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‘Unsex Me Here’¹: Mythical women and the threat of the *femme fatale* in the Victorian era, as seen in John Singer Sargent’s *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Body’s Beauty’ (c.1866)

This article will consider depictions of two different mythical women in the Victorian period, namely the characters of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth and the Jewish folkloric figure of Lilith. It will consider different interpretations of such mythical women by comparing John Singer Sargent’s *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sonnet ‘Body’s Beauty’ (c.1866-8). It will argue that Sargent creates a myth of womanhood in the character of Lady Macbeth via his portrait of Ellen Terry, largely inspired by her costume. It will compare this to the legend of Lilith as an alternative female myth; as that myth is expressed in Rossetti’s sonnet. The article will argue that these two artefacts depict differing interpretations of mythical women as versions of the *femme fatale* in the context of increased female self-expression and autonomy in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

John Singer Sargent’s status as the ‘leading portrait artist of his age’ was barely in its infancy when he painted *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) (see Figure 1).² An American, Sargent had built a reputation as a portrait painter in Paris culminating in his *Portrait of Madame X* (1884). The resulting controversy of the overt sensuality of the central female figure of this painting led him to accept the invitation of his friend Henry James to move to London in 1886.³ Alice Comyns-Carr, Ellen Terry’s costume designer for the production and a friend of Sargent’s, recalled that it was Terry’s entrance into her first scene of *Macbeth* that inspired Sargent to paint Terry’s portrait in this role. She recounts that he exclaimed ‘I say!’ on seeing her in the ‘green and blue gown like chain armour, studded with real beetle wings.’⁴ Terry’s costume was noted by critics of the time, with Oscar Wilde pithily commenting on its contrast to the rest of the cast’s more dowdy attire:

¹ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), I.5.40

² Richard Ormond, *John Singer Sargent*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1998), p.34

³ *Ibid.* p.28

⁴ Alice Comyns-Carr, *Mrs J. Comyns-Carr’s Reminiscences*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1926), p.299

Judging from the banquet, Lady Macbeth seems an economical housekeeper, and evidently patronizes local industries for her husband's clothes and the servant's liveries; but she takes care to do all her own shopping in Byzantium.⁵



Figure 1. John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, oil on canvas, 1889, 221.0cm x 114.5cm, © Tate London, 2017

Comyns-Carr notes that in designing the costume she was ‘anxious to make this particular dress look as much like soft chain armour as I could, and yet have something that would give the appearance of the scales of the serpent.’⁶ Comyns-Carr created this effect of ‘soft’ chain-mail by crocheting the dress using ‘a twist of soft green silk and blue tinsel’. The chain-mail hints at a warrior Queen, a strong female leader who is clad in armour, which symbolizes her role as a woman at war. At the same time, the softness of this form of chain-mail imbues the essentially masculine armour with an element of femininity. In order to make the design even more brilliant ‘it was sewn all over with real green beetle-wings, and a narrow border in Celtic designs,

⁵ Quoted in Roger Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, (London: Heinemann, 1968), p.198

⁶ Comyns-Carr, *Reminiscences*, p.211

worked out in rubies and diamonds, hemmed all the edges.’⁷ A photograph of Ellen Terry in costume for the role is at Figure 2. The beetle-wings and the colour of the dress created a sense of Lady Macbeth as serpentine or reptile-like, slithering her way around the stage. It also set her apart from the rest of the cast, as Wilde noted above, as somehow ‘other-worldly’ and exotic: she is both part of this thirteenth-century warring world, but also of another, mythical and fantastical world.



Figure 2. Window & Grove, Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth in ‘Macbeth’, platinum print, 1888, published 1906, 137.0cm x 99.0cm, © National Portrait Gallery, London 2017

Sargent’s original intention was to paint Terry in a scene exiting the castle surrounded by her handmaidens (see a copy of the preliminary sketch at Figure 3).⁸ However, he decided that a picture of her on her own would be more ‘effective’ and rather than defining her by her environment and the Scottish castle and handmaidens of his original idea, in the final portrait he makes her a ‘simple, exultant figure.’⁹ In Sargent’s portrayal, Ellen Terry stands alone crowning herself in an act of self-authority at the culmination of her ambition. Sargent crowns Lady Macbeth as the driving force of the play’s action, by depicting her in the act of appropriating the crown of Scotland for herself. Sargent captures the richness and vividness of the

