pitched notes), from Katerina's own passion (Wells 2001, p. 180). In detail, while 'Kollontai's utopian dream of sexual liberty' (Wells 2001, pp. 178-179) which, embodied in the concept of the Winged Eros, represents the highest achievement for women in terms of love and sexuality (Wells 2001, p. 178), its antithetical form, the Wingless Eros, is limited to a 'naked instinct of reproduction, coarse lust, quick pleasure, mere possession of someone's body' (Stites, in Wells 2001, p. 179). Anticipating the cantabile, melodious style peculiar to Katerina's singing, she fully expresses her sexual desire and, to some degree, preannounces her adulterous relationship in 'The Foal Runs After the Filly' (act 1, scene 3). In these lines, drawing some parallels with nature and accompanied by a rising melody towards a point of climax (which, in the climactic B-flat and the transient trombone trio, resembles that of the consummation scene) where she imagines to be

embraced by her lover, she denounces her loveless and sexless life (Wells 2001, p. 181). Actually, this soliloquy (Ex. 1) was immediately replaced with a more traditional aria (Ex. 2) whereby it seems that, more than physical pleasure, it is love-related liberation that stirs Katerina and that stimulates the sympathy of the audience (Wells 2001, pp. 188-189). The two versions, as cited in Wells, are reported as follows:

> (Katerina undresses)
>
> The foal runs after the filly,
> the tom-cat seeks the female,
> the dove hastens to his mate,
> but no one hurries to me.
> The wind caresses the birch tree
> and the sun warms it with his heat,
> for everyone there's a smile from somewhere,
> but no one will come to me,
> no one will put his hand round my waist,
> no one will press his lips to mine,
> and no one will stroke my white breast,
> no one will tire me out with his passionate
> embraces.
> The days go by in a joyless procession,
> my life will flash past without a smile.
> No one, no one will ever come to me.
>
> (Katerina undresses completely and lies down on the bed)
>
> Ex. 1 (Preis & Shostakovich, in Wells 2001, p. 182)

> (Katerina snuffs out the candle and sits down at the window),
>
> From the window, a while ago I saw
> that under the root there was a little nest:
> in it a dove and his mate were cooing
> and circled together in the spacious sky.
> Now I often look in on them,
> I often cry, cry out of envy—
> the happiness of the dove's mate is what I envy,
> always with someone I love not, always locked up.
> Oh, there is no liberty, no freedom.
> I cannot fly.
> Oh, I have no dove mate, beloved and dear
> I have no dear one.
> The days go by in a joyless procession
> my life will flash past without a smile.
> Alone, alone, forever alone. Why is that my fate?
>
> Ex. 2 (Preis & Shostakovich, in Wells 2001, p. 188)

However, despite its liberating power, the intensity of love is, according to Kollontai, likely to deplete both partners of their energies, especially a woman's ego (Wells 2001, p. 182). Consequently, the attempt of this desperate heroine to seek emancipation and, thus, to fulfil her dream of freedom does not result in her contentment, but rather in her ruin (Wells 2001, p. 182). In other words, acting like a Russian Don Juan, Sergei embodies the typical seducer, whose attentive cares mislead his lover. In Shostakovich, this stance is musically depicted when Sergei, trying to show understanding for Katerina by adopting a Slavish-like, lyrical music lines, serenades her and deceives her with seemingly tender attentions (Wells 2001, p. 183). In light of all this, even though the Lady performs some atrocious acts which are morally and ethically unacceptable, Shostakovich translates her being confined in a world of treacherous schemes and coarseness in music and thus provides listeners with a key to an understanding of what, as the above-mentioned lines suggest, lies behind her actions, namely a loveless, joyless, and dull existence where no one can be trusted, no one be loved.

Therefore, in opposition to the melodious lyricism of her vocal lines, Sergei gives voice to the Wingless Eros, which he represents, through ascending melodies as well as trombone solo lines. These, because of their explicit references to the motifs of sexual desire and sexual intercourse, have been described as 'pornophony' (Wells 2001, p. 164). As stated in *Pravda*, 'all this is *coarse*, *primitive*, and *vulgar*. The music *quacks*, *grunts*, and *growls*, and suffocates itself, in order to express the amatory scenes as naturalistically as possible. And "love" is smeared all over the opera in the most vulgar manner' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 206, emphasis mine). These traits may be glimpsed, for example, when Sergei, instead of responding to Katerina's descending melodic phrase with an equally low note as her closing B-flat, raises to a C-sharp (Ex. 3), which symbolizes sexual arousal (Wells 2001, pp. 170-171), or rather, announces foreplay, and is followed by the orchestral motif of sexual libido. The latter, which firstly appears in the scene of the gang-rape of the young cook Aksinya, recurs in the consummation scene and, together with Sergei's rising line and women's recurring pattern to dissuade men's desires, results in a realistic portrayal of the sexual intercourse as well as of violence (Wells 2001, p. 175).

Ex. 3 (Shostakovich, in Wells 2001, p. 172)

This pattern is reiterated shortly after when the female protagonist tries again to divert his high C-sharp, which may stand for Sergei's sexual desire (Wells 2001, p. 171), to a lower A and is, instead, followed by an even more explicit reference to his sexuality in the ascending movement of the solo trombone melody (Ex. 4). Thus, within this frame, the Lady's recurring offbeat melodies try in vain to deter her lover's arousal because his closing B-flat will eventually triumph over her A note (Wells 2001, p. 171). What is more, Shostakovich's decision to have a solo trombone is no coincidence because at that time this musical instrument was usually associated with jazz which, being a rhythmic type of music naturally accompanied by dance, a practice that in the 1920s was morally questionable, somehow symbolized depravity (Wells 2001, p. 172). This feature is also condemned by the editorial published in *Pravda* where the anonymous author comments that Shostakovich 'was forced to borrow from jazz its nervous, convulsive, and spasmodic music in order to lend "passion" to his characters' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 206).

Ex. 4 (Shostakovich, in Wells 2001, p. 174)

Given that Katerina's lyricism contrasts starkly with the coarseness and vulgarity of those that surround her, Shostakovich seems to have magnified and ennobled her figure by favoring, as anticipated, some musical patterns. In detail, lyricism and melodious lines are her prerogative throughout the opera because '[h]er criminal acts are real, but responsibility for them is not allowed to distort the lyrical purity of her line – so her inner life, like that of Leskov's Katerina (but quite *unlike* that of their Shakespearean prototype), does not register change' (Emerson 1989, p. 78). In line with this, the opera opens with a lyrical soliloquy where the female protagonist introduces the suffocating domestic environment of the Izmailova house in which she is confined and, thus, establishes from the very beginning the overall atmosphere of melancholy and aloneness which add psychological complexity to her character (Preis & Shostakovich 1983, p. 1, emphasis mine):

> Ah, why can't I sleep,
> I'll try once more.
> (*She tries to go to sleep.*)
> No, it's no use.
> No wonder —
> I slept all night —
> got up, had some breakfast with my husband,
> and then came back to bed!
> There's really nothing else to do here —
> Oh God it's all so *boring*!

> Ah, when I was single,
> even though we were poor,
> then at least I was free.
> But not now—
> this *boredom* makes one feel like *suicide*.
> I'm a merchant's wife; my husband is the
> well known wealthy merchant Zinovy Borisovich Ismalov.
> Ev'ry tiny ant has its task to do,
> the cows in the barn give us milk.
> At the mill the men fill the flour sacks.
> I alone have no work to do,
> only for me is life so *tedious*,
> only for me does morning bring *no joy* —
> the merchant's wife!

