"SHE SHOULD HAVE DIED HEREAFTER":

THE SILENT AND SYMBOLIC DEATHS

OF WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE

By

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Introduction

Reckoning, Resuscitation, Revival

Even the strongest, most crucial and renowned women in Shakespeare's tragedies do not make it to the end of the play. Not only this, but as a rule we do not generally witness their last moments. Their deaths are imagined as important to the plays, but it is the idea of loss that is stressed, not who we have lost or how we have lost them. The loss of a woman, and all that "woman" is set up to represent in Shakespeare, is a device to inspire guilt and remorse; they are used as necessary tools for tragedy. Most evidently, the deaths of these women tend to precede a culminating battle or violence. They are the tipping point, the fuel for the revenge plot, but are never assigned credit for that influence. This project aims to interrogate why Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Cordelia, and others receive the endings they do. By working closely with the texts of *Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello,* and *Antony and Cleopatra,* I will get at this persistent pattern which simultaneously elevates and dooms the woman to martyrdom. I explore how adaptations have attempted to subvert this trend in Shakespeare, how directorial choice and actors as agents in performance may alter the nature of these deaths, and I will question how successful this turns out to be.

The deaths of women in the tragedies are markedly dissonant once we consider them long enough: Portia burning out her own tongue because her voice couldn't make a difference; Lady Macbeth's quick unraveling, a reported offstage death; Desdemona's odd double-death murder. These deaths were written to have a very specific effect on the audience and on the other characters. They serve as reflections to show how bad things have become in the story - the linchpin of a morality play. I will hold under a microscope the small things: the last moments we

get with the women, the reactive lines that follow the news of the death, the reported cause of death and how the play proceeds after the fact. I have taken to the text and highlighted each element for the character I am working with. I am interested in the discord between the reality of the deaths and the spin that is put on them. I have found that modern and global adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy try in some way to recover the women: to allow them to live, to make them the heroes, to give them last words, to resurrect them. I will investigate how this effort does not get around the problem and even these productions perpetuate the symbolization of women.

Reckoning

Each leading woman who appears in *Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello* is dead or departed¹ by the end of her play. This may not seem too shocking when we accept that with tragedy comes sweeping death. But we are always left with a few men to tell the tale. Not the tragic hero, himself, no; he is among the fallen. Yet, he is inevitably afforded a moment to "play himself out". He launches his final questions, disseminates his last insults, bellows his culminating sorrows and has one last chance to influence how his story will be remembered and told. The last lines of the play, which act as our "sweet remembrancer", are given to the noble, moral men still left standing. The men who, due to gender, race, and class, hold the privilege of shaping and relaying the narrative of history. It is only women that are wiped out completely from the narrative. Why is this? What purpose do the deaths of women, generally silent and unseen, serve in these well known plays? How integral or how unnecessary are they? And, what does calling attention to what we do not see, do not ask, and do not tell

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¹ I use departed here to encompass exceptions like Bianca in *Othello* who does not die but effectively disappears from the play after Act V. Sc 1., being ushered from the stage and never mentioned again. A loose end of no consequence to anyone that remains living at the close.

change about the course of tragedy? Can it change anything about our performance of Shakespeare, our performance of women in contemporary practices of theater?

This is not only a complex topic for scholarly Shakespeare work; it also manifests ten fold in performance, film adaptation, and political sentiment as well. For female actors stepping into Shakespearean roles, it has long been an in-depth project of how to make the characters "new". There is a desire to make them stronger, more knowing, less tragic or demure. Where does this automatic need come from? Do the women of the plays lack this entirely in their original form? No. We are working from characters who already have the complexities that encourage us to take them on and take them further. Because, with the way they speak, we know there *must* be more to them within the gaps. Ophelia is young and impressionable, but she smells the rot in Denmark. Cleopatra is a queen and a lover, but she wants and desires with a force that is not contained by being a soldier's exotic fantasy. Lady Macbeth possesses a tongue prepared to murder and manipulate for status but when her boiling point comes she laments a loss of closeness and assurance of clarity, not nobility. Desdemona and Cordelia, both seemingly loving daughters/wives, end up spurned by their fathers (and one husband) and snuffed out for their expression of love with honesty as opposed to flattery. Shakespeare inspires the impulse to dig in the gaps, the certainty that there is something more underneath, some code to crack. Silence contributes to this. Giving them less to say means they can hold more secrets, an allure of "knowing more" perhaps; she is an enigma. This is exactly the silence I am pushing against.

I reject this "feminine mystique", still stubbornly rampant in our society, because of the possibilities that arise when we consider what would happen if these women unshackled their

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² Juliet Dusinberre discusses the concepts of the "feminine mystique", men's ideal perceptions of women, and the deifying of women in courtly love in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*.

tongues. "Mystifying" women also has the effect of devaluing and dismissing them. (Dusinberre, pp.32, 41) The women become myths while the men become legends. But, if we were let into the women's interior expression to the same extent we are for example, Hamlet's, then how would the story, and our perception of it, change? We are in a political and cultural climate that is still heatedly debating the merit of women's voices: in law, in policy, in the workplace, in history. What does it mean to have women's voices torn from history, to have their experiences, their thoughts and assessments erased or denied from the books? What do we lose when we don't have these voices and what paths are our stories forced down as a result? What pitfalls can these voices, if given the chance to share, help us to avoid? Likely, many. The silencing, exclusion, and isolation of women across class and race furthers us down paths of tragedy, makes it impossible for a world or a story to achieve wholeness or productive outcome.

