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Re-gendering of the Nietzschean Übermensch in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*— the Case of Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate

In her famous speech to the troops at Tilbury Elizabeth I addressed her soldiers by saying: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have a heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too” (102). Like other successful fruits of Elizabeth’s rhetorical skills this famous statement of courage “in the midst and heat of the battle” has been frequently analysed by both historians and literary scholars. As it seems, the speech is a rhetorical pearl as through the employment of implicit Renaissance misogyny Elizabeth takes full advantage of it. Her speech constitutes the embrace and, at the same time, denial of traditionally conceived femininity or female nature. By acknowledging her physical and physiological constitution she underscores her intellectual capacity, at the same time making the masculine a point of reference. In the 19th century, at the height of Wilhelmine patriarchy in Germany, Friedrich Nietzsche (105) writes in *Ecce Homo*: “Oh, what dangerous, insidious, subterranean little beasts of prey they are! And so pleasant into the bargain!...—Woman is incomparably more evil than man, cleverer too; goodness in woman is a form of degeneration [...]” As I would like to argue, against those who see Nietzsche as a blatant misogynist, in his statement, which only seemingly looks like a sexist slur, Nietzsche is actually paying women a compliment. Nietzsche’s reasoning and its conclusions, including revaluation of values, are based on “Rückschluß, or conclusion a posteriori” (Babich 27). Not only must one try to grasp the whole context of his words, meaning the entirety of his thought, but also never take his words at face value. Knowing that his philosophy opens up to the absolute reversal of human valuations, placing value “beyond good and evil”, one should reconsider Nietzschean stance on the feminine. Elizabeth’s Tilbury speech, but not only this one, makes recourse to a similar reversal of roles and functions, which demands reversal of reading. It is what is weak and feeble in you that

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becomes the heart of strength. I would like to make this intellectual parallel that can be drawn between the Renaissance Queen and the 19th century philosopher a point of departure for a rereading of roles and functions of two dramatic Queens—Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth and Marlowe’s Zenocrate—in the context of both early modern conception of femininity and Nietzschean ideas on “overhuman” potential.

As Carol Diethe (77) writes, the notion of the *Überweib* in Nietzsche’s writing is “conspicuous by its absence”. Nevertheless, as feminist readings of Nietzsche by Sarah Kofman, Kelly Olivier or Carol Diethe demonstrate, the female question cannot be overlooked when speaking about Nietzsche’s philosophy. Joan Kelly-Gadol (176) in her famous article entitled “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” answers her title question negatively by saying that: “there was no renaissance for women—at least, not during the Renaissance”. By pointing out changes in sexuality and sex/gender roles she highlights the gradual stifling and oppression of women within the patriarchal family and domestic roles. The under-developed Marlovian female characters as well as Shakespearean fatal women can be partly inscribed within this pattern—what Kathleen McLuskie (89) posited long ago when she heralded Shakespeare as “the patriarchal bard”. However, both playwrights do grant their female characters limited space and field of activity with different focuses and quite different consequences. Nietzsche, in his period was known as a “hater of women” (“Frauenhasser”), “despiser of women” (“Frauenverächter”), “enemy of women” (“Frauenfeind”), and “Antifeminist” (Helm 64). With all his apparent female-hate and misogyny Nietzsche is, nevertheless, credited for the reintroduction of the body into the mainstream of Western philosophy and as a consequence the appraisal of female sexuality against the backdrop of Wilhelmine “legendary” cult of *Hausfrau* (Helm 74-75; Diethe 73). In this context the intersection of Nietzschean “overhuman” potential and the early-modern femininity emerges, in my opinion, as even more tempting. Nietzschean insights into the feminine may help to reread early-modern drama adding a new moral edge to them while the reinvestigation of the philosophical significance of the feminine within Nietzschean canon helps to explore the unrealized possibility—a possibility of an “overwoman”.