The stark contrast between her real nature, which she tries to let emerge by breaking the oppressive cage in which she is 'cooped up […] like a canary in a cage' (Leskov 1987, p. 97), and the monotonous life and suffocating patriarchal household in which she is forced to live is, as anticipated, rendered in music. In detail, unlike the protagonist's recognizable lyrical lines, the other characters are caricatured in the opera (Wells 2001, p. 180) through their words, which are consistent with their actions, and their vocal lines, which are primarily associated with dissonant or grotesque musical intervals. Hence, whenever lyrical and melodic lines, which are the main distinguishing trait of Katerina, are attributed to the other characters, the orchestra emphasizes, being on Katerina's side, how they sound unauthentic and false (Emerson 1989, p. 69). This is conveyed, for example, in act 1, scene 1 when Boris Timofyeyevich Ismailov is exceptionally granted a few melodious lines to convey his profound sorrow over the lack of an heir. Similarly, in the following act the bass voice opens the first scene with a lyrical aria, 'That's what old age does —/ stops you sleeping' (Preis & Shostakovich 1983, p. 14), which, being a feeble imitation of the opera's opening lines where the heroine's introspective lyricism expresses her loneliness and insomnia, soon falls into a sexual reverie associated with his young daughter-in-law and, thus, uncovers the falsity of his words and his basic lechery (Emerson 2011, p. 354). Likewise, Sergei deploys 'his lyricism as a mask, a seduction strategy pure and simple' (Emerson 2011, p. 354), especially when, in act 1, scene 3, he enters Katerina's room under the pretext of borrowing a book from her singing some fleeting lyrical moments which in opposition to his lover's emotionally charged lines, only anticipate their union. Thus, surrounded by 'one-dimensional, either trivial or evil' (Emerson 1989, p. 69) characters, such her stern father-in-law or the buffoons of the

police (Emerson 1989, p. 72), the figure of Katerina seems to be 'some kind of "victim" of bourgeois society' (*Pravda*, in Seroff 1943, p. 206), or rather 'a martyr' (Bellmunt-Serrano 2019, p. 24), more than simply a sinner.

Given that this form of emotional expression is only her prerogative, she is gradually isolated from debased, caricatured characters until whatever is satirical and debased is eliminated and all that remains is tragedy (Emerson 2011, p. 357). Thus, unable to tolerate the stifling reality of her life any longer, she eventually commits suicide because, after that anything has been tried, there is anything left but die. In her final arioso she fully expresses her feeling of guilt and announces her imminent suicide, which, according to Emerson (1989, p. 64) emerges, not as an act of vengeance, but as a manifestation of contrition or repentance (Preis & Shostakovich 1983, p. 48):

> I know a lake in the forest, far, far away;
> the lake's almost round, and it's deep, very deep,
> and its waters are grim and black, grim and black —
> like my conscience.

In these lines, Shostakovich attributes to Katerina a feeling of remorse and of self-reproach which does not feature in the purely evil protagonist of the novella by Leskov. Notably, her soprano voice, by drawing a parallel between the black, deep, murky water of an imagined lake and her black conscience, sings a final aria which appears to be the solo piece where the singer can freely express her inmost thoughts and feelings of guilt. In other words, these lines may be interpreted as a final moment of repentance, unmatched in Leskov's novella, which reveals, besides her darker, socially unacceptable side, her carefully concealed human dimension and repentant soul.

The sympathy she bestows is enhanced and, to some extent, preannounced by the removal of perhaps the worst cruelty she is responsible for throughout the Russian novella: namely, the murder of little Fyodor Zakharov Lyamin, a young nephew and co-heir of Boris Timofeich Izmailov's estate. In Leskov this murder is particularly repulsive because, following the Shakespearean opposing imagery of motherhood and infanticide, a pregnant Katerina smothers a child by covering his face with a pillow while the convalescent is lying in bed reading the *Lives of the Holy Fathers*. Shostakovich probably decided to cut this grisly scene because, especially in live performance where the killing of the child should be performed onstage and, thus, directly in front of the audience, it

may be too impressive. Hence, act III substitutes the murder scene with ‘a sequence of three comically grotesque scenes’ (Emerson 1989, p. 63) created *ad hoc* by the composer, that of a wretched, inebriated peasant who, while rummaging around in the cellar for some vodka, comes across Zinovy Borisovich’s corpse; that of a police officer who, in his buffoonery, harasses a nihilist with repeated questions about the existence and immortality of the tiny souls of frogs until the drunken peasant alerts the officers to the presence of a corpse in the cellar of the Izmailov’s; and finally that of drunk wedding guests making a toast to the newlyweds just before the arrival of the policemen to arrest them (Emerson 1989, p. 63). This is a more significant example of the fact that the Russian composer opted for a hybrid genre and, thus, for a blend of tragedy, whose components are largely embodied in Katerina, and satire, in the figures of the buffoons, weaklings, libertines, fobs, and ruffians which surround the heroine (Emerson 2011, p. 346). In Emerson’s words (2011, p. 346), ‘satire dominates the outer context of the opera, tragedy the inner landscape of the title role’. This strategy, according to which this is a ‘tragic-satirical opera’ (2011, p. 346), emphasizes Shostakovich’s sympathetic gaze on the heroine because, recalling an essay that he wrote in 1993 about this opera, the composer, unlike Leskov’s portrayal of Katerina as evil, represents Katerina as a woman who, despite her crimes, has a loving heart and is psychologically complex (Emerson 2011, pp. 346-347). Or rather, instead of the emotionless account of Leskov’s objective narrator, Shostakovich’s operatic adaptation favors the emergence of the heroine’s interiority which is, in fact, the basic component of opera arias (Emerson 2011, p. 347). This stance, or rather, this ‘lyrical purification’ (Emerson 2011, p. 347) may have been influenced by Evgeny Zamyatin’s 1923 tale ‘Rus’, his version of Leskov’s 1985 novella because, ten years before Shostakovich’s adaptation, he restored the interiority of the orphaned heroine, Marfa Ivanovna, which has been completely erased by Leskov’s objective crime story (Emerson 2011, pp. 352-353). In detail, through its Neorealism and its lyrical stylization, Zamyatin’s variation and especially its allusions to the trapped heroine’s sentiments probably had an impact on Shostakovich’s revision (Emerson 2011, p. 352). Nevertheless, as Emerson (2011, p. 353) stresses, Zamyatin’s contribution to Shostakovich’s interpretation of Leskov’s novella does not extend to the whole opera, but it is simply limited to the female protagonist because in his portrayal of an innocent, timid youth who cannot but express herself in her communion with nature he gave the composer ‘a chance to cleanse his Katerina morally, to justify her’ (Emerson 2011, p. 353) and, thus,

to provide her with psychological intensity and basic human traits (Emerson 2011, p. 354).

To conclude, the effect that this sinful heroine and the juxtaposition of tragedy with satire may have on the empathizing audience is ambiguous, and two-sided. This inharmonious combination is reminiscent of the distinction, suggested by Esti Sheinberg, between two forms of the grotesque, namely, the negative and the affirmative or utopian type which coexist in this opera (Emerson 2011, p. 355). This dichotomy is recognized by Sheinberg because, as quoted in Emerson (2011, p. 355), she feels that in the rhythmic ostinato of Katerina's vocal lines a 'mixture of compassion, repulsion, mockery, and admiration' (Sheinberg, in Emerson 2011, p. 355) emerges and that the latter's juxtaposition with her multiple murders may result in a form of 'chilling macabre grotesquerie' (Sheinberg, in Emerson 2011, p. 355). However, given that the emotional heroine is completely insulated from the debased world of the Russian mercantile class and, thus, is deprived of an interlocutor, be it an on-stage character or a supreme being, it seems that an even more radical form of the grotesque, which may be denominated '"confessional grotesque"' (Emerson 2011, p. 360), prevails (Emerson 2011, pp. 359-360). In light of this, it seems that Shostakovich designed this mixture, in musical terms, of tragedy and satire to confer Katerina a profound psychological complexity whereby her cruelty may be read not as an inherently evil feature of hers, but rather as a consequence of her loneliness and desire for freedom. In other words, though this blending he managed to catch that very tension which is at the basis of negative empathy.

