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[In the excerpt below, Coriat, an American psychoanalyst, presents one of the first fully developed psychoanalytic treatments of a Shakespearean character. Lady Macbeth, he argues, suffers from “a typical case of hysteria,” presented by Shakespeare with “remarkable insight” and culminating in the sleepwalking scene. Coriat states that Lady Macbeth's ambition to be queen, for which she helps murder Duncan, is but a sublimation of her true desire for a child. She thus represses her natural cowardice from her consciousness, he continues, but after the regicide her repressed emotions begin to “break through in dreams” and surface most fully in the sleep-walking scene. Coriat further asserts that, in her somnambulistic state, Lady Macbeth reveals a “condensed panorama” of her repressed crimes and that the compulsive act of washing her hands is “a compromise for self-reproach and repressed experiences.” Lady Macbeth, he concludes, is subject to a relentless fate because she cannot free herself from the complexes of her repressed unconscious. Coriat further adds that the witches instigate “the unconscious wishes of the chief characters.”]

When we approach the problem of the somnambulism of Lady Macbeth, it must be remembered that the sleep-walking scene does not stand isolated and alone in the tragedy, but that it is the definite and logical evolution of Lady Macbeth's previous emotional experiences and complexes. In other words, she is not a criminal type or an ambitious woman, but the victim of a pathological mental dissociation arising upon an unstable, day-dreaming basis, and is due to the emotional shocks of her past experiences. Lady Macbeth is a typical case of hysteria; her ambition is merely a sublimation of a repressed sexual impulse, the desire for a child based upon the memory of a child long since dead.

In fact, an analysis of the sleep-walking scene demonstrates that it is neither genuine sleep nor the prickings of a guilty conscience, but a clear case of pathological somnambulism, a genuine disintegration of the personality. As such, it offers as wonderful and as complex a problem as Hamlet—probably more so, for Lady Macbeth's disease is clearly defined and admits of easier clinical demonstration. An analysis of the repressed emotional complexes in Lady Macbeth must of necessity illuminate the motives of the entire tragedy, such as the mental disease of Macbeth, his hallucinations and the symbolism represented by the three weird sisters. (pp. 28-9)

Lady Macbeth first appears in the fifth scene of the first act, reading her husband's letter, which briefly described his meeting with the three weird sisters. Therefore, any ideas which might enter into the mind of Lady Macbeth, were due to hints contained in the letter betraying her husband's wishes, and were elaborated in a soliloquy which revealed the very rapture of ambition. This first soliloquy is remarkable, it is her first daydream of ambition, so strong and dominating, that she believes she possesses what she really does not possess—namely, bravery. It is this imaginary wish fulfillment to be queen which later causes the hysterical dissociation. As can be demonstrated later in the sleep-walking episode, this daydream of bravery was merely assumed, a mask for the realization of the sudden uprush of her ambition. The genuine underlying cowardice was suppressed.

But the suppressed complex of ambition has become dominating and will now stop at nothing to accomplish its ends. At first consciously prodded on, it soon becomes automatic, beyond her control, she becomes dominated by the fixed idea which causes her disease and which later is responsible for the somnambulism. When the messenger arrives with the news that “the King comes here tonight” [I. v. 31], the suppressed complex of the desire to be queen and the means to be employed to accomplish the desire, breaks through for the first time. Like slips of the tongue in everyday life, which modern psycho-pathology have shown are not accidental, but are predetermined by antecedent complexes, so the immediate answer is not the usual one of welcome, but one tinged and distorted by her dreams of ambition and the first vague glimmering of homicide. Here the disturbing thought is caused or conditioned by the repressed complex and she replies

Thou'rt mad to say it.
 [I. v. 31]

Then she suddenly feels that she has disclosed herself and her innermost thoughts and in order to disarm suspicion, the remainder of the reply becomes commonplace.

The modern theory of the bursting of suppressed complexes into speech, indicates a sudden removal of the censorship and an uprushing of the subconscious ideas. This alternate play of free speech and of repression forms one of the most characteristic features of Lady Macbeth's mental disorder. In the presence of the messenger, after the revealing of the complex, a compromise with the unconscious takes place, she again becomes the calm Lady Macbeth and attempts to assume an indifferent attitude by pretending that it is lack of preparation

for the sudden visit of the King which led to this emotional outburst.

Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,
Would have inform'd for preparation.
[I. v. 32-3]

When the messenger leaves, the suppressed complex again breaks forth into a daydream of ambition, of a burning desire and wish to be queen. She imagines, but immediately represses it, at least so far as can be determined by her words, that the opportune moment has arrived and the King will walk into the trap she has prepared for him. In order to brace herself for the ordeal and for the rapidly forming plans of the "taking off" of Duncan, she again deceives herself into thinking that she possesses bravery for a deed which is clearly present in the background of her mind. This, I take it, is the most logical interpretation of the remainder of that remarkable soliloquy which follows.... (pp. 39-43)

Then, in the first appearance of Macbeth before his wife, the conversation clearly reveals the working of Lady Macbeth's mind. It is only in her waking condition that she is master of the situation, influences her husband, and maintains herself in a logical relation to her surroundings. This is not spontaneous, however, but is the effect of a suppression brought about through a colossal effort of the will. In the somnambulistic personality, she loses this mastery, becomes a coward and the subject of a depression which finally terminates in suicide. (p. 44)

Lady Macbeth is next brought face to face with the King and in response to his greetings, there follows a reply, which is the very quintessence of hypocrisy, and which may be interpreted as a substitution or a compensation for the gradually dominating but repressed complex.

All our service
In every point twice done, and then done double,
Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honors deep and broad wherewith
Your majesty loads our house: for those of old,
And the late dignities heap'd up to them,
We rest your hermits.
[I. vi. 14-20]

Then, when the time for the great deed approaches, and Macbeth wavers, she goads him on and in the words

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 pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.
[I. vii. 54-9]

Here is an example of a substitution, or what is termed in modern psychopathology as a sublimation or transformation of a sexual complex into ambition, a mechanism which is frequently found in hysteria. The theme of childlessness is here revealed for the first time. In fact, so complete does the transformation sometimes become, that the hysterics fail to recognize the sexual thoughts underlying their symptoms and they can be revealed only through the technical devices of psychoanalysis. In both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, the sexual energy is transformed—in the former it leads to an ambition complex, in the latter to criminality. In this remarkable dialogue between Lady Macbeth and her husband, we see how constant reiteration gradually fixes the complex into consciousness, an identical mechanism found in one of the scenes between Iago and his dupe Roderigo in the constant reiteration of "Put money in thy purse" [*Othello*, I. iii. 39ff].

As the final moment approaches for the murder, the so-called courage which Lady Macbeth had deluded herself that she possessed, has not remained in the "sticking place," but she weakens perceptibly and is compelled to have recourse to alcohol in order to make her brave. She is not brave naturally, but is a coward at heart, as is particularly shown in the lines:

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;
What hath quench'd them hath given me fire.
[II. ii. 1-2]

This cowardice is again later seen in the words uttered after the first cry of Macbeth heard from the King's chamber—when she becomes afraid that perhaps the possets have not been sufficiently drugged and the grooms or perhaps the King himself has awakened. The words uttered are an artful excuse, a substitution for her cowardice, and not, as one critic has stated, because some fancied resemblance to her father had arisen to stay her uplifted arm and thus worked on her conscience. Here the motive is far deeper—a symptomatic, unconscious substitution for her cowardice and not due to any prickings of conscience in the relation of child to parent. Thus the words

I laid their daggers ready;
 He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
 My father as he slept, I had done't.
 [II. ii. 11-13]

acquire a new significance in the light of modern psychopathology. (pp. 48-52)

But after the deed is done, there arises the first premonition of the impending mental dissociation and suicide. So terrible has become her fear and horror, the repression has become so intense, that she shrinks from the guilty secret, and here enters the first element of the mechanism which leads to the hysterical dissociation. She chooses repression and not free expression, thus erroneously feeling that the former will neutralize the emotional shock. Thus her warning to Macbeth

These deeds must not be thought
 After these ways; so, it will make us mad,
 [II. ii. 30-1]

shows an attitude which is characteristic of an impending mental disintegration.

Later in the scene, her words:

The sleeping and the dead
 Are but as pictures,
 [II. ii. 50-1]

indicate the beginning of a dissociation of the personality, in an attempt to cut off or repress the thoughts of the tragedy from the rest of her experience.

That Shakespeare was fully aware that repression of the emotions was not only painful but dangerous, is shown in the words of Malcolm to Macduff, after the latter has been informed of the murder of his wife and children.

