

Yeeyon Im

Beyond the Gender Divide: Looking for Shakespeare in Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth*

Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth*, a theatre adaptation by a leading woman director in Korea, has been interpreted largely from a feminist and intercultural perspective. In this article Yeeyon Im examines a body of criticism on Han's production to raise awareness of the danger of totalization in current critical geography in Korea, which may marginalize non-ideological views. The humanist issues of evil, desire, and guilt, which are explicit themes of *Lady Macbeth*, have been neglected by critics in favour of discourses of difference. Yeeyon Im asks if 'the subaltern can speak' of universality, and calls for a new literary humanism that allows reflection on how to live through the help of literature. Yeeyon Im is Associate Professor of English at Yeungnam University in South Korea, where she teaches Shakespeare and drama. She has published widely on Shakespeare and modern drama. Her articles on intercultural Shakespeare productions of Lee Yountaek and Ninagawa Yukio have appeared in *Theatre Journal*, *Shakespeare*, and *Shakespeare Bulletin*. She has also translated into Korean plays by Ben Jonson (*Volpone* and *The Alchemist*) and Christopher Marlowe (*Dido, Queen of Carthage*).

Key terms: Shakespeare in Korea, feminism, intercultural theatre, literary humanism.

MARY ANN EVANS published her novels under the pen name George Eliot to avoid prejudice against female authors. Although we no longer slight female authors for their gender, we are not entirely free from expectations and preconceptions. Theatre Group Moollee's *Lady Macbeth*, adapted and directed by Han Tae-Sook, presents a good case in point. Since its premiere in Seoul in 1998, *Lady Macbeth* has garnered feminist interpretations for obvious reasons. Its director is one of the leading female theatre practitioners in Korea, and her production highlights a female character originally in a secondary role.

As a Shakespearean adaptation outside England, the play has also been discussed in relation to authenticity and interculturalism. However, Han Tae-Sook, like George Eliot, is reluctant to tag her work as feminist, for she believes that 'theatre is ultimately about humans and human relationship'.¹ Despite Han's position, critics have praised or criticized *Lady Macbeth* in the light of feminist politics. In this article I raise the question whether a 'female' work can be read

differently. We may modify Gayatri Spivak's famous question and ask 'can the subaltern speak' of *universality*?

Lady Macbeth invites feminist criticism by its very title. Among others, Choi Young-Joo has approached *Lady Macbeth* from a feminist perspective in her articles 'Re-writing Shakespeare: an Analysis of *Lady Macbeth* as a Case of Feminine Writing' (2000) and '*Lady Macbeth*: Psychodrama Made of Light, Sound, and Form' (2000). Another important point of reference is Shim Jung-Soon's 'Female Trance in Han Tae-Sook's Production of *Lady Macbeth*' in *New Theatre Quarterly* (2009), which, to my knowledge, is the only study of the production published in English.

Both veteran theatre critics have made significant contributions to the understanding of *Lady Macbeth*, and it is not my aim in this article to refute their interpretations. Although views such as theirs remain necessary to sustain ongoing gender debates, my equal emphasis in this article is on the humanist themes of *Lady Macbeth*, since it is needful to draw attention to the danger of

totalization in current critical geography, lest it marginalize non-ideological views.

A symposium on *Lady Macbeth* in 2000, run by theatre specialists and connoisseurs, documented a fascinating debate over the feminist interpretation. This monthly symposium, which was not mediated by vigorous theoretical scrutiny, reveals a trend in the current academic practice in Korea that values ideological approaches over humanist ones. Andy Mousley's cautious move to propose 'near-universals' instead of universals is also suggestive of the totalitarian sway of the academic mainstream.² This article adds my voice to Mousley's call for the need for 'new literary humanism', a kind of 'upsizing' that allows us to speak of universal human issues with renewed awareness.

Lady Macbeth and the Feminist Critics

Han Tae-Sook's production was first performed in 1998 by Theatre Group Moollee, garnering various awards in the 1999 Seoul Theatre Festival for the best theatre work in directing and acting. Since then, it has been revived several times in Korea and abroad, including Poland (2002), Japan (2008), China (2008), and Singapore (2010). In 2008, it was chosen as the best stage production of the decade by the audience of the Seoul Arts Centre, one of the most authoritative performance venues in Korea.

Following the sold-out run in 2010, it marked its fifteenth anniversary in 2013, with the most recent performances taking place in Koyang and Seoul. *Lady Macbeth* is unique among other popular Shakespeare productions in Korea, such as Lee Yountaek's *Hamlet* (1995), Oh Tae-Suk's *Romeo and Juliet* (2001), and Yang Jung Woong's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2003), which have also been frequently performed and toured abroad, in that it is the only production of the four directed by a woman. Also unlike the other productions it has no overt aim of 'Koreanizing' Shakespeare, though it takes more liberty with Shakespeare's original than the others, as its revised title suggests.