3.3.3 VERDI'S *MACBETH*: FRAGMENTED MELODIES AND THE TENSION BETWEEN WORDS AND MUSIC

Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth*, firstly performed in 1847, was a major turning point in the history of Shakespeare reception, both in theatre and cinema, because it is considered the first operatic adaptation which is entirely based on the Shakespearean tragedy as well as the cornerstone of Verdi's early production (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 150). Therefore, this opera may be deemed a landmark of his career, both as a composer and as a playwright, and of the expressive and disruptive power of his music (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 150). Moreover, an analysis of this opera is pertinent to this thesis since negative characters are key in the typical structure of melodrama and, depending on the degree of

empathy that the text may elicit, their variety is broad (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 142). This feature is detectable in the operas by Giuseppe Verdi where the composer favors dark, low voices, such as baritone and bass, and focuses on the theme of paternity and on the role of an evil type of antagonist whereby manifold facets of negative empathy emerge, from its most latent or unconscious manifestation to its most profound one (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 142-143). The latter is exemplified by *Macbeth* where villains, in a state of overwhelming emotional and moral turmoil, are not purely evil but also nuanced, contradictory, and human (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 143). This psychological depth is achieved because, even though in most cases villains play the role of the antagonist (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 140), the murderous Macbeth and his manipulative Lady play the leading role in the opera, as in the tragedy. Therefore, Verdi, together with the librettist Francesco Maria Piave, explores the subversive power of art, the limits of melodrama, and represents in a very powerful way the ambivalent empathic arousal which an evil character may elicit in the spectators.

Firstly, Verdi accords Lady Macbeth a voice because, while in the Shakespearean tragedy the Lady is not as psychologically complex as Macbeth is, the Italian composer brought her uncanny femininity to the forefront. Like Shostakovich, Verdi achieved this by means of some adjustments to the intertext and especially by means of a masterful construction of both vocal melodies and orchestral accompaniment. In detail, the role of the Lady, as the primary offender, is expanded through some cuts, including the reduction of the roles of King Duncan and Macduff to, respectively, ‘a mute role’ (Bernstein 2002, p. 35) and ‘a *tenore comprimario*’ (Bernstein 2002, p. 35) and the elimination of the character of Lady Macduff, Lady Macbeth’s positive counterpart (Bernstein 2002, p. 35). The lack of a fatherly man, of a masculine villain, and of a *primo tenore* deviates from typical early nineteenth-century conventions of opera because, instead of portraying the *prima donna* in a passive role and male characters in a leading one (Bernstein 2002, p. 35), the figure of Lady Macbeth is intensified. Thus, Verdi seems to rework not only the ‘original’ play, but also the traditional features of opera because he ‘reinterpreted them to fit an *androgynous* reading of the soprano role’ (Bernstein 2002, p. 35, emphasis mine) and, therefore, to depict the liminality of the Shakespearean archetype, between the female and the male, the demonic and the human.

On the one hand, in the Shakespearean intertext, the experience of negative empathy intersects with, for example, dreams, hallucinations, supernatural elements, and the state of unconsciousness during sleep, which seem to be factors which, in their association with evil forces and nightmares, can activate a perturbing form of empathy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 148) for both the titular character and his female counterpart. With respect to the witchlike and evil dimension of the Lady, it seems pertinent to at least mention how, unlike in Shakespeare, in the Verdian opera the possible association between Lady Macbeth and the powers of darkness, namely the witches, 'remains hidden in the haziness of the unspoken' (Clausen 2005, p. 91). This is investigated by Clausen (2005, pp. 90-91) who suggests how, instead of resorting to semantic elements, Verdi exploits rhythm, specifically the one created by a combination of *versi sdruccioli*, to hint at this correlation (Clausen 2005, p. 91). Notably, the kind of *cadenza*, that of a proparoxytonic line, which he deploys in the chorus of the witches 'had been associated with oracles, the dead, revenants, the underworld, demons, furies etc since the 17th century' (Clausen 2005, p. 82). Moreover, in his attempt to 'adopt a sublime diction, except in the witches' choruses, which must be vulgar, yet bizarre and original [triviali, ma stravaganti e originali]' (Rosen & Porter, in Albright 2005, p. 232), the composer opted for 'disgustingly normal-sounding music' (Albright 2005, p. 235). Thus, in his intuition on the insidiousness and creepiness of the familiar, which Freud would later define *das Unheilmiche* or, in English, the uncanny, he is able to disclose their deceptiveness in their seemingly normal appearance (Albright 2005, p. 235). These musical and rhythmic patterns feature, for instance, in act-two '*La luce Langue*' where Lady Macbeth's lyrical lines anticipate the sequence of *versi sdruccioli* of the witches' chorus in act three and, moreover, resume the rhythmic figures of the overture (Clausen 2005, p. 91) where, together with 'grace notes, appoggiature, staccati, slides, prominent minor seconds' (Clausen 2005, p. 82), the 'alternation between anapaestic figures with inverted accent (hence instrumental equivalents to the *sdrùcciolo*'s characteristic rhythmic ending)' (Clausen 2005, p. 82) elicit a supernatural, weird, unnatural, grotesque atmosphere, which may be associated with witchcraft.

On the other hand, the emotional attunement to the Lady, whose liminality takes the form of an androgynous fiend, is elicited only in the sleepwalking scene provided that, unlike with Macbeth, her vulnerability fully emerges in her final delirium (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 149). Even though it cannot be stated with certainty whether he was

acquainted or not with the compelling performance of Mrs. Siddons, Verdi's interpretation of this scene and of the Lady's humanity may have been influenced by the predominant execution of that period (Bernstein 2002, p. 35). Notably, given the resonance of Mrs. Siddon's rendering of the Lady's sleepwalking, her exemplary interpretation has remained a precedent throughout the nineteenth century in England, Europe, and America (Bernstein 2002, pp. 34-35) and, thus, may also have affected the operatic version by Verdi. There are some traces of this scattered in the opera, for example in act 4, scene 4 the stage directions inform us that, following Siddons's changes to the scene, Lady Macbeth sets down the light she was holding in order to rub her hands, or rather, to cleanse them of her guilt. Alternatively, this influence may also be inferred from the fact that the so-called 'Siddons of Modern Italy' (Bernstein 2002, p. 34) was an eighteenth-century Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori, whose brilliant performance and incorporation of some shrewdness, deceitfulness, and intensity magnified the role of the Lady to the detriment of a subdued Macbeth (Bernstein 2002, p. 34). Verdi himself praised her valuable interpretation, including her gaze, her movements, and her gait, and was inspired by it to outline the stage directions of the sleepwalking scene (Bernstein 2002, pp. 37-38). Additionally, the interpretation of Ristori where the human dimension of the Lady prevails may be described in cultural and historical terms because, unlike 'the Hannah Pritchard-tradition of portraying Lady Macbeth as a terrible, fiendish, larger-than-life monster' (Clausen 2005, p. 92), since the 1830s Lady Macbeth's womanhood, frailty, delicacy, and femininity has been brought to the forefront (Clausen 2005, pp. 92-93), as this excerpt clearly shows (Clausen 2005, p. 105):

> this particular revision participates in a larger cultural process, of European dimensions, by which the Pritchardian ferocious vulture was gradually, though with some fits and starts, superseded by the womanly woman, whose moral scruples and female tenderness show through the undaunted mettle she so desperately tries to construct.

