

The Powers that Be (Or Not Be)  
The Question of Memory in Gender-Inflected  
Shakespearean Society  
by  
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The Powers that Be (Or Not Be):  
The Question of Memory and Power in Gender-Inflected

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by

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For my mother. Who will live on in my memory forever.

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## Abstract

This thesis will explore the relationship between memory and power in Shakespeare's plays Macbeth, Hamlet, Richard III, and The Winter's Tale. While focusing mainly on women's relationship to memory, the main male characters in each of these plays will also be discussed in order to give some contrast to the ways in which society expected men and women to behave and react. Society in Shakespeare's time granted women very little independence. They were encouraged to be married, to be docile, sexually static. The characters I will be discussing were, in some way, forced to challenge this ideal in order to sustain, or heighten their sense of identity, because of the death of a powerful male figure in their lives, for the simple desire for more power, or situations beyond their control. To obtain this power, the characters underwent some sort of memory manipulation in an attempt to deny the source of the initial stress. Yet the power of their memories was stronger than their resolve to suppress them. Memories of the stressful events flooded back, destroying their newly constructed identities. The return of memories, and their ramifications, vary greatly depending upon the sex of those who are denying the memories. I will be exploring the implications of this as a function of gender-biased society.

I will begin my study with Lady Macbeth, who distorts her female gender role by invoking evil spirits to give her strength to perform the murder of Duncan. Her attempts to deny the memory of the murder backfire when her husband subsumes the strength she has obtained through her distorted gender role. I will then move on to a discussion of Gertrude, who inadvertently corrupts her memory of her old husband by collapsing him with the image of her new husband. Much of this discussion will involve Hamlet's obsessive desire to clarify the memories of his father and dissolve Gertrude's displacement. I will then discuss Anne and Elizabeth in Richard III. Anne is forced to deny both the memories of her husband and father-in-law and the memory of who committed the murders in order to marry Richard and maintain her role as fertile wife. Richard manipulates both her memories and her mind, resulting in her death. Elizabeth is similarly manipulated by Richard in order to promise him her daughter. I will close with a discussion of Hermione. Hermione has little control over her memories or her perceived sexuality as both are manipulated by her husband. When his image, and memories of her become corrupt, she becomes, essentially, dead. Only after Leontes can purify his memories of her and her sexuality can she return to life.

CONTENTS PAGE

Short Titles Page	i
<u>The Powers That Be (Or Not Be)</u>	1
Works Consulted	56

Short Titles Page

i.

Adelman: Adelman, Janet. Suffocating Mothers. New York:  
Routledge Press, 1992.

Carruthers: Carruthers, Mary. The Book of Memory. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1990.



Memory holds tremendous power. Manipulating memory can create or destroy worlds. Painful deeds can be repressed. Deceased loved ones, once dead in memory, exist no more. Many Shakespearean characters utilize and exploit memory in order to try to gain control: both over themselves and others. Throughout this thesis, I will be exploring the ways in which men and women manipulate their memories in response to stressful situations. These means of manipulation are highly dependent upon the gender roles which society expects the characters to maintain. I will be investigating this through characters in Macbeth, Hamlet, Richard III, and The Winter's Tale. Most of my focus will be on the women in these plays as society grants them less agency than their male counterparts. There is, both in the literature of the Renaissance, and in historical investigations of the time, documentation of a tremendous pressure for women to fit a very specific ideal of femininity. The societies in which these women lived promoted sexual, emotional, and material dependence on men. When the female characters I will be exploring desired more power, whether because of a wish for a higher position, in order to compensate for the death of a loved one, or because of situations beyond their control, they each performed their own version of memory manipulation. I will be exploring how these women's approaches to memory, as a function of the specific gender role that society demanded they maintain, vary among them. By doing this, I hope to gain an appreciation of the extent to which the societal standard for dependent women controlled and

manipulated concepts of female power and memory. By comparing and contrasting the ramifications of the return of suppressed memories in men and women, I hope to explore further the societal double standard for how both are expected to act when faced with stressful situations.

During the Renaissance, there was an almost obsessive current of fear pulsing throughout much of the male community: the fear of cuckoldry. This fear had serious ramifications for the characteristics the ideal woman should embody. The ideal woman would be completely uninterested in committing adultery. She was to be passive, sexually static and: an "abstraction of virtue and beauty."<sup>1</sup> Male anxiety would further manifest itself in fantasies of containment,<sup>2</sup> a sort of "the-best-woman-is-a-dead-woman"<sup>3</sup> attitude. The male desire for female containment extended beyond just sexual containment: emotional and material containment was also desired. Male society largely saw marriage as an acceptable way for women "to be constantly watched and controlled."<sup>4</sup> Men also saw women's speech as a successful way

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<sup>1</sup>Jyotsna Singh, The Weyward Sisters (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 17.

<sup>2</sup>Valerie Traub, Desire and Anxiety (New York: Routledge 1992).

<sup>3</sup>Valerie Traub, Ibid

<sup>4</sup>Anthony Fletcher, Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 29.

in which they could control women<sup>5</sup>.

The audience of Renaissance drama would be familiar with this context of ideal femininity--and it is this concept of femininity that Lady Macbeth perverts the first time she is seen on stage. In her struggle to obtain the maximum amount of power for herself and her husband, Lady Macbeth calls upon the spirits of darkness to distort her memories, to block them from ever forming. In order to take this active approach to memory suppression, Lady Macbeth distorts her femininity, denying the power society gives women (namely, power through fertility) in order to obtain another sort of power: the more masculine power of aggressiveness, both in speech and in action. She calls to the spirits:

...Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here.

And fill me from the crown to the toe topful

Of direst cruelty!<sup>6</sup>

She is losing the passivity equated with femininity in the only way she knows how--to cut it off at the source by attempting to deny the societal implications of her feminine gender role. By assuming the traits of a more masculine persona (such as cruelty), she hopes her personality will become less

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<sup>5</sup>Anthony Fletcher, op cit 12

<sup>6</sup>Ed. Blakemore G. Evans The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), I.v.40-43. All further quotes from Shakespeare will be taken from this edition.

compassionate, more aggressive. By utilizing these traits, she will be able to deal with the stress of, and in turn the memory of, the imminent murder of Duncan more effectively. This is evidenced by her statement further along in the monologue:

Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring  
ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief!<sup>7</sup>

Here the sacrifice of her femininity is increased from just one of denouncing her gender to actually disowning and polluting her maternal role; no child can suckle her, only the demons she is invoking. She is making an exchange: my power (via fertility) for your aggressive, masculine-like power. Although not the popular conception in Shakespeare, there was an ancient Greek theory that the child is only the father's: the mother just carries it. In *Orestea*, Aeschylus writes, "The mother is not the parent of the child/ Which is called hers. She is the nurse who tends the growth/ Of young seed planted by its true parent, the male."<sup>8</sup> In this context, Lady Macbeth, by denying the role of "the nurse who tends," renounces the only action that can be seen as purely from the woman. Also, the period of breast-feeding is thought to be the period of greatest connection with the child.

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<sup>7</sup>I.v.47-50

<sup>8</sup>Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (London: Virago, 1977), 113.

As Lady Macbeth says, it is "tender... to love the babe that milks me."<sup>9</sup> Instead of desiring the compassion and intimacy that breast feeding evokes, Lady Macbeth wishes instead for "gall," or bitterness to invade her breasts; a taste that would drive the nursing infant away from her.

The extent to which she pollutes her maternal nature is seen with even more striking vulgarity in this speech to her husband:

I would, while [her baby] was smiling in my  
face,  
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums  
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as  
you  
Have done to this.<sup>10</sup>

Here, to goad her husband on, Lady Macbeth shows her husband that even she, a woman, can be more cruel than he. She also further perverts her femininity and calls her husband's manhood into question by embracing the masculine code of honor over all: something Macbeth is not yet willing to do. Honor--a most masculine trait in the sense she intends it-- has triumphed over her inclinations, or at least the stereotype of what her inclinations *should* be: of maternal love and care for her helpless infant. That is why the image is so unsettling; she is doing more than proposing infanticide-- she is embracing the

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<sup>9</sup> I.vii.55

<sup>10</sup> I.vii.56-59

opposite of what society expects of a mother; "dash[ing] the brains out" of an infant so as not to go back on one's word is a horrifying concept. Yet Lady Macbeth is willing to embrace the (masculine) code of honor above all if it will allow the murder of Duncan to occur.

