
Ethical Choice and Melancholy: Lady Macbeth in Her Dreams

⊙ Yanni LEI, Wei LU

Sun Yat-sen University, Jinan University

Abstract: Despite the large body of literature on Lady Macbeth, little research has been undertaken to demonstrate the relationship between the invocation by Lady Macbeth in the first act and the final dreams that imprison her. From the perspectives of literary ethical criticism and Early Modern dream theories, this essay argues that the sleep-walking scene in the final act reveals the ethical predicament and the punishment suffered by Lady Macbeth, while the invocation, instead of serving merely as exaggerating rhetoric or performance of witchcraft, indicates Lady Macbeth's ethical choice and her self-hypnosis that finally lead to the punishment. The causal relation between the invocation and the dreams is built up via a series of somatic changes brought by melancholy, through which William Shakespeare demonstrates to the audience the interaction between body and mind, and the inescapable consequence entailed by the wrong ethical choice.

Keywords: Lady Macbeth, dreams, natural melancholia, ethical choice

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It is widely acknowledged that Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* provides the main source for William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but the dreams of Lady Macbeth are the playwright's own creation. Why did Shakespeare create such dreams in the play? And what is at stake behind them? Critics including Marilyn L. Williamson and Cristina León Alfar lay stress on Lady Macbeth's gender role unmasked by her dreams. For Williamson, the dreams of Lady Macbeth reveal her feminine subjection to the masculine order that leads to her self-destruction (147–166). In a similar vein, León Alfar argues that even in the state of madness, Lady Macbeth is seeking to regain her status as Macbeth's helpmate, a desire uncovered by the reenactment of the previous scenes in her dreams when she served as the primary influencer of her husband (179–207). Other scholars, Paul H. Kocher and Bryan Adams Hampton, for instance, focus their analysis of Lady Macbeth on the debate between the physiological and

the mental dimensions of her dreams. Both Kocher and Hampton reference Timothie Bright's distinction between "natural melancholia" and "solely conscience" and conclude that it is Lady Macbeth's troubled conscience that leads to her nightmares (Kocher 341–349; Hampton 327–347). Nevertheless, there is a missing point in the studies mentioned above, that is, none of the critics demonstrate the necessary connection between the ethical choice made by Lady Macbeth in her waking hours and the endless dreams that imprison her. As Nie Zhenzhao points out, "literature is the expression of social ethics in a particular historical stage" (1); accordingly, one possible way to explore such connection is to contextualize it within the understanding of dreams and ethics in Early Modern England.

To lay the groundwork for the interpretation of Lady Macbeth, this article starts with the development of dream theories in the Early Modern period and aligns it with the analysis of the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. It argues that Lady Macbeth is a sufferer from natural melancholy, which not only connects her ethical conflicts and dreams when she is asleep, but also correlates the ethical choice made by Lady Macbeth in the first act and the sleep-walking scene in the final one. The role of melancholy that has been overlooked by previous critics, in fact, grants wishes for the character and allots punishment, weaving together the causes and consequences. Alongside ethical choice and ethical conflict, the theme of melancholy runs through the whole play, unfolding the ramifications when one makes the wrong ethical decision.

Dreams in the Early Modern Context

Different from the modern scholarship that focuses on the functions of the brain and the nervous system of the dreamer, Early Modern writers rely on the Galenic humor system for the interpretation of dreams. Dreams are believed to be the product of humoral imbalance, and they are constantly referred to for diagnostic purposes. During the Early Modern period, it is generally agreed that the content of dreams reflects the complexion of the dreamers. Thomas Nashe, one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, elaborates on the topic of dreams in the book *The Terrors of the Night or A Discourse of Apparitions*:

a dream is nothing else but a bubbling scum or froth of the fancy which the day hath left undigested, or an after-feast made of the fragments of idle imagination [...]. A dream is nothing else but the echo of our conceits in the day. But otherwhile it falls out that one echo borrows of another; so our dreams (the echoes of the day) borrow of any noise we hear in the night [...] when we are drowned in deadly sleep, take hold and co-essence themselves with any overboiling humour which sourceth highest in our stomachs. (10–12)

Nashe's discussion pinpoints three factors of dreams: the mental ("the undigested fancy"), the environmental ("the noise of the night"), and the somatic (the "overboiling humour"); yet, how exactly these factors interact with each other in dreams remains unexplained. Thomas Hill's dream theory partially fills in the gap left by Nashe and points out the corporation between body and mind.