However, in order to depict her desperation, hopelessness, and feeling of guilt in her final delirium, Verdi does not conform to the traditional representation of madness of early nineteenth-century operas, but he seems, instead, to depart from some *primo ottocento* conventions. For instance, the Italian composer opted for 'a melody devoid of lyricism or coloratura' (Bernstein 2002, p. 38) instead of the technically challenging, superb, *virtuoso* passages which, reminiscent of the virtuosity of orchestral music, traditionally featured in mad scenes in early nineteenth-century operas (Clausen 2005, p. 129). Moreover, insanity and madness usually manifest themselves in hysterical

dissociative symptoms, such as blindness, sleep disorders and hallucinations, which are rendered in music through specific 'hallucinatory or quasi-hallucinatory musico-dramatic devices' (Clausen 2005, p. 132). These are mainly inserted in those recitative parts, namely *scena* and *tempo di mezzo*, where there is a more flexible structure and, thus, the possibility for sudden variations in tempo, key, or style, to name but a few (Clausen 2005, p. 132). Notably, Clausen (2005, p. 132) comments on the fact that, while recitative is appropriate to convey a state of inconsistency and disjointedness deriving from madness, the regular patterns of the solo piece of aria are more suitable for the depiction of sanity or, alternatively, of a deeper descent into insanity because of the incongruous juxtaposition of regularity and coherence in music and the representation of madness on the scene. In line with this, recitative does not feature in the one of the most prominent scenes of the Verdian opera, the *Gran Scena del Sonnambulismo*, where, echoing Shakespeare's decision to turn to prose to express the wandering thoughts and delusions of a deranged mind, the Italian composer could have deployed recitative because, as previously, its looser musical and fragmented structure may serve as a means of expressing Lady Macbeth's agitation, turmoil, and restlessness (Clausen 2005, p. 135). Conversely, Verdi seems to favor the symmetry and regularity of vocal arias because he resorts to the usage of *ottonari*[12], the most commonly used metre in nineteenth-century opera libretto (Clausen 2005, p. 135), within a well-structured rhyme scheme where '[m]usical rests and textual pauses coincide; rhymes are clearly audible; notable changes in the orchestral texture mark the beginning of each stanza; melodic climaxes, their sequence also arranged climatically, followed by cadential closure mark their ends' (Clausen 2005, p. 136). Moreover, given that two intrinsic characteristics of *primo ottocento* conventional mad scenes, melismatic style and virtuoso-like coloratura, are not included in Verdi's variation of the sleepwalking scene, the latter seems to be 'an anti-aria, indeed an anti-mad-scene' (Albright 2005, p. 246).

Despite the different views on the prevalence of 'musical regularity or musical transgressiveness' (Clausen 2005, p. 138), the tension between the two, instead of being an indication of inadequacy or inexperience from a musical standpoint, is a significant

[12] Andrea Maffei contributed to the libretto through his Italian translation where, like in the Verdian version, a lengthy stanza composed of 'three double quatrains in *ottonario* metre' (Bernstein 2002, p. 38) substitutes Shakespeare's prose in the sleepwalking scene and, moreover, the lines of both the doctor and the chambermaid are significantly reduced in order to follow that very same metrical pattern (Clausen 2005, p. 135).

element from a dramatical perspective and, as such, it gives this scene its intensity (Clausen 2005, p. 138). Therefore, as the notion of negative empathy implies an inner tension between two contrasting dimensions, Verdi depicts the duality of Lady Macbeth through the insertion of non-traditional musical figures and motifs into an orderly structured musical and metrical form (Clausen 2005, p. 138) and, in this way, stimulates contrasting responses in the audience. Notably, the lack of a conventional structure and the interplay between two opposing musical styles entail that the smoothness and purity of the quintessential operatic singing, *bel canto*, is sacrificed in favor of constant, erratic transitions between different vocal registers, which, as indicated by Verdi himself in the score, oscillate between vocalizing *sotto voce* and *a voce spiegata* (Ercolino and Fusillo 2022, p. 151). In this respect, it is worth mentioning how Lady Macbeth is, as Verdi states in a letter to Salvatore Cammarano, meant 'not to sing' (Verdi, in Bernstein 2002, p. 39) but rather to 'have a harsh, stifled, and hollow voice' (Verdi, in Bernstein 2002, p. 39) in order to effectively convey the feeling of deep misery of a woman who, overwhelmed by guilt, is on the brink of death. Hence, the 'almost musicless state' (Albright 2005, p. 248) into which the Lady plunges 'illustrates the erasing of Lady's mind, its blanching into a state of silent candour' (Albright 2005, p. 248) and its combination with slow, measured gestures replaces the sensation of terror which prevails throughout the first acts of the opera with pity (Albright 2005, p. 247). Consequently, it emphasizes the dual nature of Lady Macbeth, as both terrifying villain and frail woman, which informs our emotional response.

More generally, this dense interweaving of speech-like and more melodic passages does not only feature in *Macbeth* but also in his last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, and seems to be the element which ultimately allows spectators to enter the mind of the characters and to empathize with them (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 150-151). For instance, Macbeth's inner turmoil and moral concerns emerge, since the very beginning, in the arias he sings, provided that the flow of these melodies is constantly interrupted or suspended in order to record his conflicting thoughts about the murder. Accordingly, it is this fragmentation and interplay between words and music, whereby the latter emphasizes what Verdi calls '*parola scenica*' (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 151), which gives listeners access to the mind of the character and, in this manner, make them feel empathy (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 150-151). Moreover, in addition to encompassing the main facets of the moral and psychological dilemma of Macbeth (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 154), the

above-mentioned Verdian concept is closely related to the process of simplification, or rather, of pruning of the dramatic text, which is not limited to Macbeth's soliloquies but, as it will be further analyzed, also concerns his female counterpart because the Italian composer intends to construct with few, but eloquent words the dramatic action (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 151-152). In this, unlike the way in which Verdi indulges in Macbeth's tormented mind through certain musical patterns, the composer seems to adjust the Shakespearean text to minimize the poignancy and to emphasize the ruthlessness and indifference of this fiendish Lady through significant word choice (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, pp. 155-156). For instance, in scene 13 of the first act, echoing the parallel between Lady Macbeth and the tradition of lecturing wives, the Italian composer stresses her attitude of utter indifference to the distress of her husband by adding some manipulative, practical, and sarcastic remarks (Piave 2014, Section 140):

> But tell me, did you not hear another voice?
> You are bold, Macbeth, but have no daring.
> You hesitate halfway, Glamis, and stop.
> Cawdor, you are a conceited child.