I am of the opinion that the women of Shakespeare, before any tampering, are already interesting and strong characters, but they are underwritten. At a certain point, the men become more treasured by the writing; we see it in the beauty and length of their speeches, their stage time, and their cherished death scenes. The women drop off. They begin to wane, like the moon. They are unfinished, interrupted. The female performers who take them on often seek to complete the picture. In her book *Brutus and Other Heroines: Playing Shakespeare's Roles for Women,* Harriet Walter talks about how an actor's work of building and developing character when taking on a role is like excavation. We tend to approach it like a post-mortem investigation. We look at the play and we say, "where is she?". Each artist picks up on different "clues" or cues in the text, leading them to have varying interpretations of individual characters and how they relate to the world of the play. At the close of the book, Walter addresses a letter to Shakespeare

himself. In it she writes about how remarkable the women in the plays are though they are not afforded much focus: "Being outside the violence, they can comment on it. They can foresee the consequences but are helpless to prevent them from happening. You put their case so beautifully and eloquently, but once they have had their say (usually in one scene) you remove us from the play, and we have to spend the rest of the evening in our dressing room." (p. 127)

I argue that this happens because women in art largely function as weapons to inspire fulmination, quick violent bursts of emotion. Catharsis in tragedy capitalizes off the obscene image of women suffering. She is given one good scene to grab the audience, then killed off. This tactic traffics in obscenity both in the Greek sense, *ob skene* (off stage), as well as the modern sense where "obscenity" means perversion. Alluding to the "offstage", the unanswerable questions, the unrevealed symptoms, all promote obscurity. When something is obscured we naturally want to uncover it. We wait it out and look harder, suspended: "At its discreet urging, we want to ask the classic text: What are you thinking about? But the text, wilier than all those who try to escape by answering: about nothing, does not reply, giving meaning its last closure: suspension."(Barthes, p. 217). We have a natural reaction to suspension which is to hang on to the lift until the period. When someone speaks on a long inhale we wait, locked in, until the exhale. Tragedy uses this by suspending revelation of the death act or the body. We never get to access the "offstage". It is only pointed at.

Resuscitation

I have discussed a feeling of pulling back the layers, "cracking the code", excavating Shakespearean heroines as if from an archaeological site. I am guilty of this in the impetus for this project. The concept of there being something to recover that is lost, a wrong to take the

responsibility of correcting, is an attractive story where we get to play champion, deliverer. Looking at roles for women that could be even more than they already are if they were not prematurely wound up, and stories that feature women only at the center of violence, mishap, or misfortune feels like a reckoning that wants retribution. Can we imagine alternate endings for tragic women? Is tragedy written in their blood, even before it is spilled? How much is "what if" worth? But many writers, Saidiya Hartman among them, have spoken about how rescue of an already unwritten figure is an impossible desire³, setting free those already confined in parenthetical death. Violence written into the canon, or the archive, cannot be undone no matter how many adaptations, re-writes, or romantic interpretations we conjure. And, conversely, attempting to intervene in the harm, the death, or the violence risks reproducing that same misuse of the figure one would like to spare. There may be no rescue, maybe "rescue" is not the mode. What do we want from engaging with these women, or with these stories of women again and again? Do we want to give them something or do we want something from them? Do we seek to reveal them to open up ourselves? Do we want to give them revenge? Or do we want them to show us answers we cannot form ourselves about the dangers of victimization? Do we want to grant them power they lack, or draw power from them into ourselves? With these questions pointed towards the relationship between "re-maker" and character, performer and character, and scholar and character; I hope to interrogate the ways not Shakespeare, but his *characters*, are constantly adapted, updated, and "re-claimed". How are we, as contemporary female performers, using women? How have the performance makers and playwrights of our past used women for their artistic vision?

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³ In "Venus in Two Acts", Saidiya Hartman writes of her complicated effort to extract and restore the erased stories of two girls on the British slave ship, *Recovery*.

An actionable goal for this project is to explore new ways of conversing with and about the women of Shakespeare that can lead us to developing some new performance practices altogether. I am interested in imagining alternative, and perhaps more productive, ways of introducing these characters to persons who have never met them before. Can we introduce a 9th grader to Ophelia without mentioning Hamlet? Or must we stay trapped in the frame that she only matters in the context of his story? I am beginning to engage with Shakespeare differently than I have done previously. Let's think about Shakespeare's text as not a code to crack, or a language to translate, but a map or a worksheet. We have been given these foundational blocks that continue to help us build character and story as significant reference points. But what we need to achieve is how to use them as a launch pad rather than a container that we morph ourselves to fit. We need to use Shakespeare to get outside and beyond him. We can value the works as highly successful and deep plays that root us in a theatrical past without setting a pinnacle that can't be matched by modern playwrights and makers. Seems dissident, doesn't it? That's the worthy challenge of it. This is the way I look at "reclaimed Shakespeare", re-writes, or stylized adaptations that play with gender and role-reversal. There is a trend and excitement in the past 20-30 years to the present for productions of Shakespeare's works cast as all femme or with casting across gender. I recognize the intention behind this is to finally allow women to take on these mammoth roles they are excluded from; roles where they get to scream and rage as Lear does. Is there a female role in Shakespeare's tragedies that we can think of which is afforded the same freedom of expression? Does it not mean as much if it is a woman? Is she considered merely a storm in a teacup? It creates a stage picture where women and women of color particularly can finally make the majority. It offers up a female perspective and voice in stories

that originally do not allow space for them. But these are not transformation. Merely, the work is repurposing the same patriarchal set-up it is critiquing. The actors are still trapped within it as they say the same lines, live out the same errors, but instead as a woman or as a femme actor playing a male character. This is still forcing ourselves to adapt to a lack given to us as a constant. There are no good roles for you, so just work with what you've got. In her letter to Will, actress Harriet Walter expressed the frustration of Shakespeare not seeming to care to write as expansive and central women as he did men. She wonders what he would write for women to perform today. "Imitating men can't be the only answer", she says. (p.128) There has to be another way. Carol Chillington Rutter, whose research focuses on Shakespeare and performance studies, says that, "[i]ncreasingly, women 'do' Shakespeare in different voices because that's how they hear him".(p. 505). I am so endlessly interested in how women "hear" Shakespeare. We listen for different things as we are all different human beings, but is there some tune, some frequency that makes certain moments and absences call to women? When women engage with Shakespeare I think it is impossible for them not to hear the silences and the screams of other women louder than the words of the men. We note our own absence in the text. Rutter calls the adaptations and "transformations" that come out of these readings "talking back" to the bard. However, I don't think we are talking to him, he is a long dead Englishman, we no longer require him to validate our interpretations of his interpretations of us. We are talking to each other.