Han Tae-Sook turns *Macbeth* into an intimate psychodrama, focusing on Lady

Macbeth's guilt-ridden conscience. She draws on Shakespeare's scenes involving Lady Macbeth, which are re-told and re-enacted by Lady Macbeth in two hypnotic sessions with the Royal Doctor. The script has no scene breaks, and the action seamlessly moves back and forth between the past and the present in an expressionistic manner. The production opens with a prologue, presenting three witch figures in simple black wandering around Lady Macbeth, who is asleep at centre stage.

This suggests, as Han Tae-Sook notes in the script, that what follows is from Lady Macbeth's unconsciousness. After a brief scene depicting her dream, the play proper begins with Lady Macbeth, sick in bed, 'troubled with thick coming fancies, / That keep her from her rest' (V, iii). The Royal Doctor invites Lady Macbeth to a talking cure: 'You will feel released once you disgorge the memory that sits heavy on your bosom.'³ Hypnotized by the Doctor, Lady Macbeth recollects the moment when she receives a letter from Macbeth (I, v). The Doctor and the Attendants take on the roles of Macbeth and the Witches. Lady Macbeth's memory moves rapidly from Macbeth's meeting with the witches up to the point of Duncan's murder (II, ii). After a brief return to the present, in which she expresses remorse, the second hypnosis session brings out her memory after the murder, with the banquet for Macbeth's coronation spoiled by the hallucination of Banquo's ghost.

Unlike Shakespeare's heroine, who has no hand in Macbeth's additional crimes, Lady Macbeth instigates her husband's commission of more murders to secure their power. After Macbeth's massacre, Lady Macbeth is suddenly seized with fear and guilt. She tries to break out of hypnosis, but the Doctor insists that she should finish her story, revealing himself as her own guilt and conscience: 'Now that you know me, have no fear and lean on me. Don't you want to purge poison from your ugly body and go back to your pure self?' Lady Macbeth dies in regret and resignation, bidding farewell to the night.

Lady Macbeth is not particularly impressive in terms of script. Although many lines

echo Shakespeare's words and phrases, it oversimplifies the action, focusing singly on the mental landscape of the heroine. Yet we are not given an explanation for Lady Macbeth's sudden guile after Macbeth's massacre. What makes the production memorable is its physicality, which gives 'to airy nothing a local habitation'.

Production details and casting vary slightly in each performance, and in this article I refer mainly to the 2008 production at the Seoul Arts Centre. Han Tae-Sook collaborated with experimental artists of the younger generation to create a total theatre experience, translating the tormented psyche of Lady Macbeth into a sensory experience of sound and vision. In addition to the speaking roles of Lady Macbeth and the Royal Doctor, professional artists participated as *Objet* – Music, Dance, and Sound Attendants.

Lee Young-Ran, a performance artist who took the role of the *Objet* Attendant, was vital to the success of *Lady Macbeth* since its premiere. Lee worked with various materials such as flour, mud, and ice to visualize the phantasmagoria of Lady Macbeth, pioneering a new territory of what she calls 'objet theatre'. The nightmarish atmosphere was enhanced by live percussion music by Park Je-Chun and by low guttural sounds made by the actors. The general effect was a new experience of total theatre in which image and sound carried the same weight as words. The success of *Lady Macbeth* owed much to this innovative mode of expression, which was praised unanimously by audiences, reviewers, and critics.

How to 'Rape Shakespeare'

Initially, *Lady Macbeth* was met with harsh criticism by purists for distorting Shakespeare. Han Taek-Sook recalls that she once wrote a long defence in response to the critics 'who disapproved of her sacrilegious slashing of Shakespeare and even suggested boycotting her productions'.⁴ Reviewers regretted the poor quality of the drama caused by interfering overmuch with the original, or the reduction of Macbeth from a heroic figure to a burlesque one.⁵ However,

reviews of later performances showed less concern for fidelity to Shakespeare. One reviewer observed that criticizing a production for 'insulting and abusing Shakespeare' was out of date, and another even asserted that 'how to "rape" Shakespeare is the main concern of contemporary theatre'.⁶

One rare exception was the article in 2008 by Lee Tae-Joo, who examined *Lady Macbeth* against Shakespeare's original and criticized it for reducing the tragedy to a psychodrama, thereby diminishing Macbeth. Lee also acknowledged radical appropriation as an effective alternative to faithful reproduction, but found that *Lady Macbeth* belonged to neither category.⁷ Choi Young-Joo blamed Han for failing to grasp the opportunity to bring out the problem of the *here and now* because of her reverence for Shakespeare.⁸ Ironically, *Lady Macbeth* was criticized for not appropriating Shakespeare more radically. Such a change in attitude indicates a shift in authority from Shakespeare to 'something else' through the influence of critical theory in Korean academia since the late 1990s.

