

The Character of Lady Macbeth - Transcript

Lady Macbeth: 'I fear thy nature; it is too full of the milk of human kindness.

To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great'

'Art not without ambition... but without the illness should attend it.'

Presenter: When the Macbeths first prepare to act out their dark plans,

Lady Macbeth fears that her husband doesn't have the 'illness' or 'cruelty' required to achieve his ambition - contrasting it to his 'milk of human kindness'.

Lady Macbeth: 'pour my spirits in thine ear.'

Presenter: This forms the basis for a marriage where manipulative Lady Macbeth asserts increasing power over her husband, setting them on a path that ultimately leads to their decline.

Lady Macbeth's manipulative and cunning characteristics are present from the start.

She advises her husband on how to act when King Duncan arrives, using figurative language...

Lady Macbeth: 'Look like th' innocent flower,'

'But be the serpent under 't'.

Presenter: And when Macbeth murders the king, she helps to cover it up.

Now, for audiences at the time, the hold that she has over Macbeth might have seemed unnatural - as the Jacobean era was a time when women were often seen as little more than the property of their husbands.

So when Macbeth is consumed by guilt as she tells him that 'what's done is done', her determination and ambition is even more apparent.

But while she initially dismisses his remorse, saying 'A little water clears us of this deed', later she too is consumed by increasing guilt and visions of blood.

Sleepwalking, she cries,

Lady Macbeth: 'Out, damned spot; out I say!'

Presenter: Whilst desperately scrubbing imagined bloodstains from her hands - symbolic of guilt - her conscience-stricken state ultimately sees her die in tragic circumstances, which is a warning from Shakespeare about the consequences of sin.

When Macbeth hears of his wife's death, he is drained of purpose, declaring that life is but a...

Macbeth: 'tale Told by an idiot', full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.'

Presenter: What does this speech tell us about the strength of Lady Macbeth's influence over her husband, and the consequences of the ambition she embodies?