Harriet Walter also points out that Shakespeare fails the Bechdel Test, every time⁴. So, yes Shakespeare has written some complex and striking women to augment his men; as

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⁴ The Bechdel Test is a metric for gender disparity in fiction inspired by cartoonist Alison Bechdel who featured a character in her comic with three basic criteria for movies. Something "passes" if it features at least two women, who talk to one another, about something other than a man. Subsequent iterations of the text also include that the women must be named and they must be featured fulfilling these other criteria for a set minimum amount of time.

individual characters they clearly succeed in interesting us, proven by the sheer amount of study done about them. But their importance to the plays unravels once the main man clammers on top of his purpose and drives forward to his demise. Their value as a collective -- as women who share, and inform, and influence one another in their own emotional internal plots -- is non-existent. They are kept locked in their own minds, making positive relationship nearly impossible. Any pre-existent emphasis of importance on the women of Shakespeare's tragedies as an ensemble is either absent or an agenda being pushed by contemporary theater artists who would hope to see them considered in such a way. The women as an ensemble, an enclave, a community (or coven if you will), has not always been a conceivable way of representing or talking about women. Even now it is considered a mini act of rebellion (against the patriarchy, of course) to have a group of women to draw from and support you, to have a space where women talk. To each other, Alone. With no censorship. It still feels groundbreaking, refreshing. Because it is not the norm. Putting women together and allowing them to talk to each other is too dangerous. It is feared because it is productive. We need to get beyond the Bechdel Test as a bar for measuring representation in art and society. Women sharing space to solve problems should not be an anomaly. I want my work to support the opposite of separatism. So, this writing does not focus on misandry. I believe Shakespeare's tragedies are about the dangers of isolation and divisive thought. The downfall of a tragedy would be good communication and the ability to share and confide with others.

Revival

In my writing I am avoiding the term "Shakespeare's women", and instead opt for "the women of Shakespeare". This may seem like an arbitrary distinction. But the sentiment is that

while they are certainly his characters, and therefore arguably "his women", the expanse of time that has passed in which these plays have been in the public domain -- for anyone who chooses to to adapt, twist, maim, or enhance -- means that the ways we receive and understand the characters now is centuries distilled from when Shakespeare lived to possess them. We have lived with them longer than he and should now be able to assess these women as people our culture has decided are reflective and "universal" of our human condition. Therefore they are representations of us, extricable from the man who named them. I am influenced by Roland Barthes' The Death of the Author in trying to talk of character and story as independent of creator. Except that, unlike Barthes, I cannot remove authorial intention from my interrogation. One of my predominant questions, and not one that I will provide or even attempt to provide an answer for, is whether Shakespeare intended us to note the exclusion, disillusionment, and dissolving of his women; whether he considered this to be the mark of tragedy, the thing which should arouse an audience to protest and change. Is the nature of their deaths as either an afterthought or an overly lamenting howl at the gods attributable to problematic gender politics, or is the tragedy talking to itself? Could Shakespeare have intended the kind of reaction this project is? Was he pointing out that the missteps and bad decisions in the plays would not be able to happen if the women were allowed to live? How progressive really is this view of women as a moral compass and center point? The question of how much we make up for him is posed poignantly in Madhavi Menon's *Shakesqueer*: "Are we simply dignifying Shakespeare by assuming he has as much to offer queer theory as queer theory has to offer him? Can Shakespeare be regarded as a queer [and/or feminist] theorist, or is he always the object on which queer theory acts in a one-sided relationship?"(p. 5) Scholarly opinion tends to deem this

man a genius. His works, in some respect, and the spotlight they still hold, prove him to be one of the most deft poets of emotional experience we have had as of yet. So I believe it is not unthinkable he had such intentions. But, I am also intensely aware of the hazard of projecting my own hopeful interpretation of this problem I perceive in the plays. It is possible, after all, to give an artist too much credit.

So, who will be next? Who will, or has, surpassed Will? Someone must. Our time and our needs, what we require our art to recognize in us and reflect about us has changed. This does not devalue or replace Shakespeare and the relevance of his plays. But we acknowledge, and contemporary theater is acknowledging, that it is not enough. We need playwrights with the same poetic skill, wit, and care for traversing the zigzags of the human heart-mind, who launch us forward from our concerns and questions today and into the next 400 years. Emily Dickinson wrote, "Can human nature not survive without a listener?" Who is the listener she speaks of? Is theater not a way of allowing ourselves to be listeners to our own nature? We hold witness to our own faults, successes, griefs, and joys. We must also hold witness to the things that trouble us. We keep coming back to Shakespeare not because it is the only theatrical writing that touches something we feel is true about ourselves and our worlds; it is not. We come back because it allows us to listen to the past too, and to make claims like: what was then is not now; or it is as it is now; or cannot be as it is now. We make judgements based on what rings familiar from a time we must always be apart from, we decide humans do not change much. We hope societies do.

In the following pages, I present "profiles" of seven women in four of Shakespeare's tragedies. I have attempted to construct these profiles both analytically and meditatively; drawing on text analysis, studies of performances and film adaptations, and using theory along

with the works of those who have taken on Shakespeare this way before me (mostly "Feminist Shakespeare" writers or critics) to qualify and comment on observations about both. I am merging my questions as an intellectual student of theater and literature with my questions and instincts as a performer. I attend, in turn, to Ophelia/Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, and Desdemona/Cordelia/ Emilia. They are grouped in such a way to discuss the suicides first, with those that occur offstage preceding Cleopatra's onstage death, and then turn to the deaths that are categorized as murder with Desdemona and Emilia's occuring on stage and Cordelia's, off. During this "procession" of female death, I will question if there is agency in death or only the weaponizing of and reducing of the female body into symbol, a pathos signifying object.

The women's untimely deaths, occurring normally just before the last act, operate as reflections to show just how bad things have become in the play and just how tragic this tragedy is. My aim in this investigation is not to ignore the men of the play but to pay particular attention to the women; to how they read as characters; to how their silences, gaps, and bodies perform; to what they say; and to how we read/perform what they don't say or do not get to say. I use "gap" to refer to a lack of something (as in voice, body, information) but also as a kind of off stage realm that women inhabit. We can call readings of silences and gaps of information the "countertext". This is a term taken from Carol Chillington Rutter who discusses the suppressed countertext in her book *Enter the Body* where she writes, "Reading performance texts means reimagining the canon, opening up its supplementary physical, visual, gestural, iconic texts, making more space for the kind of work women do in the play (particularly as Shakespeare situates their roles to play off men)--It means registering and fixing scrutiny on the woman's body as bearer of gendered meanings--meanings that do not disappear when words run out or

characters fall silent". (p. xv). In considering these aspects we will look closely at what I will refer to as the "death scenes", but which are for most of the plays (considering that almost all of the women actually die off stage therefore they do not have a "death scene") the scenes in which we last encounter the women alive and speaking, the scenes in which their deaths are reported on stage, and the scenes where their bodies reappear as corpse. From all these questions and all the analysis they prompt, I devise even more questions. But my hope is to generate content to be taken up by a group of engaged artists to continue the conversation in a performance piece. It is important to displace this realm of intellectual interrogation from just the page and allow it to be something that people can see, hear, and converse with as theater.

