In his *Star Wars* films, George Lucas always reserved the opening scene for the Empire, signaling the dominance of the imperial forces and helping to foment a sense of discord in the audience. This trick is nothing new: William Shakespeare was reserving his opening act for his bad guys hundreds of years before George Lucas was even born. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* opens with the three witches, establishing their dominance and connecting feminine power with evil and the unnatural. It is not only the three witches, but also Lady Macbeth, who manipulates the play’s male protagonists, ultimately perverting the socially “natural” order of gender hierarchy. Critics have noted how the play’s demonstration of this inverted gender dynamic would have struck a chord with Shakespeare’s audience for *Macbeth*, who had experienced firsthand the attack on masculine power implicit in the late English sovereign, Queen Elizabeth I’s rule, and how in fact, “the Scottish play” simultaneously marked both the ascension of her successor, King James I and the triumph of male over female in the play. Links between female power, evil, and the supernatural are pervasive. These links are evident in the recurring circle motif, which introduces connotations of feminine power implied in the menstrual-cycle, as well as in the pagan trinity of female deities—a triple goddess if you will—and her associative feminine archetypes: the maiden, the mother, and the crone. These archetypes and their connotations are particularly well-presented in Roman Polanski’s 1971 film *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

Polanski’s film capitalizes on the physical portrayal of the witches with different ages to signify the archetypical maiden, mother, and crone implied in the pagan deity. As Carl Jung has implied in his psychological thesis, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, each feminine archetype corresponds to a different means of feminine manipulation inherent to the overarching mother archetype reminiscent of the triple goddess. The maiden uses her sexuality to gain power, the mother manipulates through guidance, and the crone utilizes her wisdom. Ultimately, the archetypal feminine manipulation of the male characters by the witches and Lady Macbeth indicates an unnatural or evil corruption in the natural hierarchy of society, which can only be restored by the man not “of woman born,” Macduff (4.1.88).

The inversion of the natural hierarchy of society, with females superseding males, would have been perceived by Shakespeare’s audience as an attack on God and unnatural, subsequently a manifestation of evil. The natural order indicated that God was paramount, man followed, and woman’s place was below man. However, in *Macbeth*, the natural order is transposed as the female characters are presented as dominant over the male characters. Furthermore, the play and most of its adaptations open with the witches, signaling the ascendancy of the females as well as linking this feminine power with the supernatural, or evil. Shakespeare’s choice to open with the three witches is indicative of the perversion of the natural order in that the witches are servants of Satan. The three witches’ power is derived from Satan, and thus, the
female characters' dominance in the play is firmly linked with a transposed hierarchy, with Satan paramount, rather than God. This perversion of the natural order creates an opportunity for good to prevail as the true male hero, Macduff, overcomes the feminine evil, represented in the emasculated Macbeth, thus returning the natural hierarchy to its intended, natural state.

Polanski's 1971 adaptation of Macbeth continues to link the supernatural elements with feminine domination by opening with the three witches performing a spell prior to the battle. The spell itself introduces the idea of the occult and its satanic connotations, yet the scene also introduces a circle motif to the audience, for one witch bends to draw a circle in the sand. The circle is indicative of femininity and feminine power, thus creating a symbol to represent the inversion of the social hierarchy in the play. Circles indicate naturally occurring cyclical patterns; one such cycle firmly linked with femininity is the menstrual cycle. The ability to menstruate indicated a woman's sole power in Shakespearian society: her ability to bear children. It was believed by Shakespearian society that women were responsible for the gender of the child, and thus, women were attributed the power to control the future generation (Maclean 41).

