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Beguiling time, making air, and taking milk for gall: queerness in *Macbeth*

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Erin Lyons

Lewiston, Maine

May 24, 2021

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## Introduction

In this project I explore how various characters in *Macbeth* find queer ways to resist norms regarding the major forces governing their world. In a play where teleporting witches can tell the future and a woman can “unsex” herself, time, space, and bodies arise as central themes with normative and non-normative iterations that can be seen throughout. By engaging in or aligning themselves with queer interpretations of these main ideas, characters in *Macbeth* trouble norms that are otherwise taken for granted in the play, and it is very often these queer interpretations that propel the play forward. *Macbeth* places importance in its queer temporalities, spaces, and bodies—they affect individuals, interactions, and relationships onstage, as well as the unseen fabric of the world of the play.

I largely focus on the feminized characters of *Macbeth*, namely Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters. They can each be considered queer characters in a number of ways, but they have different social positions. As a married noblewoman (and human) Lady Macbeth operates within the boundaries of her body, home, and social role. The supernatural Weird Sisters, on the other hand, exist outside of the play’s society, which affords them a different set of abilities. Looking at the different ways these characters embrace queerness shows the distinctions and connections between resisting normativity from within a system and outside of it.

Macbeth himself does figure into this project at times, but not to the same extent as his wife. He begins to think in terms of a queer temporality but struggles to imagine possibilities outside the norms of generational succession—perhaps because, except for his childlessness, he seems to benefit well enough from the norms of his society as a married nobleman with military prowess. When they partner up and work together, the Macbeths as a couple can be

non-normative, but Lady Macbeth finds a greater variety of complicated and compelling ways to be a queer character.

Although the Macduffs are often considered a more wholesome foil family to the Macbeths, they have some curious familial relationships that can both question and reinforce the play's dominant norms regarding time and bodies. At times, their resistance to normativity pits them against the Macbeths, but there are also instances where parallels between them arise.

In Chapter One, I focus on time, one of the most powerful forces influencing *Macbeth*. I also introduce Jack Halberstam's theory of queer temporality and Amanda Zoch's analysis of that theory in *Macbeth*, both of which have been crucial to my own thinking throughout this project. The characters I discuss in this chapter are able to exert agency over the normative progression of time in a variety of ways, particularly in destabilizing the play's society's emphasis on generational succession. They show that there is no one natural or correct way to think about and experience time.

I then investigate physical space in Chapter Two—it is in many ways related to time, but resistance to normativity of space takes different forms in the play. I concentrate on Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters here, and I use Irina Aristarkhova's revision of Derrida and Levinas's work on hospitality to analyze how they use the spaces belonging to them and twist the norms of domesticity. The Weird Sisters' supernatural abilities also call into question what can be expected or known of physical space, and they manipulate space in a way that positions them against conventional centers of power in human society. The characters I discuss in this chapter show that the way one uses physical space can be considered queer or resistant, and that one's social position can affect the tools one has to make those changes to the space around them.

Chapter Three is about bodies, and in particular I focus on a specific group of bodily experiences and phenomena surrounding motherhood. Concerns about mothers' roles and bodies loom large in *Macbeth*'s plot and early modern English culture, and, curiously, all of the mother/child relationships in the play can be considered non-normative. The queering of bodies in relation to motherhood in this play raises the question of what actually is normative, or whether such a category even exists in this context. So much of the play centers around maternal bodies, and yet all of its feminized characters resist expectations of conventional motherhood.

All of these different queer temporalities, spaces, and bodies in *Macbeth* present imaginative possibilities for resisting normative expectations about personal identities, gender roles, relationships, and reproduction. They also call into question what we think we know about these major themes, the extent to which they truly control us, and the extent to which we may be able to control or alter them.

## Chapter One: Time

*...to beguile the time,  
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,  
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under 't. (1.5.63–6)*

When planning for Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth gives her husband these instructions. "Time" in this instance refers to the evening of hosting they have ahead of them, so she asks Macbeth to have an outward appearance appropriate for the event. To "beguile" can mean "to delude, deceive, cheat," or "To divert attention in some pleasant way" ("Beguile, v1a, v5"); she is saying that the coming evening must be a distraction nice enough that nobody expects what will happen later. Her phrasing suggests that time can be meddled with or somehow fooled.

Altering or interfering with time is just one of the numerous unusual ways in which the characters of *Macbeth* interact with it. In this chapter, I introduce Jack Halberstam's theory of queer temporality to analyze various characters' relationships to time. I also refer to Amanda Zoch's work on queer temporality in *Macbeth*, in which she tracks Macbeth's relationship with queer temporality throughout the play and argues that young Macduff represents a queer version of time. Placing value on futurity and generational succession is characteristic of early modern England, the Scottish society of the play, and the normative version of time described by Halberstam. When characters like the Macbeths and Lady Macduff seek to change that progression of time through their words or actions, their engagement with time becomes queer. The Weird Sisters exert their own kind of agency over time when they control other characters' relationships with time through the powers and knowledge they possess. Time is inextricably linked to reproduction and succession, and in *Macbeth* it is both changeable and fixed.

After providing an overview of Halberstam and Zoch's ideas, I write about how the Macbeths treat time as a malleable force that they can change for their own purposes. Then I

examine the importance of generational succession to *Macbeth*'s plot and early modern context, and how the childless Macbeths do not fit into the temporal norms around them. The Macduff family also has a complicated relationship to generational time (especially young Macduff, as Zoch explains), and the Weird Sisters have their own supernatural form of control over time. Because time and familial succession are so central to the plot of *Macbeth*, time and queerness are then often related when these characters attempt to change or control its otherwise normative progression.

### **Queer temporality**

To begin this project I think it wise to discuss how I am defining queerness in the following chapters. Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* is a crucial theoretical basis for my analysis, and for that reason it has made sense for me to adopt a conception of queerness similar to his. Halberstam describes queerness as "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (*Queer Time* 6). I also aim to take an approach similar to Zoch's to queerness in the context of an early modern text like *Macbeth*, in which she "use[s] queer unhistorically" but also takes into account early modern norms regarding sexuality and reproduction (371). So for the purposes of this thesis, that which is queer goes against the prevailing norms of its context, especially when it comes to aspects of one's self or community such as gender expression, sexuality, and the body.

Queer temporality is a concept that arises when normativity and nonnormativity are applied to time: how it is scheduled, spent, valued, experienced, interacted with, and so on. Halberstam explains that there are normative ways of thinking about and experiencing time, and

therefore deviance from those is a form of queer time. Normative time centers around heterosexual marriage, raising children, and future generations—ultimately it is about family:

The time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples. Obviously, not all people who have children keep or even are able to keep reproductive time, but many and possibly most people believe that the scheduling of repro-time is natural and desirable. Family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing. This timetable is governed by an imagined set of children's needs, and it relates to beliefs about children's health and healthful environments for child rearing. The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability. In this category we can include the kinds of hypothetical temporality—the time of 'what if'—that demands protection in the way of insurance policies, health care, and wills. (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 5)

As Halberstam writes, the “normative” way to schedule one's life revolves around marriage, families, and children. Though Halberstam theorizes about a postmodern context, some of these ideas can be applied to early modern England and the fictionalized medieval Scotland of *Macbeth*, particularly the fixation on childrearing and passing things on to future generations.

Halberstam describes queer temporality as when one lives or schedules one's life in ways that defy or don't fit into normative time. He writes, “Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction”

(Halberstam, *Queer Time* 1). When one's life isn't oriented around the family, time takes on different arrangements and meanings that open up new possibilities for existence. As Carolyn Asp writes in an article on the tragedy of gender stereotypes in *Macbeth*, there is a "...spontaneity and unpredictability that freedom from stereotypes allows" (165). Not conforming to normative expectations can lead to a liberation in how one sees and uses time. According to Halberstam, people become "queer subjects" in this way when they spend time and occupy space in ways that are unconventional or don't make sense through the lens of normative time.

### **Malleable time in *Macbeth***

The language of time is everywhere in *Macbeth*, and it is not just the women characters who (seek to) change or interact with it. Macbeth's struggle against the regular, linear march of time is a major component of the plot, and I will discuss it below because it establishes in the play the idea of time as something one can attempt to alter. However, for the scope of this project, I am ultimately more interested in the women characters' interaction with time and how it relates to their gendered experiences.

In *Macbeth*, time is something that is both regulated and subjective, and it can change to reflect the state of the world. Once Macbeth learns of the prophecy about him, his desire to gain power as soon as possible hastens the speed of the plot and takes the form of a need to skip ahead and experience the future in the present. Before he decides to act on the Weird Sisters' predictions, he says, "Time, and the hour, runs through the roughest day" as a way of expressing that he will take a relatively passive stance and let time (which here is regular and dependable) run its course (1.3.150). But once Macbeth commits to killing Duncan, he speaks of "jump[ing] the life to come" (1.7.7), "Vaulting ambition, which o'er-leaps itself" (1.7.27), and making "The very firstlings of my heart.../The firstlings of my hand" (4.1.146–7)—all of which show his wish

for immediacy in acting and getting what he wants, which Howard Marchitello describes as a “drive toward real time” (444). Macbeth wants to control not only his title and fate, but also how much time it will take for him to do so; the linear progression of time is not enough for him. After Macbeth kills Duncan, the “natural” workings of time malfunction: Ross says, “By th’ clock ‘tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp” (2.4.6–7). Day and night are mixed up, which the Old Man describes as “unnatural, / Even like the deed that’s done” (2.4.10–11). Though there are predictable ways for time to behave, whether it’s for the rise of a king or daytime/nighttime hours, they can be shaped, changed, and even perverted by Macbeth’s boldness and ambition.