⁷ Ibid. pp.211-12

⁸ Comyns-Carr, *Reminiscences*, pp.299-300

⁹ Ibid. pp.299-300

costume she wears via his use of vivid colour to show the serpentine green of the dress. This is a marked contrast to the black and white photographs of Ellen Terry in the dress itself at the time (see Figure 2 again). Sargent's portrait thus documents and records something more akin to the vividness and wonder of her costume, noted by Wilde above, that contemporary photography could not. The painter seeks to emulate the real-life glitter of the beetle-wings via the 'rich stained-glass effects' of the vivid blues and greens used in the portrait.¹⁰ The reptilian nature of the dress echoes Lady Macbeth's line that Macbeth should 'look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't.'¹¹



Figure 3. John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, oil on canvas, replica 1906 (based on a work of 1889), 86.3cm x 72.5cm © National Portrait Gallery, London 2017

Whilst Sargent was undoubtedly inspired by Terry's performance of the role and in particular the visual impact of her glittering beetle-wing costume, the scene he has chosen to paint was never in the production, let alone in Shakespeare's text itself. He centralises the character of Lady Macbeth and makes her the symbolic focal point and lead protagonist of the play's action. The victory of obtaining the crown (and by reference therefore the eventual downfall of Macbeth and the carnage that ensures) is firmly placed at the door of Lady Macbeth. And yet the arms raised in triumph give

¹⁰ Edith Craig and Christopher St John, *Ellen Terry's Memoirs*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.234

¹¹ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.5.64-65

the painting an exultant and celebratory air rather than a threatening or demonic portrayal of the role. Whilst Ellen Terry did depart from the expected portrayal of the role in her performance (as shall be discussed below), she did not see Lady Macbeth as being the sole architect of Macbeth's downfall and instead she emphasised the essentially feminine nature of Lady Macbeth. Terry saw her as a partner and help-meet to her husband rather than giving effect to her own ambition. She writes to her daughter, in the midst of performing the role:

it's precious hard work for I by no means make her a "gentle, lovable woman" as some of 'em say. That's all pickles. She was nothing of the sort, although she was *not* a fiend, and *did* love her husband.¹²

Roger Manvell in his autobiography of Terry notes that Lady Macbeth was 'a part with a strong tradition of interpretation.'¹³ Previous interpretations of the role had focussed on the character as perceived by Malcolm in the final speech of *Macbeth* as the 'fiend-like queen'.¹⁴ The most famous of these previous performances and the one that Terry was expected to emulate was that of Sarah Siddons in 1785.¹⁵ William Hazlitt described Siddons's performance in glowing terms: that 'power [was] seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine; she was tragedy personified.'¹⁶ Siddons's Lady Macbeth was a virago, devoid of femininity, driving her husband to murder and death.¹⁷ Such a depiction of Lady Macbeth as the 'dark and dreadful sublimity of evil' was what audiences expected, and the announcement that Ellen Terry had been cast was met with some consternation by critics and her friends alike.¹⁸ Terry defends her playing of the part by pointing out to her friend, the journalist Clement Scott, that a good woman could do bad deeds without becoming intrinsically evil.¹⁹ In effect, Terry argued that women had human faults just as men did and that Shakespeare's tragic women could display similar traits of hubris as their male counterparts.²⁰ Her decision to perform the role in a way which did not emphasise the unfeminine and the demonic in the part of Lady Macbeth led to a mixed reception by critics. The *Morning Post* notes the quandary that the new interpretation created in its challenge to accepted notions of what the role should be:

¹² St John & Craig, *Memoirs*, pp.234-235

¹³ Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, p.191. The critic Labouchere wrote in *Truth* on the production that 'Lady Macbeth [...] thirteen years ago, was a shrew of the most determined type' (quoted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, p.199)

¹⁴ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.7.99

¹⁵ Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage*, (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p.37

¹⁶ Quoted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, p.192

¹⁷ Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry, Player In Her Time*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1986), p.252

¹⁸ See Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, p.193 for the quote. Terry was known principally for her comedic roles of feminine delicacy and purity, such as Olivia and Portia. See Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, pp.199-201 regarding the critical reception of the production.