According to Hill, the “moderate motion of the spirites” is the “efficyente cause” of dreams, while the memory of the things seen during the day serves as the matter. Dreams are generated when the moderate motion of spirits processes and reproduces the memory in the brain. Richard Haydock furthers Hill’s dream theory by bringing up his theory about humor. Nightmares, Haydock argues, are one type of dreams caused by the oppression of excessive humors on the brain, which produces distorted images that correspond to the nature of the dominant humor (f.10.73). André du Lauren, a contemporary French physician, brings up a similar point about the correlation between dreams and humors. As Gowland writes, for du Lauren “the dominant humour produced a corresponding species for the phantasy, which in turn triggered the memory to recall disturbing images; or else [nightmares occurred] because the corrupt and blackened animal spirits, circulating in the brain and elevated to the eyes, presented dark objects to the phantasy” (Gowland 70). For all the scholars mentioned above, as well as Giovanni Borsieri de Kanifeld and Reginald Scot,¹ the physiological, instead of merely the mental factor, plays a crucial role in the production of dreams. And interpretation of dreams, in turn, helps to uncover both the physiological complexions of the dreamer and his/her secrets of the mind. In the sleep-walking scene of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare echoes the studies of his contemporaries and uses both the physiological and mental aspects of dreams to demonstrate the relationship between ethical choice and its consequence.

Lady Macbeth in Her Dreams

The sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* is one of the classics on the Shakespearean stage. Almost every line in Lady Macbeth’s somniloquy can find its resonance in the preceding scenes, but the order is altered from the main plotline; and the murders of Duncan, Lady Macduff, and Banquo are re-presented in the style of montage. The playwright juxtaposes the snippets of these separate murders in Lady Macbeth’s dreams in a similar way modern filmmakers edit and piece together individual shots, cram them into a much shorter span of time, and create a continuous sequence. And the message to be communicated rests heavily on how the snippets are connected in relation to each other. The sleep-walking sequence begins with Lady Macbeth washing her hands, moves swiftly to her description about the blood of Duncan, the disappearance of Lady Macduff, and the burial of Banquo, and then back to the scene about the murder of Duncan. There appears to be no logical transition between the events and the chronological order seems disrupted, signifying the chaotic state of the mind of character; yet, as in montage where one shot is constantly cut back to regardless of what is happening on the screen, in the dream talk of Lady Macbeth, the “hands” as symbol is reverted to repeatedly and interrupts the narration. The hands in this scene not only represent the crime Lady Macbeth committed but also serve as the nexus between different murders; along with the symbol of hands and the gesture of washing hands, the sense of guilt is evoked during the whole dream talk.

The narration about Lady Macduff and Banquo is framed within the plot against Duncan, the only one in which Lady Macbeth directly participated, though she failed to commit the murder herself. The first lines Lady Macbeth utters in her dreams are: “Yet here’s a spot” (v.1.27)² and

“Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two” (v.1.29). The spot on the hand designates the end of the murder of Duncan, while the bell striking “one, two” signals the beginning of it. The closure is immediately followed by the beginning, and after the account about Lady Macduff and Banquo, the lines about knocking and “to bed, to bed, to bed” (v.1.61) serve as the close-up and link back to the handwashing in the first line of the soliloquy.³ The arrangement of the events takes the shape of ouroboros, which symbolizes eternity and a repeating cycle in ancient mythology, and Lady Macbeth in her dreams is imprisoned in such a cycle of recurring memories of murders. In his famous essay “On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth,” Thomas de Quincey has commented on the similarly insulated state of the Macbeths in the murder scene,

The murderers and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, laid asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things without abolished, and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. (393)

Mired in the state as such, however, the Macbeths in the murder scene are liberated by the knocking sound on the door and manage to return temporarily to the world of the ordinary. Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene, by contrast, is locked up endlessly, and the knocking in her dreams, instead of waking her up, urges her “to bed” and sink further into her nightmares, where Lady Macbeth desperately cries for respite:

LADY MACBETH

The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she / now? What, will these hands ne’er be clean? No more o’ that, / my lord, no more o’ that. You mar all with this starting. (v.1.36–38)