What, man! ne'er pull your hat upon your brows;
 Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak
 Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break.
 [IV. iii. 208-10]
 (pp. 53-4)

The knocking at the gate furnishes a distinct emotional contrast to the terror of this scene and is a bursting of reality upon the unreality of things which Lady Macbeth feels creeping upon her. The silence and the whispering, the hallucinatory phenomena which Macbeth relates to his wife, the tenseness of Lady Macbeth, these all are suddenly broken into by the stern realism of the knocking. It is easy to conceive, under these circumstances, how this knocking could act as a psychic traumatism upon the tense emotions of Lady Macbeth, how it transformed her assumed bravery into terrorizing fear and how these elements alone, if necessary, could act as efficient causes for the development of the hysterical disturbance. The repression of the secret of the murder, the imaginary wish to be the mother to a line of Kings, here coincides in consciousness with terror and excitement. The repressed emotions have thus been injured and out of this injured repression, the hysteria arose.

Thus two complexes were already at work in the consciousness of Lady Macbeth and it is these complexes or rather the repression of these complexes which led to the mental dissociation. The ambition complex is based upon daydreams of ambition, not so much for herself as for her husband. It is a substitute for her childlessness or rather for the children which she has lost and it may be termed a sublimated sexual complex. (pp. 55-7)

In the third act, the words of the muttering soliloquy

'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
 Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy,
 [III. ii. 6-7]

marks the preparation for the sleepwalking scene and for her later suicide.

The preparations for Banquo's murder have been completed and both husband and wife are in a state of terror and mental anguish. Even in sleep the repressed complexes continue to break through in dreams, perhaps literal, perhaps symbolic.

Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
 In the affliction of these terrible dreams
 That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,

Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.
[III. ii. 17-22]

These words show that Lady Macbeth likewise suffered from terrible dreams, and that both related these dreams to each other. Now it is well known that during the waking state, complexes may be kept repressed by a constant censorship of consciousness. In sleep, this censorship becomes relaxed and the repressed experiences appear either as literal or symbolic dreams. Thus dreams are not chance phantasmagoria of thought disturbing sleep, but are really the logical result of stored-up but repressed experiences. (pp. 60-1)

In the sleep-walking scene, Shakespeare reached the summit of his art in creating an abnormal mental state. While some of the episodes in Hamlet may have caused more discussion and a greater literature, yet much of Hamlet is problematical, while in Lady Macbeth, there can be but one interpretation of this scene, namely, a case of hysterical somnambulism, and conforming to all the known laws of the psychological phenomena of somnambulistic mental states. The entire scene furnishes a splendid illustration of Shakespeare's remarkable insight into mental mechanisms, particularly into abnormal states of consciousness.

This somnambulistic scene is predetermined by the existing, suppressed complexes. It is a subconscious automatism. Lady Macbeth during this scene is not in a state of unconsciousness or even sleep, for in fact her consciousness is very active, but she is rather in a condition of special consciousness. In such a mental condition very complicated but natural acts may be performed.

These somnambulistic phenomena, on account of the close linking of the association of ideas are machine-like and automatic in their repetition. As the mental state in which they occur excludes any voluntary action of the will, when once started they inevitably follow the same order. Now this is precisely what occurred to Lady Macbeth. As an analysis of the mental mechanism of her particular somnambulistic state will distinctly show, the entire episode closely corresponds to the form of the condition termed monoideic somnambulism.

I must fully agree with Coleridge that Lady Macbeth is essentially of the daydreaming type. It is interesting to note that in all carefully analyzed cases of hysteria, this daydreaming will be found to be a prominent characteristic. The daydreams were partly those of ambition and partly sexual—both were imaginary wish fulfillments to be queen and to have a son as a compensation for her childlessness and thus have some one inherit the throne, since the witches hailed Macbeth as father to a line of Kings. These daydreams of Lady Macbeth furnish the key to the later night dreams and the somnambulism. Daydreams may express themselves in various hysterical symptoms and attacks, such as somnambulism, sudden losses of consciousness and amnesia, all of which are found in Lady Macbeth. This is particularly liable to occur when the daydreams and complexes are intentionally forgotten and merge into the unconscious by repression, a mental mechanism which is a prominent characteristic of Lady Macbeth. It is this mental mechanism of repression which finally developed into the somnambulism.