Nietzsche and the Feminine, the Renaissance and the Feminine

As mentioned, the relationship between Nietzsche and the feminine is more than contentious. In order to get an instinctive grasp of just how far Nietzsche’s supposed misogyny could get, it is enough to recall the famous whip passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where Nietzsche (50) declares: “You go to

women? Do not forget the whip!"¹ Apart from this, probably most shocking, example there are other aphorisms in the Nietzsche canon where the philosopher is, euphemistically speaking, critical of women. As Peter J. Burgard (2) suggests there are two ways of approaching "Nietzsche's sexist tirades". The first one is to ignore Nietzsche's attacks on femininity and focus on other aspects of his philosophy. The second option involves a more creative and deeper engagement with Nietzscheanism. The former is actually the attitude so far taken by the majority of scholars, going back to the seminal scholarly works on Nietzsche by Walter Kaufmann (Burgard 2). Kaufmann (84) in his influential study claims that "Nietzsche's writings contain many all-too-human judgments—especially about women—but these are philosophically irrelevant". As Burgard (3) suggests, Kaufmann's dismissal of the significance of the female question was not only ill-judged on the part of Kaufmann, but also "has seriously hindered the advancement of our understanding of Nietzsche". Despite Kaufmann's immense contribution to the study of Nietzschean philosophy I must admit that I am of Burgard's opinion. It seems that closing of Nietzsche's philosophy on women is too easy an option. Especially that, paradoxically, it was Nietzsche's writing that drove the development of feminism in Germany, as the works of early German feminist writers like Hedwig Dohm or Helene Stöcker demonstrate². The engagement of early German feminists with Nietzsche shows, to my mind, that the rejection of his philosophy on the basis of its seeming misogyny would be an act of intellectual cowardice.

Modern-day feminist writers seem to share my feelings as there are more and more works tackling the feminine in Nietzsche. Luce Irigaray, in her *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* seems to be taking the position of mockery. By mocking Nietzsche she approaches the exclusion of the feminine from the discourse of Western philosophy and the appropriation of the female body. Kelly Olivier (17) in her *Womanizing Nietzsche* asks a very crucial question: "As a woman, how can I read Nietzsche's text?". I would build on that question and ask: How can I creatively transform and utilize the heritage of Nietzsche to speak of female experience? In a sense, following in Irigaray's and Olivier's footsteps, I suggest that one should use Nietzsche's own weapons against him. I strongly believe that when combined with Elizabethan and Jacobean source

¹ Here like in the case of other statements on women a too-hasty condemnation of Nietzsche as a misogynist is far from being objective. As Peter J. Burgard (4) explains, in order to give justice to the whip-passage one has to render it with proper punctuation, namely double quotation. It is part of Zarathustra's conversation with the old woman and, to be precise, the statement is uttered by the woman. So the words are not only doubly removed from Nietzsche, but also belong to the narrative of "a fictionalized philosophy" (Burgard 4). On top of that the sentence ends with an exclamation mark, which, according to Burgard (5) is "at least potentially a mark of irony".

² To learn more about early German feminists and their responses to Nietzsche's misogyny see Helm or Diethel.

texts, Nietzsche's apparent aversion can be creatively used to expose the past conditions of oppressive systems and historical patterns of misogyny.

As already mentioned Nietzsche himself wrote against a very oppressive system, in the conditions of a strongly stratified, hierarchical society and restricting Lutheran morality. His writings often shocked the public but as Carol Diethe (72) points out, "Nietzsche was certainly not dynamite when he attacked socialism, feminism, or for that matter, democracy: he was mainstream conservative". The issue whether one should expect more insight into the matter of women from such an otherwise insightful thinker as Nietzsche is a matter for another discussion. Nevertheless, as can be seen, Nietzsche's assessment of women is rather a product of his period and, more generally speaking, the tradition of Western philosophy. Kelly Oliver (17) writes that Nietzsche's outlook is original and innovative as it "opens up the discussion of representing the other". However, it still "closes off the possibility of representing the feminine other. He opens up the possibility of interpreting otherwise, but he excludes woman from the process of interpretation" (Oliver 17). As it seems this long tradition of exclusion, so strengthened by the Hegelian model, goes back to the Renaissance.

Cartesian rationality so often seen as the founding principle of the early modern (and later modern) subjectivity is undoubtedly a stepping stone in the history of philosophy. Yet one has to remember that it is the philosophy in which the masculine subject is always the point of reference. A huge body of early modern texts, both pre-Cartesian and post-Cartesian, present a woman as "an incomplete man" (Augtherson 419). For instance, it is enough to cast just a cursory look at John Calvin's (440) works to learn that: "the woman taketh her original from the man, by order therefore she is the inferior or the latter". In the famous "Homily of the State of Matrimony" (435) one learns that the greatest value of a good wife is that she bends her will to the will of her husband. The research fruits of cultural materialists and new historicists have already demonstrated that the idea of Renaissance subjectivity, if not totally illusory, is definitely enslaved by the oppressive workings of ideology, and hence a far more complicated, exclusive rather than inclusive, phenomenon. It is however, important to note that the Renaissance discovery of a thinking subject is often attributed to Jacob Burckhardt, Nietzsche's contemporary and a great inspiration to the philosopher.