According to Early Modern theorists such as Thomas Tryon, dreams reveal the working of the mind of the dreamers. Be it the hidden desires or simply the occupation of the mind, there is hardly anything that is more likely to betray “the secret bent of our minds and inclinations to Vertue or Vice, or this or that particular Evil, as Pride, covetousness, sensuality or the like” than dreams. It is in dreams, Tryon argues, that the real “reaches of Soul” could be shown, without any disguise or reservation (7). In Lady Macbeth’s somniloquy, the lines “No more o’ that, / my lord, no more o’ that” (v.1.37–38) can be interpreted either together with the previous lines or connected with the following, and both reveal the working of the soul of Lady Macbeth. In the first way of reading, the mention of Lady Macduff, together with the cry for “no more,” implies that deep down, Lady Macbeth is against the commitment of more murders, especially the murder of Lady Macduff. Her question, “the thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?” (v.1.36), betrays a touch of compassion triggered by both pain and fear, which, according to Nie Zhenzhao, is a type of “moral feeling” (110). In the second way of reading, the call for “no more” is linked with the following: “you mar all with this starting” (v.1.38), in which Lady Macbeth pleads Macbeth to stop flinching.

At first glance, no new information is added in Lady Macbeth's somniloquy; yet, the word "all" reveals the desperation of Lady Macbeth. In her eyes, it is not only the banquet that Macbeth spoils, but everything they have done. It further indicates that Lady Macbeth has already foreseen the dire future in front of them. However, just as Macbeth cannot stop murdering more people in his waking hours, Lady Macbeth is incapable of stopping the cycle of re-staging what they have done in her dreams. Cycling is the special way of montage the playwright applies in rendering the order of the murders that are connected by the symbol of hands. It results in the whole gestalt of the character, revealing both her moral feeling and desperation that have been concealed from the audience in the previous scenes. And locked up in such a cycle of memories in her dreams, Lady Macbeth's cry for "no more" simply proves futile.

In addition to the order of re-presenting the preceding scenes, the imagery in the sleep-walking scene, including the taper and blood, is also worth noting, for it provides a lens into the darkness of the dream world of the character as well as the terror and pain she suffers. The taper Lady Macbeth demands by her side connects the outside world and the dream world. Both the doctor and the gentlewoman (as well as the audience) can see it, and Lady Macbeth, though in fast sleep, is sensible of it too. According to Timothy Bright, when one sleeps, his or her soul can function without interference of the body. In dreams, Bright writes, "we see with our soules, heare, talke, conferre, and practice what action soever [...] evidently with affection as if the very object of these senses were represented unto us brode awake at noone day" (118). Accordingly, interpretation of the behavior of the dreamer is the reading of his or her soul to some degree. Bright's observation pinpoints two important features of the sleepwalkers, namely, behavior out of a certain type of emotion that reveals the undertaking of the soul and the interaction with the objects in the real world. Both features are highly applicable to Lady Macbeth, who clings to the taper out of terror as if it were the only thing she could hold onto. Through the dim light of the taper outside, the audience can experience the horror of the mental world inside and imagine the precarious state of the soul of the character, who alone was closed in by the all-too-fearful darkness and cries out loud: "Hell is murky" (v.1.30). Immersed in the darkness of the dream world, Lady Macbeth's memory of offense is refreshed, nibbling and torturing the already afflicted mind.

Besides the taper, another important image in the sleep-walking scene is the blood, which is visible only to Lady Macbeth. She can see it, touch it (rubbing it) and smell it as if the spot of blood were really on her hand.⁴ Just like the inescapable cycle of the murders, the blood that refuses to be washed off signifies the unlikelihood for Lady Macbeth to dodge the crime she committed. The word "damned" in the line "Out, damned spot!" (v.1.29) shows her frustration at the futile attempts to remove it. Something in her, that is, the rational will that has been submerged when she is awake, is now working against her free will. Two lines after the "damned spot" (v.1.29), Lady Macbeth reverts to blood again in her somniloquy: "Yet who would have / thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (v.1.33–34). The image of blood at this point changes from a spot on her hand to the flowing blood from a dead man. If the spot on her hand has driven her crazy, then the blood in abundance further overwhelms her. The phrases "so much" and "who would have thought" demonstrate her shock and terror, which form an ironical