Macbeth's "inferior" masculinity as compared to his wife's is witnessed again and again at the beginning of the play. She belittles Macbeth, indirectly by calling him a "beast"<sup>11</sup> or a child<sup>12</sup> and directly by a seemingly constant questioning of his manhood manifested in such statements as, "when you durst do it, then you were a man."<sup>13</sup> Lady Macbeth also largely dominates their conversations up until the murder of Duncan; she is his instigator, his call to arms. She holds the power to convince her husband to do anything and she uses this power effectively and often.

Lady Macbeth's perversion of her femininity occurs because she equates maleness with the power to act on one's desires and the power to monitor and control emotions--both before and after a crucial event. She asks the spirits to

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

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<sup>11</sup>I.vii.49

<sup>12</sup>II.ii.51-2

<sup>13</sup>I.vii.49

Th' effect and it!<sup>14</sup>

Here we see the connection Lady Macbeth makes between her new, distorted feminine persona and the power which goes along with it-- she believes men to have the power to "stop up the access and passage to remorse," to cut off memories before they have the chance to form. As the heart and the mind were thought to be the places in which thoughts were formed and solidified,<sup>15</sup> to thicken the flow of blood (circulating through the heart toward the brain) would dull the thoughts leading to the formation of memories, effectively cutting off the memory at the root before it has a chance to become imprinted in the brain.

The importance Lady Macbeth attributes to the denial of memories can also be seen later on in this monologue. Still addressing the spirits, Lady Macbeth cries:

...Come thick night,  
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell  
 So my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
 Nor heaven peer through the blanket of the  
     dark  
 To cry, "Hold, hold!"<sup>16</sup>

Again, she is noting the necessity to stop memories, which would

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<sup>14</sup>I.v.43-46

<sup>15</sup>Mary Carruthers, 48-49

<sup>16</sup>I.v.50-54

lead to the activation of the conscience, at their roots: before they become engraved in the "wax tablet" that is the brain, to use an Aristotelian metaphor. By her reasoning, if she cannot see the murder she is committing, the memories cannot form. If she can avoid seeing the knife stab, avoid acknowledging the sinfulness of her actions, it is as though she has not done anything wrong-- how can she feel remorse for a murder she cannot remember committing?

Interestingly, Lady Macbeth sees herself performing the murder in this malevolent fantasy, not her husband. Perhaps it was originally her intention to do so before she sees how near in physical appearance Duncan is to her father. While anxiously awaiting Macbeth's return from Duncan's bed chamber during the murder she thinks to herself, "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done it."<sup>17</sup> While Lady Macbeth craves the aggressiveness and power which she equates with masculinity, she is, despite all, still a woman. While she can be "unsexed" she does not, in turn, become a man. She is left in a sort of gender-sex limbo. It is for this reason that she spends much time convincing her husband to do the act and belittling his masculinity when he will not; she can assume aspects of the masculine gender role but she can never completely lose sight of the socially implied limitations of being a woman. This is perhaps the first sign that Lady Macbeth cannot be as cruel, or have as strong a power over her memories, as she had previously

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<sup>17</sup>II.ii.12-13



thought; she has not so perverted her feminine gender role that she cannot be subject to bouts of compassion associated with what society perceives to be feminine.

Yet Lady Macbeth does show a great deal of resolve in the necessity of obliterating memories before this point-- and even after. She believes that the murder of Duncan cannot even be performed without a dissolution of memory. The initial stage of the plan, getting to the king, involves the erasure of memory. She plans on getting the chamberlains, who are watching after the king, drunk so that their "...memory, the warder of the brain,/ Shall be but a fume, and the receipt of reason/ A limbeck only."<sup>18</sup> And when their memory is abolished, Lady Macbeth asks her husband, "What cannot you and I commit upon/ Th' unguarded Duncan?"<sup>19</sup> The murder of Duncan, Banquo, and all that follow rest on this: the first demolition of memory. Clouding memory is absolutely essential to the success of the murders.

After the murder as well, the necessity of blocking memories is reinforced with a fresh urgency. Macbeth, in shock after the murder of Duncan, is told by his wife that "These deeds must not be thought/ After these ways; so, it will make us mad."<sup>20</sup> The memory of the deed must be expunged from the brain. This is a refrain from her earlier appeal to the spirits to "Stop up the access and passage to remorse." Her hope is that the murder of

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<sup>18</sup>I.vii.65-67

<sup>19</sup>I.vii.69-70

<sup>20</sup>II.ii.30-31

Duncan will not be processed into a memory, that by denying they ever committed a crime, they will feel no remorse for it.

This is complemented by her statement while washing Duncan's blood off her hands: "A little water clears us of the deed;/ How easy it is then."<sup>21</sup> The erasure of memories for her at this point is as easy as water washing away fresh blood from her hands. Of course, this becomes severely complicated later with her obsessive-compulsive hand washing in the sleep walking scene (which will be discussed in more detail later). Macbeth seems finally to understand his wife as he says, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself."<sup>22</sup> He sees the necessity of separating his memory of the murder from the rest of himself; the two cannot co-inhabit his brain without driving him to insanity.

After the murder of Duncan, there begins a gradual shift in power from Lady Macbeth to her husband. Macbeth embodies the societal definition of the masculine gender role making Lady Macbeth's role as his instigator obsolete; he does not need to be goaded on by her seemingly "superior" masculinity once he becomes the complete embodiment of it. The first step toward Macbeth's reassumption of the dominant role comes with the murder of Banquo. Much unlike Duncan's murder, in which Lady Macbeth is the instigator, the murder of Banquo apparently occurs completely outside of Lady Macbeth's control. While she implies that Macbeth could murder Banquo, Macbeth says to her, "Be innocent of

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<sup>21</sup>II.ii.64-65

<sup>22</sup>II.ii.70

the knowledge, dearest chuck;"<sup>23</sup> she is no longer necessary for him as an instigator and cannot even be given the role of confidante. She is even belittled and put back into the role of passive female recipient when he calls her "dearest chuck," an inversion of times before when she would compare him to beasts or children. While an endearing term, it serves to put Lady Macbeth back into her place and Macbeth back into his; Lady Macbeth is re-assigned her societal role as passive recipient to her husband's orders and Macbeth is once more in a position of authority where he can give her orders. She is no longer a barbarous instigator of regicide, she is "a chick." While she still encourages him to deny memories by saying, "Things without all remedy/ Should be without regard: what's done is done"<sup>24</sup> it comes off as being more of a reminder to herself. He, not even paying attention to her, passes over her comment in a continuation of his own inner-monologue. He no longer needs her help to work up to violent, masculine deeds. He does not even need her help in suppressing memories of the murder. He has successfully lived up to his decision to "not know [him]self"<sup>25</sup> in regard to the murders.

This decision becomes complicated with Macbeth's visitation by the ghost of Banquo. While this scene shows that Macbeth does not have as much control over his memories as he thought, the way

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<sup>23</sup>III.ii.45

<sup>24</sup>III.ii.11-12

<sup>25</sup>II.ii.70

in which the ghost manifests itself to him and the way in which he reacts to the ghost shows an agency and command over his memories which Lady Macbeth does not have. The ghost of Banquo is indistinguishable from those at the banquet; Macbeth does not realize at first that it is a ghost at all. Unlike Lady Macbeth, he does not experience it as a re-living of the actual murder as it was not he who actually performed the murder. When he realizes who it is, he does not feel regret or desperation but anger: he asks those at the table, "Which of you have done this?"<sup>26</sup> He then challenges the ghost of Banquo to a duel and demands that he "avaunt, and quit my sight!"<sup>27</sup> Macbeth is awake during his visitation; he has control over his actions and what he will say in a way that the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth cannot. He has the ability and the determination to make the vision go away; he aggressively pursues the image of Banquo; Lady Macbeth is helpless to combat her memories that come to haunt her nightly. There is an agency, then, to Macbeth's actions that Lady Macbeth does not have with regard to these experiences. I would argue that the way in which society has molded their specific gender roles allows Macbeth this control over his memories: he was raised to take control, to fight obstacles; this is the power that Lady Macbeth wishes for when she invokes the spirits. Yet, in order to maintain this power, she needs to overcome the inner-dueling of how she as an individual wants to

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<sup>26</sup>III.iv.48

<sup>27</sup>III.iv.92

behave versus how the rest of society *expects* her to behave; ultimately, the conflict between the two becomes too strong for her to deny. Macbeth experiences no conflict between how he wants to behave and how society wants him to behave.