In addition to altering the passage of time as he experiences it, Macbeth also disrupts the progression of generational time and attempts to control it, though he is ultimately unsuccessful. Luisa Guj writes about how Macbeth’s rise to power simultaneously speeds up and slows down time: “On the one hand, he accelerates it by hastening Duncan’s death; on the other hand, he stops its natural unfolding by trying to prevent the succession of Banquo’s progeny” (Guj 180). The transition of royal power with each successive generation is a regular, predictable function of time that Macbeth throws a decidedly large wrench in.

Another major way in which Macbeth does not fit into this particular function of time is that he himself has no heirs. Zoch details how, over the course of the play, the Macbeths find themselves in opposition to normative time—a queer temporality arises “...in contrast to normative generational time’s privileging of children, futurity, and lineage” (379). Zoch argues, “In making himself king, the normative progression of time becomes Macbeth’s enemy. With his wife’s aid he attains the crown, yet he cannot achieve immortality through generational succession” (378). The political system of *Macbeth*’s Scotland relies on the recurrent transfer of

power from king to heir throughout time, and as Zoch writes, though Macbeth tries to manipulate this system and time itself, he isn't able to for very long.

His famous speech after hearing of Lady Macbeth's death demonstrates this defeat—the repetition and resignation of “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day” indicate a return to the idea of time as regular, steady, and out of Macbeth's control (5.5.18–9). Zoch notes that all of the tomorrows “...signify futurity for others but nothing for himself” (383). Time is a force that Macbeth tries and fails to command by interfering with the progression of generations.

In Macbeth's struggle against time, the ideas of normative and non-normative experiences of time arise. There are expected ways for time to be perceived when it comes to the natural world and generational succession (and therefore the stability of the state), the latter of which especially recalls Halberstam's ideas about normative time. In seeking to change or challenge these normative temporalities, the Macbeths begin to engage in queer temporalities—for example, meeting and working at night, when everyone else is asleep, and attempting to seize power in a way that doesn't rely on generational family ties. In *Macbeth*, time has the potential to be altered in ways that deviate from the norm, but seemingly not in ways that are beneficial or lasting.

It is when Macbeth returns home in Act One that the couple begins to think about time as something that is malleable. Right after her famous “unsex me” speech, Lady Macbeth and her husband have a conversation where they start to drop hints to each other about what they're thinking of doing that night (get your mind out of the gutter—they are planning an assassination). In this passage, she makes clear that she sees time as something she can interact with and change.

Lady Macbeth's characterization of the present and future has an interesting relationship to the ideas of normative and queer time. She tells Macbeth, "Thy letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant" (1.5.56–8). With "transported," she uses the language of physical motion and space to describe time, a dynamic that can be seen throughout the play and will be discussed further in Chapter Two. Describing the present moment as "ignorant" shows that with the future comes knowledge. And as Lady Macbeth says when she associates the time to come with "sovereign sway and masterdom," the future comes with power as well (1.5.69–70). The desire to experience the future immediately, which presages Macbeth's talk of "o'er-leaping" and other similar metaphors, suggests an alternative to the regular passage of time, which indicates a potential hope for a queer version of time.

However, in the theory of queer temporality, a focus on the future is typically associated with normative time—as Lady Macbeth insinuates herself, the future is a source of power, and this power that comes with participating in a social standard is usually only available to those who marry and start families. And yet, the Macbeths don't have reproduction/children on the mind (not yet, at least), but rather a power grab that interferes with traditional family lineage. Without any children of her own to tether the Macbeths to the future, perhaps Lady Macbeth initiates this recurring idea of bringing the future into the present so that she can experience some of its knowledge and power anyway, in which case she is operating within the paradigm of an alternative, queer temporality.

As the Macbeths begin plotting to do away with Duncan, their conception of time expands to not just something they can experience differently, but something that they can actually alter. Upon learning that Duncan is to leave the following day, Lady Macbeth says, "O

never / Shall sun that morrow see” (1.5.60–1). In addition to insinuating that Duncan will not live to see another day and predicting the night-like darkness of that day, she could also be making a son/sun pun, as Shakespeare has been known to do—as with the “sun of York” in Richard III (1.1.2). Duncan already has sons, but if the Macbeths succeed, he will never see them again, for his family line will have been disrupted. It is later in this conversation that Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to “beguile the time”—to deceive it because it can be altered for their own purposes.

### **Patrilineage and succession**

One major form of the normative progression of time that affects the world of *Macbeth*, and that characters like the Macbeths try to challenge, is patrilineage, the generational succession from fathers to sons. Patrilineage was a very significant concept throughout the culture of early modern England, as Stephanie Chamberlain writes in her contextualization of Lady Macbeth’s infanticidal leanings within attitudes towards mothers during the time period. Patrilineage’s influence ranged from laws to religious discourse to literature, such as Shakespeare’s “young man” sonnets with their pleas to their subject to reproduce so that his name, looks, and legacy can live on (Chamberlain 84). Luisa Guj writes that Shakespeare “...suggests two outlets from time’s tyranny: one, accessible to all, to be achieved through marriage and reproduction; the other obtainable by the intellectually gifted through poetry and fame” (176). The importance of male generational succession also led to cultural anxieties about women’s role as mothers. Women were commonly stereotyped as uncontrollable and irrational, and men were unable to confirm the paternity of their children, so fears of women’s infidelity—which would undermine the succession from father to son—were not unusual (Alfar 23). As I examine in Chapter Three, an extreme extension of this thinking was the cultural fear of infanticidal mothers, which Lady

Macbeth plays into.

Her discussion of herself as a mother is just one example of how the plot and language of *Macbeth* revolve around parents and children. This recurring motif relates to the idea of normative temporalities in this world that have to do with reproduction and family—again, norms that the Macbeths do not conform to. The importance of patrilineage to both the fictionalized setting of *Macbeth* and its early modern audience informs and enhances the non-normativity of their interactions with time.

Parents and children, particularly fathers and sons, are crucial to the plot of *Macbeth*. Macbeth keeps trying to disrupt the succession from father to son—he kills Duncan and has Banquo murdered in the hopes of upsetting the future transfers of power from both men to their sons. However, the sons survive and signify Macbeth's downfall, with Malcom taking his rightful place on the throne by the play's end, and Fleance escaping the murderers to continue a family line that will eventually become royalty. Despite Macbeth's schemes, patrilineage prevails and fathers' power returns to their sons.

Then there is the character of Macduff: the murder of his children motivates him to join the revolt against Macbeth, and as the child of a Caesarian birth, he is technically not “of woman born” and can therefore “harm Macbeth,” which he indeed does (4.1.79–80). Both Macduff's parentage and parenthood are what enable him to defeat Macbeth. In the world of the play, patrilineage is a stubborn force that, due to the way the play ends, has a sense of righteousness or correctness to it, thus making it a powerful reproductive and temporal norm that works against the Macbeths.

This emphasis on patrilineage puts the Macbeths in a curious position, since they have no children of their own. There are prevailing ways of thinking about time and norms about

reproduction and succession, and the Macbeths cannot seem to fit into either. Macbeth tries to secure power but has no children to pass it down to, and fathers/sons are key to his downfall. As childless characters with unusual relationships to time in a world of fathers and sons, the Macbeths become queer subjects who bring queer temporality into their medieval Scottish context. It is childlessness that further implicates Lady Macbeth because of women's association to childbearing. Grace Tiffany frames her childlessness within the circumstances of both the plot and post-Elizabethan England:

*Macbeth* demotes the image of the childless female, a radical break with the tradition which, in Elizabeth's service, had presented childlessness as virgin purity and a source of divine power. Childlessness in *Macbeth* is, in contrast, a mark of demonic resistance to the natural biological renewal of the ruling order, and thus an impediment to the continuing life of nations. It is linked with regicide and infanticide, while nurturance and healing power belong to the play's fathers and father-figures... (149–50)

Tiffany clearly delineates the non-Macbeth royal lines as “natural” and key to the future of the nation, which goes hand in hand with Halberstam's ideas about normative temporalities and their uses. As a childless woman, Lady Macbeth taps into the early modern cultural fears about women with power who don't fit the blueprint of expected behavior for wives and mothers.

Because her willingness to manipulate time in various ways is coupled with planned interference with patrilineage and changes to her power and roles as a woman, Lady Macbeth's engagement with time becomes queer, as she seeks new or different ways to conceive of time, succession, and gender roles. An infamous moment of hers is when, in admonishing Macbeth's lack of conviction, she describes herself as capable of infanticide:

...Nor time nor place

Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:  
 They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
 Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know  
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
 Have plucked the nipple from his boneless gums,  
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
 As you have done to this... (1.7.51–9)

Here, her relationships to time determine how she plays into cultural fears and falls outside of norms of gender and temporality. Time and space “adhering” means that they “fit or belong together, as a story” or “agree” (“Adhere, v5”). The circumstances are right for killing Duncan—Lady Macbeth is telling her husband that their scheme has worked and it is the right time and place to kill the king, so he has to follow through even though he is having second guesses. Time is also something that has the power to “unmake” a person, which becomes even more true by the end of the play when time and succession are clearly not on Macbeth’s side.

Then, Lady Macbeth changes the subject to nursing and killing children. By bringing this example up within the same passage, she draws a connection between time, place, and the role of a mother—like time and place in this passage, mothers also have the power to “unmake,” especially in the context of early modern cultural fears about motherhood, where concerns about women’s relative power when it comes to having and raising children resulted in sensationalized fears of mothers killing their children. Like Macbeth has the potential to be unmade by time, Lady Macbeth as a mother has the potential to unmake another life and interfere with time in the

sense of futurity and succession. This particular gender role enables her to envision a disruption of futurity that is tied to her potential to be a mother (though likely not a very good one).