Musically, the power of Macbeth's female, fiendish counterpart is articulated, mainly in the first part of the opera, through some musical contrasts. In the above-mentioned example, this is conveyed through the opposition between the voice of a terrified and petrified Macbeth, with whom we easily empathize, and the vocal lines of a domineering Lady who resumes the melody of Macbeth's lines in a major key and is accompanied by a cello, a clarinet, and the vibrations of the *pizzicato* (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 157). The impression that these musical contrasts may have on listeners resembles, to some extent, the one silently evoked by the illustration *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812) by Henry Fuseli (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 (Fuseli, 1812)

In this oil painting Fuseli immortalizes ‘an episode of heightened psychological tension’ (Benton & Butcher 1998, p. 58) where the relationship between a weak husband and an undaunted wife is clearly expressed. This may have been influenced by either Sarah Siddons’s or David Garrick and Hannah Pritchard’s rendering, which has already inspired a watercolor sketch of this very scene (Benton & Butcher 1998, pp. 58-59). However, the realistic details, in terms of garments and setting, of his first drawing are replaced in the 1812 version by light effects whereby ‘the curtain to the right is reduced to a dark shape tied back; the door jambs to the left function more as a psychological cage pressing in claustrophobically on Macbeth than as an actual door frame’ (Benton & Butcher 1998, p. 59). Pointing the bloody daggers toward his body, which is reduced to a thin skeleton or ‘a hollow shell of a man’ (Benton & Butcher 1998, p. 60), Macbeth discloses his feeling of remorse and his haunting memories of the murder. Moreover, the only touches of red, which recreate bloodstains both on Macbeth’s torse and on the daggers, hint at the depth of his moral depravity and its irreversible effects on his soul (Benton & Butcher 1998, p. 60) to the extent that he appears to be trapped in a hellish nightmare. Conversely, the muscular tension of Lady Macbeth’s body as well as the sudden movement of her index to silence Macbeth suggest the manipulative powers and influence that she has over her frightened husband. Thus, this painting displays, like in Verdi, the psychological dilemma which is at the basis of *Macbeth* (Benton & Butcher 1998, p. 61) and evokes an intense sensation of fear, helplessness, claustrophobia, oppression, and terror with which we easily empathize.

Moreover, given the intensification of her demonic and evil nature in the reworking by Verdi, her hysterical fit and her sudden disintegration are even more unexpected because they are in stark contrast to her display of nerve and self-control. Notably, in an attempt to amplify her negative role, in the Verdian opera the Lady is not only an accessory to the murder of King Duncan, but also to the massacre of Macduff's family and to let no one, including Fleance, stand in the way of their success. This change is rather significant also because Lady Macbeth's evil machinations to murder Macduff's children contrast with an understanding of her ruthlessness in terms of past traumas and their impact on her psychology. Specifically, the alleged loss of a child as well as the desire of an heir as possible motivations for her vengefulness cannot be applied to the revised operatic version of the tragedy (Clausen 2005, p. 107) because they may, instead, actualize and replace the fantasy of infanticide which she creates in act 1, scene 7 of the tragedy. Thus, while in Shakespeare the Lady returns on stage in a crazy state after a protracted absence, Verdi intensifies 'her impressive display of control, power, and fearlessness' (Clausen 2005, p. 161) by, on the one hand, replacing those few traces of her basic humanity and vulnerability, including her fainting fit following Duncan's murder and her inability to commit regicide herself because of a resemblance between the King and her father (Clausen 2005, pp. 106-107), and, on the other hand, by magnifying her participation both in Macbeth's treacherous scheme against Macduff and in the banquet. Notably, at the end of the second act it is the *prima donna*, rather than a group of males, to propose a toast to the new King and Queen of Scotland not in a melodious, *cantabile* style, but in *recitative*, an imitation of natural, ordinary speech (Bernstein 2002, pp. 35-36). Moreover, her line 'Or riconosco il tuo coraggio antico' (Piave 2014, Section 341) leads the Macbeths to sing a vibrant duet where their voices express their shared desire for both power and revenge (Piave 2014, Section 343):

> Hour of death and vengeance,
> thunder resound throughout the entire world,
> bewildering, like the dark intention
> that has shaken our hearts to their depths.
>
> Fate's remorseless decree; that this business will
> end with crime since it was begun with blood.
> Vengeance!

However, the intensification of her fiendish nature is accompanied by the gradual emergence of her vulnerability and humanity. These contrasting traits may be glimpsed in the act-2 aria for soprano, *La luce langue*, which Verdi composed for the 1865 edition of the opera. In detail, even though its main themes, including an almost erotic lust for the sceptre (Clausen 2005, p. 107), for power, relentless ambition, and 'voluttà del soglio' (Piave 2014, Section 194) which are emphasized in the final part of the aria, hint at the dominance of the Lady (Ex. 5), there is a touch of humanity and a moment of hesitation in the first part of the song (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 158). In the latter, 'a more subdued scoring' (Clausen 2005, p. 104) is introduced (Ex. 6), 'Lady Macbeth's vocal range is lowered, and her melodic lines, marked *legato e cupo*, acquire a more incantatory quality' (Clausen 2005, p. 104). This leads Lady Macbeth to contemplate the possibility of a new offence a cappella and *parlando* and to repeat it again *più piano* (Clausen 2005, pp. 104-105). Thus, unlike her initial control of both music and emotions, she begins to waver and to hesitate (Clausen 2005, p. 105) and, in other words, she anticipates her final disintegration. In addition, as previously, the rendering of her humanity and psychological complexity that Verdi offers may also be the legacy of the interpretation of the role by Adelaide Ristori. Nevertheless, as in Shakespeare, the psychological complexity and human dimension of the Lady explodes only when, in the sleepwalking scene, she appears for the last time and, racked by a feeling of guilt and remorse, is no longer the ruthless, remorseless fiend of the first acts.

Ex. 5 (Verdi, in Clausen 2005, p. 102)

Ex. 6 (Verdi, in Clausen 2005, p. 104)

Shortly after the above-mentioned duet, where the Lady's determination is clearly stated, her change is sudden, almost unbelievable (Clausen 2005, p. 161) because she reappears in the sleepwalking scene where she is unexpectedly unable to cope with her feeling of guilt. Therefore, her character acquires an even more disturbing creepiness (Ercolino & Fusillo 2022, p. 159). As anticipated, this is conveyed not merely in the lyrics, but especially in music through a marked contrast between the elaborate, intense musical passages in the first acts and the almost non-existent coloratura in the sleepwalking scene (Clausen 2005, pp. 161-162). In other terms, in this delusional episode prevails an aura of quietness and of almost musicless harmony which, in opposition to the typical early

nineteenth-century representation of madness on stage and to the gendered association between coloratura and women, whose bodies were considered to be more liable to mental disorders, enables Verdi to effectively convey the inner turmoil of her deranged mind and of a woman who, even in her hysterical fit when a glimpse of her femininity eventually transpires, is not completely deprived of that manliness she has aspired to (Clausen 2005, p. 162). Therefore, retracing the main intertext, in the Lady's final hallucinated state Verdi divests her of the ruthless ambition and musical intensity that has marked her role up to that moment and sentences her to 'a state of gesturelessness, paralysis, aphasia' (Albright 2005, p. 248) to the extent that in singing, for example, 'Who would have thought that there would be so much blood in that old man?' (Piave 2014, Section 382) she seems to be absent, or rather, 'disconnected from the accompaniment, disconnected from normal patterns of melodic development' (Albright 2005, p. 251). In line with this, her silence, the main sign of nineteenth-century condition of hysteria (Bernstein 2002, p. 36), echoes her mental and physical breakdown (Albright 2005, p. 250).

To conclude, the composer's meticulous attention to detail to create a contrast between the dual nature of the Lady and, thus, to elicit a feeling of negative empathy in the audience 'bespeaks the general fascination of Verdian opera with the musical intensification of extreme states of mind and its growing fascination with representations of interiority' (Clausen 2005, p. 107). Therefore, spectators are likely to experience contrasting emotions and, consequently, to 'leave the theatre bewitched, bothered and bewildered by the sight of a possessed prima donna and the sounds of her uncanny narrative' (Bernstein 2002, p. 46).