contrast with the lines of Lady Macbeth in Act II, Scene 2: “If he do bleed, / I’ll gild the faces of the grooms withal, / For it must seem their guilt” (58–60). What Lady Macbeth could manipulate when she is awake, namely, the darkness of night and the blood, frightens her when she is asleep. In dreams, as Nashe writes, “[t]he table of our heart is turned to an index of iniquities, and all our thugs are nothing but texts to condemn us” (244). Although the free will⁵ of Lady Macbeth cries for an escape from the crime scene and removal of the evidence of murder, her rational will, like a merciless judge, refuses to release her. The ethical conflict between free will and rational will, together with Lady Macbeth’s memories of murders, leads to the punishment that tortures the afflicted mind of the character, locks her up in her dreams, and forces her to face the consequences of her crime. Both the repeating cycle of the memories of murder and the unwashable spots of blood signify the impossibility of escape from such punishment, while the darkness as indicated by the taper illustrates the horror of it, and the connection between ethical conflict and punishment is built up via the mechanism of melancholia in the dreaming period.

According to Hill’s theory on dreams, the production of dreams requires two factors: memory, phantasy, or conflicts in mind as the raw material and the spirit or humor that processes the memory and generates the dreams (Avid[r]–Avi[v]). The images in dreams, in turn, could be used for diagnosing the patient’s dominant humor and hidden illness. Tryon, for instance, asserts that “the natural temperament or complexion, and consequently many times the secret diseases of persons are so soon, or better found out by their Dreams, than by any outward signs” (6). Levinus Lemnius, the influential Dutch physician in the 16th century, argues in the same vein: the main complexion and the dominant type of humor “may be neerely conjectured and found out from dreams” (56–59). Darkness and frightful images in dreams, including dead bodies, smoke, and so forth, are attributed to melancholy (Dannenfeldt 415–441), while dreams about fighting and quarrel are related to choler. Those who dream of a red color and the “merry conceits” are believed to have sanguine complexion, and the images of the flood, drowning, and rain in dreams are correlated with phlegmatic complexion (Aughterson 364–366). In the case of Lady Macbeth, the darkness signaled by the taper, murders implied by blood, and the image of Duncan as a dead man all point to melancholy,⁶ which stirs up her ethical conflict and memories about murders when she is asleep. In *A Treatise of Melancholie*, Bright provides a detailed description about what happens to the body of the melancholic person in the dreaming period:

[t]he inward sense and outward so feeble[d], the fancy overtaken with gastly fumes of melancholy, and the whole force of the spirite closed up in the dungion of melancholy darkenes, imagineth all darke, blacke and full of feare, their heartes are either overtender and rare, & so easily admitte the passion or over close of nature serve more easily to imprison, the chearfull spirites the causes of comforte to the rest of the bodie. (189)

The terms “dungion,” “darkenes,” “darke,” and “full of feare” in Bright’s account resonate with Lady Macbeth’s depiction of her dream world. The humor of melancholy, though believed to be a physiological substance in the Early Modern period, could penetrate the mental world of the dreamer, and arouse and possess the ethical conflicts in his or her mind, producing distorted

images that further afflict the already troubled conscience. The physiological and mental aspects of dreams are thus intertwined and hinge upon melancholia, which is an illness that “crosses the boundaries” of body and mind (Betz 114), and expose the frailty of the dreamer. Further, it is also through the mechanism of melancholia that the playwright correlates the ethical choice made by Lady Macbeth in the first act and the sleep-walking scene in the final one.

Ethical Choice and Self-Hypnosis by Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth uses the word “illness” as early as her first soliloquy in the first act of *Macbeth*, where she complains about the lack of necessary illness in Macbeth to attend ambition: “thou wouldst be great; / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it” (i.5.16–18). The “illness” in these lines is generally interpreted as wickedness and violence, but it also has the denotation of physiological sickness. Although the character herself may not be aware of it, the playwright has already interconnected ethics and pathological disease right from the beginning. Such a double sense is further evidenced in Lady Macbeth’s invocation to the spirits, which is filled with ethical and medical terms about the change of one’s mind and body:

LADY MACBETH

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

(i.5.38–52)

The same as “illness,” the word “spirits” also has ethical and physiological dual connotations. The terms related to “spirits” in the soliloquy, including “tend on mortal thoughts,” “fill [...] top-full of direst cruelty,” “murd’ring ministers,” and so forth, suggest that the first connotation of the word is related to evil or immorality. Lady Macbeth’s invocation to such spirits for the purpose of satisfying her “blind and murderous desires” (Greenblatt 2715) indicates an unethical choice she has made in favor of free will against rational will. Yet, the ethical choice by Lady Macbeth

is unique in the sense that it is accompanied by a set of somatic changes. Stephen Greenblatt has raised an interesting argument about the connection between will and body in *Lady Macbeth*: “all of her expressions of will and passion [...] strain toward bodily realization, even as they convey a psychic and hence invisible inwardness” (2715), but what Greenblatt fails to explain is how the connection is achieved and why it is important. Regarding the first question, this essay argues that it is through the double connotations of the word “spirits” that Shakespeare correlates the ethical choice and the somatic changes in the invocation scene, and Lady Macbeth’s reference to unsexing, blood-thickening, and stopping “the access and passage to remorse” hints at the second connotation of “spirits,” that is, the animal spirits in the physiological sense.