¹⁹ Auerbach, *Ellen Terry*, pp.257-8. Ellen Terry had left her husband, the artist G.F.Watts, and lived as mistress to Edward William Godwin, where she gave birth to two illegitimate children. As such, Terry's private life was very much the 'fallen woman' of Victorian consciousness in reality.

²⁰ See in particular, Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932), pp.160-1. Terry argues that the very fact the Lady Macbeth is 'haunted by the horror of the murder' and 'dies of remorse' is evidence itself that she is 'not of the tigress type, mentally or physically.'

A creature so spiritual, so ineffable, has never perhaps been put on the stage. Is this Lady Macbeth? Who shall decide? That it is not the Lady Macbeth of tradition or of Mrs Siddons we know. It is scarcely a Lady Macbeth we recognise. It is, perhaps, one of which we have dreamed. Shakespeare, at least, it may be said, would have hailed it a delight as revelation, if not as interpretation.²¹

Terry herself states that Siddons's playing of the role was more successful as a 'single, forceful dramatic figure' but found in Shakespeare's text (as well as Siddons' own writing on the role) evidence that there could be more femininity in the role of Lady Macbeth than previous interpretations would suggest.²² Terry makes an argument for a Lady Macbeth who is more mistaken woman, led astray by her love for an imperfect man, than demonic harridan.²³ Her notes on the part comment that Lady Macbeth:

is full of womanliness ... [and she] is capable of affection - she loves her husband - Ergo - she is a woman - and she knows it, and is half the time afraid whilst urging Macbeth not to be afraid as she loves a man. Women love men.²⁴

However, it was the visual spectacle of Ellen Terry's performance, and in particular that of Comyns-Carr's serpentine costume, which inspired Sargent's interpretation. Whereas Terry's Lady Macbeth was closely linked to her close reading of the text of *Macbeth* and in particular the characters of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as the masculine and feminine combined, Sargent's Lady Macbeth stands alone devoid of male influence appropriating the symbol of royal authority for herself. For Sargent, unsurprisingly of course for a painter, it is the physical, visual appearance of the character that is his inspiration and as such, his interpretation of the character is a marked difference to the inner, feminine, inspiration Terry reads from the actual text of Shakespeare. He notes in a letter to his friend Isabella Stewart Gardner:

Miss Terry has just come out in Lady Macbeth and looks magnificent in it, but she has not yet made up her mind to let me paint her in one of the dresses until she is quite convinced she is a success. From a pictorial point of view there can be no doubt about it - magenta hair!²⁵

In his portrait, gone is the overly feminine interpretation of the actress, who insists that her character is simply motivated by her devotion to her husband as dutiful wife. Sargent sees beyond Terry's interpretation to the individuality of Lady Macbeth. Her

²¹ Quoted in Charles Hiatt, *Ellen Terry and her Impersonations*, (London: Bell, 1900), p.206

²² Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, pp.192-5. For Siddons's views on the role, see Thomas Campbell, *The Life of Mrs Siddons*, (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), Vol II, <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/300149943.pdf>, [accessed: 19 February 2017], pp.10-34

²³ Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, pp.192-3

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.195

²⁵ Letter to Isabella Stewart Gardner, 29 December 1888, quoted in Charles Merrill Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, (London: Cresset Press, 1957), p.142

very act of taking the crown of Scotland for herself symbolises the overthrow of her husband's ambitions and, by extension, male authority. Sargent's Queen intends to rule in her own right. The dress she wears, with its rich colours and celtic designs, speaks to a long history of royalty and nobility (especially when compared to the otherwise dullness of the costumes noted by Wilde above). The glittering beetle-wings and chain-mail create a serpentine effect of scales and armour, which aligns this Lady Macbeth with other such slippery, female characters who (notably also affiliated to the snake) instigate the downfall of man: Medusa, Eve and, as I shall now turn to, Lilith. In this way, Sargent portrays Lady Macbeth as a symbol of Victorian womanhood as myth.²⁶ A myth Terry herself referred to when she stated that 'in Shakespeare all the elements of womanhood are holy.'²⁷