In order to pull Macbeth out of his fantasy of the ghost of Banquo, Lady Macbeth resorts to her old tactics of calling Macbeth's manhood into question. If she, a woman, is able to deal with the murder of Duncan effectively, why should not he be able to deal with the murder of Banquo: a murder he did not even commit? She belittles him, stating:

O proper stuff!

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,  
 Authoriz'd by her grandam. Shame itself,  
 Why do you make such faces? When all's done,  
 You look but on a stool.<sup>28</sup>

Lady Macbeth tries to show him the absurdity of re-living the fear of these murders by comparing them to "a woman's story." They are not fit for the world of men and only fit for the world of women as an old wife's tale. Moreover, Lady Macbeth is unaffected by Macbeth's vision of Banquo. She believes Macbeth

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<sup>28</sup>III.iv.59-67

to be looking upon nothing and thus his fear to be unfounded. She shames him, calling him "unmann'd"<sup>29</sup> while she remains very much in control of the situation. She reassures the guests and is eventually the one who asks them to leave.

Yet there is a strange turn at the end of the scene. While Lady Macbeth is the one in control throughout the scene, suddenly at the end she seems to lose authority. Macbeth blames his episode on "initiate fear that wants hard use"<sup>30</sup>; with practice, the memories of those he has killed will no longer come back to haunt him; his murders will continue. Macbeth finds a way to control any future onslaught of the memories of those he has killed by stating that it is the act of killing, the very act which would bring on the troublesome memories in the first place, which will allow him to gain control over his memories. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, shows no desire for the murders to continue; she seems to just want to ignore all that has happened by going to sleep. And while she tells him that he needs sleep, it is by his authority that they leave for bed.<sup>31</sup>

From this point on, Lady Macbeth largely fades from the text. While she was extremely dominant in her first few scenes with Macbeth--both in the number of lines she spoke in relation to Macbeth and the content of her lines--after this point she virtually disappears (other than, of course, her sleepwalking

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<sup>29</sup>III.iv.72

<sup>30</sup>III.iv.141-2

<sup>31</sup>III.iv.140-141

scene). Although her sickness demands some attention, her death occurs off-stage, mentioned only in passing with little reaction from Macbeth.

By the time of her death, the power Lady Macbeth received from distorting and manipulating her feminine side becomes completely consumed by the expectation society has for the feminine. She is the very embodiment of ineffectual femininity in the sleep-walking scene. She is asleep: vulnerable, passive, manipulable--much in contrast to Macbeth's violent outbreaks in his scene with the ghost. She speaks of sweetening her hands with perfume and cries out in gasps of pain and confusion while Macbeth demands Banquo to fight or leave. He has agency, Lady Macbeth has none!

As we have seen, Lady Macbeth equates her assumption of a deviant feminine role with the ability to keep memories from invading the mind, of being able to choose what is to be thought of and what is not. This is made apparent both in her "make thick my blood" speech and in her equation of Macbeth's bout with the memory of Banquo with unmanliness. When she loses the power she had taken on through her distorted gender role, the memories of the murder flood back. Lady Macbeth's madness manifests itself in an endless repetition of the memory of the murder of Duncan, the memory she so vehemently tried to suppress.

The scene is ritualistic, indicating that her emotions are unbalanced and have been for a long time; she performs the same actions over and over again, as evidenced by the nurse's

knowledge of what will happen next. She scrubs at the imaginary blood on her hands, lamenting, "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"<sup>32</sup> a stark contrast to the ease with which the blood was washed off her hands after the actual murder. While the physical blood has obviously vanished, it is the memory of the blood, and of how the blood got on her hands, which has come back to haunt her.

This scene is made more poignant by the emphasis Lady Macbeth still puts on the necessity to forget about the murder. She says in her sleep to her husband, "No more o' that, my lord, no more of that; you mar all with this starting"<sup>33</sup> and "What's done cannot be undone"<sup>34</sup>; despite her obvious inability to obey her own advice she maintains that denying the traumatic memory of their murder of Duncan is the only way to come away from the event unscathed.

The physician looking on at this scene sees that her sleepwalking is a result not of a physical illness but of a spiritual-mental dysfunction, as seen in his statement: "infected minds/ To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets./ More needs she the divine than the physician."<sup>35</sup> The uncontrollable retrieval of memories which Lady Macbeth experiences is equated in medieval literature on memory with an imbalance of bodily

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<sup>32</sup>v.i.43

<sup>33</sup>v.i.44-45

<sup>34</sup>v.i.68

<sup>35</sup>v.i.72-74



humors. Up through the Renaissance, the body was believed to be composed of four humors: one dry and warm, one moist and warm, one dry and cold, one moist and cold. The brain was thought to be extremely moist and cool. Aristotle thought, as quoted by Mary Carruthers, that "those who are melancholic are too fluid to retain images well and so recollect uncontrollably."<sup>36</sup> He says also that memories manifesting themselves in dream-images (as happens with Lady Macbeth) are the result of "aroused, imbalanced emotions."<sup>37</sup> But it is more than an imbalance of emotions that the physician sees her as having; it is beyond his practice, a matter of the divine. Her corrupted memory of this traumatic event is responsible for her obsessive-compulsive behavior. To restore herself to sanity, she needs to restore her knowledge of the path to God. This is consistent with a theory of memory sketched out by Frances Yates (and complemented by Mary Carruthers) in her The Art of Memory. She discusses a concept of memory held in Ancient Greece--and beyond--that memory is one of the three powers of the soul, making up, with understanding and will, "the trinity in man."<sup>38</sup> The power of memory remained appreciated and revered in the literature of the Middle Ages, a time in which the importance of memory took on a more religious connotation. The most important function of memory was to remember heaven and hell and the ways to get to both: or to avoid

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<sup>36</sup>Carruthers, 49

<sup>37</sup>Carruthers, 58

<sup>38</sup>Carruthers, 49

one and get to the other. In suppressing her memory, Lady Macbeth has also suppressed one of the three parts of her soul and this has led to an inability to remember, and get to, heaven. Memory, as with the inability to escape the feminine gender role, is more powerful a force than Lady Macbeth has realized; it is stronger than the power she hoped to derive from corrupting her femininity and strong enough to lead her to insanity and suicide.

Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, manipulates her memory in a way slightly different from Lady Macbeth. While Lady Macbeth seeks actively to distort and suppress her memories, calling upon exterior forces to help her, Gertrude seems unaware that a suppression of memory has occurred. Gertrude's shift from love of Old Hamlet to love of Claudius seems more like the unconscious act of displacement than a conscious act of forgetting her first husband. Displacement is a defense mechanism wherein one's feelings or emotions are shifted toward a more acceptable or available replacement. The process involves "'stimulus generalization': the more similar the displaced object is to the original, the greater the potential for motive satisfaction-- but also the greater the potential for anxiety."<sup>39</sup> Marrying her deceased husband's brother is probably as close as she could get to the original. It is important to stress that defense mechanisms are *unconscious*; Gertrude would not be aware of her

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<sup>39</sup>David G. Winter, Personality Analysis and Interpretation of Lives (New York, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, 1996), 77.

shift in affections (and sexual satisfaction) from Old Hamlet to his brother as being unhealthy or forced. In fact, she would not recognize it as a shift in affections at all, but as a new and separate love.