Burckhardt (98, 250) capitalizes on "the development of the Individual" but at the same time he underscores the equality of men and women in Renaissance Italy. There is ground to suspect that Burckhardt's cult of individuality found its way into Nietzschean conception of the over-man. Burckhardian fascination with the primeval instincts of the Italian despots fighting ruthlessly for power, their "raw" manliness is, to my mind, something that might have stirred Nietzsche's imagination and led to the conceptualization

of the “overhuman” potential. Nietzsche’s Burckhardt-infused vision of the Renaissance makes me believe, despite Nietzsche’s misogynist innuendoes that the overhuman potential does not have to be exclusively masculine. Therefore, I see Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth as a first-hand candidate for the *Übermensch*, or *Überweib* to be more precise. Nietzsche might have not believed that women could have “overhuman” potential and that is why I suggest that Marlowe’s Zenocrate, on the other hand, is closer to the ultimate Nietzschean vision of what a woman should be. However, both these women are products of gendered discourse and thus subliminally communicate Renaissance gender stereotyping.

Lady Macbeth and Zenocrate

Carol Diethe (70) summarizes Nietzschean attitude by calling it: “a procedure [...] of the typical middle-class male, who simultaneously idealized and feared woman in equal measure, and solved the conflict by dividing women into two types, the Eves and the Madonnas”. Yet, according to Diethe (70), for Nietzsche all women are, in a sense, Eves. In this assessment Nietzsche is not far from the popular portrayal of women in the Renaissance, which sees a woman as the seed of the original sin—the ultimate inciter and the temptress. In the popular misogynist poem by C. Pyrrye (429) entitled “The Praise and Dispraise of Women” (1551) one reads:

Also as Eve from joyful place,
(alas, alas the while)
Her posterity did deface,
and cast into exile.

I would argue that this essentialist dual picture of female nature is also inscribed within the fabrics of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Just as Lady Macbeth could be read as a proverbial Eve, so can Zenocrate be seen in terms of an unsexed Madonna. Both of these women share some common features. They are both companions to their excessively ambitious husbands. The relationships with their husbands are very intense and passionate, though the nature of these passions seems to be quite different. So is the nature of their respective companionships and relations with the men.

Our first encounter with Lady Macbeth informs us of a relative equality between the spouses as well as quite a substantial degree of intimacy between them. In the fatal letter which apparently infects Lady Macbeth’s mind with ambition and a temptation to murder Duncan Macbeth calls her his “dearest partner of greatness” (1:5:11). In the following reflections of Lady Macbeth on her husband she expresses her doubt in Macbeth. She says:

yet do I fear thy nature;
 It is too full o' 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. (1:5:16-20)

In her view he might be too soft for the future roles she would like to see him in. Interestingly, Lady Macbeth never questions her own strength of will in the pursuit of power. She says: "Hie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear; / And chastise with the valor of my tongue (1:5:25-27). So from the start it is visible that she frames herself as the architect of the future order of things.

The first encounter with Zenocrate, on the other hand, is quite different. As we know, her passage through the lands conquered by Tamburlaine is halted by his army. As a consequence, she is held hostage. In the first conversation between Tamburlaine and Zenocrate he more or less plainly informs her of his intentions. Initially Zenocrate, the daughter of the Soldan of Egypt, disdains Tamburlaine. Her contempt seems to have a class difference underpinning as she says:

Ah, shepherd, pity my distressed plight!
 (If, as thou seem'st, thou art so mean a man,
 And seek not to enrich thy followers
 By lawless rapine from a silly maid. (1:2:7-10)³

Zenocrate is understandably not happy with a perspective of becoming a concubine or even wife to the shepherd warrior. What is more, she seems to hate the idea of being a trophy wife, a kind of an ornament and legitimization for Tamburlaine's conquest, to make it even worse—taken by force. Yet despite that, she nevertheless downgrades herself by calling herself "a silly maid". Having no other alternative she yields to Tamburlaine and says: "I must be pleas'd perforce,— wretched Zenocrate!" (1:2:258). Her first meeting with Tamburlaine almost coincides with the arrival of Theridamas with whom Tamburlaine parleys to make him join forces. Zenocrate is a witness to the conversation and her aristocratic presence, in a sense, seals the deal. Interestingly enough, once Zenocrate stops being part of the bargain she undergoes a surprising change of heart. From 3:2, when in her conversation, she announces:

Ah, life and soul, still hover in his breast,
 And leave my body senseless as the earth,
 Or else unite you to his life and soul,
 That I may live and die with Tamburlaine! (3:2:21-24)

³ To distinguish between Part 1 and 2 of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* I add the title whenever I refer to Part 2.