Lady Macbeth's willingness to commit infanticide if necessary fits into the play's narrative of patrilineage and succession. Zoch brings into the picture her motivation of convincing Macbeth to kill Duncan: "...Lady Macbeth equates killing a child with killing a king, both actions that disrupt futurity" (382). Macbeth's killing Duncan is analogous to killing a father (of a kingdom), whereas in killing a hypothetical child, Lady Macbeth ends both its life and the father's (Macbeth's) family line.

Stephanie Chamberlain argues that Lady Macbeth's would-be infanticide "...comes to represent the demise not only of Macbeth's moral and political legitimacy within the tyrannized world of the play, but that of his line itself" (82). Swearing that she would kill off her and Macbeth's offspring is what convinces him to seek more power by killing Duncan. It takes the hypothetical end of his family line to rise to the throne he is then unable to pass down—through this lens, Macbeth's taking of power is untenable from the start (though again, the importance of the future is debatable). In channeling motherhood in order to imply killing a child and incite the killing of a king, she encourages the disruption of futurity and again presents a dark twist on a female gender role.

### **The Macduff family**

The Macduff family also has a complicated relationship with generational succession in several ways: through Macduff's crucial role in the plot, Lady Macduff's verbal intervention in her son's parentage, and, as Zoch discusses, the queer temporality of young Macduff.

Macduff's status as exception to the Weird Sisters' prophecy is due to his position within his family line as both a father and a son; Macbeth isn't able to grasp the whole picture of that

until it's too late. Shortly after learning of his entire family's murder, Macduff says, "He has no children" (4.3.219). In the 2015 edition of the Arden Shakespeare *Macbeth*, editors Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason mention that it's unclear whether he refers to Malcolm or Macbeth, but either way, Macduff is asserting that being a parent gives him a particular perspective that the play's childless characters lack (268). This perspective translates into a unique position of power over Macbeth because at his birth he was "...from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped" (5.8.15–6). Grace Tiffany contextualizes Macduff's position within his family line and the play's patrilineal themes:

Macduff, of course, also represents the successfully (though roughly) birthed child, whose triumphant life and power defeat the child-killing designs of the tyrant Macbeth. In this capacity Macduff is like Malcolm and Fleance, threatened sons who, escaping a death-grip, will play crucial roles in ensuring the continuance of a royal line...Macduff, however, is a unique 'babe' in that his role as generational link, as both son *and* father, are equally important to *Macbeth's* plot and themes. (Tiffany 155)

Macduff's violent, "untimely" birth represents a departure from normative time and evokes the play's recurring idea of maternal bodies' capacity for violence.

Lady Macduff also brings up mothers' power over generation succession and time when she describes her husband as both dead and alive. When she tells her son, "Sirrah, your father's dead," she implies that he is as good as dead because of how he has treated the family (4.2.31). Young Macduff mirrors her language when he asks, "Was my father a traitor, mother?" putting his father into the past tense (4.2.46). Though Macduff is very much alive in England with Malcolm, he becomes figuratively dead to his family. His simultaneous life and death is mirrored

in young Macduff's simultaneous embodiment of the present and future, as Zoch argues and I discuss below. In describing her husband like this, Lady Macduff exerts an agency over time through her language. Though she cannot alter the fabric of space and time (like the Weird Sisters do), she can still affect the way she and her son perceive time in the context of their family.

In a continuation of her calling Macduff Sr. both dead and alive, Lady Macduff describes her son thus: "Fathered he is, and yet he's fatherless" (4.2.27). Young Macduff has a father who helped create him, but Lady Macduff doesn't acknowledge him as a parent of her child in this moment. As Caroline Bicks describes this moment, Lady Macduff "...revises her son's paternity based on her own definition of what a 'father' is. Her son is rendered 'fatherless' because her husband has not demonstrated the marks of true paternal identity as she has constructed it" (155). She exerts agency over not only time but also the category of who counts as a father. Unafraid to criticize her husband's failings as a parent, she goes as far as to figuratively break the patrilineal link between father and son. Lady Macduff takes the bold, non-normative step of disregarding the existence of her son's father, especially considering the patrilineal context of the play. A.R. Braunmuller compares the fathered and fatherless young Macduff to Macduff Sr., who via C-section is "mothered/motherless" (Braunmuller 22). Father and son are still connected, not necessarily by the typical relationship of father/son patrilineage, but by their paradoxical states of parentage. The motherless Macduff may be emotionally stunted, but the prophecy makes him powerful and triumphant, while the fatherless Macduff merely makes some witty banter before meeting his tragic end—a difference that suggests that a severed father/son relationship is more of a disadvantage, which aligns with the inferior yet feared position of early modern mothers.

In addition to being figuratively fatherless in a patrilineal society, young Macduff is what Zoch describes as a “knowing-innocent child” (375) who is wise beyond his years and meets an untimely death. She argues that he is a queer figure who embodies queer temporality by already representing his adult future that will never come to be. By blending together the adult and the childlike, young Macduff “disrupts the play’s linear temporality by failing to align with the futurity he, as a child, appears to symbolize” (Zoch 370–1). His simultaneous representation of future and present highlight that Macbeth is killing off Macduff’s family and future forever, but his queerness complicates the play’s notions of patrilineage and time.

In addition to referring to Halberstam, Zoch also pulls from Lee Edelman’s theory of queer temporality—Edelman writes that normative ways of thinking about time revolve around future generations instead of the present. Therefore, “...*queerness* names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 3, emphasis his). Zoch argues, “...Macduff’s son is both the Child—symbolizing innocence and futurity within the narrative world of *Macbeth*—and the nonviable queer, who, with his disregard for death and uncanny adulthood, threatens the very way of life for which the Child stands” (383). The reason children are so important in this play is because they will grow up to carry on and pass down their family titles, but young Macduff seems grown-up without ever actually reaching adulthood, which troubles any simple emphasis on futurity *Macbeth* might suggest. Young Macduff’s queerness is an example of what happens when those intended to benefit from normative time do not conform to it.

When Macbeth’s men come to kill them, young Macduff is slain before his mother, and calls out to her, “He has killed me, mother. Run away, I pray you” (4.2.86–7). Though able to

speak and therefore at least somewhat alive, he says that he has already been murdered. In speaking about himself in the present perfect, young Macduff exemplifies his simultaneous existence in the past, present, and future, while also recalling how he and Lady Macduff talked about his father as both alive and dead. There is also a curious mirroring to the murder of Banquo, where after being wounded he tells his son to run away—except here it is the child telling the parent to flee. This again speaks to young Macduff's uncanny adult-ness and the unusual relationship he has with his mother. The older Macduff's position seems to contribute to the reinforcement of generational succession's importance to *Macbeth*. However, Lady Macduff and her son's unusual relationships to time are ultimately the result of the Macbeths' interference with time (and subsequent rise to power)—everyone's uses of time become entangled over the course of the play.

### **The Weird Sisters, time, and power**

The Weird Sisters also have their own relationship with time that sets them apart from the play's human characters; they do not fully exist in human society and are not impacted by forces like patrilineage. For them, time is a source of immense power throughout the play, from their potion ingredients to their association with fate.

In 4.1 when the Weird Sisters are making a concoction in their cauldron, the “Root of hemlock digged i'th'dark” (4.1.25) and “slips of yew / Slivered in the moon's eclipse” (4.1.27–8) that they use share an important characteristic—according to Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason, they are both harvested in darkness because that makes them most potent (236). Not only do these poisonous ingredients pervert the common metaphor connecting agriculture to procreation and life, since they are used for poison, but they also show that time influences the witches' brew. The Weird Sisters are constrained by time in this way, since it is dictated when they can

make the potion, but it also shows that they know how to use time, in terms of both the hour and even agricultural cycles, to their advantage in a way not everyone in the play can.

The Weird Sisters' botanical knowledge also connects to their ability to know the future, particularly Macbeth's fate. In a world obsessed with futurity, this is an immense power. The future knowledge they impart to humans is particularly tied to the concepts of reproduction and succession. When Banquo asks if they "...can look into the seeds of time, / And say which grain will grow, and which will not" (1.3.68–9), he has no clue how fitting his turn of phrase actually is—his language evokes the Weird Sisters' natural potion ingredients, and the life cycles of crops are not unrelated to generational succession.

Macbeth later accuses the Weird Sisters of having the ability to interfere with "Nature's germen" (4.1.58), which Clark and Mason gloss as "seed or 'life-forming elements'" (239). This idea ties into Banquo's "seeds of time" (1.3.58) and the metaphor of familial reproduction as agricultural—through their powers, the witches can manipulate time and reproduction, though not in the same way as the Macbeths. In addition to collecting ingredients and frustrating Macbeth, the Weird Sisters are also capable of influencing the very social structures, forces, and concepts that most preoccupy the human characters of the play (while seeming to have a lot of fun doing so).

The apparitions that the Weird Sisters show Macbeth in 4.1 are closely tied to patrilineage and its implications for his fate. The second apparition, which delivers the crucial message that "none of woman born / shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.79–80), is described in the stage directions as "a bloody child" (Shakespeare 240). According to Clark and Mason, the child could refer to Macduff's recently slain son, the hypothetical murdered Macbeth baby, or the elder Macduff ripped from the womb (240)—it represents the ending of family lines associated with the

Macbeths, and also how it is a particular mother/son relationship that causes his demise. The third apparition is another child, this time wearing a crown and holding a tree, perhaps meant to be a descendent of Banquo. The tree recalls a family tree and the connection between nature's growth and human reproduction, plus the crown indicates a title and power passed down from father to son. They use their powers to show Macbeth the normative, patrilineage-focused forces of his society that have doomed him from the start since he doesn't have children.