Yet Gertrude has long been looked upon by others-- from Hamlet to contemporary literary critics-- as having a rampant and uncontrollable "sinful" sexuality. This line of criticism can be seen more in texts from before the feminist movement: perhaps an indication of the continuous propensity to wish a passive, sexually static ideal of femininity. Carolyn Heilbrun, an early feminist scholar, drew much attention for her belief that Gertrude was not all bad, although she still felt that Gertrude's lust was one "which throws out of joint all the structure of human morality and relationships."<sup>40</sup> I will be arguing that this is not lust for lust's sake. Gertrude's lack of distinction between Old Hamlet and Claudius is a source of power, used to block the memory of her dead husband. Her new sexual relationship with Claudius shows not a rampant sexuality but an inability to distinguish between her old and her current husband.<sup>41</sup>

Gertrude forces herself to see a continuation between Old Hamlet and his brother Claudius as a way to move on with her life. At the time in which Hamlet was set--and written-- women

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<sup>40</sup><sub>15</sub>

<sup>41</sup>Adelman, 13

were considered property.<sup>42</sup> Women lived in a society which "never allowed them independence from men either physically or spiritually... freedom of conscience for women was still a new concept."<sup>43</sup> There was a strong societal pull for women to get married and stay married. Around this time of Puritan influence, the family was "newly emphasized as the focus of political, social, legal and economic organization"<sup>44</sup> permutations of which "constitute[d] a central structure in the psychic and social dimensions of woman's oppression."<sup>45</sup> This theme of oppression through marriage can be seen in the tradition still carried on today of a father giving away his daughter at her wedding: it "put women in mind of a duty where into the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others."<sup>46</sup> Society perpetuated an ideal of dependent women. Marriage was seen as a means to be morally rescued,<sup>47</sup> for women to be "saved" by their superior male counterparts. This pull to marry in order for a woman to hold on to power and prestige in society is seen again in Richard III with a slight twist as will be discussed later.

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<sup>42</sup>Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

<sup>43</sup>Dusinberre, 92-93

<sup>44</sup>Dympna Callaghan, "The Ideology of Romantic Love," The Weyward Sisters (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 62

<sup>45</sup>Callaghan, 65

<sup>46</sup>Anthony Fletcher, 70

<sup>47</sup>Jyotsna Singh

It can be argued that Gertrude's marriage to Claudius can be seen as a marriage of convenience and dependence. At the death of a husband, wives were suddenly left not only without a loved one but also without their source of material and social identity. (For instance, take Queen Elizabeth's quote in Richard III upon the imminent death of her husband: "The loss of such a lord includes all harms."<sup>48</sup>) At the sudden loss of her husband, Gertrude finds her identity as wife and queen suddenly in question. She uses her sexuality as a way of holding on to her identity as wife, an identity that is a dubious one, as the defining characteristic of being wife in this age was to be essentially identity-less as a woman, "forfeits her separate identity in marriage."<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, it is the role that women during this time were pressured to embrace. Gertrude may feel an additional pressure to remarry as the kingdom is, at the time of Old Hamlet's death, kingless, a fact made more menacing by the oncoming attack of Fortinbras and his army. There is then a double pressure for Gertrude to marry; there is both the pressure that society places on women to be married and the threat of losing her position as Queen if Fortinbras defeats the weakened kingdom of Denmark.

The speed with which Gertrude remarries is a sign of her desperation to hold on to her position as wife and queen. Gertrude can even admit to herself that her marriage is

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<sup>48</sup>I.ii.6-8

<sup>49</sup>Dusinberre, 101

"o'erhasty"<sup>50</sup> and has occurred while the memory of her deceased husband is still "green."<sup>51</sup> Her hasty remarriage causes a lack of distinction between the old and new husband not just for her but for the whole court--except of course for Hamlet. "The court... seems all too willing to accept the new king in place of the old."<sup>52</sup> This sort of group amnesia in part leads to Hamlet's obsession with restoring memory to his mother and, through her, the kingdom, a task made more urgent by his ghost-father's haunting refrain for him to "remember me."<sup>53</sup>

Gertrude's nondiscriminating sexuality, as perceived by her son, can be seen in the Player scene between the Player King and Player Queen. The Player King asks the Player Queen to make an oath to "think thou wilt no second husband wed,/ But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead"<sup>54</sup> to which she staunchly agrees, stating, "Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife, If once I be a widow, ever I be a wife!"<sup>55</sup> If we take the Player Queen to be a direct parallel to the real queen, as Hamlet wishes, the Player Queen and the real queen's both remarrying shows their inability to distinguish between husbands. And if the Player Queen keeps her word not to remarry if her husband

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<sup>50</sup>II.ii.57

<sup>51</sup>I.ii.2

<sup>52</sup>Adelman, 13

<sup>53</sup>I.v.91

<sup>54</sup>III.ii.214-215

<sup>55</sup>222-223

dies, as Hamlet says she does ("O but she'll keep her word"),<sup>56</sup> then it follows that in Gertrude's mind she does not marry a different man but an extension of the first. To keep the oath true that she wishes misery on herself if "once I be a widow, ever I be a wife," it would follow that since she is still a wife, she must never have been a widow; she can thus justify her sexual relationship with both men by equating Claudius with Old Hamlet: Gertrude is denying the memory of Old Hamlet in order to escape the painful memory of her late husband and her guilt at her "o'erhasty marriage."<sup>57</sup>

Gertrude's failure of memory, her "inability to distinguish properly between [Hamlet's] father and his father's brother,"<sup>58</sup> makes Hamlet's task of avenging his father also a task of restoring his mother's memory of his father, as I mentioned briefly above. At Hamlet's father's request, Hamlet vows not only to keep the memory of his father alive, but:

Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures  
past  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,

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<sup>56</sup>231

<sup>57</sup>II.ii.57

<sup>58</sup>Adelman, 13

Unmix'd with baser matter....<sup>59</sup>

Hamlet goes far beyond promising to keep alive the memory of his father; he vows, in a sense, to become his father,<sup>60</sup> or at least to lose his self-identity as all previous memories he has formed are now to be "wipe[d] away." By losing his sense of self, though, he begins to lose all perspective. Despite his father's admitted flaws (he is in purgatory for "the foul crimes done in [his] days<sup>61</sup>"), Hamlet idealizes his father to God-like proportions,<sup>62</sup> comparing him to "Hyperion," "Jove," and "Mars."<sup>63</sup> Hamlet becomes obsessed with forcing his mother to differentiate between Claudius and his father and thus to restore her memory: but the sense of urgency with which he employs this differentiation may be in part because of his own failure to differentiate.<sup>64</sup> His difficulty with keeping the images of his father and Claudius separate is seen perhaps most poignantly in the scene in which Claudius is praying in his bedroom. Hamlet refuses to kill his uncle at this point because, as Janet Adelman puts it nicely, "Hamlet becomes so unsure that there is an essential difference between them that he worries that God might

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<sup>59</sup>I.v.98-103

<sup>60</sup>Adelman, 13

<sup>61</sup>I.v.12

<sup>62</sup>Adelman, 22.

<sup>63</sup>III.iv.56-57

<sup>64</sup>Adelman, 13



send the wrong man to heaven."<sup>65</sup> This may be why Hamlet so exaggerates the differences between Old Hamlet and Claudius; he is trying to work up to the sense of urgency with which he promised to remember his father in the first place. When Hamlet gets his mother alone, he presents her with a picture of his father and a picture of Claudius, saying:

Look here upon this picture, and on this,  
 See what a grace was seated on this brow...  
 This was your husband. Look you now what  
 follows:  
 Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear  
 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you  
 eyes?

...What devil was't  
 That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind  
 Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans  
 all.<sup>66</sup>

Hamlet sees in his mother a "devilish" desire not to distinguish between her two husbands. He accuses Gertrude of blocking off her senses to be with Claudius. This mirrors Gertrude's transposition of sexual affection from one man to another: In keeping with the player scene, in order to be with Claudius, she

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<sup>65</sup>Adelman, 21

<sup>66</sup>III.iv.54-79

needs to block the memory of being with either man specifically and transfer it to being with one man who has no individual identity. If she can be intimate with a man without seeing, feeling, hearing, or smelling him, who is she actually with? There is no specificity to her sexuality: which does not mean that she has a "rampant" sexuality which "throws out of joint all the structure of human morality and relationships" as Heilbrun so forcefully put it. Again, I believe that her remarriage to Claudius is not a result of Gertrude *needing* sex for the sake of sexual pleasure. If it were only sex that she needed, why would she feel pressure to re-marry so quickly? Rather, the marriage is a result of Gertrude's inability to live as a single woman in a male-dominated society which pushed for women to be married and completely dependent on men. To her at this point, Claudius and Old Hamlet are one. She refuses to be responsive to the sensual differences between the two as that would lead to the breakdown of her elaborate denial and corruption of her first husband's memory, and in turn a breakdown of the only power society has allowed her to know as a woman.

Hamlet eases his attack on his mother after he is re-visited by his father's ghost. The ghost's re-appearance, meant to "whet [his] almost blunted purpose"<sup>67</sup>, does just that. While he still obsesses over his mother's sexual relationship with his uncle, he no longer tries to put his father and Claudius at such opposite extremes of the spectrum. At this point he moves on to

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<sup>67</sup>III.iv.111

a new tactic: insisting that Gertrude stop sleeping with Claudius on moral grounds.