Part I.

Ophelia & Gertrude: Killing the Obedient Tongue

I became aware that I was weary of watching various Ophelias presented as innocuous sacrificial lambs while studying adaptations of *Hamlet* on film and stage in a course on Global Shakespeare at Trinity College. Each time Ophelia died, I became more and more aware that through her death she was being made into a symbol of innocence and misfortune, that she was no longer a character in her own right, or perhaps that she never even got to be a character in the first place. I say this believing that "character" in theater is meant to define representations of beings, which share the depth, internal complexity, and imperfection of the audience who receives them. Characters, full and well-written, have an arc in the story. To be fully developed as a character means not to be unflawed, but to have a rounded sense of self; three dimensional believability. And most notably to be present in the action of the play and to interact with others in the story.

Character, a state of representation that performs or holds identity, can be partly defined by a figure's relation to others, how they communicate and are communicated with. But when characters are kept out of the mix, sectioned off in their own corner, and offstage for the majority of the play; they are more spoken of than ever speaking themselves. When the women in Shakespeare disappear from the stage, get spoken for, or are deemed "mad" by depiction; they become less than character to me. They become merely a signifying name, sometimes a body. They are made symbols of femininity, tragedy, beauty, innocence, sex etc. and are mostly silent. Death in tragedy is a tool to create governable idols, just as adulation in love is a dangerous tool to make women into deities. This encourages audiences, men, and societies not to see them as

real people who exist and die without beauty in real life, but instead as myths. And the thing about myths is we can make mythic figures stand for and say whatever we want. They are passive emblems on which we project our own desires and fears. The tragedy of the play, and the grief of other characters, is enhanced by the death of feminine figures such as Ophelia. But what is bothersome is that once she becomes this "necessary tool" for drama, this symptom of the game, we lose Ophelia's character as an entity. When the woman dies off from the story and off of the stage, whatever nuanced female mind Shakespeare wrote for us to encounter, or sketched out for an engaged actor to bring to full flawed life, is struck away and reduced to a plot device. We lose her; she becomes a ghost, a name to be shouted at the sky.

A large part of this discussion depends on how we understand agency for characters. Do we define agency for characters differently then we do ourselves? As they are characters, and therefore brought into a devised world by an authorial power who has already predestined their life's trajectory, demographic, and all other limiting factors of who they can and can't be; then they do not have agency in a broad sense if we define agency as free-will over what happens to us. But if we define agency more basically as the ability to make choices and the opportunity to have those choices to make, then some characters within the frame of the created world, can be said to have more agency than others. When we speak this way about choice-making in fiction, when we desire to find fiction surprising and engaging in general, we also must assume that it could have been different; that there was another route the story may have taken. Agency can be defined simply as the capacity of an individual to act independently in a given environment. I think in the ways that we utilize "agency" today we also mean claiming the ability/right to intervene in what others would act upon us. The ability to say yes or no. So, the women of

Shakespeare may have an equal lack of agency from Shakespeare as the men he writes in the sense that they all fulfill the scheme of one brain. But what I aim to note is that on the inter-character level, the men as they are written and allowed to legislate, perform agency in a way the women do not. In the ways characters talk about one another and act upon one another, some are endowed with more agency through language then others. The women may have moments of choice, but as they slip toward their exits from the story their agency is stripped or converted in a way that turns them into more of a prop or a symbol. Characters like Guard #1 or Gentlewoman are props in the same way, unnamed and unrelated to the other characters who drive plot progression and influence others. The constant question here is whether to see this as Shakespeare reflecting his time's gender disparity or enforcing it. One of the questions this project asks is what are the benefits of performing women in victimhood vs. the violence of inflicting that victim fate through restaging?

On the Text

In *Hamlet* Ophelia and Gertrude exist as seemingly the only two women in an otherwise masculine state. Elsinore as we experience it in the play is strikingly absent of women, as is Dunsinane, the seat of the Macbeths. Like most of Shakespeare's plays, the ratio of male to female is extreme. Just as there are side men, periphery to the action, filling out the numbers, occupying the extra space; surely there would also be women who live out lives on the edge of the story that occupies our attention. But we never see *them*. Where are all the women? Only the women who are named, who are deemed important due to how they affect and offset the experiences of the men, appear. For all intents and purposes, they could be the only women in all of Denmark.

Ophelia and Gertrude drift through the halls of a palace where most doors and hearts are shut to them. Their abilities, their status, their virtues are dictated by the men in the Danish court who "guide" them. And these things are always at risk of being dashed and taken away by the same men who endow them. When the men of Shakespeare are experiencing emotional turmoil, grief, or anger they are prone to a habit of translating this pain into misogyny. Their expression of frustration at their plights tends to result in cursing the nature or general existence of women. They are so "overcome" that they become hateful. Our best cases are Othello and Hamlet. Hamlet, for his part, takes his horror at his mother for being able to move on from King Hamlet to marry his brother so quickly and extends it into a confirmation that all women are untrustworthy, weak in will, and two-faced: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (1.2.146) This is carried directly into his condemnation of Ophelia. He first greets her with, "the fair Ophelia" and "Nymph". In the use of this word to name her, she is already a symbol to him. A nymph is a spirit of nature in Greek mythology. "Nymph" conjures images of rivers, sirens, maidens, the beguiling woman. Classic art depicting nymphs or naiads feature nude or partially nude pale feminine bodies, dripping in flowers or half hidden in a stream⁵. With this utterance, Hamlet secures and foretells Ophelia's fate as it will be described by Gertrude. He seals her in a picture. From those pretty words, it is a quick but harsh switch to "get thee to a nunnery" as he tells her she has brought him to madness and that he knows women make monsters of men. He seeks to throw her with his spiteful words, just as he seeks to harm Getrude with them and tear down their ideas of their own virtue. About the Player's prologue Ophelia says, "Tis brief" and Hamlet aims

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⁵ Gaston Bustierr, "Nymph"; John Everett Millais "Ophelia"; "Hylas and the Nymphs" J.W Waterhouse,

his jab, "As woman's love." (3.2.175). He commands his mother to, "assume a virtue if you have it not" (3.4.181). He passes judgement on his wounded whim, and takes no other testimony.