She becomes passionately, almost blindly, loyal to Tamburlaine and she becomes his ever present companion.

Unlike the relationship of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, Zenocrate's and Tamburlaine's relation is, at least originally, non-sexual. Though Zenocrate is often deemed Tamburlaine's "concubine" by his opponents (Agydas, Zabina, etc.) she herself mentions only "His talk much sweeter than the Muses' song" (3:2:50). When Tamburlaine first meets the Soldan, her father, he says of Zenocrate: "And for all blot of foul in chastity, / I record heaven, her heavenly self is clear" (5:1:489-490). It clearly suggests that the expression of affection among them is limited to this almost chivalric game of wooing with beautiful words. In *Macbeth* the situation is evidently opposite as Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth: "Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valor / As thou art in desire?" (1:7:43-45). Of course, her words might be read twofold, but I would argue that Lady Macbeth contrasts Macbeth's sexual capacity and his virulent libido with his political naiveté and his meekness. In her vision of manhood political caution or obedient conservatism are equal to emasculation. In a very Nietzschean way Lady Macbeth clearly wants to channel or transfigure Macbeth's libido into a more effective will to power. However, as mentioned, she fears Macbeth's nature burdened with "the milk of human kindness", or in Nietzschean terminology—mediocrity. Nietzsche would see that, more than often, the so called "good" impulses are really sublimated low instincts (Hollingdale 144-145). That is why she senses fear in Macbeth's softness and pity. Following Nietzsche (84-85) in *Beyond Good and Evil*, one could say that Lady Macbeth is a "tropical" woman—a kind of a Cesare Borgia figure, in Nietzsche's aphorism deemed a "man of prey", "healthiest of all tropical monsters". Lady Macbeth has a very acute sense of human instincts, both her husband's as well as her own. She wants to embrace them and take advantage of them. This, in Nietzschean terms, is a sign of health and strength⁴. However, despite sexual tension and intimacy that is implicit in the conversations of Macbeth and his wife, it is clear that she resents Macbeth for his qualms. She keeps on questioning his manhood and tries to change this "temperate man" into more than a man. She tells him:

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. (1:7:56-57)

Lady Macbeth puts Macbeth in the chains of a very limiting, essentialist definition of manhood and one has a feeling that the more she pushes him to "greatness" the less respect she can muster for him. After all, she is the one who

⁴ For more information on "tropical men" see: *Beyond Good and Evil* (aphorism 197) and Nietzsche's elaboration on the topic in the *Twilight of the Idols* (IX 37).

plans the murder and carries out her plan—using Macbeth more as her tool rather than treating him as a partner in this transgression. She explicitly demands relinquishing all control over the enterprise from Macbeth for the sake of her command when she claims:

and you shall put
This night's great business into my despatch;
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom. (1:6:79-82)

One can see that in the case of Macbeth there is a reversed mechanism as compared to Tamburlaine. The intensity of passion between Macbeth and his wife shrinks rapidly with the increase of their power. This is, in my opinion, due to the misguided expectations the spouses have of one another. Lady Macbeth's constraining ideal of masculinity far exceeds Macbeth's capacity to live up to her vision. Macbeth also seems astounded by her energy and managing skills. Lady Macbeth, to my mind, does not only exceed the expectations of Macbeth, she generally does not fit in the pattern of Renaissance femininity defined by total obedience and subjugation to the husband. At one point Macbeth resolves not to kill Duncan when he says: "We will proceed no further in this business" (1:7:34). Faced with quite a firm decision to give up the plan she responds with a bitter attack on Macbeth's manhood. Such behaviour is far beyond the traditionally conceived Renaissance wife's obedience. However, as mentioned, this reversal of roles as well as the rise in power results in the disintegration of their intimate union. In *Tamburlaine*, the opposite takes place—the more power Tamburlaine gains, the more Zenocrate feels inclined to fall for him.