According to the humoral theory popular in the Early Modern period, spirits in the medical field refers to “an airy substance [...] by which the powers of the body are stirred up to perform their office and operation” (Culpeper 52). Generated in the liver, the pneumatic vapors circulate to different parts of the body; when they reach the brain, they are refined in it, and changed to the animal spirits that cause sensation. Conversely, the sleeping process begins when the animal spirits are gradually congealed by the coldness of the brain and obstruct the passage of sense.⁷ With the onset of this process, emotions are blocked, and the body falls asleep. Accordingly, the lines “you spirits / [...] Stop up the access and passage to remorse” (i.5.38–42) hint at the (lack of) movement of animal spirits in the sleeping process, and Lady Macbeth’s invocation, to some degree, could be interpreted as a kind of self-hypnosis by which she wishes to escape from the pang of conscience and fall into a presumably insentient state that resembles sleep.

Further, the line “make thick my blood” (i.5.41) implies that melancholy is involved in the invocation process. According to Bright, when the body is affected by melancholy, “the blood is over grosse, thick & impure, & nature so disordered” (188–189). This is close to Lady Macbeth’s depiction of the change to her body in the invocation. Another reference to melancholy can be found in Lady Macbeth’s line: “take my milk for gall” (i.5.46). It was widely accepted in the Early Modern period that milk was converted from the blood of the mother, but in Lady Macbeth’s soliloquy, instead of turning into milk, she summons the spirits to turn her blood into gall, which is another name for melancholy.

Although the word “melancholy” does not appear directly in this play, it is noteworthy that Shakespeare does not distinguish spirits from humors as his contemporaries tend to do, and the equation between spirits and melancholy could be found in Shakespeare’s other plays. In *King John*, for instance, he writes, “Or if that surly spirit, melancholy, / Had bak’d thy blood, and made it heavy-thick, / Which else runs tickling up and down the veins” (iii.3.42–44). In these lines, “surly spirits” are referred to as an explanation of melancholy, and a parallel could be drawn between “Had bak’d thy blood, and made it heavy-thick” (iii.3.43) in *King John* and “make thick my blood” (i.5.41) in *Macbeth*. Accordingly, the spirits that “tend on mortal thoughts” (i.5.39) in *Macbeth* may also indicate melancholy, which in Shakespeare’s time was believed to be especially “conducive to crime” (Olson 111).

Since the word “spirit,” in its second sense, is used interchangeably with “melancholy” in Shakespeare’s plays, when Lady Macbeth summons the spirits to “stop up the access and passage to remorse” (i.5. 42), she is, in fact, trying to induce an intentional shut-down of moral feeling via

melancholy. How exactly Lady Macbeth manages to achieve that, whether by witchcraft or by other types of supernatural power, Shakespeare leaves open for the audience, and what matters is the correlation between Lady Macbeth's ethical choice during the hypnosis process and the ethical conflict in the sleep-walking scene that is made possible through melancholy. In this play, melancholy is both the agent that shuts down Lady Macbeth's moral sense when she is awake and the one that stirs it up during her sleep.

The playwright makes the characters have their wishes granted, though not in the exact way they want. In the case of Lady Macbeth, she curbs the affliction of conscience and successfully helps her husband complete the murder. Nevertheless, changes in Lady Macbeth start to show up after the couple obtain the crown they desire: she loses her vitality and gradually falls into a trancelike state, which is most clearly reflected in the change of her language style. Before the murder, the tone of Lady Macbeth is aggressive and provocative. She speaks mainly in blank verse, and the power of her rhetorical skills is demonstrated in the figurative language she uses for creating different effects. For instance, the three "m"s in "be so much more the man" (i.7.51) lay stress on the sense of masculinity, and the four "w"s in the line "will I with wine and wassail so convince" (i.7.64) leave the impression of whispering a secret. However, after the murder, Lady Macbeth's eloquence is gone. Her lines get shorter and shorter. After the banquet scene, she falls into complete silence for four whole scenes, and when she reappears on stage, she is lost in the state of somnambulism. Thus, the trajectory of Lady Macbeth in the whole play could be interpreted as a process that starts from self-hypnosis to gradually falling into the realm of dreams, and the theme of sleep brackets the development of the character. But that is not yet the end.