In these referenced scenes Hamlet dictates to Ophelia and Gertrude what to do. He tells them where they should go, how to proceed, and what will happen to them. Their value to him in discourse hinges on obedience. Because he views them as inconstant, they are always in a state of proving their amenability, hoping to save this male perception of their virtue as faithful and palatable. Laertes and Polonius also hold this manipulative power over Ophelia. With no mother figure, her father and her brother completely hold the reigns of Ophelia's guidance and future. The power is not only in the patriarchal system they inhabit, but they are also her only source for tenderness and advice, her family. One gets the sense that Hamlet is Ophelia's only other companion in Elsinore. Her scenes pursue his, she exists in contexts with him and about him. Who can she confide in? When she shares with her father and expresses to be at a loss, "I do not know my lord what I should think?", his response is to school her, "Marry I will teach you, think yourself a baby", and on Hamlet: "with a larger tether may he walk/Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia/Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,"(1.3.136). Laertes in the same scene also imparts advice that reminds Ophelia only of her limits:

fear it, my dear sister,

And keep you in the rear of your affection,

Out of the shot and danger of desire.

The chariest maid is prodigal enough

If she unmask her beauty to the moon. (37-41)

Laertes here encourages his sister to restrain herself in order to protect herself, to recede within because even the most cautious woman is exposing too much of herself if she shows her face to the moon. These words police Ophelia's sexuality and her potential for free independent thought. The people in her life spend the entire play building up walls of virtue around her, they constantly remind her how short her leash is "and with a larger tether may he walk than may be given you." Ophelia is young and at a precipice of absorbing information, where listening to impulse becomes very important. But this is stopped up in her by the patriarchal system in place. She sees more than others, but must say she does not know what to think because her perceptions and words are not valued. To all their sermonizing she says only, "I shall obey, my lord" (1.4.145). How can she find space to carve out her own developing sexuality and discernment, when the men in her life force their judgements and values upon her as all important law and the only other woman in her world relates to her as her son's marital prospect and when it is most needed wants not to speak to her?

Each man uses each woman very clearly as a pawn in their plots. Acting as puppet masters, Polonius and Claudius set Ophelia up as bait with the "remembrances" Hamlet gave her, love notes, to return to him. "Sweet Gertrude, leave us too/For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither/That he, as 'twere by accident, may here Affront Ophelia."(3.1.33) They set their trap and observe it play out "seeing unseen". Gertrude does not weigh in or object but leaves Ophelia alone and follows orders, exiting on "I shall obey you."(41). Claudius and Polonius tell Ophelia this is how they will figure out what is wrong with Hamlet and whether she is to blame; framing it as for her own good. They pose and prep her. But what she receives is verbal abuse, and cold rejection right in front of her father and king; humiliation. When Hamlet has left they do not rush

to check on her. They do not even let her speak. Polonius says, "How now, Ophelia? You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said; We heard it all." He asks the question and does not pause for her answer. She "need not" speak because they believe they already know all she would say. They heard it all but they did not hear her. When Ophelia cries out, "O, woe is me/T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"(175), she is entreating her hidden audience of her father and Claudius, as well as the theater audience. Here Ophelia tries to demand awareness, she tries to communicate to her father in one of the simplest ways, "look at me, look at this". But he does not. As spectators, of the text and the performance, we are easily on the other side of this too. Discarded and emotionally manipulated, Ophelia challenges us to see from where she sits, to look the way she does, outwards in, at the crumbling of care and honor among men. This is one of those moments Shakespeare has written which pry the gap and prompt us to wonder if Ophelia is our true way into this text. Are we meant to traverse these halls with Ophelia, to see as she sees? If we were able to, would we know more? Why then do we spend so much of our time looking away from Ophelia and following Hamlet as he soliloquizes his woe. He delivers his to us, while we must imagine Ophelia's woe after she leaves the stage.

Gertrude's obedience is scattered throughout the play in her potential implicitness in Claudius's rise, her ability to take Hamlet's insults, and her eagerness to be loved. Like Ophelia, when spoken to at length by the men around her and given direction, she performs obedience: "I shall obey you". Her obedience to Claudius distances her from Hamlet but her moments of action and speaking in the play are all still about her son. She still functions as a mother trying to love and be loved by her son. Claudius and Polonius, operating with minds of politic, manipulate the women's care for Hamlet, and weaponize their love. This capitalizes on an instinctual inclination

many women have to suffer for their love. Or at least, this is how we have grown accustomed to seeing women as lovers represented in literature and media. The woman proves her love by waiting, nurturing, sacrificing, bearing emotional burden. Feminine love is characterized and praised more often by suffering and pain than by pleasure or following desire. So, Gertrude is villainized for taking another husband and not staying faithful to a dead man. She is made to suffer from Hamlet's insults because she is his mother. And even her death act, whether read as intentional or accidental, is about him.

Gertrude is dispatched like Ophelia to speak with Hamlet. Claudius and Polonius decide that she cannot be the only one present when he speaks because she cannot be fully trusted, "'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother/Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear/
The speech of vantage."(3.3.32-34) She is considered only in how useful or effective she will be as part of their plans. Polonius sends Hamlet to her chamber and before he arrives, preps
Gertrude as he did Ophelia, "Look you lay home to him/Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with/And that your Grace hath screened and stood between/Much heat and him."(3.4.1-4)
She tells him she will do so and he conceals himself. Then Hamlet speaks to her, cleaving her heart in two, kills Polonius and now they are alone. He is all over the place, accusing her, entreating her help, cursing her, calling her "Mother". She asks of him "What Shall I do?"
(3.4.202). She asks as a mother, how do I make you happy? He dispenses her, uses her in his scheme, demands her secrecy. She agrees to continue speaking of his madness, the logic being that when one is considered "mad" as opposed to vengeful, one is not fully responsible for one's actions. I will address this same logic later in regard to Ophelia's "madness".