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet, 'Body's Beauty' was written c.1866 to accompany Rossetti's painting *Lady Lilith* and first published in the frame of that painting when it was displayed at Royal Exhibition in 1868.²⁸ Algernon Swinburne in his *Notes of the Royal Exhibition, 1868* states that Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* painting and sonnet are a representation of the 'sensual beauty' of the 'siren' and that for 'this serene and sublime sorceress there is no life but of the body.'²⁹ Swinburne goes on to say:

Of evil desire or evil impulse she has nothing; and nothing of good. She is indifferent, equable, magnetic; she charms and draws down the souls of men by pure force of absorption, in no wise wilful or malignant; outside herself she cannot live, she cannot even see: and because of this she attracts and subdues all men at once in body and in spirit.³⁰

Swinburne's interpretation of Rossetti's Lilith is firmly in the tradition of the threatening *femme fatale* of the female characters of the 'sorceress' and the 'siren'. Essentially feminine in her attractiveness, she lures men's souls for her own consumption. However, the absence of spirituality and love means that this is neither good nor bad. She is devoid of either quality, rather she is 'indifferent' and 'passive'. She is another form of virago to accepted notions of Lady Macbeth, as she is devoid of feminine qualities of emotion and feeling. She is sensual and attractive, but her attraction is other-worldly. It is not for earthly procreation but for man's spiritual downfall that she lures them to her. Rossetti originally published this in his *Poems* (1870) under the 'sonnets for pictures' section. However, in 1881, he amended the title of the poem from 'Lady Lilith' to 'Body's Beauty' and included it in his *House of Life* sequence of sonnets, with some minor textual amendments.³¹ This 1881 version reads as follows:

²⁶ Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp.209-213

²⁷ Terry, *Four Lectures*, p.151

²⁸ <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/n5054.r47.rad.html> [accessed: 19 February 2017]

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
 (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
 That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
 And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
 And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
 And subtly of herself contemplative,
 Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
 Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
 Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
 And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
 Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
 Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
 And round his heart one strangling golden hair.³²

Rossetti firmly places this myth of womanhood in the character of Lilith as described by Goethe in his *Faust*:

Beware of her fair hair, for she excels
 All women in the magic of her locks;
 And when she winds them round a young man's neck,
 She will not ever set him free again.³³

Rossetti's Lilith is the first wife of Adam: beautiful but dangerous. This legend of Lilith appears to have its origins in Jewish mysticism, in particular the tale told in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*. In this tale, Lilith is the first wife of Adam and is made from the same clay as him. However, they quarrel when Adam insists her place is beneath him and not on top of him. Lilith leaves the Garden of Eden and God sends two Angels to bring her back, but she refuses. Instead, she is rumoured to cause infant death unless they are protected by amulets.³⁴ Rossetti's Lilith has hair which catches young men, in the same way as that depicted in *Faust*. F.G. Stephens also suggests that Rossetti was inspired by Robert Burton's reference in *An Anatomy of Melancholy* that 'The Thalmudists say that Adam had a wife called Lillis [sic], before he married Eve, and of her he begat nothing but demons.'³⁵ Stephens states that Rossetti as both

³² Dinah Roe, *The Pre-Raphaelites: From Rossetti to Ruskin*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), pp.125-6. This is the 1881 version of the sonnet, included in *The House of Life* sequence. It is largely the same as the one on the frame of the 1868 portrait, but with some amendments to lines 2, 9 and 11.

³³ This translation (of Shelley's) is attached to the back of Rossetti's watercolour version of the painting of *Lady Lilith* (1867) and quoted in Virginia M. Allen, 'One Strangling Hair,' *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.66, No. 2 (June 1984), pp.285-294 . [accessed: 16 October 2016], p.290

³⁴ Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Scheuring and Valaarie H. Ziegler, *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.204-7

³⁵ F.G. Stephens, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *The Portfolio: Monographs on artistic subjects*, London, 1894, p.67 <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:7316/docview/8307966?accountid=13042> [accessed: 18 February, 2017]

‘painter-poet set about to educe a solid form of his notion of the fair and evil-hearted witch, who, as a sort of Lamia, had been originally formed like a serpent.’³⁶