The very agent (melancholy) Lady Macbeth invokes to shut down her senses in her waking hours is working against her when she is asleep. And the "thick night" she summons to come, together with the "dunest smoke of hell" and "the blanket of the dark" (i.5.47–49), fall upon her in exactly the same way as she demands them. The horrible dreams of Lady Macbeth echo and illustrate the concern Shakespeare expresses in *Hamlet*:

HAMLET

To sleep, perchance to dream — ay, there's the rub:
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
 Must give us pause. (iii.1.64–67)

When Hamlet's action is stalled by his reflection on what may happen when one is asleep, Lady Macbeth does not pause or consider "what dreams may come," but yields to her free will, which, just like the Porter's account about the last stage of drunkenness, "equivocates [her] in a sleep, and / giving [her] the lie, leaves [her]" (ii.3.29–30) locked up in the loop of murders and cries, in vain, for "no more." Regarding the second question about why the correlation between the ethical and the physiological matters in the play, this essay argues that with such connection, the playwright illustrates to the audience the inescapable consequence entailed by the wrong ethical choice. The sleep-walking scene in the final act reveals the ethical conflict and punishment

suffered by Lady Macbeth, while the invocation in the first act, instead of serving merely as exaggerating rhetoric, indicates Lady Macbeth's ethical choice and self-hypnosis that eventually leads to her punishment, and the causal connection between the invocation and the dreams is built up via a series of somatic changes brought by melancholy. As with the theme of sleep, the theme of melancholy runs through and brackets the whole play.

In the article "Thinking Sleep in the Renaissance Sonnet Sequence," Giulio J. Pertile describes dreams as the "liminal state" (36) between sleeping and waking; for Lady Macbeth, dreaming is also a state between the past and the future. Despite her free will to jump to the future liberated from the affliction of conscience, the rational will of Lady Macbeth drags her back, and the ethical conflict aroused by melancholy traps her in this in-between state. Even the knock that is supposed to break the suffocating insulated state fails to wake her from her most horrible dreams. Such dreams as these both enchant the audience and give them shudder. They invite the audience to walk inside the inner world of the character and peek at the deepest secret hidden inside. If, according to Yang Gexin, the question about how to be a human underlies an ethical choice (422), then with the character Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare stages what may happen when one makes the wrong choice, and the inescapable consequences that follow.

Notes

1. Giovanni Borsieri de Kanifeld, a famous Italian physician, emphasizes "the physiological origins of nightmares within the ordinary course of nature." According to de Kanifeld, "Nightmares were much more likely to result from morbid states of the brain that prevented the healthy flow of blood through that vital organ" (qtd. in Handley 28). Reginald Scot, an English writer who is renowned for his *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, argues that nightmare is "a bodilie disease (as has been said) although it extends unto the trouble of the mind" (49).
2. The quotations from the play in this paper are based on *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et al., W. W. Norton, 2016.
3. One can compare the order of events in the somniloquy with the lines by Lady Macbeth in Act ii Scene 2: "I hear a knocking / At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber. / A little water clears us of this deed. / How easy is it then" (68–71).
4. "Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes / of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (*Macbeth* v.1.42–43).
5. Free will, according to Nie Zhenzhao, is an "outward manifestation" of desire (39).
6. The dreams of melancholic patients, according to Nicholas Culpeper, are featured by "frightful things, black, darkness, and terrible businesses" (56). Philip Barrough, an English medical writer, also summarizes the main symptoms of melancholy, which include "ferefulnesse, sadnesse, hatred," and "strange imaginations [...]" Moreover they desire death, and do very often benight and determine to kill themselves" (45). Regarding the melancholy of Lady Macbeth, further evidence could be found in her "thick-coming fancy" mentioned by the doctor (v.3.39) and his warning of her attempt at suicide (v.1.65–67).
7. "When the vapours ascendeth ther vnto, and by the coldnes of the braines, those vapours are changed into humours, the which closet the conducts of the nerues" (Lowe Chap. 4).

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