In addition to their knowledge of linear time, the Weird Sisters are associated with cycles and repetition, different concepts of time that serve as further reminders that they exist beyond the bounds of human society. The very first lines of *Macbeth*, uttered by the first witch—"When shall we three meet again?"—immediately frame the play as concerned with issues of time and repetition (1.1.1). A similar effect is achieved in 4.1, when the first two sisters begin their lines with "Thrice" (4.1.1,2). They repeat amongst themselves a word that in itself connotes repetition. The singsong rhythms and rhymes of the Weird Sisters throughout the play create verbal circles around the cauldron that subtly tie them to the cyclical—which feels fitting considering how they seem to exist outside of the play's society dominated by the value of linear succession.

In "The Sounds of Supernatural Soliciting in *Macbeth*," David Kranz argues that the rhythms and language of the Weird Sisters are echoed in the speech of other characters throughout the play, which elevates them from the supernatural/demonic to the cosmic and fateful. Through thorough analysis of each scene's meter and repeated words, he concludes that "The witches' tune and words are heard, however slightly, in almost every scene, and are even perceptible in the speeches of the anti-tyrannical Scots toward the end of the play. This range and distribution suggests that the poetic patterns represent powers that include but go beyond the demonic" (Kranz 349). He argues that every character whose speech has traces of the Weird

Sisters' language plays a role in carrying out the prophecies that define Macbeth's fate. This larger significance of witch-inspired language, beyond just being creepy or comedic, indicates that the Weird Sisters represent more than just the anti-society or supernatural, but also a more omnipresent, influential power of knowing fate.

The Weird Sisters have immense power because they possess knowledge of the future, a mastery of time that the play's human characters may desire but ultimately lack. If the witches cannot manipulate time themselves, then they are still certainly associated with whatever higher power may have that ability. Through their disregard for social norms and abilities to know, bestow, and withhold knowledge of the future, the Weird Sisters' relationship with time is by no means normative by the standards of *Macbeth's* Scottish society. At the same time, in their association with an unchangeable, predetermined future, they also represent an obstacle to other characters' efforts to interfere with the course of time.

By objecting to, trying to change, or not fitting into normative time's emphasis on reproduction and futurity, these characters' engagements with time become queer in a number of different ways. The Macbeths challenge the domination of generational succession that poses an obstacle to them as a childless couple, and Lady Macbeth in particular warps the role that she, as a wife and potential mother, is expected to play in that succession. Lady Macduff also participates in the verbal severing of parent/child links, and her son embodies the queer temporality of a simultaneous child/adult. Throughout all of this, the Weird Sisters are not necessarily controlling or changing the future, but rather controlling and changing who knows what about the future, a different kind of autonomy regarding time that lines up with their transcendence of the play's human society. These various relationships with time call into question the need to rely on father/son succession, expectations of childhood as a period of time,

who is really controlling time's machinations, and even the value of permanence and longevity when it comes to having political power. They show that there is no one way to think about and value time. In *Macbeth*, the same can be said for space.

## Chapter Two: Space

With letters being able to “transport” their readers into the future (1.5.56), and time and place “adhering” to each other (1.7.52), the concepts of space and time often go hand-in-hand within the language of *Macbeth*. This relationship takes the form of both verbal and visual metaphors—for example, “jump[ing] the life to come” (1.7.7) and the line of kings in 4.1, respectively. And not unlike with temporality, there are characters in *Macbeth* who are able to exert control over physical space in ways that pose challenges to norms of gender and society.

In a similar vein, Halberstam’s theory of queer temporality also extends to the queering of physical space. He writes, “A ‘queer’ adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space” (*In a Queer Time and Place* 6). According to Halberstam, “‘Queer space’ refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (*Queer Time* 6). Though the postmodern context does not apply to *Macbeth*, characters like Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters do use and create space in non-normative ways, and the witches in particular do so in a way that threatens dominant social structures. In his discussion of queer temporality and space, Halberstam refers to a quote from Steve Pile: “the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination” (*Queer Time* 6). Queer space is not necessarily just a mirror image of normative space, but rather involves new ways of imagining and using space.

In this chapter, I examine how Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters’ uses of physical space twist or go against social norms and thus become queer. Viewed through the lens of Irina Aristarkhova’s “Hospitality and the Maternal,” all four characters pervert the concepts of hospitality and domesticity in a variety of ways. The Weird Sisters also use their teleportation

and wind manipulation abilities to challenge the powers that be in the play's human society. In the environments of both the home and the outdoors, Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters demonstrate non-normative ways of using and controlling space.

### **Hospitality and domesticity**

Irina Aristarkhova argues that when it comes to theories of hospitality like those of Derrida and Levinas, the feminine—and especially the maternal—is taken for granted as an “unthought foundation” of hospitality and not discussed enough (163). Theories of hospitality too often essentialize women, or else overly metaphorize them in order to avoid essentializing them. When the feminine is left out, there arises a version of hospitality where the theoretical woman “silently prepares the ground for hospitality between men, only to pretend to disappear” and is obligated “to remain silent, discreet, to understand without words and to welcome effortlessly, to almost become one with the walls of the house” (172).

Aristarkhova hopes to give the feminine more agency within hospitality rather than obscure it as some unspoken fundamental concept. She focuses especially on the maternal and its ability to foster hospitality with agency and intention—seen this way, the “passivity” associated with the feminine becomes a maternal, decisive act of welcoming and “readiness to contain and to produce space for the other out of one's own flesh and blood” (175–6). Giving due consideration to the roles of the feminine and maternal opens up new possibilities for thinking about and enacting hospitality. I revisit the concept of the maternal in Chapter Three, but Aristarkhova's ideas about hospitality also apply to *Macbeth's* women characters' use of their physical space.

When plotting the assassination of Duncan, Lady Macbeth alters not only her understanding of time, but also typical gender roles—both in her marriage and in her role as

hostess, where she presides over the space of her home. Lines 58 to 60 in 1.5 are quick exchanges where Macbeth and Lady Macbeth finish each other's lines, metrically speaking. At this point, they are partners who are in tune with each other and on equal footing, which is already a departure from the male-dominated power dynamics of marriage one would expect. When Lady Macbeth is instructing her husband to "Look like the time," he is to specifically "bear welcome," which shows how crucial hospitality (or the illusion of it) is to their schemes (1.5.64). She continues her double entendres and furthers their perversion of hospitality by saying that Duncan "Must be provided for" (1.5.67). Not only will the Macbeths cater to Duncan as a guest, but they will also make sure that the king gets what's coming to him.

Lady Macbeth then asks for the events of the evening to be put "into my dispatch"—a taking of control that makes sense for her role as a woman welcoming guests into the home, but also puts her in a position of greater power than her husband (1.5.68). In taking charge of the night in order to both entertain her guests and plan the king's murder, Lady Macbeth's position connects to early modern concerns about how women's power in the realms of home and family could pose a threat to the status quo. In utilizing both time and space to plan a disruption to generational futurity and embody an uncertain position of gendered power, Lady Macbeth uses these forces in a queer way.

Lady Macbeth's skillful command of her home—a space she welcomes Duncan into only to plan his demise—makes her both an example of and a twist on Aristarkhova's ideas about hospitality. When she tells Macbeth to put the evening's events into her control, exchanges pleasantries with Duncan, and intervenes in the banquet scene to save face, she is every bit the active and capable hostess. Though it does seem to come easily to her, she is not the silent and invisible hostess of femininity left undiscussed. In a conversation between the Macbeths in 1.7,

Lady Macbeth chides her husband for leaving dinner before Duncan has finished eating, an assertion that his hosting manners are inferior to hers, as Clark and Mason point out (167). A few lines later, however, she calls Macbeth a “coward” (1.7.44) for having doubts about their assassination plot—his determination and courage are also inferior to hers. Paradoxically, she is both a better hostess and better committed to killing the guest she is hosting. She takes the concept of being a hostess with agency (relating to Aristarkhova’s revision of theorizing hospitality) to the extreme of turning hospitality on its head and ultimately harming the guest.

After that harm has been done, Clark and Mason’s discussion of Macduff’s line “Look to the lady” (2.3.120), when everyone has gathered following Duncan’s death, raises multiple possibilities for Lady Macbeth’s role as hostess. The Folio text has no stage directions for what Lady Macbeth does before this line, but editorial additions over time have led to the common convention that she faints, or at least seems to. According to Clark and Mason, she could do anything here to get attention, not just faint, and therefore “Look to” doesn’t necessarily have to mean “take care of,” but could just mean “look at” (317). They write, “If we strip away all the accumulation of masculine editorial interference the text is opened up for a range of interpretative possibilities to be explored” (316). In this scene, Lady Macbeth is commanding her guests’ attention and taking up space in the room. The removal of an overly imposing masculine perspective opens up additional possibilities for how Lady Macbeth can act and exert control in her home, a dynamic similar to what Aristarkhova discusses.

In many ways, Lady Macbeth is a commanding and decisive female presence in the context of hospitality—and a connection to Aristarkhova’s intervention into the theory of hospitality. But in addition to embodying such an intervention, Lady Macbeth represents a twist on Aristarkhova’s ideas as well when she uses her hospitality skills for evil. She presides over

and welcomes people into the space of her home, only to turn it into a sinister, much less welcoming place. In positing that her use of space here (and other words and actions of hers elsewhere) is queer, I do not intend to equate queerness and evil. Rather, I wish to point out that by using a conception of femininity that is in some ways overlooked to control her space in an unexpected way, Lady Macbeth engages in new possibilities for thinking of gender and space.

Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters both play around with ideas of hospitality and domesticity—they twist common expectations of those concepts to their own ends, but in different ways that show how a witch experiences womanhood and power differently from a human woman. Though their gender presentation is somewhat ambiguous, the Weird Sisters are indeed “Sisters” and described as something close to “women” (1.3.45), so I think it fair to connect them to ideas of femininity within *Macbeth*. At the same time, I categorize the Weird Sisters as not entirely human, because their supernatural powers are so great as to put them on a separate plane from the rest of the play’s characters in terms of how they experience and inhabit the world. While Lady Macbeth welcomes Duncan into her home only to have him killed, the Weird Sisters have their own ways of perverting hospitality. In both of these instances, the characters manipulate ideas about home life for their own (sometimes sinister) purposes.