CONCLUSION

Starting with an analysis of the evolution of the notion of empathy and its limits, this study has attempted a gradual exploration of the aesthetic experience of negative empathy with the aim of investigating the alluring power of evil in artworks. In detail, it has illustrated the coexistence of feelings of attraction and repulsion for Lady Macbeth, a classic archetype of this category, by looking at both Shakespeare's tragedy and some remarkable later reworkings where the figure of the Lady is central. For this purpose, the first chapter has provided a brief overview of the development of the notion of empathy over time and has described the major features of negative empathy in order to clarify how fictionality itself is a key component of this experience. Then, the second chapter has focused on the complexity of Shakespeare's lines, syntactical constructions, visual imagery, characters' creation, and the motif of false appearance to convey Lady Macbeth's contrasting features, from her cruelty to her femininity and humanity. In the third and last chapter, instead, this analysis has adopted an intermedial and cross-cultural perspective since many are the traces of Lady Macbeth's disturbing allure in later adaptations and appropriations of *Macbeth*. As outlined, depending on the medium, the mechanisms and techniques which seem to stimulate this aesthetic experience in the audience are manifold and, therefore, the case studies covered have be analyzed separately to verify the functioning of these methods in different media. As it has been examined in the third chapter, Kurzel's *Macbeth*, Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and Verdi's *Macbeth* are noticeable instances of this aesthetic experience and the mechanisms which, in movies and musical compositions, tend to enhance the emergence of Lady Macbeth's humanity which, in turn, allows spectators to identify with this seemingly remorseless wicked woman.

Notably, this thesis has focused on those cinematic tools, mainly colors, lines, and soundscape, and those musical patterns, such as changes in key, rhythm, styles, tempo markings, which enable, respectively, film directors or screenwriters and composers to construct an overall atmosphere with which viewers may empathize. In other words, it has explored the ways in which our interpretation of a piece of fiction is likely to be heavily influenced by the aural and visual components of films, stage plays, or operas

precisely because of the capacity of color palettes and musical scores to portray emotions and to elicit strong emotional reactions in spectators and listeners. Therefore, it has also been verified how, as Theodor Lipps postulated for the first time in *Leitfaden der Psychologie*, empathy may be felt not only for fictional characters, but also for aesthetic objects in general and for the overall mood that they construct. In line with this, when a significant mood is evoked by a certain aesthetic construct, a form of *Stimmungseinfühlung* may be experienced and, if this aura tells us something about, for example, a villain's past, life, or current situation, the audience may feel empathy for that fictional character as well. This is the case of the movies and operas considered in this study because, as it has been indicated, it is not merely the way in which the character of Lady Macbeth has been created and transposed, but especially the overall atmosphere of these reworkings that stimulates character identification and mutual feelings.

As regards the disturbing allure of Lady Macbeth, it should be noted that, except for the most remarkable and acclaimed theatrical interpretations of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose critical reflections and receptions are partially collected in *The Masks of Macbeth* by Marvin Rosenberg, few are the published traces of readers' and viewers' emotional responses to more recent adaptations and appropriations of this female archetype. In light of this, it would be interesting to dedicate a study to a collection of significant reviews and critical interpretations which may serve as a useful means to evaluate and verify the impact of the above-discussed techniques on specific groups of people or, on the basis of what has been hypothesized by Rosenwein, on different 'emotional communities.' In other words, the acknowledgement of the relevance of certain mechanisms which, albeit differently, in films, theatrical performances, novellas, and operas may stimulate the experience of negative empathy would also awaken an interest in an analysis of how different cultural, political, historical backgrounds influence the effects of these techniques on the audience's empathic response. Likewise, a detailed account of the experience of collective empathy, which may be triggered by specific features peculiar to stage performance and cinema, would provide some noticeable comments on and insights into the capacity of a villain, like Lady Macbeth, to conquer or bewitch the audience so that they are in between distancing from her fiendish nature and getting closer to her human, feminine side.

Bibliography

Albright, D. (2005) 'The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's *Macbeth'*, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 225-252 [Online]. DOI: 10.1017/S0954586706002059.

Andreychik, M. R., Migliaccio, N. (2015) 'Empathizing With Others' Pain Versus Empathizing With Others' Joy: Examining the Separability of Positive and Negative Empathy and Their Relation to Different Types of Social Behaviors and Social Emotions', *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 37, no. 5, pp. 274-291 [Online]. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2015.1071256 (Accessed 23 May 2022).

Asp, C. (1981) '"Be Bloody, Bold and Resolute": Tragic Action and Sexual Stereotyping in "Macbeth"', *Studies in Philology*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 153-169 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/4174071 (Accessed 13 September 2020).

Bataille, G. (1958). '*La littérature et le mal*'. Interviewed by Pierre Dumayet, *Lectures pour touts*, Office national de radiodifusion télévision française, 21 May, available at https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/i00016133/georges-bataille-a-propos-de-son-livre-la-litterature-et-le-mal (Accessed 29 May 2023).

Batson, C. D. (1987) 'Prosocial Motivation: Is it Ever Truly Altruistic?', in Berkowitz, L. (ed) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, San Diego, Academic Press, vol. 20, pp. 65-122.

Batson, C. D. (2010) 'Empathy-Induced Altruistic Motivation', Mikulincer, M. and Shaver, P. R. (eds) *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior: The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Washington, DC, American Psychological Association, pp. 15-34.

Bellmunt-Serrano, M. (2019) 'Leskov's rewriting of Lady Macbeth and the processes of adaptation and appropriation', *Sederi*, vol. 29, pp. 11-33 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.34136/sederi.2019.1.

Benjamin, W. (1963) 'The Story-Teller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov' (trans. H. Zohn), *Chicago Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 80-101 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/25293714 (Accessed 7 March 2023).

Benton, M. and Butcher, S. (1998) 'Painting Shakespeare', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 53-66 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3333305 (Accessed 3 March 2023).

Bernstein, J. A. (2002) ''Bewitched, bothered and bewildered': Lady Macbeth, sleepwalking, and the demonic in Verdi's Scottish opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1-2, pp. 31-46 [Online]. DOI: 10.1017/S0954586702000034.

Bevilacqua, A. (2009). *Dmitri Shostakovich: Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* [DVD]. Germany: Arthouse Musik.

Bladen, V. (2017) ‘Performing the Child Motif in Kurzel’s *Macbeth* (2015)’, *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 129-137 [Online]. Available at https://angl.winter-verlag.de/article/ANGL/2017/2/11 (Accessed 7 March 2023).

Bortolotti, G. R. and Hutcheon, L. (2007) ‘On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and “Success”: Biologically’, *New Literary History*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 443-458 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20058017 (Accessed 7 March 2023).

Bowen, N., Jones, N., Meally, M. and Mortimore, K. (2019) ‘Shakespeare’s language’, in Eid., *The art of drama*, vol. 2, *Macbeth*, s.l., Peripeteia Press, pp. 60-73.

Brodesco, A. (2014) ‘Heisenberg: Epistemological Implications of a Criminal Pseudonym’, in Pierson, D. P. (ed) *Breaking Bad: Critical Essays on the Contexts, Politics, Style, and Reception of the Television Series*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, pp. 53-72.

Burden, M. (2017) ‘A Short Article on a Lively Subject: Geltruda Rossi, Sarah Siddons, and Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth *à la* Fuseli’, *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 55-69 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767717000031.

Burnett, M. T. (1993) ‘The ‘fiend-like Queen’: rewriting Lady Macbeth’, *Paregon*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1-19 [Online]. DOI: 10.1353/pgn.1993.0061.

Céline, L. F. (2012 [1932]) *Journey to the End of the Night* (trans. R. Manheim), Richmond, Alma Classics.

Churchill, C. J. (2015) ‘“Is That All There Is?”: Time, Guilt, and Melancholia in *Sleep No More* and *Macbeth’*, *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 161-174 [Online]. Available at https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1386 (Accessed 10 November 2022).

Clausen, C. (2005) ‘Introduction’, in Id., *Macbeth Multiplied: Negotiating Historical and Medial Difference between Shakespeare and Verdi*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, pp. 11-28.