It is not surprising that feminism has had a powerful influence on *Lady Macbeth*, which is an adaptation that foregrounds the neglected heroine. Lady Macbeth is already a formidable figure in Shakespeare's tragedy, but her significance is diminished after Act III, Scene iv, when she disappears from the stage except for a brief appearance in the sleep-walking scene in Act V. Han's adaptation focuses on Lady Macbeth throughout, rendering her even more fearsome, and critics have paid close attention to the reversed power structure of the couple in Han's production.

Lady Macbeth (Seo Joo-Hee) oozed with sexuality, glaring with desire and ambition for power, whereas Macbeth, personified by the Royal Doctor (Chung Dong-Hwan), was a cowering figure not only 'too full o'th' milk of human kindness' (I, v), but also awkward and timid. A most cited example is the scene in which Lady Macbeth urges her husband to murder Duncan, taunting him for his lack of masculinity. At Macbeth's lines 'Bring forth men-children only. For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males'

(I, vii), the couple copulate, with Lady Macbeth on top. Critics regard this scene as a clear indication of the reversal of the gender stereotype. Shim Jung-Soon, for instance, takes this image to be not so much 'love-making' as 'a power struggle', in which Lady Macbeth displays 'Ki energies stronger than her husband's'.⁹ Lee Hyon-U points to the banquet scene, in which Lady Macbeth calms Macbeth's fears, covering him with her arms 'as if she were a pro wrestler'.¹⁰ (See Figure 1, opposite.) To cite Shim Jung-Soon again, Lady Macbeth is presented as a subject of desire and power, who assumes the 'male traits of aggression, strength of will, and desire', in contrast to Macbeth's supposedly feminine passivity.¹¹

It is true that Macbeth is portrayed as a weak character in Han's production, but it may be more precise to say that Macbeth is marginalized in the presence of a powerful heroine. In other words, the focus is more on Lady Macbeth's ambition and guilt than on a male–female power struggle. Here it needs to be taken into account that Macbeth is not a 'real' character equal to the heroine but a figure reconstructed by Lady Macbeth from her memory, a role assumed by the Royal Doctor in hypnosis sessions to facilitate Lady Macbeth's acting-out. The passive and ludicrous features of Macbeth may result from the awkwardness of the Doctor's role-playing.

Admittedly, Macbeth seems to take on his own life separately from that of the Royal Doctor in some instances – when he urinates on stage from fear of Banquo's ghost, for instance. However, Macbeth loses consistency as a character as the Royal Doctor switches back and forth between his roles. He merely responds to Lady Macbeth instead of leading the conversation. In addition, the Royal Doctor shows that he plays the role of Lady Macbeth's guilt and conscience only at the end, further weakening the solidity of all characters except for the heroine. *Lady Macbeth* is not so much about the relationship of the couple as about the psyche of the heroine.

Shim Jung-Soon offers an elaborate reading of Lady Macbeth's psyche of desire and guilt, based on the concept of *Han*. Han Tae-

Sook's production, Shim argues, 'explore[s] the psyche of Lady Macbeth interculturally from a Korean woman's perspective and that of the national ethos of *Han*'.¹²

Lady Macbeth as a Korean Woman of *Han*

Han is a traditional Korean idea that resists any exact translation, but generally refers to a complex sentiment composed of resentment, affection, sorrow, and bitterness. Shim defines *Han* as 'the Korean national ethos, which is traditionally associated with rather negative emotions such as frustrated desire, resentment, regret, and a sense of loss and sorrow'.¹³ She also relates the notion of *Han* to fate and destiny, explaining *Han* as 'the collective unconscious' rooted in Korea's historical circumstances as a small country oppressed by superpowers such as China and more recently Japan.¹⁴ Then, Shim ascribes Lady Macbeth's desire for power to her *Han* about her destiny (that she is victimized by the witches) and her childlessness (especially her lack of a male heir, which is regarded as a great sin for women in traditional Korean culture).¹⁵

Shim Jung-Soon sheds some fresh light on possible motives for Lady Macbeth's extraordinary ambition and desire. The notion of destiny first appears in the first hypnosis session, when Lady Macbeth echoes Macbeth's words: 'Fated to be a king! – If it is fate, then he will be crowned by Fortune even without any efforts.' At the end of the play Lady Macbeth blames fate, stating that 'We have been hunted by the witches, dragged by the rough waves of fate. Fate made us sin, trapped us into life worse than death.'