If, as mentioned, it is not physical intimacy that brings Tamburlaine and Zenocrate together, one may ask what fuels Zenocrate's change of attitude towards Tamburlaine. I believe it is exactly Tamburlaine's increase of power and influence that Zenocrate finds so appealing. Tamburlaine seems to be aware of this mechanism. For this reason he waits with the wedding until his position as the ultimate ruler of the East is secured. I would also argue that it is his manliness defined as the animalic drive towards mastery that makes him such a charismatic figure both for his companions and Zenocrate. Agydas, Zenocrate's servant, is totally perplexed when he finds out that Zenocrate, initially so dismayed at Tamburlaine, feels strongly attracted to him. He exclaims in total shock:

How can you fancy one that looks so fierce,
Only dispos'd to martial stratagems?
Who, when he shall embrace you in his arms,
Will tell how many thousand men he slew;
And, when you look for amorous discourse,
Will rattle forth his facts of war and blood,
Too harsh a subject for your dainty ears. (3:2:39-45)

Yet for Zenocrate, obviously in love, Tamburlaine is “fair”. In warfare he has absolutely no brakes, and his ambition sees no limiting horizon because he is the “Horizon-stretcher”⁵. But in love he has only “sweet words” for Zenocrate. So Tamburlaine is an artist clad in the robes of a barbarian or, the other way round, he is a barbarian with artistic leanings. Either way this explosive mixture forms his overhuman potential that wins also Zenocrate’s heart. Nietzsche (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 28), in his highly poetic style famously announces: “Courageous, unconcerned, sarcastic, violent—thus wisdom wants us: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior”. However, Nietzsche uses his woman-metaphor here to speak about wisdom rather than women. His comment perfectly illustrates the Tamburlaine-Zenocrate dynamics. Zenocrate, once in love with her rough warrior also finds in herself previously unknown reserves of cruelty and excessive indulgence in power. In her treatment of Zabina she matches Tamburlaine in the exaggerated display of violence. Of course in everything she does she always stays in the shadow of Tamburlaine. In this she not only fulfills an early modern role traditionally cut out for women but also approximates a very Nietzschean ideal of womanhood. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche (69) claims that “Comparing man and woman overall, you could say: woman would not have a genius for finery if she did not have an instinct for the *secondary* role”. One can feel indignation reading Nietzsche’s comments on women, especially because of their inescapable essentialism, which is otherwise criticized in Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, there is no escaping an observation that in the case of Zenocrate a “secondary” role is something that she embraces willingly, taking advantage of this “finery” that is implicit in it. Zenocrate encapsulates the Nietzschean vision of the feminine also in other aspects where Lady Macbeth apparently fails, namely in her maternal duties.

Zenocrate is a mother of three sons, who in the dreams of Tamburlaine follow in his footsteps to become “the scourge and terror of the world” (*Tamburlaine the Great—Part 2* 1:3:59). Having fulfilled her most significant role of bringing sons to the world Zenocrate is asked by Tamburlaine to “rest [...] like a lovely queen” (*Tamburlaine the Great—Part 2* 1:2:16). And from now on her role is pretty much limited to being “lovely”—if indeed her role was ever anything else than that. According to early modern standards a woman attains salvation through child-bearing (Augtherson 419). This in turn leads us to the discussion of Lady Macbeth, whose barrenness subliminally seems to go hand in hand with her moral and mental disintegration. The question of the progeny of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth has long perplexed critics. Their responses range from the downright dismissal of the importance of this issue to more detailed analyses of the protagonists’ personalities in connection with their failed family

⁵ In her newest account of Marlowe’s drama Lisa Hopkins calls Marlowe “the Horizon-stretcher”. To read more see Hopkins 106.

relations.⁶ I believe that the question of children or rather their lack in *Macbeth* is an issue of profound importance both on the level of structure and style as well as character motivation and the entire message the play communicates. Macbeth, just as Tamburlaine, also expects male progeny from Lady Macbeth when, astounded by her energy and initiative, he says: “Bring forth men-children only; For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (1:7:83). So it is not only Lady Macbeth who defines the masculinity of her husband through the animalic drive towards mastery. Also Macbeth forces his wife into an essentialist definition of femininity which predominantly sees her as the carrier of his sons. In other words, in a very Nietzschean vision, Macbeth frames her as the mother of his “overhuman” progeny. However, for the early-modern standards Lady Macbeth emerges as a complete degeneration of nature when she delivers her most controversial anti-maternal credo:

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. (1:7:63-51)

It is this seeming perversion of her “natural” instincts that Macbeth finds shocking yet irresistible. In a sense their bickering over the right course of action in the initial scenes of the play illustrates what Nietzsche (*The Anti-Christ, Ecce-Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* 105) terms: “the natural state of things, the eternal war between the sexes”. In a metaphorical sense, the opening scenes of the play portray a conflict between the seemingly natural definitions of masculinity and femininity as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth force one another into the strait jackets of gender essentialism. Nietzsche (*The Anti-Christ, Ecce-Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* 105) would summarize such a conflict by saying:

⁶ One could refer to the famous discussion started by L. C. Knights in his article “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism.” *Explorations*. New York University Press, 1964. 15-54, where the author dismisses character analysis in the vein of A.C. Bradley. Obviously he does not really focus on the question of children but he generally criticizes the idea of even posing such questions. Knights (20) claims that “the only profitable approach to Shakespeare is a consideration of his plays as dramatic poems, of his use of language to obtain a total complex emotional response”. More recent critics tend to go back to the motivations and possibilities implicit in characters’ speeches and their influence on behaviour. Michael D. Bristol in his article entitled “How many children did she have?” goes back to this question in order to analyse the motivation of Lady Macbeth.

Woman, the more a of woman she is, fights tooth and nail against rights in general: after all, the natural state of things, the eternal war between the sexes, gives her the highest rank by far.—Did anyone have ears for my definition of love? It is the only one worthy of a philosopher.—Love—its method is warfare, its foundation is the deadly hatred between the sexes.

After all, in this conflict it is Lady Macbeth that has the last word. However, whenever one thinks of the “overhuman” potential of Lady Macbeth—as the architect of events in the play, as the ultimate driver of action—one always stumbles on the fact that it is she who eventually breaks down and commits suicide.

If one were to follow a Nietzschean interpretation and at the same time an early modern vision of femininity one could suggest that it is exactly the perversion of nature that leads to Lady Macbeth's insanity. For this “deadly hatred between the sexes” Nietzsche (*The Anti-Christ, Ecce-Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* 105-106) gives only one solution: “Did anyone hear my answer to the question how to cure—‘redeem’ a woman? Give her a baby. Women need children, the man is only ever the means: thus spoke Zarathustra”. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche (48) already gives a similar definition of womanhood: “Everything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy. A man is for woman a means: the end is always the child”. As can be seen, in Nietzsche's vision the profundity of a woman's role is encapsulated in her potential to bring children to the world. His maternalism is also seen as a biological imperative and thus women who lack this basic instinct or, even worse, repudiate it emerge as unnatural.

In Nietzsche's philosophy repudiation of instincts leads to *resentiment* while a rejection of an instinct on which the survival of the species is dependent, in the eyes of Nietzsche, appears as something catastrophic. For this reason Nietzsche fears feminism so much. For instance, when he (*The Anti-Christ, Ecce-Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings* 105-106) speaks of:

—‘Emancipation of women’ [as] the instinctive hatred of *failed* women, which is to say infertile women, against those who have turned out well,— the fight against men is only ever a means, pretext, tactic. By elevating *themselves* as the ‘women *as sich*’, as the higher women, as the ‘idealists’ of women, they want to *lower* the rank of women in general; there is no surer means of doing this than secondary education, trousers, and the right to belong to the political herd of voters. Emancipated women are basically anarchists in the world of the ‘eternal-feminine’, people in bad shape whose bottom—most instinct is revenge [...].

One cannot escape thinking that when it comes to feminine roles Nietzsche combines a long tradition of misogyny dating back to the Renaissance with post-Darwinian ideas on the naturalness of the maternal instinct. Following Nietzsche's line of argument, in the case of Lady Macbeth this instinct is repudiated and this results in an unexpected role reversal, where it is a woman who assumes a position of power. However, this must be "unnatural" as Lady Macbeth's own words testify:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! (1:5:47-50)

The wish to become "unsexed" is of course crucial as it implies that for a woman to be cruel always involves going beyond feminine nature. This "unsexing" realized in the assumption of power and the emergence of a woman as an active subject automatically cancel the possibility of being a mother. On top of all Nietzsche's misogynist statements, he (*Beyond Good and Evil* 69) also claims that "When a woman has scholarly inclinations, there is usually something wrong with her sexuality. Even sterility makes her prone to a certain masculinity of taste; man is, if you will, 'the sterile animal'".

