

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. 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 th'access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time. Bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue. Look like th' innocent flower,
But be the serpent under 't. He that's coming
Must be provided for; and you shall 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.

Analysis:

Lady Macbeth speaks these words in Act 1, scene 5, lines 36–52, as she awaits the arrival of King Duncan at her castle. We have previously seen Macbeth’s uncertainty about whether he should take the crown by killing Duncan. In this speech, there is no such confusion, as Lady Macbeth is clearly willing to do whatever is necessary to seize the throne. Her strength of purpose is contrasted with her husband’s tendency to waver. This speech shows the audience that Lady Macbeth is the real steel behind Macbeth and that her ambition will be strong enough to drive her husband forward. At the same time, the language of this speech touches on the theme of masculinity—“unsex me here / . . . / . . . Come to my woman’s breasts, / And take my milk for gall,” Lady Macbeth says as she prepares herself to commit murder. The language suggests that her womanhood, represented by breasts and milk, usually symbols of nurture, impedes her from performing acts of violence and cruelty, which she associates with manliness. Later, this sense of the relationship between masculinity and violence will be deepened when Macbeth is unwilling to go through with the murders and his wife tells him, in effect, that he needs to “be a man” and get on with it.