Clausen, C. (2005) ‘Fantastical Creatures: Witchcraft, Gender, Madness II’, in Id., *Macbeth Multiplied: Negotiating Historical and Medial Difference between Shakespeare and Verdi*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, pp. 75-172.

Coplan, A. and Goldie, P. (2011) *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Coplan, A. (2011) ‘Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects’, in Coplan, A. and Goldie, P. (eds) *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 3-18.

Cowden Clarke, M. (2009) ‘The Thane’s Daughter’, in Cowden Clarke, M. (1851) *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines; in a Series of Fifteen Tales*’, vol. 1, New York, Cambridge University Press (this edition 2009), pp. 89-168.

Curry, W. C. (1959) *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, 2nd edn, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press.

Davidson, C. (2017) 'Evil and Fascination in Macbeth', *Parergon*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 129-141 [Online]. DOI: 10.1353/pgn.2017.0031.

De Quincey, T. (1897) 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth', in Masson, D. (ed) *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. X, London, A. & C. Black, pp. 389-394.

Deonna, J. A. (2007) 'The Structure of Empathy', *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 99-116 [Online]. Available at https://brill.com/view/journals/jmp/4/1/article-p99_11.xml (Accessed 26 September 2022).

Di Bona, E. (2019) 'Emotional Accounts of Musical Experience and Musical Object: On the Relationship between Music and Emotion', in Gouk, P., Kennaway, J., Prins, J., Thormählen, W. (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind, and Well-being*, New York, Routledge, pp. 165-178.

Edwards, P. (1998) '"Lost children": Shostakovich and *Lady Macbeth'*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 157-198 [Online]. Available at https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939809366223 (Accessed 7 March 2023).

Eileen, J. (2017) 'Empathy in Literature', in Maibom, H. (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, New York, Routledge, pp. 306-316.

Eisenberg, N. and Morris, A. S. (2001) 'The Origins and Social Significance of Empathy-Related Responding. A Review of Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice by M. L. Hoffman', *Social Justice Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 95-120 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012579805721.

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A. and Spinrad, T. L. (2006) 'Prosocial Development', in Eisenberg, N., Damon, W. and Lerner, R. M. (eds) *Handbook of Child Psychology*, vol. 3, *Social, Emotional, and Personality Development*, 6th edn, Hoboken, Wiley, pp. 646-718.

Eisenberg, N. and Eggum, N. D. (2009) 'Empathic Responding: Sympathy and Personal Distress', in Decety, J. and Ickes, W. (eds) *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, pp. 71-84.

Emerson, C. (1989) 'Back to the Future: Shostakovich's Revision of Leskov's 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District'', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 59-78 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/823597 (Accessed 7 November 2022).

Emerson, C. (2011) 'Shostakovich's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk"', in Bethea, D. (ed) *All the Same The Words Don't Go Away: Essays on Authors, Heroes, Aesthetics, and Stage Adaptations from the Russian Tradition*, Boston, Academic Studies Press, pp. 342-361.

Ercolino, S. (2018) ‘Negative empathy: History, theory, criticism’, *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 243-262 [Online]. DOI: 10.1111/oli.12175.

Ercolino, S. and Fusillo, M. (2022) *Empatia Negativa: il Punto di Vista del Male*, Milano, Bompiani.

Esse, M. (2002) ‘‘Chi piange, qual forza m’arretra?’: Verdi’s interior voices, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1-2, pp. 59-78 [Online]. DOI: 10.1017/S0954586702000058.

Faegin, S. L. (1983) ‘The Pleasures of Tragedy’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 95-104 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20013989 (Accessed 28 September 2022).

Fay, L. E. (2000) ‘Tragedy-Satire (1932-1936)’, in Ead., *Shostakovich: A Life*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 67-85.

Fox, A. (1979) ‘Obstetrics and Gynecology in Macbeth’, *Shakespeare Studies*, vol. 12, pp. 127-141 [Online]. Available at https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/obstetrics-gynecology-macbeth/docview/1297959220/se-2?accountid=17274 (Accessed 9 February 2023).

Freud, S. (1953 [1905-1906]) ‘Psychopathic Characters on the Stage’, in Strachey, J. (ed. and trans.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, *A case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, London, The Hogarth Press, pp. 305-310.

Fuseli, H. (1812) *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* [Oil paint on canvas]. Tate Images [Online]. Available at https://www.tate-images.com/preview.asp?image=T00733 (Accessed 04 May 2023).

Fusillo, M. and Legge, D. (2020) ‘Un *Macbeth* Nudo: Lingua, Suono e Carne per Tradurre l’Energia del Male’, *Teatro e Storia*, vol. 41, pp. 349-361 [Online]. Available at https://www.teatroestoria.it/pdf/41/TeS-41-7b-Fusillo-Legge.pdf (Accessed 24 March 2023).

Gallese, V. (2001) ‘The ‘Shared Manifold’ Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons To Empathy’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 8, no. 5-7, pp. 33-50 [Online]. Available at https://www.academia.edu/2207334/The_shared_manifold_hypothesis_From_mirror_neurons_to_empathy (Accessed 28 September 2022).

Gallese, V., Ferrari, P. F. and Umiltà, M. A. (2002) ‘The Mirror Matching System: A Shared Manifold for Intersubjectivity’, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 35-36 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X02370018.

Gallese, V. (2003a) ‘The Manifold Nature of Interpersonal Relations: The Quest for a Common Mechanism’, *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, vol. 358, no. 1431, pp. 517-528 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3558130 (Accessed 28 September 2022).

Gallese, V. (2003b) ‘The Roots of Empathy: The Shared Manifold Hypothesis and the Neural Basis of Intersubjectivity’, *Psychopathology*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 171-180 [Online]. DOI: 10.1159/000072786.

Hardy, J. (2019) *Shakespeare’s Great Tragedies: Experiencing their Impact*, New York, Routledge.

Harlow, G. H. (1814) *Portrait of Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth* [Oil on canvas]. The British Library [Online]. Available at https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/portrait-of-sarah-siddons-as-lady-macbeth-by-george-henry-harlow-1814 (Accessed 15 March 2023).

Harris, A. (1980) ‘Midnight hags: The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*’, in Id., *Night’s Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-Century English Drama*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 33-45.

Hindle, M. (2007) ‘Shakespeare and the Language of Film’, in Id., *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-16.

Hindle, M. (2007) ‘Orson Welles’ *Macbeth* (USA, 1948)’, in Id., *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 206-211.

Hoffman, M. L. (2002) ‘How Automatic and Representational is Empathy, and Why’, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 38-39 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X02410011.

Hudson, E. (2002) ‘‘… qualche cosa d’incredibile …’: Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1-2, pp. 11-29 [Online]. DOI: 10.1017/S0954586702000022.

Hutcheon, L. and O’Flynn, S. (2013) *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn, Abingdon, Routledge.

Huysmans, J.-K. (1884) *Against Nature*, White, N. (ed) (trans. M. Mauldon), New York, Oxford University Press (this edition 1998).

Jahoda, G. (2005) ‘Theodor Lipps and the Shift from “Sympathy” to “Empathy”’, *Journal of the Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 151-163 [Online]. DOI: 10.1002 /jhbs.20080.

Jameson, A. (2009) ‘Lady Macbeth’, in Ead., *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, vol. 2, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 299-326.

Jameson, F. (2015) *The Antinomies of Realism*, London, Verso.

Jang, S. Y. (2021) ‘*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, from Nikolai Leskov’s Novella and Shostakovich’s Opera to William Oldroyd’s Film’, Shakespeare Review, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 107-137 [Online]. DOI: 10.17009/shakes.2021.57.1.005.