The sleep-walking scene is not mentioned in Holinshed and it must therefore be looked upon as an original effort of Shakespeare's creative imagination. Lady Macbeth had none of the usual phenomena of sleep, but she did show with a startling degree of accuracy all the symptoms of hysterical somnambulism. Somnambulism is not sleep, but a special mental state arising out of sleep through a definite mechanism. The sleep-walking scene is a perfectly logical outcome of the previous mental state. From the very mechanism of this mental state, such a development was inevitable. She is not the victim of a blind fate or destiny or punished by a moral law, but affected by a mental disease.

It is evident from the first words uttered by the Doctor in the sleep-walking scene, that Lady Macbeth had had several previous somnambulistic attacks. That we are dealing with a genuine somnambulism is shown by the description of the eyes being open and not shut. Now several complexes or groups of suppressed ideas of an emotional nature enter into this scene and are responsible for it. The acting out of these complexes themselves are based upon reminiscences of her past repressed experiences.

The first complex relates to the murder of Duncan as demonstrated in the continual washing of the hands, an act not seen earlier and here clearly brought out in the sleep-walking scene. This automatic act is a reminiscence of her earlier remark after the murder of Duncan, "A little water clears us of this deed" [II. ii. 64].

The second complex refers to the murder of Banquo, clearly shown in the words, "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave" [V. i. 63-4], thus demonstrating that she is no longer ignorant of this particular crime of her husband.

The third complex entering into the sleep-walking scene distinctly refers to the murder of Macduff's wife and children—"The Thane of Fife had a wife, where is she now?" [V. i. 42]. Various other fragmentary reminiscences enter into this scene, such as Macbeth's terror at the banquet in the words, "You mar all with this starting" [V. i. 44-5], the striking of the clock before the murder of King Duncan, and the reading of the first letter from Macbeth announcing the witches' prophecy. Thus a vivid and condensed panorama of all her crimes passes before her. Like all reported cases of hysterical somnambulism, the episode is made up, not of one, but of all the abnormal fixed ideas and repressed complexes of the subject. The smell and sight of blood which she experiences, is one of those cases in which hallucinations developed out of subconscious fixed ideas which had acquired a certain intensity, as in Macbeth's hallucination of the dagger. Since blood was the dominating note of the tragedy, it was evidence of Shakespeare's remarkable insight that the dominating hallucination of this scene should refer to blood. The analysis of this particular scene also discloses other important mental mechanisms.

There is a form of nervous disease known as a compulsion neurosis in which the subject has an almost continuous impulsion to either wash the hands or to repeat other actions almost indefinitely. As a rule, this compulsion appears meaningless and even foolish to the outside observer and it is only by an analysis of the condition, that we can understand its nature and true significance. The compulsion may arise from the idea that the hands are soiled or contaminated or there may be a genuine phobia of infection or contamination. As an example, I had the opportunity to observe the case of a young girl who would wash her hands a number of times during the day. She could give no explanation for this impulsion. A psychoanalysis, however, disclosed the fact that the washing of the hands was due to ideas of religious absolution from certain imaginary sins and arose as an act of defense against imaginary contamination. Now a similar group of symptoms is found in *Lady Macbeth*. In the sleep-walking scene the following dialogue occurs—

Doctor. What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

Gentlewoman. It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour. [V. i. 26-30]

Then later in the scene, *Lady Macbeth* speaks as follows, disclosing the complex which leads to this apparently meaningless action. “What, will these hands ne'er be clean? ... Here's the smell of the blood still: All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” [V. i. 43-51].

Here the symptom develops through *Lady Macbeth* transferring an unpleasant group of memories or complexes, which have a strong personal and emotional significance, to an indifferent act or symptom. The act of washing the hands is a compromise for self-reproach and repressed experiences. The mechanism here is the same as in the compulsion neuroses, a proof of Shakespeare's remarkable insight into the workings of the human mind. When the doctor later states, “This disease is beyond my practise” [V. i. 59], he expressed the attitude of the medical profession towards these psychoneurotic symptoms until the advent of modern psychopathology.

In the words, “Out damned spot—Out I say” [V. i. 35], the mechanism is that of an unconscious and automatic outburst. It is very doubtful if *Lady Macbeth* would have used these words if she were in her normal, waking condition. Thus the difference between the personality of *Lady Macbeth* in her somnambulistic and in the normal mental state, is a proof of the wide gap existing between these two types of consciousness.