One could ask if Lady Macbeth's political "inclinations" become the source of her "sterility" and "masculinity of taste" or is it the other way round that her "sterility" pushes her into the traditionally masculine sphere of power. Following Nietzsche, there must be something wrong with her if she denies her maternal duties for the sake of political success. If we indulge in a little make-believe and imagine Lady Macbeth as a man we may see her as a perfect Nietzschean "overman". She is characterized by excessive ambition and creativity. In order to pursue her goals she goes beyond good and evil treating the evil as incidental or necessary in the process of over-coming. She wants to get rid of remorse as an emotion that burdens one unnecessarily especially when one can do nothing about the consequences of one's actions. However, despite all that she falls short of realizing this over-human potential as it is her that breaks down burdened with pricks of conscience. In the early modern conceptualization of Lady Macbeth's mental disintegration one could explain it by saying, following the words of a very popular "Homily of the State of

Matrimony” (437), “she is the weaker vessel, of a frail heart”. Embracing Nietzsche’s cult of instincts one could summarize her condition as a consequence of denying maternal instinct. Nevertheless, both of these stances let biology condition and define what is understood as the feminine.⁷

To my mind both Shakespeare and Marlowe embrace very radical maternalism that can be found in Nietzsche’s philosophy and that is also a predominant ingredient of the early-modern definition of femininity. The implications of this maternalism are different for both plays. Lady Macbeth emerges as a passionate and sensual woman who wants to push her husband towards greatness. Yet in the pursuit of power she becomes an active agent—a political animal or a female version of Tamburlaine. However, the assumption of the reversed role might be interpreted as a reason for her breakdown and ultimately death. Zenocrate is closer to the patriarchal ideal of a woman—a loyal companion and a mother of three sons. In a sense, she inspires Tamburlaine to further conquest by becoming his ever-present admirer. She herself also becomes an asexual object of art worthy of admiration and even in her death she remains so. The deaths of both wives leave their husbands rather unconcerned, which even further limits their potential roles as carriers of energy and creativity. Macbeth, when informed of Lady Macbeth’s death is already too engrossed in his own mad attempts to hold on to the crown while Tamburlaine throws himself madly into the sea of further destruction and conquest and thus shakes off his grief pretty quickly. Both plays repeat the pattern of a strong man accompanied by a weaker woman.

We can then either accuse Marlowe and Shakespeare of perpetrating early modern misogyny and dismiss their portrayals of women altogether or we can try to embrace a wider perspective and say that neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe are more misogynist than Nietzsche is. As Sarah Kofman in her famous article “Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism” suggests, there is no one definitive vision of a woman implicit in Nietzsche’s texts—nor there is of man for that matter. Kofman highlights that there is no essential construct known as “woman as such” in Nietzsche’s philosophy. “Woman *an sich*” is one of the petty attempts of turning one perspective into an absolute truth. Thus woman is an affirmation of her own mystery. The attempt of establishing absolute truth about woman is also a sign of weakness, of *resentiment*. The same applies to a vision of man. Kofman (191) writes: “‘woman’ is neither castrated nor not castrated, any more than man retains control (*détient*) over the penis”. Obviously

⁷ Nietzsche’s conceptualizations of the feminine seem to predate Freudian definitions of womanhood, where a woman is defined by lack (e.g. penis envy). However, a view of a woman seen as an incomplete man seems to have biblical origins as God carved Eve out of Adam’s rib. The early modern period appears to follow this vision of womanhood where female physical weakness in contrast to man’s strength becomes a standard for seeing a woman as inferior in virtually all capacities.

neither Lady Macbeth emerges as an ultimate failed woman defined as lack of the right instinct nor Macbeth can be read as an “overman” embracing impulses. They both fall short of their potential. It really takes thick skin to become “an overhuman” being, whether man or woman. Tamburlaine and Zenocrate seem to form a Nietzschean “overhuman” couple but their relationship is deprived of a life affirmative passion and sensuality. In conclusion, it is worth underscoring that just as Nietzsche’s texts, taken in its entirety, present multiplicity of stances on women and men, both affirmative and non-affirmative, so the characters of Shakespeare and Marlowe also constitute a fraction of possible multiple perspectives on the feminine and masculine. Characters presented in *Macbeth* and *Tamburlaine* seem to possess “overhuman” qualities but very often they emerge as human, or to use Nietzsche’s terminology, “human, all too human”.

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