Hamlet's insistence on differentiating between the two men does have an effect on Gertrude. She pleads with Hamlet to stop exposing their differences, realizing she has been ignoring them. She says to him:

...O, Hamlet, speak no more  
 Thou turns't my eyes into my very soul,  
 And there I see such black and grained spots  
 As will not leave their tinct.<sup>68</sup>

"Soul" is a meaning-laden word to use in regards to memory. As discussed earlier in the section on Lady Macbeth, memory was thought to be one of the three parts of the soul. By looking into her soul, then, Gertrude is in essence looking into her memories of Old Hamlet: A memory so heavily corrupted that it cannot be redeemed--the "black and grained spots/... will not leave their tinct--" or, they will not lose their color. Although she has been exposed to the falsity of her memories, she cannot redeem her first husband's memory. She has collapsed the two men into one for too long.

When Hamlet forces Gertrude to realize that her sexual inclination toward her husband is a result of not differentiating between him and her ex-husband, she loses the power she had through her sexuality. Hamlet becomes, in a way, a replacement

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<sup>68</sup>III.iv.88-91

for the husband figures by controlling his mother's sexuality. Hamlet dictates whether or not Gertrude can be with her husband, removing all sexual power Gertrude once had. He tells Gertrude no longer to be subject to Claudius' sexuality, stating:

Refrain tonight

And that shall lend a kind of easiness

To the next abstinence.<sup>69</sup>

His hope is to break her sexual dependency on Claudius and by doing so, to keep her from melding the image of him and Old Hamlet as she had previously done. If she stops sleeping with Claudius, it becomes easier for her not to think of him as a husband figure and more as a brother (in-law). Hamlet hopes that by breaking the pattern of her sleeping with Claudius as a sort of faceless, sense-less man ("Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight..."<sup>70</sup>), the memory of Old Hamlet will come back to her, as she slept with him *specifically*, as her husband. Gertrude easily gives this power to control her sexuality over to Hamlet, a further indication of her dependency on men and the extent to which she stays within the bounds of her socially-given gender role. She asks Hamlet, "What shall I do?"<sup>71</sup>, to which Hamlet replies:

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

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<sup>69</sup>III.iv.159-167

<sup>70</sup>III.iv.78

<sup>71</sup>III.iv.180

Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,  
Pinch wanton on your cheek...  
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses...  
Make you to ravel all this matter out,  
That I essentially am not in madness....<sup>72</sup>

He cheapens her relationship with Claudius, describing her as a sort of prostitute, giving up secrets for sexual favors. Her power over Claudius is thus dirtied by Hamlet: her relationship with Claudius is revealed as being wretched and sordid; she has been using Claudius for her own purposes. Hamlet takes away her ability to use Claudius any longer by assuming control over whether or not she will sleep with him again; her sexuality, her source of power, is no longer her own. With her walls of false memory crumbled and her sexuality--her one constant source of power--no longer her own, Gertrude is in the position of the widow for the first time as she realizes the broken vow of the Player scene: If she be widow she cannot re-wed. She thus loses the identity she had been so loathe to lose at the death of her husband. More importantly, she loses her sense of identity as wife and the power that she knows through that role.

With Gertrude's mask of sexuality gone, she drinks from the poisoned wine in the fencing scene not by mistake, it has been argued for, but as a form of suicide to save her son and the

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<sup>72</sup>III.iv.182-187

memory of Old Hamlet as embodied in Hamlet.<sup>73</sup> I should preface the rest of this rather controversial interpretation by saying that even if we do not accept Adelman and Cook's interpretation that Gertrude's death may be a suicide, the implications of her death are the same. Knowing she was about to die, Gertrude's warning is still to her son, showing a high degree of loyalty to him (over her husband) and to the memory of Old Hamlet. Moreover, in terms of the plot, the final outcome is still the same. Those who held a polluted memory of Old Hamlet are destroyed. Whether it is a sacrifice for Gertrude to die or an accident, the distorted memory of Old Hamlet which she retained is no longer and her last sentence is a warning to keep Hamlet, and the memory of her original husband, alive. To return to Adelman's interpretation of the fencing scene, Gertrude drinks the wine knowing that Claudius has prepared it for Hamlet and shows uncharacteristic disobedience in refusing Claudius' order not to drink from the glass.<sup>74</sup> Gertrude's final statement is a warning to her son; she addresses no one else, not even Claudius to blame him for her death. Instead she says, "No, no, the drink, the drink--O my dear Hamlet--/ The drink, the drink! I am pois'ned"<sup>75</sup> after which she immediately dies. That her final words are a warning to Hamlet reveals her desperation to protect the uncorrupted memory of Old Hamlet as embodied in her son:

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<sup>73</sup>Janet Adelman and Judith Cook

<sup>74</sup>Adelman, 15

<sup>75</sup>v.ii.309-310

Hamlet needs to survive as it is only he who still holds the uncorrupted memory of his father. As already mentioned, the court accepted Claudius as Old Hamlet's replacement and Gertrude could not un-corrupt her memories of Old Hamlet. Hamlet is the only one in whom the memory of his father appears to be alive and well. Also, as his sole son, Hamlet is the only person who can keep the memory of his father alive through his line. If Hamlet dies, so does the legacy of King Hamlet. In terms of the memory of Old Hamlet, if Gertrude dies nothing is lost as her memories of him are so stained. The desperation of her final cry to Hamlet reveals the extent to which she wishes his memory to be righted and to have the memory of the whole kingdom restored. While Gertrude is unsuccessful in having Old Hamlet's memory live on directly through Hamlet, Hamlet dies telling Horatio to tell the tale to Fortinbras, on whom the legacy of Old Hamlet now lies.

The case of Gertrude and the case of Anne in Richard III are very similar. Both are widowed and left floundering in a male-dominated, marriage-pushing society. Elizabeth captures this sentiment well at the impending death of her husband when she asks, "If he were dead what would betide me/.... The loss of such a lord includes all harms."<sup>76</sup> Not only will she lose the husband whom she loves but also the role of wife on which she is dependent for social identity. Yet while both Anne and Gertrude

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<sup>76</sup>I.iii.6-8

feel pressure to marry, the circumstances are slightly different. Anne is younger than Gertrude. She has most likely built an identity around the societal ideal of fertile wife: an identity for which Gertrude is now too old for. When Anne is forced into widowhood, she loses the possibility of realizing her role as fertile woman, an ideal which had been instilled in women as their true function in society as is seen again and again in this text with the need to carry on the line, to bear more children. Also, Anne *knows* that Richard has killed her husband and her father-in-law; there is no conclusive evidence in the text that Gertrude had any knowledge of the murder of her husband. Thus, unlike Gertrude, for Anne to marry "requires the suspension of moral judgment and the erasure of historical memory."<sup>77</sup> She must forget not only the harm felt from the murders of her husband and father-in-law on an emotional level, but also the ramifications that come from the death of a royal figure on society both at that moment and for future generations.

At the time Richard attempts to woo Anne, the deaths of her husband and father-in-law are still very recent; so recent that her father-in-law is yet to be buried. Anne has probably just begun to realize the bleakness of her situation--she has no children, no husband, no father-figure; she has no male figure at all to depend upon. Richard realizes this too and moves in quickly on Anne--but not before informing the audience of his

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<sup>77</sup>Eds. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether, Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 42



intent:

For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest  
daughter.

What, though I killed her husband and her  
father?

The readiest way to make the wench amends  
Is to become her husband and her  
father....<sup>78</sup>

Richard is aware of the societal pressure Anne must feel to be married. There is little a single woman would be able to do in her society to take care of herself. Richard realizes that she needs a controlling male figure to have any sort of command or sway in their society. Richard will be playing into Anne's need to feel power and to deny the memories of her father-in-law and husband in his wooing of her.