However, what the audience sees on stage – her sexual manipulation of her husband and active participation in the crimes – contradicts the idea of victimization. 'Don't blame Fate for it,' the Royal Doctor as Conscience solemnly replies. In Han Tae-Sook's production, Lady Macbeth is the agent of her own downfall and that of others, even more than in Shakespeare's play. Few Korean audiences would associate the destiny of Lady Macbeth, as Shim argues, with 'their memories of their own mothers' life stories of *Han*', who



Figure 1. During the banquet, Lady Macbeth (Seo Joo-Hee) calms Macbeth (Chung Dong-Hwan)'s fear and forces him to smile. Photo: Park Kyung-Bok, Seoul Arts Centre.

'had no alternative but to resign themselves to their destinies, to endure and persist in their hard lives'.¹⁶

The Theme of Childlessness

The lack of a male heir appears to be a more plausible cause of Lady Macbeth's *Han*. Lady Macbeth reminds her husband of their childlessness when she urges him to kill Duncan: 'Man has something to protect as long as he is alive, but what do we have to

fear, being childless? Be brave since we have no issue.' She later reproaches her husband that they did not commit the crime to benefit another's issue, echoing Shakespeare's line for Macbeth: 'If't be so, / For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind' (III, i). Most importantly, when Lady Macbeth returns to the present from hypnosis, she regrets her past:

Fear visits me instead of sleep. / I cannot close my eyes, I cannot rest. / Mothers, hear the cry over the nest / Deep in sorrow for a lost youngling. / When you lose a child, you lose all the world. /

(*Sobbing*.) I had nothing to envy in the world, / But do pain and pleasure resemble each other?¹⁷

Shim cites these lines to support her view, taking them to be Lady Macbeth's lament over 'her ill fate for having lost her child'.¹⁸

Han Tae-Sook certainly plays on Lady Macbeth's childlessness, as implied in Shakespeare's tragedy: 'I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me' (I, vii). Yet, as in Shakespeare, it is not a past experience but a conditional: 'Had I sworn like you [Macbeth] in this business, I would dash out a smiling baby sucking in my bosom and smash its brain out.' No more specific information is provided in the production to suggest Lady Macbeth's loss of a child or her suffering from not producing a male heir. The theme of childlessness, which remains rather vague in the script, could have been presented as a strong motivation for her action on the stage.

For instance, one television production emphasized this theme by showing a child's room that Lady Macbeth keeps intact, even after her loss. However, the possible loss of her child, be it a son or not, was not emphasized visually on the stage through performance art, the signature style of Theatre Group Moollee (*moollee* literally means 'physical'). In a strong piece of physical theatre such as *Lady Macbeth*, words are not sufficient to deliver a message. We may say that the theme of childlessness remains potential but is not fully actualized in Han's production.

A 'Third Space of Homogenization'

Similarly, Shim's comparison of Lady Macbeth's psychodrama to 'the shamanistic ritual of *Gut*' is more conceptual than real. Shim's view of Lady Macbeth as a shaman purging her own *Han* is rather unusual in that a shaman generally works as a medium for his/her clients to connect to the supernatural to ease their suffering or realize their wishes.¹⁹ *Gut* has been a common intercultural strategy for directors such as Lee Youn-aek, Oh Tae-Suk and Yang Jung Woong, who appropriate its ritual form not only for the purposes of highlighting national culture,

but also for theatrical effects. However, Han Tae-Sook's production displays no physical aspects of *Gut*, with a shaman in a special costume and all the paraphernalia necessary for the ritual.

Lady Macbeth is not intercultural in the manner of other Shakespeare productions that consciously seek to incorporate their indigenous culture into the Western text by localizing character names, adopting traditional costumes, and employing traditional sounds, dances, and rituals. Noticing the difference between *Lady Macbeth* and Lee Youn-aek's *Hamlet* or Oh Tae-Suk's *Romeo and Juliet*, Choi Young-Joo recognizes 'a homogenized hybrid of Western and traditional Korean culture', in which *Gut* and *Samulnori* (a traditional percussion quartet) give way to music and sound effects adapted from the Western style, traditional Korean costume to a hybrid of Korean and Western costumes, and a stage dominated by traditional images to a de-territorialized lighting that represents human interiority.²⁰