For what purpose has Rossetti chosen to select this obscure feminine demon from Jewish folklore as his subject matter? Griselda Pollock notes that Rossetti used ‘opposing categories’ of women, of ‘pure, virtuous women’ pitted against ‘the impure woman’, Beatrice versus Guinevere for example.³⁷ The painting/sonnet combination of *Lady Lilith* / ‘Body’s Beauty’ and its companion painting/sonnet, *Sibylla Palmifera* / ‘Soul’s Beauty’ is one example of such ‘opposing categories’ in their depiction of the ‘siren and the sibyl’ described by Swinburne above. Pollock believes that the ‘dominant tropes of Pre-Raphaelite literature have functioned to secure a regime of sexual difference.’³⁸ Lilith as mythical figure, her hair terrifying and threatening dominant male ideology, is akin to Medusa as her hair is a sign and myth of uncontrollable female sexuality, outside of patriarchal authority and control.³⁹ For Virginia M. Allen, the Lilith of Rossetti’s sonnet and painting is emblematic of Victorian male anxiety of the modern Victorian woman and their call for sexual and political independence.⁴⁰ Allen bases her analysis on a letter from Rossetti to one of his patrons, Thomas Hake, in which Rossetti confirms his belief that ‘the perilous principle of the world being female from the first’ is the ‘essential notion of the [‘Lady Lilith’] sonnet.’⁴¹ Allen reads this as being perilous to Rossetti and his patrons and links the reception of the Lilith painting/sonnet combination as linked to contemporary dialogue on women’s emancipation. In ‘Body’s Beauty’, it is, in particular, Lilith’s hair that contains the threat of entrapment and strangulation. It lulls the ‘youth’ into an almost hypnotic trance, before snapping his ‘straight neck’ in an act of metaphorical castration, her hair overcoming the essence of his manliness. This hair is bewitching and beguiling, it overcomes ‘heart and body and life’ in one by breaking the phallic neck. But her hair also has a value, it is the ‘first gold’, of primary value of all others. It speaks to a basic, primitive instinct that predates the biblical story of the Fall of Man in Genesis, as the legend of Lilith serves in Jewish mythology. The repetition of the word ‘soft’ and the alliteration on the syllables ‘sh’ in the second stanza create a dreamlike, sleepy effect, perhaps created by Lilith’s poppy flowers. The language is not in itself threatening

³⁶ Ibid. p.68

³⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), p.160

³⁸ Ibid. p.161

³⁹ Another form of hair as a sign of threatening female womanhood and sexuality can be seen in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* and their reference to the death of Rossetti’s wife, Elizabeth Siddal. They recount the legend that on opening the coffin to retrieve the manuscript of his poetry that he had buried with her, it was discovered that Lizzie’s famous hair had ‘continued to grow after her death, to grow so long, so beautiful, so luxuriantly as to fill the coffin with its gold’. This supernatural (and most likely fictional) account places Rossetti’s wife with her own mythical status. For Gilbert and Gubar, ‘Lizzie Siddal Rossetti’s hair leaps like a metaphor for monstrous female sexual energies from the literal and figurative coffins in which her artist-husband enclosed her.’ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven & London: 1984 (2000, 2nd edition), Yale University Press), p.27

⁴⁰ Virginia M. Allen, ‘One Strangling Hair,’ *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.66, No. 2 (June 1984), pp.285-294 www.jstor.org/stable/3050418 [accessed: 16 October 2016], p.294

⁴¹ Letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Thomas Gordon Hake, 21 April 1870 in Doughty, Oswald & John Robert Wahl (eds.), *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 4 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.850

in this respect, it lulls the listener into an almost hypnotic trance, into another world away from the realities of existence. It acts as a feminine spell of entrapment and domination, this 'witch' beguiling men with her sonorous beauty.