Lady Macbeth may therefore be looked upon as possessing two personalities, which appear and disappear according to the oscillations of her mental level. In her normal, waking state, repression and an assumed bravery are marked. In the sleeping or somnambulistic state, the repression gives way to free expression and her innate cowardice becomes dominant. In her waking condition, she shows no fear of blood, but shrinks from it when in a state of somnambulism. Her counsel to her husband while awake is that of an emotionless cruelty, while in somnambulism she shows pity and remorse. If one could believe in the womanliness of *Lady Macbeth*, then her sleeping personality must be interpreted as the true one, because removed from the inhibition and the censorship of voluntary repression.

Thus Shakespeare, with most remarkable insight, has made the sleep-walking scene exactly conform to all the characteristics of a pathological somnambulism—that is—the subject sees and hears everything, there is a regularity of development, as the subject repeats the same words and gestures as in the original experience and finally, on a return to the normal personality after the attack is over, there is no memory for the attack, in other words, amnesia has taken place. *Lady Macbeth's* actions during the sleep-walking scene are very complicated, show a clear memory of her past repressed experiences, in fact, they are an exact reproduction and rehearsal of these experiences. Finally, she shows an amount of reasoning and association which would be impossible during the annihilation of consciousness during sleep and which only could have taken place when consciousness was very active. (pp.66-77)

After the sleep-walking episode comes the last scene of all—the final picture of the catastrophe—the only possible solution of *Lady Macbeth's* mental disease—namely her suicide. We are left completely in the dark as to the method of suicide—here both drama and chronicle are silent. The impulsion to suicide has occasionally followed an hysterical somnambulistic delirium and likewise has occurred in the course of the attack. (pp. 87-8)

The relentless fate of Greek tragedy, of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Rosmersholm*, also dominates the tragedy of *Macbeth*. In *Lady Macbeth* there is a constant battle between free will and determination. Determinism is triumphant, because *Lady Macbeth* cannot emancipate herself from the suppressed complexes which inevitably led to her mental disorder. She thinks she chooses her actions whereas in reality they are chosen for her by the unconscious complexes. *Macbeth* is likewise the victim of the same mental mechanism.

This ethical relentlessness of the tragedy is due to the hysteria of *Lady Macbeth*, with its strong, deterministic factors. Because *Lady Macbeth* in her somnambulistic state was different from *Lady Macbeth* in her waking condition, she suffered from a disintegration or a dissociation of the personality.... *Lady Macbeth's* personality was doubled, normal and abnormal, alternating, but at the same time co-conscious. The dissociation resulted from repressed, unconscious motives and conflicts, due, not to a sudden emotional shock, but to a series of repressed complexes.

Thus in the tragedy of *Macbeth* we move in a kind of symbolized world. The *Macbeth* legend is a symbol and it conceals within itself the theme of childlessness in the same manner that a dream may symbolize underlying strong, personal motives and interests. This is the reality behind the symbolism. *Macbeth* is primitive, myth-like and it is now well recognized that the formation of myths and legends has the same mechanism as the formation of dreams. In *Macbeth* as in dreams, we move in a world of supernatural activities—witches and ghosts, exaggerated and heroic deeds, even at times emotionless murders—a mechanism identical with dreaming. The witches are

primitive myth creations, sexless, yet old women, emotionless yet exciting to ambition, motiveless, yet furnishing the main motive of the tragedy. They are thoroughly Shakespearean and in them we see how the creative imagination of the poet is related to the primitive myth maker. They wield their power over Macbeth (and secondarily over Lady Macbeth) because they stimulate his half-formed unconscious and repressed wish to be King. The witches are thus the instigators of the entire tragedy and of the unconscious wishes of the chief characters. They set its machinery in motion in the same way that a dream may be instigated by the events of the day. Thus their meaning becomes clear in the light of psycho-analysis. They are erotic symbols, representing, although sexless, the emblems of the generative power in nature. In the "hell broth" are condensed heterogeneous materials in which even on superficial analysis one can discern the sexual significance. If it be asked, why this particular symbolism? it is because they bring to maturity Macbeth's "embryo wishes and half formed thoughts." When Macbeth shrinks, it is not from the horrors involved in their prophecies, but from his own imaginary wish fulfillment and mental conflicts. The shrinking is overcome, however, by their constant harping and the unconscious wish becomes an obsession. This is the mental mechanism of Macbeth, which, by a kind of mental contagion he transfers to his wife and which finally develops in her, into a typical case of hysteria. (pp. 89-92)

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