Shakespeare links the menstrual cycle with the supernatural through the ingredients in the witches' charm. The witches use a "Toad, that under cold stone/ Days and nights has thirty-one/ sweltered venom sleeping got" (4.1.6-8). The allusion to 31 days of exuding venom is a reference to the menstrual cycle; the venom is likely a reference to the menstrual blood. Blood was regarded as key to life, being a separate and more important entity than the four humors. Thus, by referring to the creation of venom over the course of 31 days, Shakespeare alludes to a perversion of the natural feminine ability to create life, and the power derived from this act. Rather than indicate that the cycle was natural, the toad produces venom, symbolically implying that the women were poisoning their wombs, and harming their potential children. This image of a menstrual cycle generating poison instead of blood would effectively suggest that the women had lost their God-given abilities, cementing the idea of an inversion of the natural order and the extensive control of evil forces.

Furthermore, the idea of women harming their potential offspring corresponds to the allusions of child abuse in the scene, and continues to imply the unnatural mutation of women's position in society. Rather than following the natural nurturing role of the mother, the witches indicate examples of women abdicating the female gender role of mother and assuming a more violent, unnatural role. The witches require a "Finger of birth-strangled babe / Ditch-delivered by a drab" (4.1.30-31). This allusion to a woman murdering her own offspring is also reflected in the lines "Pour in a sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow" (4.1.64-65). These images of females neglecting their young also correspond to the feminine assault on male dominance. Children are the root of man, and by attacking their young, women are assailing the base of male power. Ultimately, women have the ability to control the next generation, and this power and its subsequent corruption, is implicated in the images of women murdering their offspring. Rather than continue the circle of life, the women in Macbeth break the cycle by relinquishing their natural maternal role and killing their offspring.
The circle is also suggestive of the pagan triple goddess, a three pronged, cyclical deity related to the cyclical phases of the moon (waxing, full, and waning moon). The triple goddess is a single deity comprised of three separate phases which correspond to an archetypal feminine manifestation: the maiden, the mother, and the crone. These archetypal embodiments are explored in the various adaptations of Macbeth where the physical portrayal of the three witches corresponds to a different aspect of archetypal feminine manipulation. In Roman Polanski's 1971 production of Macbeth, the witches are divided into three stages of life. One witch is young, the other is middle aged, and the third witch is an elderly woman. The young witch, or maiden represents the promise of girlhood and of blossoming sexuality. It is this sexuality that the maiden uses to manipulate male characters. The second, middle-aged witch represents the mother archetype. A mother's nurturing effectively instills a sense of respect and loyalty for her in her offspring. The final witch is an elderly woman, which is a manifestation of the crone. A crone exploits men by providing them with her wisdom and advice. Polanski's 1971 film correlates to these divergent means of archetypal feminine control by positioning the witches at different stages of life.

Shakespeare indicates the separate archetypal forms of manipulation in an exchange between Macbeth and the three witches, where the witches respond to Macbeth's query with the following responses:

   FIRST WITCH: Speak.
   SECOND WITCH: Demand.
   THIRD WITCH: We'll answer. (4.1.62-64).

These responses correspond to each manifestation of the triple goddess, and the related means of manipulation. The first witch's statement, “Speak,” indicates the sexual manipulation inherent to the maiden. Speaking indicates that Macbeth is, on a surface level, in control of the interaction. This control over the maiden is alluring to a man. A man will initiate a conversation with a young woman, thus indicating both his interest in her as well as his apparent domination. Yet, ultimately the young woman is able to manipulate the man on a deeper level by using his sexual interest to her advantage. The second witch's reply, “Demand,” corresponds to the mother's ability to manipulate men through her nurturing. A man demands things from his mother and she acquiesces. A baby's cry demands the care of his mother, yet ultimately, the mother raises the son to be loyal to her. Finally, the third witch's response, “We'll answer" conforms to the crone's means of manipulation through her wisdom and advice. The crone correlates to the wise-woman archetype in that men seek her advice. Thus, she is able to control men through the advice that she provides. These divergent means of manipulation ultimately lead to a similar outcome of women controlling men.