This simultaneous entrapment and playing of both women creates an anxious, hostile environment for the two to live within. We can look at isolation from each other, bred independence on father/brother, and the puppeteering of love as the various ways the oppressive patriarchal structure in *Hamlet* systematically dismantles the women. I think dismantle is the right word as machinery is a motif brought up in *Hamlet* quite a bit. Ophelia is figured as a piece of machinery assembled and programmed by her father and brother. Her brother's words remain in her head locked, he holds the key; and Hamlet refers to his heart as a machine⁶. Ophelia and Gertrude spend the play trapped in the mechanics of their time. From the outset it is all question, doubt, and ridicule for them, and either blatant or latent shaming of their sexualities. Denmark is a different kind of prison for them than it is for Hamlet. The women are on the periphery until the men bring them into focus or give them a task to perform in a scene as chess pieces in their enterprises. The overt themes of obedience to male and systemic power in all of the speeches and actions for both Ophelia and Gertrude show that to obey is to remain in line, safe, but also to pretend they know less than they do, to submit to leadership that misuses them. To disobey is to disavow the only things giving them place: the men attached to them who hold power and status in Denmark. We see this in how they use their voices and in their silences; in what they keep to themselves. But each woman has a single moment of disobedience, which can be read as moments which interrupt their oppression. These exceptions are when Ophelia comes into the court, a disruption, after her father's death with her coded songs and her flower tokens and when Gertrude takes up the poisoned cup and drinks from it.

⁶ I also reference here Heiner Muller's *Hamletmachine*, which ends with an Ophelia who is in a wheelchair, being entirely wrapped and covered with cloth bandages by two other performers. During this she speaks such lines as: "Down with the happiness of submission. Long live hate and contempt, rebellion and death. When she walks through your bedrooms carrying butcher-knifes you'll know the truth."

In Act 4 Scene 5, Gertrude is informed that Ophelia is outside, upset, and wants to be heard. She says "I will not speak with her." Gertrude is operating in the service of two men in her life, concealing the wrongs she knows, and suppressing her own guilt. For she knows what Ophelia is going through. She has lost someone. She is also alone here, the only other woman in Elsinore. She has seen where they have driven Ophelia, knows her right to outrage. But if she acknowledges this and speaks to her, she is facing the harm her complicitness in the system has helped cause. She will break. This is Gertrude's fear but Horatio entreats her to speak with Ophelia because "she may strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds". (4.5.14-15) The encounter now frames the women to oppose each other instead of support. Gertrude operates to diffuse and Ophelia to erupt. Ophelia tries to get to Gertrude, but what is in the way? They are still not fully alone. Horatio is there, silently rendering their conversation as surveilled, inorganic. They cannot speak directly, therefore Ophelia sings her coded songs. Here her tongue becomes disobedient. Her speech is removed from a clear idea of sense, only lucid to those who listen, and unable to be silenced by power. But Gertrude fails to hear her or cannot: "What says your song?", "Nay Ophelia--". Yet, Ophelia here is persistent. She says listen to me. To call this scene mad raving is to diminish it in the same way Claudius does. Her mind is not meandering. There is a focused desire to deliver meaning if we note the, "Say you? Nay, pray you, mark." (4.5.25-28) Don't speak, listen. It is repeated again when Gertrude attempts to interrupt her song. Then, Claudius enters the scene and the potential for solution, for feminine convening, is killed. Gertrude, complicit, directs Claudius's male gaze to Ophelia: "How long hath she been thus?"

This scene is the most space Ophelia takes in the whole play--her largest and only disruption. In this speech she becomes dangerous. Claudius defends by repeating, "Pretty

Ophelia."(4.5.61) This is an example of a verbal act that works to simultaneously symbolize and reduce. Claudius attempts to tranquilize her and invalidate her unrest through pity. His use of "pretty", the adjective relentlessly attached to young girls as images of sweetness and youth, puts her back in her image box. Ophelia the nymph. Ophelia the poor girl. Ophelia=sweet. She cannot do any harm if she is not taken seriously and if they sedate her anger. Ophelia says to Claudius "Lord we know what we are, but not what we may be."(4.5.48-49) This echoes "to be or not to be"; it is her own commentary: we know ourselves now but cannot say what will become of us. We cannot say what comes after death. We also cannot say what truly lies behind someone's eyes. Ophelia saying this to Claudius is a disclosure as well as an accusation. But Claudius passes it off, lamenting, "poor Ophelia, divided from herself and her fair judgement" (4.5.91-92). Juliet Dusinberre points out, "the irony lies in the fact that she was never allowed to have any judgement".(p.94)

On Ophelia's exit, Claudius says "Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you." (79). This echoes the same words of the doctor in *Macbeth* when he beholds Lady Macbeth sleepwalking, "Look after her," (*Mac.*5.1) That she needs monitoring does not only suggest she needs protection from what she may do to herself but that the state of things must be protected from *her*. She is now a threat to the norm: the masculine monopoly on reason and knowing. The statement serves further to pity and configure her as unbalanced enough to need minding.

Therefore, what she says should not be taken too seriously or mean anything more than sorrowful babbling, for her grief "Springs all from her father's death." (4.5.80-81) Yet, it does not. It is about Hamlet, it is about the failures of communication, of family. It is about the state of Denmark, her imprisonment and oppression as a woman in this society, and her suffocating

role in everyone's game; all that she knows but is not permitted to speak and grieving her own youth. Claudius claims the power to paint over all this and prescribe it to one kind of sorrow and anger only (the loss of a parent) as does the play itself and productions where Ophelia raves about the stage, a bubble to pop.

She re-enters after Laertes has arrived, a double insult, but she is outnumbered. Ophelia here navigates a space of masculinity marked by her very presence within it as feminine; in this governed and monitored space she can only speak in code. She gives pretty things, flowers stacked with associated grave meanings, to the others in the room: repentance, sorrow, remembrance, adultery. I do not believe as some do that this is just "hysteric" nonsense. Productions love to play up their mad Ophelias with this scene, but the character has more to convey than that. I believe this is an instance of gap, where something impossible to be said by a woman in a man's court is trying to escape from a mouth trained to be couth and obedient. "There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end."(4.5.207-209) This song rings of a cutting irony. Her song and dispatching of rosemary etc. is a coded way of telling them, I know what you are, I know what you have done and I, who you reduce to just a "pretty" thing for your use and your loving, am also full of meaning and knowing. She too has withered now that she knows and has seen the outcome of the dishonor of the state. Her last words before she exits to die are: "And of all Christians' souls, I pray God, God be wi' you."(223) She is calling out the sins of all, their complicitness in her father's death, in her grief, in the corruption of the state, in their abuse of power, in their silence etc. But the others do not register her. Claudius uses her disruption, her effect on Laertes' emotion, to direct his attention to politics and law. The attention is diverted to

a protective power move where Claudius gains Laertes' trust by telling him if he is found at all to blame for Polonius' death he will give over his kingdom, crown, life, et al. This leads to Laertes and Hamlet's confrontation, the dramatic peak of the play centered around the men.