The Weird Sisters are associated with nature and the outdoors, and Scotland’s landscape in particular—not one specific house like Lady Macbeth—so when Macbeth encounters them or seeks them out he is entering their space in a way. He imposes himself on them and tries to order them around—which makes him a rather impolite guest—despite the witches’ clear power over their space and knowledge of important information that he seeks. For example, in one scene he commands, “Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more” (1.3.70), and in another he wishes “an eternal curse” on the witches if they don’t obey him (4.1.104). He disrespects their speech and

makes threats, even though they know more than him and are probably more capable of casting curses than he is. As Aristarkhova describes Derrida's theory of hospitality, "Given the fact that hospitality is dependent on ownership before it is offered hospitably to the other, Derrida argues, an essential tension is built into its structure" (167). Macbeth does not seem to respect that tension or the ownership the Weird Sisters have, perhaps because he is simply entitled, or because the witches occupy a position beyond the bounds of human society and it is unclear whether the same rules still apply.

Perhaps the most famous scene involving the Weird Sisters is itself a twist on hospitality and domesticity: the cauldron scene in Act Four, Scene One. As the witches narrate the process of adding ingredients to their cauldron, they exemplify a number of different ways in which they challenge social norms and play upon common fears. Much thought has already been devoted to how this scene represents an evil perversion of domesticity that plays on early modern anxieties about feminine power. Kate Chedgzoy writes:

The list of noxious substances read out by the witches, which constitutes the incantation, is a *recipe*, albeit a parodic one; this becomes more tenable when we recall that books of housewifery were often composed in rhyme in the early modern period...Cauldrons, now linked with witches thanks to the memorability of this very scene, were once simply the ordinary cooking utensil of those too poor to own an oven. The witches' cauldron is a reminder of women's control over food production. Like village witches, the witches of *Macbeth* use this power to reverse it; instead of transforming the natural into the cultural, they produce the unnatural. (227)

By using the cauldron for their own sinister purposes, the Weird Sisters create an image of domesticity that hints at the power it lends women—a power that could be frightening to those who rely on the early modern status quo. Preparing ingredients in a cauldron is not only a household chore, but it can also be threatening—especially when putting things like mummified flesh and entrails into a familiar (pun intended) cooking vessel.

There are also parallels between their carefully crafted recipe and Lady Macbeth’s control of her home on the night of Duncan’s murder. If the Weird Sisters are making a potion, it is implied that somebody will eventually drink it (though we don’t know who). Someone out there will be the recipient of their sinister domesticity, much like Duncan in Lady Macbeth’s house—or even Macbeth, in whose ear she “pour[s] my spirits” (1.5.26). In turn, Lady Macbeth is in her own way controlling various ingredients composing the night of Duncan’s murder. She arranges people and orchestrates events within her home in order to deny Duncan the hospitality she initially shows him. Whether cooking up a potion or a plot, the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth show how women can have a particular agency over space through creative and alternative interpretations of hospitality.

### **Weird Sisters and wind power**

A major way that the Weird Sisters’ use of space differs from Lady Macbeth’s is that in addition to manipulating the hospitableness of their space, they can alter and destabilize the elemental physics of the space itself. In Kristen Poole’s *Supernatural Environments in Shakespeare’s England*, she connects the way time operates in *Macbeth* to the Weird Sisters’ effect on perceptions of physical space. They conflate space, time, and the cosmos to create a sense of chaos and uncertainty that lingers throughout the play:

Time, space, atmospheric conditions and planetary motions become jumbled together. The answer to the witches' question of 'when?' is posited not so much in temporal as atmospheric terms ('in thunder, lightning, or in rain'). The 'hurly-burly' is timed by 'the set of sun.' While the answer to 'Where the place?' seems straightforward ('Upon the heath'), that sense of definitive emplacement becomes undermined as the witches seem to 'hover through the fog and filthy air'...Where are we? When are we? The coordinates of both time and space are shattered, and the effect on the audience – with ears perhaps still ringing from the theatrical thunder, and nostrils stinging from the gunpowder – is one of disorientation. Through much of the rest of the play the audience will witness Macbeth himself trying to recover a sense of solid space, trying to make sense of his environment, trying to force spatial fixity upon a world in which daggers hover and woods move. (Poole 140)

In the Weird Sisters' hands, space and time are potent yet malleable forces that continue to shape the course of *Macbeth* even when they are offstage. They enact a sense of spatial disorientation that works to upend social structures and norms.

A contributing factor to this disorientation is the Weird Sisters' ability to travel wherever they want while still being particularly rooted in Scotland, a power that is tied to their control of the elements, especially wind. From the very beginning, when they agree to meet "Upon the heath" in adverse weather conditions, the Weird Sisters are tied to the Scottish landscape (1.1.6). Mary Floyd-Wilson writes that due to English stereotypes about Scotland's rugged natural conditions and Scottish people's greater susceptibility to the elements, the Weird Sisters' brand of elemental magic marks them as particularly Scottish (136). However, despite being so clearly

connected to a specific place, the witches also have notable freedom to travel through space as they please. As “Posters of the sea and land,” they can appear and vanish at will and seem to be able to “go, about, about” however they like (1.3.33–4). When the Weird Sisters “Hover through the fog and filthy air” (1.1.10) and sail the ocean in sieves (1.3.8)—a feat that would mean preventing water from getting through the holes—they closely tie their geographical autonomy to their control of the air. Throughout *Macbeth*, the witches are associated with the language of physical space and the air throughout it. Though Lady Macbeth is very much in charge of her own space, the castle, she never leaves, while due to their powers the Weird Sisters manage to travel wherever they want while remaining connected to Scotland.

In addition to enjoying the freedom of unlimited travel, the Weird Sisters also use their wind powers to oppose the constructs of human society. Early modern witches were frequently accused of summoning storms, manipulating winds, and even charging money in exchange for such efforts. In events that likely inspired Shakespeare’s portrayal of the Weird Sisters, Danish and Scottish witches were accused of summoning inclement weather to sabotage ships carrying King James and his wife Anne. One of the accused even confessed that they traveled the ocean in sieves to accomplish this (Floyd-Wilson 147). In this example, witches and their elemental powers are expressly aligned against the monarchy.

After the cauldron scene, Macbeth gives a speech where he enumerates the various effects of the Weird Sisters’ powers,—all of which have to do with wind. These include the abilities to unleash wind “Against the churches” (4.1.52), make “castles topple on their warders’ heads” (4.1.55), and raze “palaces and pyramids” (4.1.56). This series of hypothetical attacks on buildings represents their opposition to Christianity, royalty, and therefore the physical and figurative power structures of church and state. Additionally, the Weird Sisters’ turbulence can

“Confound and swallow navigation up” (4.1.53), referring to the threat they pose to ships at sea, and to orientation in space in general. They use their wind powers to upset or overturn seats of power in human society.

The Weird Sisters’ conversations with each other are also frequently preoccupied with issues of physical space and location. When they meet, right away they ask each other questions such as “Where the place?” (1.1.6) and “Where hast thou been, sister?” (1.3.1)—place seems to be on their minds often. And in addition to traveling where they want and using wind to their own ends, the witches also exert power in the way they occupy physical space (or don’t). For example, when Macbeth and Banquo encounter them, the former is frustrated that the Weird Sisters “stop our way”—they are physically blocking the men’s passage so that they can deliver their knowledge of the future (1.3.77). Then, when Macbeth orders them to speak, they vanish into a “bubble” (1.3.79). The Weird Sisters’ ability to be where they want and disappear in a flash grants them even more power over their interlocutors.

Kristen Poole argues that the play’s human characters and the Weird Sisters inhabit extremely different understandings of physical space that were both prevalent in the early modern period. On the one hand, physical space was seen as mathematical and geometrically organized, while on the other it was seen as more fluid, permeable, and open to the supernatural (Poole 10). Poole writes that these two visions of space are difficult to reconcile, and in *Macbeth* “...we witness the interaction of characters who seem to be inhabiting different, and fundamentally incompatible, spatial epistemologies” (20). One way in which the Weird Sisters exemplify the more porous version of space (and how it gives them power) is when Macbeth and Banquo witness them vanish for the first time. In his letter to his wife, Macbeth writes that the

witches “...*made themselves / air, into which they vanished*” (1.5.4–5). Poole explains a particularly striking interpretation of this line:

This line can easily be read as ‘they made themselves into air,’ but that is not quite what it says: the witches, far from breathing into the wind as participants in a preexisting spatial frame, make their own air. They create new space that they can step into. This idea fractures the notion of a stable spatial structure. It creates a breach in nature. (Poole 159)

So the Weird Sisters are not only able to send wind where they want, but they can also create new air for themselves, which challenges the emerging notions of physical space as rigid, measured, and mathematically predictable. It is a wonderful metaphor: similar to how they create their own pockets of air to exist within, witches in general have to create a space for themselves as outsiders from the rest of society. And in doing so, they trouble the “stable...structure[s]” of male-dominated society. This ultimate type of agency over physical space gives the Weird Sisters the upper hand in their dealings with human men, while also representing the ostracized yet powerful social position of the witch, a use of space that I posit is queer.

With all of their knowledge and abilities related to space and time, it should come as no surprise that the Weird Sisters’ manipulations of the two concepts go hand-in-hand. For example, Howard Marchitello writes that the witches’ teleportation is characteristic of an “absolute speed” where they can immediately get from Point A to Point B (444). Once Macbeth witnesses the Weird Sisters vanish, he is driven by a desire for that absolute speed in the form of knowledge/experience of the future, hence all of the transportation via letter, overleaping, vaulting, etc. The witches’ rupture of space is also a rupture of time, and it is a key component of how they launch the rest of the play’s events into action.