The difference originates largely from Han's lack of interest in the nationalist agenda of reviving tradition through theatre, which guides the intercultural Shakespeare productions of Lee Youn-aek and Oh Tae-Suk.²¹ Shim Jung-Soon's imposition of intercultural significance on *Lady Macbeth* may reflect the nationalist impulse shared by theatre practitioners of the older generation. As Choi Young-Joo observes, productions of the younger generation such as Han's *Lady Macbeth* and Won Young-O's *Hamlet from the East* create 'a third space of homogenization' that allows 'de-territorialization' and 'de-historicization' to traverse the globalized world culture more readily.²²

In Carl Weber's terminology, *Lady Macbeth* can be regarded as a successful case of 'transculturation', which deconstructs and transcends foreign or indigenous culture to create something new.²³ If *Lady Macbeth* is 'an intercultural performance based on the Korean shamanistic female form of *Gut*, localizing a woman's version of *Macbeth* within a culturally accessible context', as Shim argues, it is of a subtler kind than performances that overtly profess feminism or interculturalism.²⁴

Feminist Debate: Gong-Ie-Mo Symposium

The Performance and Theory Group (Gongye-onkwa Ieronulwehan-Moim, usually referred to as Gong-Ie-Mo) is a society of theatre critics and specialists that runs a monthly symposium and publishes a quarterly magazine. *Lady Macbeth* was the topic for the June symposium in 2000, and Choi Young-Joo presented the paper 'Lady Macbeth: Psycho-drama Made of Light, Sound, and Form', followed by an open discussion. The symposium records a heated debate over whether *Lady Macbeth* is a feminist work. Choi asserted that '*Lady Macbeth* is a feminist theatre that failed', but six out of the seven participants in the discussion were against this feminist interpretation, arguing that the production is more about guilt (Song Min-Sook) and the interiority of a sinner (Lee Hye-Kyoung) than about gender issues, and that *Lady Macbeth* is presented as an archetypal and universal human being rather than a woman (Sym Jae-Min).²⁵ Shin Ah-Young, who presided over the discussion, noted that 'most participants regard it rather far-fetched to view [*Lady Macbeth*] as feminist'.²⁶

Choi Young-Joo's view is remarkable for her awareness of the director's reluctance to consider herself as a feminist.²⁷ As Kim Dae-Hyun points out, Choi's insistence on feminism originates from her rigid gender binarism, which makes it difficult to regard *Lady Macbeth* as a simple human being.²⁸ Examples of Choi's binary view abound. For instance, she remarks that 'Shakespeare's language is masculine: explanatory and logical. Han Tae-Sook's language is an intermittent language of space, which is also Oriental language and feminine language'.²⁹ Choi praises the physicality of the production, which prioritizes the body, voice, sound, music, lighting, and *objet* performance over words because this 'challenges the logos-oriented, male-centred narrative, subverting male-centred writing through temporary, fragmentary, contingent, and amorphous writing'.³⁰

For Choi, the greatest failure of Han's adaptation lies in the fact that 'the female character *Lady Macbeth* has to assume all the

sins of regicide and usurpation' and dies under the whip of the male Doctor/Conscience.³¹ Choi criticizes Han Tae-Sook's lukewarm adaptation, which repeats 'the traditional male-centred interpretation' of a woman as a source of evil, ascribing it to Han's reservations about feminism and her reverence of Shakespeare.³² Other feminist scholars, who share Choi's view of failed or limited feminism, show a similar kind of gender binarism in their analysis of characters, as discussed earlier.

In such a binary view, *Lady Macbeth* is reborn as a subject of desire and guilt, but she is reduced to an object of psychoanalysis by male characters, namely the Royal Doctor and the Attendants. Shim Jung-Soon finds it ironic that *Lady Macbeth*'s desire is manifested through the very patriarchal method of hypnotic psychotherapy by a male doctor.³³ Shim also notes the limitations of the sex scene mentioned earlier, despite its gender reversal of a 'woman on top', for it is 'based on the stereotype of a woman fulfilling her desire only through her husband and his sexual manipulation'.³⁴

As Jang Eun-Soo points out, the confusion over feminism arises from the very title, *Lady Macbeth*, which invites such an interpretation, and Han Tae-Sook is responsible for this regardless of her intention.³⁵ Han herself notes that *Lady Macbeth* was intended to reveal 'the extreme purity and the extreme evil hidden in human nature'.³⁶ Han refuses to distinguish between feminist and non-feminist theatre, noting that her protagonist is a human being as well as a woman.³⁷ Feminist readings of *Lady Macbeth* are valuable despite Han's position, because the text always signifies more than the intention of the author, who is subject to various ideologies, despite himself or herself. At the same time, such readings are also symptomatic of politicized academic discourse, which in turn informs theatrical practice.