We move quickly from Ophelia to Laertes' revenge which is spurred along by grief over his father's murder, as well as outrage at the loss of his sister's perfect image. The blame for all this is directed onto Hamlet and Laertes and Claudius begin planning their murder plot. The final nail in the coffin, so to speak, is Gertrude's pronouncement to Laertes that "You're sister's drowned." in Act 4 Scene 7. Laertes's immediate reaction to this is strange, "Drowned? O, where?" It is quick, confused. His first step is to ask *where*--an unnecessary detail which allows Gertrude to launch into her illustrative monologue. He weeps but then admits that once the tears are gone "the woman will be out" and he will embark on his mission of justice/revenge. Her brother's reaction to her death is: "too much of water hast thou poor Ophelia/And therefore I forbid my tears".(4.7.211-212) We are packaged a symbol of Ophelia, a watery woman, too emotional, pitiable. He accepts it all very quickly. The plot is advanced. The woman left behind.

Gertrude's act of disobedience comes in the shape of re-training her obedient tongue as well. Hamlet and Laertes are in the ring with their foils. Claudius has lifted the poisoned cup to Hamlet, who dismisses it. Gertrude, toasting to her son's fortune, takes the cup. Knowing it will be her death and will also save Hamlet from the cup, Claudius commands, "Gertrude, do not drink." She responds, "I will my lord; I pray you pardon me."(5.2.317-318) The one time she does contrary to her husband's wish, it is her death. In both instances, the moment Ophelia and Gertrude dare to disrupt and disobey is immediately followed by their deaths. Claudius tries to cover up what has been done. Hamlet calls out as Gertrude falls and the King quips "She swoons

to see them bleed". But Gertrude, in her death, does not abide the lie, "No, no, the drink, the drink! O, my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poisoned." (5.2.339-341) Previous, Gertrude knew of Claudius's schemes as one of the pieces in them, but at a point she was no longer in the loop, yet still a player. This alienation and un-informing of the woman leads to her accidental death. Gertrude dies on stage unlike Ophelia, but this death is the immediate incentive for Hamlet to realize Claudius's designs on him and bring about the final action of the play. Gertrude functions as the reveal and then is forgotten. The tragic hero needs his surprise incentive for furious revenge and big emotion, but past that the woman's use expires. Ophelia and Gertrude are the tools to achieve comeback for the wounded hero.

There is great significance in the fact that it is Gertrude who reports Ophelia's death and who, we are asked to assume, was the only witness to that death. If it is the case, then Ophelia's drowning is the closest, most intimate, and most alone the two women have been the entire play. By proclaiming that Ophelia was "incapable of her own distress" (4.7.203), Gertrude both deprives Ophelia of intention and removes blame for the death from either of them, blaming it on madness and grief. Her report is so consciously edited to be beautiful as well as tragic, just as the play likes to configure Ophelia. This makes her an unreliable narrator of the event. Her report removes all agency from Ophelia in the moment of her death, she is acted upon rather than an agent who acts. It is another step in her transformation into a painted symbol. All language in the report has things happening to Ophelia, she is the object of the sentence structure and never the subject. "When down her weedy trophies and herself/Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide/And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up" (4.7.199-201) Her name is never spoken in the monologue. The report of her accidental drowning is made suspicious by these odd

mentions in Gertrude's speech. She says that Ophelia "chanted snatches of old lauds" while her clothes held her afloat before sinking her. This suggestion that, having fallen into the water and in the midst of drowning, Ophelia did not struggle or even register her own danger but instead sang bits of song, is phantasmal. It works to detach the report from reality and the woman from reason. It takes away any idea of consciousness--of her holding awareness of circumstance--and gives her mythology. She is turned into a mermaid: the "nymph" Hamlet named her to be. This monologue does the final work of seeing Ophelia disintegrate into a tragic idol. This transformation is not about memorializing her, but giving the rest of the characters and the audience a touchstone for lamenting: a muse. In *Enter the Body*, Carol Chillington Rutter discusses Laurence Olivier's 1948 film adaptation of Hamlet and how it depicts Ophelia's death, which is to say it does not. Underneath Gertrude's voiceover, Ophelia briefly appears floating in a beautiful tranquil river setting. She is awake, even singing, a miracle of nature carried along as if she controlled the water. The camera pans past her then back to the direction her body was floating, but the body is gone. Olivier also cut Ophelia's only monologue prior, a further dilution. Rutter writes, "Ophelia's drowning is not the sight of Ophelia's death nor the site of any of the grotesquerie Shakespeare writes into Gertrude's report of it. Rather, annexed to Olivier's project, her drowning is the site where male ingenuity celebrates its own creativity. It exploits the woman's body as muse, but denies the body the death that would trouble and transform its signifying power."(p.38) Portrayals of Ophelia's death that take Gertrude's report as straight fact make the event about creating a pretty painting or about mythologizing a woman in distress, and not at all about a woman drowning or committing suicide.

Gertrude's reasons for reporting like this can be taken many different ways and come with many questions. Did she actually witness Ophelia's drowning in such detail, if so why did she let it happen? If Ophelia drowned herself, why does Gertrude lie? Is it self serving or to protect Ophelia's reputation of virtue? Some believe Gertrude here is protecting both herself and Ophelia by lying about her suicide so that the young woman can be afforded a proper burial. In this instance she is motivated by guilt and pity. In Women of Will, Tina Packer argues the other side saying that "Clearly she (Gertrude) could have saved her but she doesn't. Ophelia is dangerous running around the court, spreading rumor, and she must be stopped. That she takes her own life is a convenience for Gertrude."(p. 195) This interpretation has Gertrude acting in self-interest, perhaps in the interest of Claudius and/or Hamlet. It is unclear who she is protecting. But either way, the only person who listens, watches, and witnesses Ophelia's last moments is the other woman in the play. We see here how the two women are continuously pitted against each other by patriarchal structures. Both women are motivated by a tenderness for Hamlet that he does not return to them. The structure of the play positions them to oppose each other or at least repel. An example of this is configuring Ophelia's death as something that benefits Gertrude because it protects her husband's secrets. In cases where Gertrude and Hamlet's relationship is intentionally read as oedipal, Ophelia and Gertrude become competitors.