Kębłowska-Ławniczak, E. (2022) 'William Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth*: An Exercise in Storytelling and Boredom', *Anglica Wratislaviensia*, vol. 60, pp. 241-253 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.19195/0301-7966.60.15.

Keen, S. (2006) 'A Theory of Narrative Empathy', *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 207-236 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20107388 (Accessed 8 June 2023).

Keen, S. (2007) *Empathy and the Novel*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Knights, L. C. (1933) *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism*, Cambridge, The Minority Press.

Kurzel, J. (2016). *Macbeth* [DVD]. Milan: Eagle Pictures.

Leskov, N. (1987) 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk', in Leskov, N. (1987) *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk and Other Stories* (trans. D. McDuff), s.l., Penguin Classics, pp. 87-150.

Levin, J. (2002) 'Lady MacBeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria', *ELH*, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 21-55 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/30032010 (Accessed 7 November 2022).

Lynch, A. (2017) 'Emotional community', in Broomhall, S. (ed) *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, London, Routledge, pp. 3-6.

'Macbeth, Giuseppe Verdi' (2006) *Invito all'Opera in DVD*, episode 25, Directed by Bruno Campanella. Written by Francesco Maria Piave. First broadcast 2004 [DVD]. Novara, De Agostini.

Massumi, B. (2002) *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, Duke University Press.

Miller, G. (2017) '"He has no children": Changing Representations of the Child in Stage and Film Productions of *Macbeth* from Polanski to Kurzel', *Shakespeare*, vol. 13, no.1, pp. 52-66 [Online]. Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2016.1174728 (Accessed 1 March 2023).

Morreall, J. (1985) 'Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions', *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 95-103 [Online]. Available at https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enjoying-negative-emotions-fiction/docview/1297911426/se-2 (Accessed 23 September 2022).

Morton, A. (2011) 'Empathy for the Devil', in Coplan, A., and Goldie, P. (eds) *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 318-330.

Mulcahy, K. V. (1984) 'Official Culture and Cultural Repression: The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 69-83 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3332676 (Accessed 4 March 2023).

Mullan, J. (1988) *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Mullin, M. (1987) 'Stage and Screen: The Trevor Nunn "Macbeth"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 350-359 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/2870509 (Accessed 11 March 2023).

Oldroyd, W. (2017) *Lady Macbeth* [Online]. Available from: Amazon Prime Video [Accessed 2 September 2022].

Phillips, C. (2013) '«Unsex Me Here»: Bodies and Femininity in the Performance History of Lady Macbeth', *Testi e Linguaggi*, vol. 7, pp. 353-361 [Online]. Available at http://elea.unisa.it:8080/xmlui/handle/10556/1147 (Accessed 3 December 2022).

Polanski, R. (2012). *Macbeth* [Online]. Available from: Apple TV [Accessed 1 June 2023].

Preis, A. and Shostakovich, D. (1983 [1932]) *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk: Opera in Four Acts (1932 Version)* (trans. E. Downes), New York, G, Schirmer, Inc.

Prins, H. (2001) 'Did Lady Macbeth Have a Mind Diseas'd'? (A Medico-legal Enigma)', *Medicine, Science and the Law*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 129-134 [Online]. Available at https://doi.org/10.1177/002580240104100208 (Accessed 10 November 2022).

Rasmus, A. (2018) 'What bloody film is this? *Macbeth* for our time', *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, vol. 18, no. 33, pp. 115-128 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-8530.18.08.

Reyes, C. and Kenny, A. (2020) 'Shakespeare's Violent Women: A Feminist Analysis Of Lady Macbeth', *UC Riverside Undergraduate Research Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 81-85 [Online]. DOI: 10.5070/RJ5141049301.

Rhodes, N. (2020) 'Before We Sleep: *Macbeth* and the Curtain Lecture', *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 73, *Shakespeare and the City* [Online] (Published online ahead of print 23 January). Available at http://hdl.handle.net/10023/19359 (Accessed 16 February 2023).

Robinson, J. (2017) 'Empathy in Music', in Maibom, H. (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, New York, Routledge, pp. 293-305.

Rosenberg, M. (1974) 'Lady Macbeth's Indispensable Child', *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 14-19 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3206576 (Accessed 8 February 2023).

Rosenberg, M. (1978) 'Lady Macbeth', in Id., *The Masks of Macbeth*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, pp. 158-205.

Rosenberg, M. (1978) 'Act I, scene V', in Id., *The Masks of Macbeth*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, pp. 206-242.

Rosenberg, M. (1978) 'Act V, Scene i', in Id., *The Masks of Macbeth*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, pp. 559-589.

Rosenwein, B. H. (2010) 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', *Passions in Context*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-32 [Online] Available at https://www.academia.edu/45675723/Rosenwein_Problems_and_Methods_in_the_History_of_Emotions_2010_ (Accessed 31 May 2023).

Rosenwein, B. H. (2016) 'Theories of Change in the History of Emotions', in Liliequist, J. (ed) *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp. 7-20.

Sanders, J. (2016) *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd edn, Abingdon, Routledge.

Semenza, G. M. C. (2022) 'William Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth*, Shakespeare, and Adaptation Studies', *Adaptation*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 285-303 [Online]. Available at https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apab015 (Accessed 1 March 2023).

Seroff, V. I. (1943) 'Chapter 9', in Id., Dmitri Shostakovich: the Life and Background of a Soviet Composer, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 190-229.

Shakespeare, W. (1603) *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Edwards, P. (ed), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (this edition 2003).

Shakespeare, W. (1623) *Macbeth*, Brooke, N. (ed.), New York, Oxford University Press Inc. (this edition 1994).

Smith, K. K. (2017) *Gender, Speech, and Audience Reception in Early Modern England*, New York, Routledge.

Stadler, J. (2017) 'Empathy in Film', in Maibom, H. (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, New York, Routledge, pp. 317-326.

Tomarken, E. (1984) 'The Witches in "Macbeth": Samuel Johnson's Notion of Selective Empathy', *CEA Critic*, vol. 47, no. 1/2, pp. 78-89 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/44378163 (Accessed 2 December 2022).

Tosi, L. (2013) 'How Many Children Read Lady Macbeth?: Prose Versions of the Scottish Play from the Lambs to Young Adult Novels', in Bishop, T., Huang, A. C. Y. and Sillars, S. (eds) *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, vol. 13, *Special Section, Macbeth*, Farnham, Ashgate, pp. 73-92.

Tosi, L. (2021) *Shakespeare: guida a Macbeth*, Roma, Carocci editore.

Turgenev I. (1965) 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' (trans. M. Spiegel), *Chicago Review*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 92-109 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/25293952 (Accessed 15 March 2023).

Verdi, G. and Piave, M. F. (2014 [1847]) *Verdi's Macbeth: Complete Libretto with Music Highlight Examples* (trans. B. D. Fisher) [Kindle], Boca Raton, Opera Journeys Publishing.

Wells, E. A. (2001) ‘‘The New Woman’: Lady Macbeth and sexual politics in the Stalinist era’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 163-189 [Online]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S095458670100163X.

Wigzell, F. (1988) ‘Russian Dream Books and Lady Macbeth’s Cat’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 625-630 [Online]. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/4209847 (Accessed 27 July 2022).

Williams, G. W. (2004) ‘‘Time for Such a Word’: Verbal Echoing in *Macbeth*’, in Alexander, C. M. S. (ed) *Shakespeare and Language* [Online], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 240-250. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511617379.015.

Wills, G. (1995) ‘Gunpowder’, in Id., *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare’s Macbeth*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 11-31.

Wills, G. (1995) ‘Jesuits’, in Id., *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare’s Macbeth*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 90-105.