Choi Young-Joo's remark is most revealing as to what is and is not desirable in current academic and theatrical practice. Persisting in her feminist stance, Choi refutes opposing views by asking what *Lady Macbeth* means 'in terms of contemporary perspec-

tive and contemporary values'; and she suggests that an adaptation should reflect what is meaningful at the time of rewriting, which *Lady Macbeth* fails to do.³⁸ Although Choi agrees with Sym Jae-Min that *Lady Macbeth* deals with the theme of tortured conscience, she denies its relevance to the *here and now*, citing Heiner Müller's *Hamlet-machine* as an exemplary adaptation reflecting contemporary concerns.³⁹ According to Choi, any meaningful adaptation should be an 'appropriation', or 'a hostile takeover, a seizure of authority over the original in a way that appeals to contemporary sensibilities steeped in a politicized understanding of culture', to borrow Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier's definition.⁴⁰

'Theatre is about Humans'

Lady Macbeth is not some ideological appropriation such as *Hamlet-machine* or Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: a Play about a Handkerchief*. It appeals not as political propaganda, but as humanist theatre. Many of Han Tae-Sook's theatre productions centre on female characters, but she professes no feminist agenda. As Baek Hyun-Mi points out, she is a director who is intent on uncovering the desire and guilt of human beings.⁴¹

Han has consistently explored the dark side of human psychology in theatre works, including *Kim Su-Im, Myself* (1997), *Bae Jang-Hwa and Bae Hong-Ryun* (2001), *Kwang-Hae* (2002), and *Seo An Wha Cha* (2003). She has also directed two other Shakespearean adaptations, namely, *Richard III the Hunchback* (2004) and *Iago and Othello* (2006), both of which focused on the twisted psyches of villain-heroes. Han's latest productions of classics such as *Oedipus* (2011), *Antigone* (2013), and *Dante's Divine Comedy* (2014) reveal her interest in universal human issues. Thus, *Lady Macbeth* resonates with Shakespeare's tragedy in its exploration of the dark human psyche.

Admittedly, *Lady Macbeth* does not do justice to the multi-dimensional complexity of Shakespeare's tragedy. Lee Tae-Joo complains that the form of psychodrama is not effective in enacting a tragedy of regicide,

as it allows no space for the character of Macbeth to develop.⁴² It is a production that historicists would also abhor; all historical details disappear, simply leaving human beings with their mounting ambition and torn conscience. Even Macbeth is reduced to a shadow of the heroine. However, the play succeeds in bringing out an effect similar to that of Shakespeare's tragedy: a split psyche over ambition and guilt, the question of evil and fear, the lurid imagery of blood and darkness, which probably inspired the director's work. *Lady Macbeth* seems to return to those old traditional interpretations championed for many years by critics from A. C. Bradley to G. Wilson Knight to Harold Bloom.

Han Tae-Sook feels no obligation to be faithful to Shakespeare, and she does not profess to revive the Korean tradition or promote a feminist cause through Shakespeare. *Lady Macbeth* offers a close-up view of the overlooked heroine, as Han 'always felt disappointed that Lady Macbeth's struggle with guilt that led to her death was just announced and not shown onstage in the original work'.⁴³

Han's *Lady Macbeth* is portrayed neither as a victim of Korean patriarchal ideology nor as the antithesis of her husband. As Bradley points out, 'Those two characters are fired by one and the same passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike.'⁴⁴ Moreover, Han's heroine eclipses Macbeth in her ambition, fear and guilt. As Jang Eun-Su noted at the symposium, Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth* embodies the same universal issue of ambition and guilt represented by Macbeth in Shakespeare's play⁴⁵ – a play of darkness in a physical as well as psychological sense, with its dark imagery of starless night and crimson blood corresponding to the mental state of the Macbeths.

Physical Theatre and the Darkness Within

Despite its heavy cuts, Han's adaptation includes a direct translation of those famous lines that evoke the imagery of darkness and cruelty, such as 'Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires' (I, ii), 'Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal



Figure 2. 'I'll do my share.' Lady Macbeth stabs Duncan. Photo: Jang Jei-Hoon, Theatre Group Moollee.

thoughts, unsex me here' (I, iv), 'Come, thick night' (I, v), 'Never shake / Thy gory locks at me!' (III, iv), 'I am in blood / Stepped in so far that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er' (III, iv), 'Out,

damned spot!' (V, i), and 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' (V, i).

Theatre Group Moollee's physical theatre, which Choi praises as an example of 'femi-

nine writing', was most effective in manifesting the darkness within. The eerie guttural sound made by the witches seemed to come from the realm of the unconscious, and live percussion music by Park Je-Chun also enhanced the primordial atmosphere. Offstage murders in Shakespeare's tragedy were represented on the stage through Lee Young-Ran's performance art. The murder of Duncan was enacted as a mud performance, in which Lee, the *Objet Attendant*, threw mud on the wall to create a figure symbolizing Duncan. The Macbeths stabbed it with a dagger hysterically, and the figure shed red powder, as if bleeding. (See Figure 2, on previous page.)