Just before Richard comes on stage to make Anne his bride, Anne enters bearing her father-in-law's corpse and in no mood to be wooed. She is angry and sad, having just lost two very important, very powerful men in her life in a short span of time--and by the same man's hands. Her hatred toward Richard is so strong that she wishes strife not only on him but also on those who are, or will be, close to him. She curses him, stating:

If ever he have a child, abortive be it,

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<sup>78</sup>I.i.153-157

Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,  
 Whose ugly and unnatural aspect  
 May fright the hopeful mother at the view,  
 And that be heir to his unhappiness!  
 If ever he have wife, let her be made  
 More miserable by the [life] of him  
 Than I am made by my young lord and thee!<sup>79</sup>

Less than two hundred lines later, Anne puts the curse on herself with her agreement to marry Richard. That Anne would intentionally do this to herself would be impossible to support; she must have undergone some sort of memory suppression in order to agree to marry Richard and succumb to the hardships that she has imposed upon herself. By agreeing to marry Richard she wishes upon herself horrible unhappiness--worse than the grief she is experiencing now at the death of her husband and his father. Not only that, but she curses all the power she might have exercised through her feminine gender role. Any fantasy she may be entertaining of being in the role of [Richard's] fertile wife again (perhaps one of the major reasons she would agree to remarry at all) is polluted as she has wished horrors on his unborn children. Any child she would have with Richard would be ugly, unnatural, monstrous: certainly not fit to carry on the royal line.

The notion that Anne must have suppressed the memories of

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<sup>79</sup>I.ii.21-28

all that Richard has done to her and her family is furthered by the fact that he woos her in front of the body of her father-in-law. For Anne to agree to marry Richard over Henry VI's body seems unconscionable. She must have somehow ignored that the body was in front of her or denied the memory of who was inside the casket. That Anne has forgotten about the body, or at least who the body is in relation to her, is supported by her consent at Richard's taking it to be buried. Of course, it would normally be unheard of for the murderer of the deceased to be the one to take it to be buried. Something in Anne's mind shifts in order for her to allow Richard to take the corpse. That Richard does take the body symbolizes Anne's trying to leave the memory of the dead behind; she is symbolically leaving behind her old life-- especially her marriage to Edward. Richard has done her no wrong if those who are dead are not and were not a part of her. This is similar to Lady Macbeth's reasoning about Duncan's murder; if she has no memory of the murder she has nothing to feel remorse for.

Richard plays into the knowledge that Anne needs to deny these memories by the way in which he woos her. While courting, he proposes:

*Glou:* Say that I slew them not?

*Anne:* Then say they were not slain.

But dead they are, and, devilish slave, by thee.

*Glou:* I did not kill your husband

Anne:                               Why then he is alive

Glou: Nay, he is dead, and slain by Edward's  
  hands.

Anne: In thy foul throat thou li'st! Queen  
  Margaret saw

Thy murd'rous falchion smoking in his  
blood...

Didst thou not kill the king?

Glou:   I grant ye.<sup>80</sup>

Within the space of eleven lines, Richard has gone from adamantly denying that he killed Anne's husband to agreeing quite easily that he has. He further disorients Anne by confusing his motives, blaming the murders on her beauty instead of his anger. By the end of their conversation Anne does not know what to think; all she previously believed has been rotated so many times that it becomes nearly impossible to understand what actually happened. Richard's role--and her role--in the murders are no longer black and white. Richard presents himself as having a reason for killing them other than just hatred; he did it not out of hate, but out of love, a much nobler cause.

The extent to which Richard relies on obliterating Anne's memory of his killings is seen most poignantly after he has successfully wooed her. He cackles to himself, "Hah!/ Hath she forgot already that brave prince,/ Edward, her lord, whom I, some

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<sup>80</sup>I.ii.91-102

three months since, / Stabb'd in my angry mood at Tewksbury?"<sup>81</sup>  
 Yes, she must have forgotten her "brave prince" through Richard's manipulation, otherwise there would be no justification for her marriage to Richard. Although she later attributes his success in wooing her "woman's heart" to her growing "captive to his honey words"<sup>82</sup> this seems to be a woefully inadequate incentive to marry her husband's murderer. Something more must have happened: namely, a suppression of the memories of the deceased.

I do not mean to deny that his "honey words" had something to do with her agreeing to marry him--to deny this would also be inadequate. The emphasis Richard places on Anne's beauty and sexuality gives Anne an immense sense of her power as a woman. Anne's sexual power is no longer just that of fertility, of producing life, but also of producing death. While she is not directly responsible for killing her husband or his father, it is because of her, according to Richard, that their deaths occurred at all. Richard feeds into her sense of sexual power by heavily emphasizing her role in her husband's death:

*Anne:* Ill rest betide the chamber where thou  
 liest!

*Glou:* So will it, madam, till I lie with  
 you... But, gentle Lady Anne....

Is not the causer of the timeless deaths  
 Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,

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<sup>81</sup>I.ii.238-241

<sup>82</sup>IV.i.78-79

As blameful as the executioner?

Anne: Thou wast the cause, and most accurs'd  
effect.

Glou: Your beauty was the cause of that  
effect--

Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep  
To undertake the death of all the world,  
So I might live one hour in your sweet  
bosom.<sup>83</sup>

Richard's manipulation of Anne is so effective here because he not only confuses her memory of their deaths, but he also gives her power: a power which Anne has been without since the death of her husband. If Anne perceives herself as being capable of causing Richard to murder she could safely reason that she would have immense power over him if they were married. That it was a lie that Anne's beauty drove him to murder leads to serious ramifications for Anne as she soon finds herself without any of the power she thought she would have in their relationship.

Left without this power, her sexuality is manipulated by Richard, making her living situation unbearable. Due in part to Anne's self-curse, in part to Richard's hatred of her, in part to memories of her deceased husband returning, Anne "Never yet an hour in his bed/ Did... enjoy the golden dew of sleep."<sup>84</sup> She

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<sup>83</sup>I.ii.111-124

<sup>84</sup>IV.i.82-3

dies soon after this scene, offstage.

After Anne's death, Richard succeeds in manipulating Elizabeth into promising to bring his marriage suit to her daughter. He does this by putting a twist on forgetting and remembering. If Elizabeth's daughter marries Richard, he will make up for the deaths he has caused by bringing new life to the family by fathering a new royal line. This ties into the notion of historical living through the children, a common theme in Shakespearean drama; there is anxiety about not having an heir with Gertrude in Hamlet, Leontes in The Winter's Tale, Macduff in Macbeth and Lear in King Lear to name but a few. This notion is captured well in this dialogue:

*Elizabeth:* Yet thou didst kill my children.

*Richard:* But in your daughter's womb I bury  
them;

Where in that nest of spicery they will breed  
Selves of themselves, to your  
recomforture.<sup>85</sup>

Richard is playing off Elizabeth's fear of being heirless (as he has killed her children). He has the power, through his fertility, to bring new life to Elizabeth's line, and as King of England, he also has power to make the new line very prosperous. He is promising to create new memories for her to replace the memories of those he killed.

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<sup>85</sup>IV.422-425

For Elizabeth to replace the memories of the deaths that Richard caused with new ones, or to deny them, is necessary in order for her to agree to prostitute her daughter to Richard. This turns Elizabeth into a sort of inverted Hamlet figure. She controls her daughter's sexuality by denying memories rather than exposing them. She goes through the same complete reversal of beliefs that Anne does earlier. At the beginning of the scene Elizabeth adamantly opposes Richard's marriage suit. She retells all the wrongs he has done to her family as evidence why he will not marry her daughter. She says:

Send to her by the man that slew her  
brothers....

Therefore present to her... steep'd in  
Rutland's blood--

A handkercher, which, say to her, did drain  
The purple sap from her sweet brother's  
body....

