

story-she states in 'Why I wrote the Yellow Wallpaper'⁴ that she wanted to provide a cautionary tale about what the commonly used 19th century "rest cures" could do to the mental stability of patients in order to 'save women from being driven crazy' and suffering the 'utter mental ruin' to which she was so nearly a victim herself. Thus, Gilman conveys how much women suffered in a late 19th century American patriarchal society and could have been driven to madness. However, unlike Shakespeare, whom it could be argued, attributed women's suffering to their own manipulative personalities and desire for power, perhaps the message to readers of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is that it is not women's nature that drives them to madness, but rather the cruel and, arguably, barbaric oppression of women by men, which would drive anyone mad.

Although Lady Macbeth is portrayed by Shakespeare as being extremely powerful, dominant and strong for the best part of the play, the protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper* appears to be suffering throughout Gilman's novel. For Lady Macbeth, these very characteristics lead to her madness and emotional suffering to such an extent that she eventually dies, most likely by suicide, in the final act of the play. Shakespeare, as does Gilman, uses hallucinations to highlight the distortion of reality and madness. In Lady Macbeth's case, a 'spot' of blood on her hands in the famous 'Out damn'd spot!' speech from Act 5 Scene 1, conveys this madness and portrays how her feelings of sin and guilt have resulted in her transforming into 'an anxious childlike wreck'⁵ as she is overwhelmed by the 'blood' that she believes has stained her hands. This is particularly shocking and disturbing for the audience as they watch her constantly washing and wringing her hands. Moreover, in the majority of productions, Lady Macbeth is presented, in her sleepwalking state wearing a simple costume of a nightdress, to be child-like, afraid and insecure, which is in strong contrast to the dominant woman one sees at the beginning of the play.

One must consider the extent to which the patriarchal society was to blame for Lady Macbeth's suffering. Denying women any ambition or chance to succeed, combined with the extent to which she desires to rise above her station and fruitlessly endeavour for power women could not achieve at the time, inevitably would lead to mental instability. Although some could argue that 'Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a powerful icon for women' by 'display[ing] the strength of power that women have the ability to possess if they wish to'⁶,

⁴ *Why I wrote the Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1913), The Forerunner October Issue

⁵ *Relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth*, tutorhunt.com

⁶ *The Negative Portrayal of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's Play, Macbeth*, bartleby.com