Lee also shaped Duncan's head out of a lump of clay suspended from above in order to express the guilt of the Macbeths. In the 2000 production, she cut a statue of Duncan out of a block of ice, which gradually melted down into a pool downstage. For the massacre scene, Lee punched Duncan's head with her fists and disfigured it, while Macbeth and other performance artists expressed the pain in a controlled movement. (See (Figure 3, opposite page, top.)

Lady Macbeth, stricken with pangs of conscience after the memory of her sins, literally immersed herself in the pool of water onstage. Her final confrontation with her conscience was embodied by the white flour rope, kneaded by Lee, which wound around her neck like a snake. (See Figure 4, opposite page, bottom.) Through performance art, *Lady Macbeth* vividly incarnated the horror and guilt imparted only verbally in Shakespeare's tragedy. If Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 'engulfs us in a phantasmagoria', as Harold Bloom puts it, Han's *Lady Macbeth* does so physically.⁴⁶

The 'same old story' of desire and guilt may not be as evident as such ideological issues as women's rights or class struggles, but it is not something to be discarded as outdated or irrelevant to contemporary society. Admittedly, the humanist reading presented above does not provide a new insight into Han's *Lady Macbeth*; it is the director's interpretation, and is shared in the professional theatre reviews and private

blog reviews by most theatregoers considered in this article.

Such humanist approaches to *Lady Macbeth* may be lacking because such themes seem too obvious for critics under pressure to find something new to say. On the other hand, the criticisms of Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth* examined in this article reveal the bias in current critical geography that prioritizes the discourse of difference such as gender, race, class, nation, and religion. While such views are important in understanding and improving particular human conditions, there should also be the opportunity to view humanity in general without falling into the fallacy of essential humanism.

As Andy Mousley maintains in defence of what he terms 'literary humanism', literature and literary criticism can, and *should*, deal with the ethical question of how to live.⁴⁷ At present, the discourse of difference seems to be the master-narrative in an academic industry of ever-diversifying theories to the extent that humanist views are marginalized and silenced. Discourses of difference that resist the totalization of grand narratives are necessary, but at the same time one needs to speak of universal human issues in art in order to deal with the ever-increasing dehumanization of today's society. As Mousley argues, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* demonstrates powerfully the ethical dimension of human psychology and emotions – exactly what Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth* also achieves.⁴⁸

Choi Young-Joo complains that *Lady Macbeth* ends like a morality play, presenting the death of a sinner, assigning full responsibility to the heroine.⁴⁹ From the new literary humanist view, this complaint may be turned into a compliment. Han Tae-Sook attributes the same psychological depth of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to a 'mere' woman. *Lady Macbeth* grapples with the 'near-universal' question of evil, fear, and guilt, forcing the audience to confront the darkest corners of human psychology and to reflect on how to live. The power of *Lady Macbeth* derives not so much from Shakespeare's genius or feminist politics, as from Han's determination to explore the far reaches of human nature – as does Shakespeare.



Figure 3 (above). The massacre scene. From left to right: Dwarf Assistant (Kwon Kyeom-Min), Macbeth (Chung Dong-Hwan) and Dance Assistant (Park Ho-Bin). Photo: Park Kyung-Bok, Seoul Arts Centre.

Figure 4 (below). The *Objet* Assistant (Lee Young-Ran) strikes Lady Macbeth (Seo Joo-Hee) with a snake-rope. Photo: Jang Jei-Hoon, Theatre Group Moollee.



Notes and References

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1. Tae-Sook Han, 'Fascinated by Theatre as Resistance', in Shim Jung-Soon, ed., *Twenty-First Century Korean Women Directors: History and Aesthetics* [K] (Seoul: Purun Sasang, 2004), p. 41. Unless noted otherwise, all English translations of Korean sources, marked as [K], are mine. This essay cites Korean names in the text by following the Korean way of putting the surname before the given name (Korean surnames usually consist of one syllable, and given names two).

2. Andy Mousley, 'The New Literary Humanism: Towards a Critical Vocabulary', *Textual Practice*, XXIV, No. 5 (2010), p. 830.

3. References are to Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth* (unpublished script for the 2002 production [K]). I have compared the script with a video recording of a performance on 11 April 2008, both of which were produced by the Seoul Arts Centre and are kept at the Korean National Archives of the Arts, Seoul.

