

Explore how Shakespeare presents the marriage between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (30):

The relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is strange and complex, atypical of a marriage of the period. Their marriage is shown to be very strained, in anticipation of the crime they are about to commit, which is conveyed through their arguing; "was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself?" Lady Macbeth's manipulative character is shown through this constant questioning of her husband, when he decides to not kill Duncan. The term "hope" gives positive connotations of the murder, suggesting that their desires can easily be achieved if he agrees. However, the tone is very critical of Macbeth, calling his repression of his desires cowardice which in turn questions his manliness. The personification of "hope" also suggests that Macbeth is going against his word, as if he made the promise when he was "drunk", making Macbeth feel as if he is betraying his wife. The argumentativeness of Lady Macbeth would have been surprising to a Shakespearean audience, as they would not have expected such a powerful role be given to her. A typical marriage of the time would consist of the wife being the lesser of the two, whereas in the play they are relatively equal. Shakespeare could have done this to play on his viewers' opinions to show that women did have more power than what was thought.

Shakespeare also presents their marriage as quite unbalanced, with Lady Macbeth, in many cases, seeming to hold more power than her husband. For example, in the extract she immediately questions him, asking, "why have you left the chamber", and, "know you not he has?" the shortness of her lines at the start emphasise the seriousness of the subject, and the break of iambic pentameter in the first line shows how Shakespeare wanted to create a tense mood, as they prepare for the murder. The phrase, "know you not" appears to criticise Macbeth's lack of knowledge, which Macbeth accepts. Macbeth does try to reassert his power by saying, "we will proceed no further in this business", but Lady Macbeth, through a mix of charm and insults, manages to convince him to go through with her wishes. This shows how Lady Macbeth is obviously the more dominant of the two, a rarity for the Shakespearean times. Lady Macbeth clearly manages to use her marriage to her own ends, and takes advantage of her husband's power and reputation.

However, Macbeth himself is almost the opposite when it comes to their marriage, as he is portrayed to be very trustful and devoted to his wife. In Act 1 Scene 5, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband about his meeting with the witches, as he does not want her to be "ignorant of what is promised thee". The fact that he doesn't reveal his inner emotions to anyone else, not even Banquo, but only to his wife, shows how close he believes their relationship is. It is ironic that by revealing this information to her, he reveals Lady Macbeth's extremely ambitious and manipulative side, leading to the murder of Duncan and eventually the breakdown of their relationship. Macbeth refers to her as, "my dearest partner in greatness" and "dearest love", highlighting their intimate relationship, and how, somewhat weirdly, he considers them as equals, which would have been out of place in contemporary Jacobean society. This is a clear change from the very start of Act 1 Scene 5, where Lady Macbeth's first lines are the contents of the letter, giving her the appearance of a typical, devoted wife.

This loving attitude from Macbeth in Act 1 is shown to be the opposite towards the end of the play, when Lady Macbeth is revealed to have died, most likely by suicide. Macbeth launches into a soliloquy, starting with "she should have died hereafter". Interestingly, Macbeth doesn't appear sad or fazed at all by this shocking news. By saying that it would have been better if she had died later, he is suggesting that he wanted her to see the victory so that she would know the throne was secure, which could imply