This idea of archetypal feminine manipulation is not reserved solely for the witches, but is continued in the character of Lady Macbeth, and her subsequent portrayal in the film and stage adaptations. Whereas the witches adhere to the three archetypes inherent to the pagan triple goddess, Lady Macbeth's character corresponds to the

1 I wrote this essay in response to a course assignment. Spivak's analysis of Foe in another section of A Critique of Postcolonial Reason was not part of the assignment, and I have not read her analysis of Foe.
archetype of the femme fatale. The femme fatale is a woman who exceeds her gender's
limitations by manipulating men, either through seduction or wit. Regardless of her
physical portrayal, Lady Macbeth's ability to influence Macbeth's actions indicates her
transcendence of gender constraints. After receiving word of the witches' prophecies,
Macbeth writes to Lady Macbeth, which signals her importance to the reader. In an
age where men have all the social and political power, Lady Macbeth is an anomaly.
Her husband's report to her signifies not only Lady Macbeth's position as a trusted
confidante, but also alludes to her new title and power gained from her station as
Macbeth's "...dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.11). Lady Macbeth's power in her
marriage is suggestive of female ascendancy in the play. Lady Macbeth's position
as Macbeth's partner also indicates her usurpation of a masculine role through the
characteristics of the femme fatale, especially through her wit. The femme fatale
utilizes not only feminine sexuality to gain dominance, but also the masculine trait
of intelligence. Lady Macbeth is masculine in her dominance, in that her intelligence
leads her to incur the role of husband and its implicit caretaking responsibilities in her
relationship to Macbeth. Upon reading Macbeth's letter, Lady Macbeth realizes that
Macbeth "...is too full o' th' milk of human kindness/ to catch the nearest way" (1.5.17-
18). Rather than nag her husband or resort to other feminine means to motivate
Macbeth, Lady Macbeth takes it upon herself to see that the witches' prophesies come
to fruition, by making a deal with the spirits to "...unsex me here/ and fill me from crown to
the toe top-full/ of direst cruelty" (1.5.41-43). Lady Macbeth's desire to take on more
masculine traits is also seen in her interactions with Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is the
mastermind behind the scheme to murder Duncan, she even goes so far as drugging
his guards and then smearing them with blood to implicate them in the murder of
Duncan. By completing this task, Lady Macbeth finishes what her husband cannot
complete, claiming that "The sleeping and the dead/ are as painted pictures. 'Tis the
eye of childhood/ that fears the painted devil" (2.2.57-59). Lady Macbeth planned
the murder of Duncan and also aided her husband in carrying out their plans. Rather
than being the traditional subservient wife, Lady Macbeth assumes Macbeth's roles
in the relationship, corresponding to the archetypal femme fatale's appropriation of
masculine traits to gain dominance.

Lady Macbeth does not lie to her husband to conceal her manipulations of him.
This straightforward behavior is masculine in nature, conforming to the femme fatale's
usurpation of masculine power. Macbeth is not only aware of his wife's scheming,
he actively relies on her participation in his affairs as well as her advice. She is his
confidante and his emotional support. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth obsesses
about the murder, and it is Lady Macbeth who advises him that "what's done is done"
and to stop dwelling on the murder (3.2.14). During the banquet scene, when Banquo's
ghost torments Macbeth, it is Lady Macbeth who takes control of the situation by
explaining Macbeth's ravings to the guests as well as sending them away. Additionally,
at the close of the scene, Lady Macbeth counsels Macbeth to get some sleep, signaling
to the reader the power she has over Macbeth, for she can send him to bed like a
child (3.4.142). Roman Polanski's 1971 movie, The Tragedy of Macbeth, did an excellent
job capturing the actors' emotions during this scene. Francesca Annis as Lady
Macbeth appears exasperated with Macbeth's (played by actor Jon Finch) behavior. In
comparison to Macbeth’s wild actions and speech she is cool and collected. A viewer is able to see Macbeth’s need for Lady Macbeth as well as her ability to control him through the performance of the actors.