Another place where the Weird Sisters collide space and time is when they show Macbeth the line of kings in 4.1. They create a spatial representation of patrilineage, showing both the cycle and the line of time in the succession of kings. Within the same scene, the Weird Sisters both reject and represent various social norms—they go from perverting domesticity to showing Macbeth the relentlessness of patrilineage. The witches recall Halberstam’s reference to Steve Pile and the notion that resistance is not necessarily the mirror image of domination: their position relative to the norms of human society can be more complex than simple rejection.

Shortly before the show of kings, the witches’ third apparition tells Macbeth that he will be unbeatable until “Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him,” to which he responds, “That will never be” (4.1.92–3). This prediction demonstrates not only the foreknowledge associated with the supernatural, but also the Weird Sisters’ connection to fluctuations in physical and space in the natural world—forests typically do not move around very much, but the witches have shown that the laws of physics are more like guidelines for them.

It is also of note that the apparition’s prophecy uses the subjunctive (“Shall come”) while Macbeth responds in the indicative (“will never be”). This change emphasizes Macbeth’s determination, incredulousness, and refusal to take the apparitions’ words seriously. His rejection of social norms looks very different from the Weird Sisters’: Macbeth tries to alter the normative course of time so he can rise within his political system, while the witches exist outside any human system and seem to be more aware of the extent of their abilities.

Whether hosting guests or meeting on the heath, Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters show how space can be used to defy social norms. Lady Macbeth operates within the space of her house to use and discard the virtues of an autonomous feminine hospitality as she chooses,

while the Weird Sisters accomplish a similar effect with their cauldron. The witches have the ability to manipulate the fabric of air and space itself, a talent they use to undermine religious and political power and perhaps, even, the futurity-obsessed Macbeth. All four characters present new possibilities for non-normative relationships between gender, physical space, and societal loci of power.

### Chapter Three: Bodies

*...For the poor wren,  
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,  
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl. (4.2.9–11)*

Through this metaphor, Lady Macduff displays her view of motherhood: mothers are willing to defend their children and keep them safe no matter the circumstances. In using the image of a wren fighting an owl, she draws attention to the “diminutive” state of the mother, the underdog in this fight, but also suggests a capacity for violence that is tied to the wren’s maternal motivation to protect her young. The wren is willing to physically harm another bird, at the risk of harm to herself, to keep her “young ones” safe.

Issues of mothers’ experiences, bodies, and impacts were not just on the mind of Lady Macduff. There were major concerns in early modern England about mothers’ roles and abilities to physically nurture—or physically harm—their children. These concerns can be seen reflected in the popular street literature of this time, with stories such as that of Margaret Vincent. Unlike the Weird Sisters or Lady Macbeth, she neither practiced witchcraft nor plotted the assassination of a king—but she did kill her children. According to the pamphlet *A Pittiless Mother*, Margaret Vincent converted to Catholicism as an adult, but her husband insisted on raising their children as Protestants against her will, so she killed the children in order to, in her eyes, save their souls. Though her story may have been sensationalized, its presence in the mass-produced pamphlets of street literature reflects how early modern discourse about mothers’ roles and tendencies, be they to save or to harm, manifested in stories about how they affected physical bodies.

Motherhood, violence, and the bodies they affect are all frequently entangled in *Macbeth*, and in this chapter I look at the violent maternal entanglements that implicate Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters, and the Macduff family. In my analysis of bodies in this chapter, it is not my

intention to impose a mind/body dualism on the play's characters, but rather to think of the body as just as much a product of culture and context as any other part of one's self. Since, as Judith Butler writes, both sex and gender are socially constructed, there is nothing inherently natural or innate in how bodies are categorized and discussed (Butler 7). Motherhood is not a state with concrete boundaries, and I do not mean to conflate womanhood with motherhood or to reduce women or mothers to the reproductive capabilities of their bodies—but I cannot necessarily say the same about *Macbeth's* society, characters, or historical context. By troubling existing norms (or outright playing into fears) about gendered embodiment and maternal identities and practices, these characters present queer possibilities for having a body that reads as female in a heteronormative, patrilineal context.

In this chapter, I provide some historical context regarding early modern cultural anxieties about both childless women and mothers, including widespread fears about infanticide. Then I explore Lady Macbeth's complicated relationship with her body and its reproductive capabilities, plus her infanticidal claims and how they relate to Irina Aristarkhova's arguments about the maternal. The Weird Sisters also have their own ways of challenging dominant expectations of bodies and motherhood. I turn next to the Macduff family, who in particular present alternative versions of mother/child relationships that relate to early modern concerns about the capabilities of mothers' bodies. All of these characters show that motherhood, a concept that is crucial to the structure of *Macbeth*, is an unstable category that can be challenged from many different directions.

### **Motherhood anxieties**

Early modern beliefs about gendered bodies tie into the stereotypes and anxieties that I discuss in this chapter. Women were often thought of as disorderly and uncontrollable compared

to neat and orderly men, both in terms of character and their physical bodies. According to medical beliefs at the time, they had colder and wetter bodily humors and were generally more physically porous—plus, the uterus had the ability to float around and travel throughout a woman’s body (Eggert 9). There were negative stereotypes of women having no reasoning abilities and being completely driven by their bodily desires, “exist[ing] only to satisfy their own corporeality” (Alfar 40).

These generalizations about women, coupled with the importance of male succession, led to fears about women’s role as mothers. As I mentioned in my discussion of patrilineage in Chapter One, there were widespread cultural fears of early modern women being unfaithful to their husbands, thus undermining the succession from father to son (Alfar 23). Stephanie Chamberlain writes, “That patrilineage could be irreparably altered through marital infidelity, nursing, and infanticide rendered maternal agency a social and political concern” (73). The significant role women played in reproduction, the root of men’s claims to sovereignty and legitimacy, was cause for anxiety about the power that mothers had and their potential to disturb the prevailing power dynamics of the time.

At the same time, however, childless women were also a cause of cultural anxiety. A prime example is Queen Elizabeth: an unmarried, childless, woman with immense political power. Though *Macbeth* wasn’t written and performed until after she died, Elizabeth would have remained present in the recent memory of the English people at the beginning of her successor King James’s rule. Her refusal to marry and thus have children was the cause of much discomfort with her rule and worry about the future; her childlessness posed a challenge to the early modern conceptions of gender and power. Elizabeth was both the ultimate mother (of the whole kingdom) and an entirely un-motherly figure (for refusing to provide England with an heir via

direct male succession). She also represented a rejection of patrilineage, both as a woman inheriting power and a title and also by not producing a son, let alone any heir to whom she could pass down her power and title.

The wild rumors about Queen Elizabeth that stemmed from her childlessness demonstrated the cultural anxieties surrounding women and mothers at this time. On one hand, people talked about all the secret lovers and bastard children she had despite her Virgin Queen image, but on the other people wondered if she had some reproductive deformity preventing her from having children, such as that she didn't menstruate, for example (Levin 70, 86). As Carole Levin puts it, "This solicitude over Elizabeth's sexual capacity was a means for the people to express their concern over a female monarch, and also a way of expressing the hope she would fulfill her womanly function, and have a child—a son who would reverse the dangerous precedent of a woman ruler" (67). Some of the rumors of illegitimate children went even further as to suggest that Elizabeth killed those children, usually by casting them into fires or otherwise burning them (infanticide was another early modern hot topic, as I discuss below) (Levin 83). This gossip about the Queen shows the cultural discomfort with her childlessness, and what it might mean about her body, her character, and the future of England.

As a woman in a position of political leadership, Queen Elizabeth did not always embody a very normative feminine identity. In her Speech to the Troops at Tilbury, she went as far as to say, "I know I have the body butt of a weake and feble woman, butt I have the harte and stomack of a king, and of a king of England too" (British Library). She did not stay within the conventional bounds of femininity, in how she described her body or when it came to the expectation that she marry and have children. Elizabeth presented an unusual version of womanhood and (non-)motherhood within an early modern context that would have been fresh

in collective memory at the time of *Macbeth*'s creation and performance—Lady Macbeth herself seems to resemble an extreme version of the fears about her.

### **Infanticide panic**

One particularly intense manifestation of early modern cultural anxieties about mothers was the widespread fear of infanticide. Though this crime was likely not an actually very prevalent problem, it figured largely in the public imagination, to the point where there was specific legislation enacted making infanticide a criminal offense (Chamberlain 75–6). Mothers who killed their children, or were accused of doing so, loomed large in the public imagination. For example, when Anne Boleyn gave birth to a stillborn child, she was thought to be demonically possessed and therefore responsible for the baby's death. Her failure to provide an heir to England drew accusations of treason. Chamberlain also points out that by not giving Henry VIII a son, Anne Boleyn was exposing his dependence on her for an heir and therefore his vulnerability as a king, highlighting the very real importance of mothers in the production of offspring so crucial for men in a patrilineal system (Chamberlain 77–8).

Murderous mothers made appearances in a variety of early modern media, one such being popular street literature: cheap pamphlets presenting sensationalized accounts of recent crimes or executions. Exaggerated tales of mothers killing their children would have been a lucrative way to capitalize on people's biases and fears. Susan C. Staub distinguishes between stories of unmarried mothers killing bastard children and married mothers killing legitimate children. Unmarried women were unequivocally condemned and demonized, and characterized as “decidedly unnatural, monstrous, and sexually promiscuous”—criticisms in line with all of early modern patriarchy's negative ideas about women, even though these women's murderous actions were likely motivated by the strictures of a patrilineal society (Staub 335).