Is Lilith simply a threat to male sexuality or is she instead a reflection of the 'male libido, profoundly ill at ease with itself'?⁴² Gitter has claimed that the women in Rossetti's poetry are rarely 'passive, helpless objects of ... desire; they are, at best, accomplices, knowing participants in sexual banter; at worst, they are instigators, destructive and dangerous *femmes fatales*, who use their gold to tempt, to corrupt, to strangle.'⁴³ If so, Rossetti's art and poetry is not about the object depicted. It is about the inner, artistic temperament; the personal inspiration of poetic genius; and ultimately an expression of the Romantic notion of art and the soul of the artist being one, or what Shrimpton terms 'a late - perhaps the last - flowering of a great Romantic genre.'⁴⁴ If Rossetti's Lilith is actually about male libido and artistic temperament, what does Sargent's depiction of Lady Macbeth, especially one that departs from both Henry Irving's production as well as Terry's own interpretation of the role, say about his view of women and in particular their identity. There does not appear to be any threat *per se* in Sargent's portrait. Lady Macbeth's hair is safely entwined in two plaits by a gold ribbon, although that gold ribbon does have echoes of the imagery Rossetti uses to describe the gold of Lilith's hair ('first-gold'). Lady Macbeth's hair, in both the production and the portrait, is also red. Whilst this is most likely a reference to her celtic roots, it also subtly references the red hair that was so associated with Pre-Raphaelite painting. This connection with the Pre-Raphaelites is hinted at in Terry's reputation as 'the Painter's Actress', largely as a result of her brief marriage to the Pre-Raphaelite contemporary, the artist G.F.Watts, and her unconventional liaison with the aesthete Edward William Godwin.⁴⁵ More particularly Terry explicitly links the Sargent portrait with Rossetti in her comment: 'the whole thing is Rossetti - rich stained-glass effects'. Terry also refers to the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones on the painting:

Sargent's picture is almost finished, and it is really splendid. Burne-Jones yesterday suggested two or three alterations about the colour which Sargent immediately adopted, but Burne-Jones raves about the picture.⁴⁶

⁴² J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.62

⁴³ Elizabeth G. Gitter, 'The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination', *PMLA*, Vol.99 No.5 (Oct., 1984), pp936-954 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462145> [accessed: 16 October 2016], p.947

⁴⁴ Nicholas Shrimpton, 'Rossetti's Pornography,' *Essays in Criticism*, Vol.29(4) (October 1979), pp.323-340 <http://eic.oxfordjournals.org/> [accessed: 5 October 2016], p.329

⁴⁵ W.Graham Robertson, *Time was: The reminiscences of W. Graham Robertson* (London & New York: Quartet Books, 1981). The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography states that she was 'a cult figure for poets and painters of the later Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements' as a result of her marriage to G.F.Watts and the portraits he made of her during their brief union (Booth, Michael R., 'Terry, Dame Ellen Alice (1847-1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, first published 2004; online edn, Jan 2011), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36460>) [accessed: 7 March 2017]

⁴⁶ St John & Craig, *Memoirs*, p.234

The subject matter itself is similar too and both represent male interpretations of this trope of female empowerment and female authority. Both are strong female characters, with power over men in one way or another. Lady Macbeth is ‘fiend-like Queen’ and virago, and Lilith has the power to captivate and strangle men. Both sit outside the male hierarchy. Lady Macbeth as depicted by Sargent is self-crowning and exultant in her self-expression. The Lilith of legend chases her own existence separate to Adam and Rossetti depicts this by the danger of her ‘one strangling hair’ and the reference to her as the first wife of Adam. The myths depicted in each of Sargent’s portrait and Rossetti’s sonnet can therefore be seen as examples of what Swinburne referred to as ‘woman of the type of Adam’s first wife; [...] a living Lilith, with ample splendour of redundant hair.’⁴⁷ Such ‘living Liliths’ symbolise the empowered woman of Victorian Britain as examples of the ‘first strong minded-woman and the original advocate of women’s rights.’⁴⁸ In Rossetti’s sonnet, his ‘living Lilith’ is a ‘modern Lilith’ who threatens patriarchal structures. For Sargent, his Lady Macbeth in her Lilith-like serpentine dress, stands in a celebrated act of autonomous defiance and self-expression. Both of these differing myths of womanhood are symbolic women who embody, in their different ways, the ‘divine-demonic woman’ of Victorian imagination.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ Letter to the editor of *The Athenaeum* from A Ponsoby-Lyons, quoted in Allen, *One Strangling Golden Hair*, p.294

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Figure 2. Window & Grove, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth in 'Macbeth'*, platinum print, 1888, published 1906, 137.0cm x 99.0cm, © National Portrait Gallery, London 2017

Figure 3. John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, oil on canvas, replica 1906 (based on a work of 1889), 86.3cm x 72.5cm © National Portrait Gallery, London 2017