The visual appearance of Lady Macbeth provides directors with a chance to portray different variations of the character. These physicalizations in turn reflect the different manipulative modes employed by women to influence men. The Lady Macbeth of the text comes across as a woman with a very masculine personality, and oftentimes people expect her visual appearance to reflect her masculine persona. However, presentations of Lady Macbeth on stage or in film show many different versions of Lady Macbeth, ranging from a very androgynous appearance to a very feminine appearance. While a masculine or “butch” appearance, as seen in Judi Dench’s 1979 performance, conforms to Lady Macbeth’s masculine personality, a feminine appearance, demonstrated by Francesca Annis in 1971, also works well by creating an interesting dichotomy of masculine and feminine characteristics. An attractive, feminine Lady Macbeth would be able to manipulate her husband mentally (traditionally considered a masculine trait), as well as being able to physically manipulate Macbeth through her sex appeal (traditionally considered a feminine trait). Of the many actresses who have become Lady Macbeth over the years, Francesca Annis’s version of Lady Macbeth in Roman Polanski’s 1971 The Tragedy of Macbeth, is an excellent example of how powerful Lady Macbeth can be because of an appealing feminine appearance. In this version of the film, Annis’s Lady Macbeth is pretty and young. She uses traditional female wiles, including crying and becoming emotional, to convince Macbeth to murder Duncan. Her kisses not only allude to her ability to use sex as a way to control her husband, but also to the biblical betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Judas used a kiss to mark Jesus for arrest, and similarly, Lady Macbeth’s kisses mark Macbeth as her target to be manipulated. No matter what her physical appearance, Lady Macbeth was important to her husband, and this station allowed her to easily influence his actions.

The different portrayals and textual examples of Lady Macbeth’s exploitations introduce the idea of the multifaceted nature of her character. Lady Macbeth does not adhere to one set mode of manipulating her husband. She implements the different modes of manipulation utilized by the three faces of the triple goddess. Lady Macbeth is the embodiment of the archetypal maiden, mother, and crone. She exercises the archetypal mode of manipulation that most benefits her situation, oftentimes layering the disparate modes of exploitation in a single exchange. When planning for the arrival of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth provides both her counsel as well as her nurturing presence, underscored by elements of her sexuality. Lady Macbeth advises Macbeth to “Look like th’ innocent flower,/ But be the serpent under’t” (1.5.65-66). This advice is indicative of her value to Macbeth for her counsel, yet the images of the flower and the snake suggest a deeper, sexual implication. Flowers are overt symbols for the vagina, and the snake is an image clearly phallic in nature. This dichotomy of the variant archetypal modes is continued later in the same exchange. Lady Macbeth assumes the role of nurturer, instructing Macbeth to “…put/ This night’s great business into my dispatch,/ Which shall to all our nights and days to come/ Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom” (1.5.67-70). Yet the reference to “…all our nights and days to come” carries an ulterior sexual meaning. The use of the possessive adjective “our” links
the couple; the following image of "night" suggests the sexual nature of this bond. Lady Macbeth layers the distinct archetypal forms of manipulation in her interactions with Macbeth, evidence of her embodiment of the three forms of archetypal feminine manipulation implicit in the triple goddess.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* may have reserved the opening scene for the bad-guys, but much like in *Star Wars*, the good-guys win in the end. The natural hierarchy is restored when the true male hero, Macduff, confronts Macbeth, the embodiment of the unnatural female-dominated hierarchy, and triumphs. Prior to this victory of male over female, the play featured an inverted natural hierarchy, as the female characters' coercive efforts threatened male domination and power. The feminine dominance in the play, and its unnatural or evil connotations, is apparent in the feminine archetypes and their corresponding form of feminine manipulation. Be it the seduction inherent to the maiden, the mother's nurturing brand of exploitation or the crone's coercive counsel, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and its many adaptations are rife with examples of archetypal female power.

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**Works Cited**


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2 Epistemic violence is "the forcible replacement of one structure of beliefs with another; the term is borrowed from . . . Michel Foucault" (Editor's Footnote, Leitch 2197).