Married women, on the other hand, were described with a little more respect because of their more sanctioned social position, and were often acting out of a sense of motherly duty to spare their children from some sort of suffering—like Margaret Vincent, who killed her children because she couldn't convert them to Catholicism. However, these women did not escape critique either, and not just because they committed murder. Staub argues that by granting these women the status of ordinary, somewhat respectable mothers, these stories and their reception ultimately cast all mothers as potentially dangerous (Staub 335). Regardless of how infrequently infanticide actually occurred, its popularity in the press strengthened the connection between motherhood and violence and vilified all mothers. Infanticide was condemned as not just murder, but also as a crime against a husband's family line and an example of the dangers mothers posed to early modern power structures.

### **Lady Macbeth's gender identity**

Even before she suggests that she would commit infanticide, Lady Macbeth challenges the expectations placed on her body as a woman. She seeks to change her gender identity through altering her body to be less conventionally feminine. At times, this change seems successful and she embodies a new and unique identity, but at other moments she is limited by stereotypes about women and normative emphases on reproduction and futurity.

Lady Macbeth's dissatisfaction with her woman's body, as well as the play's association of manhood with action and courage and womanhood with weakness, reflect rigid gender roles and notions of women's physical inferiority. However, she defies early modern ideas about breastfeeding, which was seen as a pinnacle of motherly moral virtue that represented and further contributed to mothers' affection for their children (Gowing 198–9). Breastfeeding was considered a way for a mother to pass down character, morals, and even the word of God to a

child (Trubowitz 97); though that could be a good thing, it also challenged men's dominance in passing things down to offspring.

Lady Macbeth makes this challenge especially sinister when she asks the spirits to "take my milk for gall" (1.5.48) and declares that she would be able to kill a baby she was nursing (1.7.54–9). In addition to not having children in the first place, Lady Macbeth describes herself in relation to motherhood in a way that resists conventional virtues of being a mother. Both early modern England and the Scotland of *Macbeth* value succession and patrilineage so highly, which makes the married but childless Lady Macbeth an unusual figure in the contexts of the play and the society in which it was written and first performed.

Lady Macbeth's desire for bodily transformation can be interpreted in any number of ways, but ultimately it makes her gender identity non-normative. Lady Macbeth's unsexing, as Ana Penjak writes, could be seen as a transgender narrative that challenges the notion of the body as "a fixed concept of being," and posits instead that the body is constantly transforming and "becoming" (239). Penjak also argues that one of the many freedoms Lady Macbeth gains from being unsexed is the "freedom from simply being a body" (241). Seen this way, her transformation happens to a body whose identity is constantly in flux, while also preventing her from being reduced to just her body.

Another way to look at Lady Macbeth's unsexing is through the lens of Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*. Though people often fail to recognize the power of masculine women, Halberstam writes that these masculinities open up new possibilities for the expression of gender and have the potential to destabilize the relationship between masculinity and men. If Lady Macbeth is aiming to be not necessarily a man, but a more masculine woman, then the changes she desires for her mind and body can serve as "assaults on the coherence of male

masculinity” (*Female Masculinity*, 15). However one interprets Lady Macbeth’s changing gender identity and the ways she wishes it expressed through her body, she aims for a version of herself that is freeing, subversive, and queer.

However, as the Macbeths discuss their plans for Duncan’s murder, Macbeth’s words to his wife reveal the limitations placed on her and her body as a woman. His chosen way of praising Lady Macbeth’s bravery is to say, “...thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (1.7.74–5). After she has demonstrated her ability to kill a child if it came to that (which I would say throws some doubt on her mothering abilities), he still praises Lady Macbeth in terms of motherhood. Though she has sought to be unsexed, this praise frames her as a womb. Macbeth’s focusing of his compliments on hypothetical offspring shows that he values Lady Macbeth for the possibilities of futurity she represents, despite, paradoxically, their lack of children and her willingness to harm said offspring.

He finishes with a reminder that “False face must hide what the false heart doth know,” which channels the recurring idea in the play of the outside concealing a very different inside, with eyes, hearts, and hands all seemingly keeping secrets from each other (1.7.83). However, in equating Lady Macbeth’s character traits like bravery and ambition to the biological function of birthing, Macbeth doesn’t seem to extend that separation of inside (“heart”) and outside (“face”) to his wife. His compliment to her recalls the early modern stereotype of women being ruled by their bodies and biological functions: if Lady Macbeth can only birth (brave, strong) male children, then it must be a reflection of her brave, strong character. Despite her forging of a new gender identity, Lady Macbeth is unable to escape fully the imposition of motherhood on her gender and body due to how Macbeth expresses his opinion of her. She has complex

relationships with her body and motherhood and strives to forge her own path with them, though she is met with varying degrees of success.

### **Inhospitable motherhood**

In making Lady Macbeth a potential child-killer, Shakespeare not only utilizes the popular motif of the murderous mother, but also heightens his portrayal of her as threatening to early modern conceptions of womanhood. She embodies many fears about women and their societal position, all of which converge at the idea of where mothers fit into society and what happens if they stray from their prescribed role. By being capable of killing her own child in a context that values male succession and female caregiving, Lady Macbeth plays into sensationalized cultural fears and becomes the ultimate challenger to the maternal status quo, in both the play and an early modern context.

As I have discussed in Chapter One, Lady Macbeth's word choice in the passage where she mentions infanticide calls to mind mothers' power to "unmake" human life if they choose (1.7.54). Another interesting complication of Lady Macbeth's assertions at this point in the scene is that she chooses to play up her identity as a nursing mother after she has previously wished to be unsexed, her milk taken for gall. Rather than rejecting motherhood outright, she twists it into something sinister based on fears and suspicions of mothers' potentially harmful power.

Aristarkhova also writes about mothers' power, but in the context of hospitality and without the early modern connotations of evil and sinfulness. In her discussion of how to reimagine femininity and hospitality, she advocates for recognizing the importance of "The connection to the first home, the home of the mother, the place of an original welcoming and hosting" (174). The maternal body and the actions of the mother can be portrayed as having agency when it comes to hospitality:

One *prepares* oneself, as Derrida and Levinas write, even before there is a call or a need; one is always expecting, even though the guest always comes unexpectedly. The moment of coming, as the moment of birthing, is not the end of hospitality, but rather one of its many instantiations...This notion of expectancy and the intentionality and preparation that issue therefrom complicate the reduction of the mother into a passive container that merely provides space for generation. Indeed, if hospitality is performative, it is about the *work* of hospitality: its decision-making or deferring, its labor and the dealing with its unexpected outcomes. (175)

As a capable and commanding hostess, Lady Macbeth indeed expects her guests, makes decisions, and deals with her fair share of unexpected situations—but she is not as typical an embodiment of Aristarkhova’s ideas when it comes to the concept of her as a mother. By switching her breast milk for gall and being willing to hypothetically murder the child she nurses, Lady Macbeth portrays her body as rather inhospitable compared to how Aristarkhova sees the maternal as contributing to hospitality. Envisioning her infanticide claim in terms of hospitality also makes clearer the connection she draws to the planned murder of Duncan—both he and the hypothetical Macbeth child are welcomed and then killed by Lady Macbeth.

In line with Aristarkhova’s argument, she is no “passive container,” and she is capable of doing “the work of hospitality.” As with the hospitality of the physical space she controls, Lady Macbeth is also willing and able to revoke that welcome when she pleases. As a welcoming hostess, she demonstrates Aristarkhova’s idea of feminine agency within hospitality, and she also has the agency to use that initial welcome to enact violence, cause bloodshed, and tear bodies apart.

Lady Macbeth demonstrates a savvy awareness of the normative social expectations of her body: it is supposed to look a certain way, assumed to behave a certain way, and is often reduced to its reproductive capabilities. Whether she is downplaying her femininity and motherhood, or evoking them to play into early modern culture's worst fears about those identities, Lady Macbeth avoids any normative characterization of her gender identity and body.

### **Weird Sisters**

The same cultural fears about motherhood were also present in early modern attitudes toward witches, which makes for an interesting comparison between the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth in terms of their embodiment and agency. The Weird Sisters' threat to traditional marriage and motherhood also demonstrates their non-normative social position and values.

In addition to being associated with paganism and the devil in a Christian country, early modern witches' relationship to Satan was often depicted as maternal and/or sexual, which reflects the contemporary notions that women were largely expected to bear children and have insatiable physical desires. Witch figures were often older, unmarried women on the outskirts of society. They were thought to nurse Satan's familiars with a secret extra nipple that was supposed to be one of the telltale signs of a witch (Chamberlain 81). In this way, witchcraft was a sort of perversion of motherhood that reflects anxieties about both women outside of social structures and mothers in general.

At the same time, witches' relationship with the devil was also sexualized—the extra nipple, or “witch's mark,” was often believed to be located in the genital area, the implication being that witches were both nursing and deriving sexual pleasure from the devil (Callaghan 368). These beliefs about witches make clear the early modern fear regarding women's roles, that the very people tasked with birthing and caring for children have an innate propensity for evil

and uncontrollable pleasure-seeking. Dympna Callaghan, who draws connections between witchcraft and the early modern “infanticide craze” (368), writes that both witches and infanticidal women were “persecuted *as mothers*: as bad old mothers for witchcraft, and as bad young mothers for infanticide” (367, emphasis hers). Though the Weird Sisters themselves are not mothers, as witches they carry connotations of a warped version of motherhood.

Like Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters’ bodies don’t always fit neatly into binary gender categories, but for them, gender ambiguity has different manifestations and effects. According to Banquo's description of the Weird Sisters, it is immediately clear to audience members that they fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum when it comes to gender presentation. Their “beards forbid [him] to interpret” them as women (1.3.46). These mysterious bearded people don’t fit neatly into a category of “man” or “woman”—part of what convinces Macbeth and Banquo that they are supernatural is the fact that categories normally applied to humans don’t work for them.