If this inducement move her not to love,  
Send her a letter of thy noble deeds:  
Tell her thou mad'st away her uncle Clarence,  
Her uncle Rivers, ay (and for her sake!)  
Mad'st quick conveyance with her good aunt

Anne.<sup>86</sup>

She is very aware here of all the deaths he caused--both directly

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<sup>86</sup>IV.iv.271-283



and indirectly. Moreover, she knows the dangers involved with marrying Richard as evidenced by Anne's "quick conveyance." She holds Richard responsible for Anne's death; to have her daughter marry him would be unconscionable considering Anne's fate. Also, her premature death would eradicate any hopes for Elizabeth of having heirs through her daughter. Additionally, Elizabeth is aware of Anne's curse against any woman Richard marries. Anne tells Elizabeth in the previous scene:

This was my wish: "Be thou," quoth I,  
                   "accurs'd  
 For making me, so young, so old a widow!  
 And when thou weds't, let sorrow haunt thy  
                   bed;  
 And be thy wife-- if any be so mad--  
 More miserable by the life of thee  
 Than thou hast made me....<sup>87</sup>

She knows the curse worked on Anne and would have no reason to assume that it would not work on her daughter. She must have denied the memory of Anne's curse in order to promise her daughter to one whom she knew would make her daughter miserable. Quite possibly, Elizabeth denies the possible danger she will put her daughter in by finding some superficial justification for doing so; Elizabeth knows that society frowns heavily on unmarried women, as evidenced by her earlier quote at the thought

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<sup>87</sup>IV.i.71-76

of losing her husband, "If he were dead, what would betide on me?"<sup>88</sup> With most of her family now dead, Elizabeth may be wanting to find security for her daughter via a husband and children. Richard helps Elizabeth fall into this misconception by his account, mentioned earlier, of childbirth as being so mechanical and devoid of female influence. There seems to be no emotion in his view of childbirth. The woman becomes a machine designed to spew forth little princes and male heirs, not a woman giving birth to a human being. There is no denying that having children is necessary to continue the royal line--but the woman seems to be almost taken out of the process: "That nest of spicery," the womb (not the woman) has children. Richard even refers back to the Aristotelian conception of childbirth mentioned earlier with Lady Macbeth by suggesting that the woman has no other role in the pregnancy except for keeping the child inside of her; she does not contribute to the genetic makeup of the child--it is all in Richard's sperm which will "breed/ Selves of themselves" while the woman sits docilely by. Richard is purposely dehumanizing the birthing process to make Elizabeth's task of separating the emotion of her love for her daughter and the memories of the horrors Richard committed from her desire to continue the line. Elizabeth admits to this denial of memory. She asks, "Shall I forget myself to be myself?"<sup>89</sup> recognizing that she must forget the wrongs Richard did to her and her family

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<sup>88</sup>I.iii.6

<sup>89</sup>IV.iv.420

(and could very possibly do to her daughter) if she wants him to continue her family line.

Richard knows the denial of memory is crucial to Elizabeth's consent to try to win him her daughter's hand. He tells Elizabeth, when she recounts his murders of her family, to "Harp not on that string, madam, that is past."<sup>90</sup> He also encourages Elizabeth to forget herself when she asks if she should; he states, "Ay, if your remembrance wrong yourself."<sup>91</sup> He asks Elizabeth to "plead what I will be and not what I have been,"<sup>92</sup> to forget the past and think only of what could be. He continually emphasizes the future, pleading with her to forget the past.

By the end of the scene, Elizabeth relents and agrees to talk to her daughter about marrying Richard. Although we cannot know what would have happened had Richard not been killed in battle, it would probably be a fair assumption that her daughter would have died a similar death to Anne, based on the curse she inflicted upon any that Richard will marry and his previous bedroom behavior.

Yet Richard is not impervious to the effects of the denial of memories, despite his constant urgings to keep the past away from the present. In this way he is much like Lady Macbeth. Compare, for instance, these lines of Richard and Lady Macbeth:

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<sup>90</sup>IV.iv.363

<sup>91</sup>1.421

<sup>92</sup>1.413

Richard says to Elizabeth, "Look, what is done cannot be now amended"<sup>93</sup> while Lady Macbeth says to Macbeth in her sleep, "What's done cannot be undone"<sup>94</sup>. Both he and Lady Macbeth are also subjected to the memories of what they hoped to block. Richard is visited by the visions of those he has killed as that is what he has been hoping to keep away, Lady Macbeth remembers the actual murder as that is what she wished to forget.

Richard's ghostly visitations mark the first time in which he does not have control over the situation at hand. Throughout the play, he manipulates seemingly impossible situations into his favor and for his means: he kills his brother, marries Anne, gets Elizabeth to promise him her daughter, and on and on. Richard lacks agency in this scene; he, again like Lady Macbeth, is asleep during his visitation. Richard is, in fact, the only male studied here who encounters his ghosts while asleep. Macbeth sees Banquo at the banquet, Hamlet sees his father outside and in his mother's room, Leontes' "visitation" is at Paulina's house. This feminizes Richard. He is given no agency, he is essentially powerless to the visions and to their condemnations. His feelings of helplessness last throughout his soliloquy given upon awakening. For the first time, Richard doubts himself. During a short, but intense period of self-questioning, Richard is forced to recognize his sins as "the souls of all that [he] had

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<sup>93</sup>IV.iv.291

<sup>94</sup>V.i.68

murther'd..."<sup>95</sup> threaten vengeance on him. His conscience "hath a thousand several tongues"<sup>96</sup>; the flooding back of the memories of those he killed gives his conscience voice. It takes the memory of those he has murdered to move his "coward conscience"<sup>97</sup>; before this point, his conscience has never come into play; he has been able to "harp not on that string... that is past."<sup>98</sup>

Hermione in The Winter's Tale is put into a similar situation to Elizabeth's daughter. Hermione has no control over her memories and little control over her perceived sexuality; both are controlled by her husband, Leontes. Hermione relies on Leontes for her memories as she seems to have formed none of her own. This is seen well in this dialogue:

*Leontes:* Hermione, my dearest, thou never  
spoks't

To better purpose.

*Hermione:* Never?

*Leontes:* Never, but once.

*Hermione:* What? have I twice said well?

When was't before?

I prithee tell me; cram's with praise, and

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<sup>95</sup>v.iii.204

<sup>96</sup>v.iii.193

<sup>97</sup>v.iii.179

<sup>98</sup>iv.iv.364

make's

As fat as tame things. One good deed dying  
tongueless

Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.

Our praises are our wages..../ But to th'  
goal:

My last good deed was to entreat his stay;  
What was my first? It has an elder sister,  
Or I mistake you. O, would her name was  
Grace!

But once before I spoke to th' purpose?  
when?

Nay, let me hav't; I long.<sup>99</sup>

The urgency behind this speech is thinly veiled. She asks him variations on the same question six times in the span of twelve lines; she clearly does "long" to know of what she has done in the past, to the point of desperation. As she has no way to access the memories herself she depends upon her husband to recount them for her. Strangely, Hermione implies in her monologue that it is not just her personally who relies on male figures for memory but women as a whole. She uses "'s" (read "us") instead of "me" when asking Leontes to tell her what she has done well before. This has implications for the way in which Hermione perceives her social role. She exonerates men, putting

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<sup>99</sup>I.ii.88-101

them in control of not only her but of her whole sex. She puts herself in a completely dependent position by perceiving men to have the extent of power she believes them to have.

Hermione is left out of the memories that Leontes and Polixines spend the scene recounting; she "had then not cross'd the eyes/ Of [Polixines'] young play fellow."<sup>100</sup> More than not being a part of the memories, she is actively denied access to the memories. Hermione, and other sexual women, are responsible for the end of the care-free days of childhood for Leontes and Polixines. Not until after Leontes met Hermione had "Temptations... been born"<sup>101</sup> to them. Hermione sees the position Polixines is placing her in as the instigator of sin, saying:

Of this make no conclusion, lest you say  
Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on,  
Th' offenses we have made you do we'll  
answer,  
If you first sinn'd with us, and that with us  
You did continue fault, and that you slipp'd  
not  
With any but with us.<sup>102</sup>

Hermione here takes responsibility for the men's fall into sin,

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<sup>100</sup>I.ii.78-79

<sup>101</sup>I.ii.77

<sup>102</sup>I.ii.81-86

or into the temptation of women. She gives her sexuality a negative connotation, responsible for the death of childhood: a concept put much in contrast by her fertile, fully pregnant figure. By drawing a connection between her fertility and her sinful female sexuality, she corrupts the image of herself as pure for her husband. The playful way in which this speech would most likely be delivered would lend to the tone of this speech. Hermione is bantering, flirting in a way, with Polixines here. While she is taking responsibility for her sexuality and the men's fall into sin, she does not seem to regret it; indeed, she seems to be implying that she would do it again. This is the point at which Leontes' jealousy begins to surface as it is here that Hermione convinces Polixines to stay; her sexuality again proves to be a powerful force.