4. Ji-Young Jang, 'Han Tae-Sook, Director of *Lady Macbeth* Asks about Human', *Kukmin Daily* [K], 3 March 2008.

5. Mi-Whan Oh, 'Reinterpreting Shakespeare with Focus on *Lady Macbeth*', *Hankuk Daily* [K], 16 June 2002; Lee Gwang-Hyung, 'Theatre Group Moollee, *Lady Macbeth*', *Kukmin Daily* [K], 30 September 1999.

6. Sook-Hyun Kim, '*Lady Macbeth* on the Crossroad', *The Pressian* [K], 22 April, 2008; Kim Seung-Hyun, 'Revival of *Lady Macbeth* with its Original Cast', *The Mumwoha Daily* [K], 3 June 2010.

7. Tae-Joo Lee, 'Regaining Shakespeare: a Methodology through Han Tae-Sook's *Lady Macbeth*', *Theatre Criticism* [K], No. 50 (2008), p.127.

8. Young-Joo Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*: Psychodrama Made of Light, Sound, and Form', *Performance and Theory* [K], No. 2 (2000), p. 183, 188. This article, a record of the Gong-le-Mo symposium, consists of Choi's presentation (p. 182–7) and the follow-up discussion (p. 187–200).

9. Jung-Soon Shim, 'Female Trance in Han Tae-Sook's Production of *Lady Macbeth*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, XXV, No. 1 (February 2009), p. 67.

10. Hyon-U Lee, 'Dialectical Progress of Femininity in Korean Shakespeare since 1990', in Hyon-U Lee et al., *Globalizing Shakespeare in Korea and Beyond* (Seoul: Dong In Publishing, 2009), p. 54.

11. Shim, 'Female Trance', p. 67.

12. Ibid., p. 64.

13. Ibid., p. 65.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 70

17. The last two lines, 'I had nothing to envy in the world, / But do pain and pleasure resemble each other?', were omitted in the 2008 video recording.

18. Shim, 'Female Trance', p. 68–9.

19. Ibid., p. 70.

20. Choi, 'The Intercultural Shakespearean Performance in Korea and the Performance Style for the "Third Space" and the "Global Local Culture"', *Korean Theatre Studies* [K], No. 24 (2004), p. 125.

21. For Lee and Oh's nationalist tendency, see Yeeyon Im, 'The Location of Shakespeare in Korea: Lee Yuntaek's *Hamlet* and the Mirage of Interculturality', *Theatre Journal*, LX, No. 2 (May 2008), p. 263–70; and Im, 'Oh Tae-Suk's *The Tempest* and Post-Shakespeare in Korea', *In and Out* [K], No. 36 (2014), p. 83–93.

22. Choi, 'The Intercultural', p. 127–8.

23. Carl Weber, 'AC/TC: Currents of Theatrical Exchange', in Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, ed., *Interculturalism and Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1991), p. 31.

24. Shim, 'Female Trance', p. 70.

25. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 188, 191, 192, 189.

26. Ibid., p. 192.

27. Ibid., p. 188. Choi cites a telephone conversation with Han Tae-Sook in which the director expressed her uneasiness at being labelled a feminist.

28. Ibid., p. 199.

29. Ibid., p. 187–8.

30. Young-Joo Choi, 'Re-writing Shakespeare: an Analysis of *Lady Macbeth* as a Case of Feminine-Writing', *Shakespeare Review* [K], XXXVI, No. 1 (2000), p. 174.

31. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 186.

32. Choi, 'Re-writing', p. 188–90.

33. Shim, 'The Irony of Gender, Desire, and Power in the Production of *Lady Macbeth*', *Theatre Criticism* [K], No. 21 (2000), p. 180. See also Shim, 'Female Trance', p. 70.

34. Shim, 'Female Trance', p. 70.

35. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 192.

36. Han, 'Fascinated by Theatre as Resistance', p. 40.

37. Ibid., p. 40–1.

38. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 199.

39. Ibid., p. 183.

40. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare: a Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

41. Hyun-Mi Baek, 'A Study of the Sensual Images Expressing Unconsciousness in Han Tae-Sook's Works', *Studies in Korean Dramatic Art* [K], No. 17 (2003), p. 345–6.

42. Tae-Joo Lee, 'Regaining Shakespeare', p. 127.

43. Mi-Hui Kim, 'Macbeth Told from Wife's Perspective', *Korea Herald*, 24 May 2000; quoted from Hyun-U Lee, 'Dialectical Progress', p. 53.

44. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 293.

45. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 199.

46. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p. 516.

47. Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*, p. 8.

48. Ibid., p. 98.

49. Choi, '*Lady Macbeth*', p. 186.