Carolyn Asp argues that the Weird Sisters’ gender ambiguity is an extension of their supernatural powers, since they are freed from the constraints of the gender binary. There is indeed power behind the beards’ ability to forcefully “forbid” any concrete determination of their gender. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, is hemmed in by gender stereotypes despite her desires to be not conventionally female. She is a human woman with a set social position, unlike the Weird Sisters, so any unsexing of hers must be solely internal. Marjorie Garber describes the witches as “dream images” for Lady Macbeth, whose powers of gender transformation are limited to her internal anatomy and character (713). Both Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters challenge the boundaries of womanhood, but their outer appearances denote the different ways

they do so. The witches and their beards are able to move and act freely, while Lady Macbeth is more limited by her woman's body and social role.

However, Lady Macbeth is not alone in her connection to infanticide. In addition to the "Finger of birth-strangled babe" in their potion (4.1.30), the Weird Sisters summon the apparitions for Macbeth with "sow's blood that hath eaten / Her nine farrow" (4.1.63–4). The witches are shown to gain power from offspring killed by their own parents—as I have previously discussed, infanticide was seen as the ultimate sin against one's family and lineage, and a dangerous manifestation of the power accorded women as caretakers. Through their historical context, looks, and infanticidal ingredients, the Weird Sisters trouble many of the same norms as Lady Macbeth but don't seem to experience the same limitations.

### **Macduff family**

The various members of the Macduff family present different versions of non-normative mother/child relationships that challenge Macbeth's prioritization of father/son relationships and contribute to the play's preoccupation with the bodies of mothers.

Part of why Macbeth is so vulnerable to Macduff's particular fulfillment of the prophecy is because he (Macbeth) values father/son relationships over any other type of parent/child relationship. Perhaps the most damning part of the prophecy is that "...none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.79–80)—with this knowledge in hand, being born from a woman becomes a weakness in Macbeth's eyes. After slaying Young Siward, yet another family line he kills off, Macbeth declares, "Thou wast born of woman" as if it were an insult (5.7.6). By killing someone like Young Siward he is actively dealing a blow to the Siward family by severing a patrilineal link; whereas in his eyes Young Siward's being born from his mother is a weakness and what causes him to die.

Another moment showing this mindset is after Macbeth learns of Macduff's birth circumstances and decides to fight him anyway—he describes his opponent as “being of no woman born” (5.8.31). His phrasing rings a little odd, since he isn't negating the action of birth but rather negating the existence of his mother. Learning about the prophecy seems to lead Macbeth to even further disregard the importance of mothers, even after the circumstances of Macduff's birth are revealed to him.

Macbeth is blindsided because he only focused on Macduff's descendants. As Clark and Mason describe it, “...Macduff gives [the prophecy] a meaning [Macbeth] had not considered...” (295). Macbeth went to the effort of having Macduff's wife and children killed in order to cut off his family line, because father-son family ties are considered most important. But he did not give any consideration to Macduff's relationship to his mother, or more broadly speaking, the range of possible relationships that can exist between mother and child. Plus, the relationship between Macduff and his mother is described in particularly violent terms—their two bodies are “ripped” apart (5.8.16). The very climax of the play hinges on a mother's body and the violence associated with it. It never occurred to Macbeth that an unusual instance of that violence could meet the prophecy's terms and contribute to his downfall.

On the other hand, the way Lady Macduff talks about her husband shows her awareness of the varying potential of mothers. Upset with Macduff for leaving his family in a time of danger, she tells Ross, “He loves us not; / He wants the natural touch” (4.2.9). This phrasing is reminiscent of Macduff's “untimely,” perhaps even unnatural, birth. Since, as Clark and Mason note, early modern C-sections only happened right before or after the mother died (295), Macduff grew up without his mother—Lady Macduff may be implying that Macduff is a worse father and husband because he lacked his mother's love. Her description of that love as a “touch”

also draws bodies into the equation. Though the physical circumstances of Macduff's birth enabled him to defeat Macbeth, they also have apparently negatively affected his relationship with his family.

Lady Macduff then contrasts herself with both her husband and (implicitly) his mother by framing herself as a "poor wren, / The most diminutive of birds," who will nevertheless defend her young against predators (4.2.9–10). Unlike Macduff or his dead mother, Lady Macduff is capable of caring for and trying to protect her children. And as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, she hints at being capable of violence for the sake of defending her children. Lady Macduff believes in the importance of a mother's love—she thinks that her husband has suffered without it, which harms her family, and that via the nature metaphor it is her natural role to keep her family safe.

Lady Macduff seems to embrace the wide range of powers and influence mothers can have. She understands mothers to be nurturers, and sees it as a problem when one doesn't have that nurturance as a child. In figuratively killing off her husband and through the ways she describes Macduff's mother and herself, she demonstrates the variety of violent potential mothers have in the world of the play.

Young Macduff's queerness can be seen in the context of his relationship with and interactions with his mother, making her a part of its expression. Their witty banter shows that he isn't afraid to speak his mind around his mother and offer bold remarks like, "...if you would not [weep for my father], it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father" (4.2.62–4). Lady Macduff in turn is impressed with her son's mind—though they are not necessarily equals, his maturity is evident and they are clearly close. There is also the early modern notion that mothers could pass characteristics and morals to their children through nursing, so in that sense

children were extensions of their mothers. If young Macduff is a product of how his mother has raised him, then Lady Macduff becomes implicated in his queerness. Their relationship shows how even through the normative virtue of a maternal connection like breastfeeding, queer possibilities can still arise. Lady Macduff and young Macduff, with their close bond and Junior's queerness, present a second alternative possibility for the mother/child relationship (Macduff and his late mother being the first).

The Macduffs are often compared with the Macbeths (and especially the two Ladies) as an idealized family with children, as opposed to the evil, childless title couple. As Garber puts it, Lady Macduff is "the paragon of onstage motherhood," a strong contrast to Lady Macbeth who, if she even had a child in the first place, is very much willing to kill it (Garber 714). However, the Macduffs are decidedly not normal in many ways. Both Ladies Macbeth and Macduff are critical of their husbands, but there is more disagreement between the Macduffs. As Alfar argues, Lady Macbeth can be seen as exemplifying early modern wifedom by aligning herself completely with her husband's goals (111). With an outspoken wife, a husband with an atypical relationship to his mother, a son who is a queer figure, and both father and son embodying paradoxes of life, death, and time, the Macduffs are actually significantly non-normative. With much of these conditions traceable back to the women in the family (Lady Macduff, Macduff Senior's mother), the Macduffs may be just as queer a family as the Macbeths.

Viewed through the lens of nursing, hospitality, or infanticide, the feminized characters of this play that is constantly focused on maternal bodies continually find ways to challenge what is expected of those bodies. Ultimately they all call into question whether there is such a thing as a "normative" mother or maternal body in the first place. In the play's society, where there is so much emphasis on patrilineage and women's responsibility to reproduce, the social system is

such that it is near impossible for the feminized characters to fit into what the society expects of them. As a result, every portrayal of or allusion to motherhood is in some way queer by the standards of the characters' context.

## Conclusion

Throughout *Macbeth*, characters like Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters, and the Macduff family challenge normative notions of how time, space, and bodies should behave. Because the conventions of these three themes in the context of the play all support generational succession through patrilineage, as well as traditional gender roles when it comes to homes, families, and bodies, their reimaginations of these forces can be seen as queer.

Beyond the research and writing that I have done for this project, there are a few continuations of the ideas I have discussed that I think would be interesting to pursue further. Jack Halberstam's theory has been crucial to my understanding of time and space for this project, and I would love to use *In a Queer Time and Place* more to explore the possibilities of Lady Macbeth as a transgender character—her transformation is fascinating and can be interpreted in so many ways. I also think that Irina Aristarkhova's arguments about hospitality could be applied more to the banquet scene in 3.4. That is another place where events end up in Lady Macbeth's "dispatch," and instead of the feminine being an invisible, unspoken presence within the hospitable space, there is an invisible man in the form of Banquo's ghost that only Macbeth can see. In a similar vein, I believe that there is more to be said about the various visions and apparitions in *Macbeth*, such as the ghost of Banquo and the Weird Sisters' visual displays for Macbeth in 4.1. These figures trouble time, space, and bodies all at once—they show people who have died or have yet to exist, can appear and disappear out of thin air, and are of dubious corporeality. Because the themes of time, space, and bodies are so broad, there are plenty of opportunities for future exploration of how these themes are destabilized in the play.

Taken together, characters like Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters, and Lady Macduff show that societal norms can be resisted from any position, but in different ways. Lady Macbeth and

Lady Macduff both exist within the confines of human society, the latter perhaps better conforming to gender and reproductive expectations than the former, but they are both able to find agency and queerness in their own ways. The Weird Sisters are different in that they are not a part of society in the same way the human women are, so they have separate limitations and abilities. That they make it out of the play alive, while the human women do not, may suggest that challenging systems of power and normativity from the outside, rather than from within, is more tenable or effective. But then again, that argument places value on futurity and perpetuity, so perhaps the point is that this is a question not easily resolved.

Regardless, the queer possibilities of *Macbeth* infuse both the action onstage and the overall atmosphere of the play's world with uncertainty and excitement. They are reminders that time, space, and bodies, which are all major controlling components of the play, are uncertain, unstable, and subject to changes and challenges. Nothing in this world is as it seems—and that is to be embraced. The play is a potion of characters, events, and ideas mixing together in a murky and uncertain world. These different forms of queerness affect both the individual ingredients and the broth they are part of—they show alternative possibilities for inhabiting a world whose normative ideals do not work for everyone, and they make *Macbeth* more multifaceted, imaginative, and subversive.

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