But why does Leontes so suddenly and so thoroughly become jealous, almost to the point of insanity? There is no Iago-like instigator calling Hermione's sexuality into doubt. In fact, everyone defends her sexuality and purity. I believe that Leontes has a hard time differentiating between himself and his childhood friend. They are "twinn'd lambs"<sup>103</sup> and their being "train'd together in childhoods... rooted betwixt them such affection, which cannot choose but branch now."<sup>104</sup> When he begins to confuse Hermione's sexuality by seeing it as evil, unnatural, and of great dividing power (as she held the power to

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<sup>103</sup>I.ii.67

<sup>104</sup>I.i.22-24



weaken Leontes' and Polixines' friendship when she was first wooed) he begins to confuse also who the object of her sexuality is. Hermione's sexuality broke apart Leontes and Polixines at first and now her sexuality has the power to bring them back together by having Polixines stay on in Sicilia. When the two are made into one again, to Leontes, the choice of whom Hermione will choose to "corrupt" with her sexuality could be either her husband or his childhood friend as Leontes sees no distinction between the two.

Leontes becomes more and more confused with his wife's sexuality and his memories of her and of himself. He questions that Mamillus is his son<sup>105</sup> although Polixines was not even in Sicilia at the time of his conception. He refuses to believe anyone who says that Hermione is pure. His confusion reaches its pinnacle when Leontes dismisses the oracle stating Hermione's innocence, saying, "There is no truth at all i' th' oracle./ The sessions shall proceed; this is mere falsehood."<sup>106</sup> By this point, Leontes' memories have become so corrupt that he cannot even hear truth from the mouth of his god. This again ties into the concept retold in Yates of a denial of memory being a denial of the soul and corruption of memory leading to a corruption in the path to heaven. Leontes has become so caught up in his false memories that he loses sight of all else, including God. Not until Hermione's perceived death does Leontes begin to see the

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<sup>105</sup>I.ii.117-118

<sup>106</sup>III.ii.140-141

extent to which his memory went awry.

Once Leontes realizes that he has "too much believ'd [his] own suspicion,"<sup>107</sup> why does not Hermione return to life? Why is the sixteen-year absence necessary? In order for Hermione to be brought back to life, her memory needs to be cherished--both through herself alone and through her offspring. It becomes so important for the memory of her to be uncorrupted because she does not control her memory; as stated before, her husband does. And his memory of her at the time of her death does *not* suddenly become pure. Stanley Cavell argues just this:

'I have too much believed mine own suspicion'  
 ... a fully suspicious statement, I mean one  
 said from *within* his suspicion, not from  
 having put it aside. The statement merely  
 expresses his regret that he *believed* his  
 suspicion too much. How much would have been  
 just enough? And what would prevent this  
 excess of belief in the future? The  
 situation remains unstable.<sup>108</sup>

Leontes does not admit to being wrong in thinking that Hermione is unchaste, only that he got carried away with the knowledge. If Hermione were to come back to life at the end of the scene

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<sup>107</sup>III.ii.151

<sup>108</sup>Stanley Cavell, Disowning Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 196-197.

instead of sixteen years later, the situation could easily occur again. Leontes needs to rethink and re-remember what his wife is actually like; he must appreciate her chasteness as constant and part of her: not something he can control through his suspicion. Claudius in Much Ado About Nothing needs but one night to repent his role in Hero's death, as he has come to fully appreciate his wrongness.<sup>109</sup> Leontes needs the full sixteen years to come into complete knowledge of how he should have behaved and how he will act in the future.

After sixteen years, Leontes has achieved success in purifying his memory of Hermione. Although Leontes is urged by others to "forget [his] evil,"<sup>110</sup> he refuses to, stating, "Whilist I remember/ Her and her virtues, I cannot forget/ My blemishes in them...."<sup>111</sup> He follows Paulina's request to never remarry<sup>112</sup>, despite his lack of an heir, in order to keep pure the memory of his queen: for if he marries again, the memory of Hermione would surely fade: especially if he has a child with his new wife, for then Hermione's blood would be left out of the continuing royal line--she would be replaced by another. Paulina continually forces Leontes to come to terms with the memories of his wife on his own. Paulina uses a form of reverse-psychology to keep the memory of Hermione alive in Leontes in the first

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<sup>109</sup>Much Ado About Nothing, V.iii

<sup>110</sup>v.i.5

<sup>111</sup>v.i.7-9

<sup>112</sup>v.i.65-69

place; Paulina says to him:

...Alas, I have show'd too much  
 The rashness of a woman; he is touch'd  
 To th' noble heart. What's gone and what's  
     past help  
 Should be past grief. Do not receive  
     affliction  
 At my petition; I beseech you, rather  
 Let me be punish'd, that have minded you  
 Of what you should forget.<sup>113</sup>

Upon hearing this, Leontes vows not only to remember Hermione, but to visit her<sup>1</sup> grave every day. By forcing Leontes to come to terms with what he has done on his own, Paulina allows Leontes to accept the memory of Hermione as it actually is, not as a manifestation of how somebody else remembered her.

Hermione's and Leontes' daughter returning after sixteen years of being presumed dead brings a deeper dimension of Hermione's memory to Leontes than before. Perdita symbolizes the purity of the union between him and his wife. Whereas before he adamantly claimed that Perdita was not his and that she must be killed, upon seeing her now he realizes that she is his own. Before he understands her to be his daughter, though, he must first finally completely differentiate himself from Polixines. He separates Hermione from Polixines' wife and Polixines from

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<sup>113</sup>III.ii.220-226

himself when he sees Polixines' son. He says to him, "Your mother was most true to wedlock, Prince,/ For she did print your royal father off,/ Conceiving you...."<sup>114</sup> He goes on to say:

...You have a holy father,  
A graceful gentleman, against whose person  
(So sacred as it is) I have done sin,  
For which the heavens, taking angry note,  
Have left me issueless.<sup>115</sup>

Leontes fully comprehends his fault in Hermione's "death" at this point, as the heavens reward him by bringing back his daughter. This time she believes the daughter to be his and the purity of his memory of Hermione is fully restored.

Hermione's awakening results from her being fully restored in Leontes' memory. As Hermione was so dependent upon Leontes for her memories and her identity, it is not until her memory is accurately revived through Leontes that she can live again. Leontes is seen as the one who brings Hermione back to life, "For from him/ dear life redeems [her.]"<sup>116</sup> Once Hermione returns, she is once again placed back into the position of having no memories of her own. What she has been doing for the past sixteen years is not revealed and when Leontes questions where she has been, he asks Paulina (another controller of memories),

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<sup>114</sup>v.i.124-126

<sup>115</sup>v.i.170-174

<sup>116</sup>v.iii.102-103

not his wife.

Although Lady Macbeth's, Gertrude's, Anne's, Elizabeth's, and Hermione's problems vary according to their situations, the main obstacle remains constant: How are women to maintain a sense of identity and power in a male-dominated society? Often the only way to find a sense of power is to deny the memories of the obstacles standing in their way to a sense of higher independence. By either having their memory and sexuality be self-manipulated or manipulated by others, the women end up in a position of lesser authority than before, for they lose the identity they were trying to build upon in the first place. The extent to which the patriarchal society in which Shakespeare was writing discouraged women from finding a self-identity that was independent, powerful, and based on reality leads to serious ramifications for the lives of women. To escape the confines of their society becomes impossible: they cannot gain power by living with their memories, as the memories will keep them from moving on into a sphere of higher power nor can they gain power from denying their memories as the memories will inevitably return. Society thus forces women to be kept in a position of dependence upon men; the ideal of the feminine, dependent woman is too strongly embedded in society for them to possibly have strength to overcome it; especially if their society grants them no means for finding strength.

This paradox of power is seen with even greater poignancy

when observing how the men in these plays deal with their memories. The men have agency in their repression. They can demand for apparitions to go away and they do. They can work situations into their favor through the denial of memory instead of becoming slaves to their memories as the women do. This is largely due to the fact that their society grants men greater agency in general, not just in the manipulation of their memories. They are used to having power, to taking control, to demanding results. They treat their memories as they would treat any other aspect of their lives: with force and will.

Memory, then, does not lie in a mental vacuum. It is manipulable by external forces, just as the conceptions of ideal femininity or masculinity are. When the power of memory is thought to be independent from these external factors, when it is thought to be a force that can be controlled purely by the individual, problems may arise. They arose for the women in these plays because the power that they wanted as an individual did not fit into society's conceptions of what power should be for a woman. With the men, this difficulty did not arise because the power that could be harnessed through their memories was consistent with the strength and agency that society already granted them.

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