I desire a relationship for Ophelia and Gertrude like the brief moment of possible communing for Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*. This project is concerned with wishing this for all Shakespearean women and understanding how they are denied the intimacy of exchanging interiority, secrets, experiences and fears and the possibility for memory and learning that it provides. Even Desdemona and Emilia do not fully attain that female friendship because

Emilia's unspoken betrayal as an accessory in Iago's scheme keeps them from ever fully aligning as allies.

In The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare, Carolyn Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely discuss female friendship as a way of "restoring women to the plays of Shakespeare"(p.5). Through "shared conversation, mutual affection, and extraordinary intimacy" women can "create a kind of female subculture apart from the man's world". But Gertrude and Ophelia are never given room or time for female friendship. Instead of getting to convene they are thematically made to oppose each other: Ophelia virtue, Gertrude dishonor. In the end they are inverted to reflect each other. Ophelia is given a "dishonorable" burial due to the uncertainty around her death and Gertrude dies purely as a victim after drinking the poison cup meant for her son. The strange implied dynamic between Ophelia and Gertrude is very frustrating when we get little to no meaningful interaction and truthful exchanges between female characters in the tragedies. There are small moments, like Gertrude dropping petals into Ophelia's grave after she distributed flowers in the court, that can almost be an acknowledgement; in my reading, I desperately wish it to be. What I hear is the silent ache of an older woman who watches a younger one perish on the same altar once built for her. Otherwise, when they interact it is in the context of other people or they are merely within the same room. They do not share plot-progressing dialogue and they are isolated from each other by the schemes of other characters and by the play's framework. If they were allowed these things that Lenz, Greene, and Neely speak of it would bring them too far into the male hero's realm where men share information, strategize, and mourn publicly.

"There is no place for women in the hero story", Packer assesses (p.181). On this note, I want to explore parallels in the text between Ophelia and Hamlet and Ophelia and the Ghost. The ghost of *Hamlet* is the poisoned King Hamlet, shadowing the battlements, beckoning, and demanding "Remember me." But the figure who truly is made to haunt the text and the play is Ophelia. She becomes an emblem of lost innocence for both the characters of the play and for the audience. Hamlet grieves Old Hamlet many times through many speeches in the play. Comparatively, Ophelia and Gertrude are given very few words of mourning. In Act 1 Scene 1, Horatio and Marcellus call after the silent ghost: "Stay! Speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!"; "Tis gone and will not answer." (61-62) This resonates with the idea of the women who die in Shakespeare acting as ghosts the men call to and would like to regain. Due to the nature of tragedy and the inhabitability of their story, they cannot stay and they will not answer. Not to answer is a disobedience, a refusal to submit in the way they may in life. Do they simply punish by removing themselves? Who will act out the revenge play for Ophelia? For Gertrude? I wonder if they would ask for one with as much vehemence as Old Hamlet does: "if thou didst ever thy dear father love--revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.31) The Ghost has more to say in his few scenes in the play than either woman does. He commands repeatedly "remember me." There is also the repetition to Hamlet of "swear, swear!". The Ghost demands unceasing reminder, ensuring his own memory, and ensuring a future. This is so different from what the women are afforded.

In the tragedies, the audience is in on the schemes and concerns and inner griefs of the men more than they ever know the strife or fate of the women before it occurs. In Act 1 Scene 2 Hamlet says, "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue".(64) He speaks and makes known

something the women already consistently perform. The difference is that he does not in actuality keep his tongue held. He can release to the audience in soliloquy. The women do not. The last words Hamlet has before he dies are full of intention and direction, unlike the women. "But let it be. Horatio, I am dead." (5.2.370) All of his dying words frame death with power and acceptance. Though poisoned and therefore not in control of his death, he is given the power to speak to and of it. He accepts his death and declares the moment when his character falls silent: "The rest is silence." (395) The deaths of women come instead as a surprise. They do not get to choose or call it what it is. It happens *to* them. They are often reduced to hysteria, like Lady Macbeth and Ophelia, and made incapable of it. Hamlet speaks not much of mourning the others who have died, significantly the women who have been laid out around him, but instead speaks to Horatio of his own story and reputation. He expresses a desire for it to be redeemed somehow and relayed. In death, Hamlet is given a place of honor and formal mourning/rites:

Let four captains

Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,

For he was likely, had he been put on,

To have proved most royal; and for his passage,

The soldier's music and the rite of war

Speak loudly for him." (441-446)

By contrast, it is a place of dishonor and incomplete burial rites for the body of Ophelia. This contrast hinges upon the privilege to testify for yourself.

Hamlet is "a play text whose core issue exhaustively and excessively examines the imperatives of male reaction to the death of men ('remember'; revenge'). When it finally arrives

at the grave, however, *Hamlet* lays out a woman's body for speculation." (Rutter, p.28) The Gravedigger has a line that speaks ironically to the disappearance of women in death. Hamlet asks him who is to be buried in the open grave if not a man or a woman. He replies, "One that was a woman sir. But rest her soul, she's dead."(5.1.124) When Ophelia dies she ceases to be a woman, the "woman" is lost. Now she is a body, a silent emblem that can be invoked for other purposes and made to gaze upon. Even Ophelia's funeral is not about her. It is about the grief of Laertes and Hamlet and their need to fill the grave themselves, using her as fodder for their righteousness. They trespass on her body even in death, as if its only import is to serve their personal growth and/or pleasure. A performance ensues of male self-importance. It is the need to one up each other. The need to be seen as both victim and hero in tragedy. In analysis, Ophelia has more in common in thought and circumstance with the hero of the tale than she is given credit for. She is present, if not in close view, somewhere in the room for the whole "to be or not to be" speech. Something normally thought to be Hamlet's solitary self reflection has her as silent witness. What happens if we consider her suicide as a response to, or in conversation with, this content that is overheard? Hamlet's comments in the speech apply to her personal situation a great deal, especially in the later acts of the play after he spurns her and her father is killed: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time/Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely/The pangs of despised love, the law's delay/The insolence of office".(3.1.78-81) Ophelia can hear all this as speaking straight to her. She personally suffers the oppression of proud men, rejection of her love, and the insolence of Denmark. This may be a directorial choice for performance, but I am curious about what it means that the text leaves vague whether she does in fact hear him or not.

The obscurity in Ophelia's death is something which is common in all of the deaths we examine. It is a symptom of the fact that they are all reported by a narrator who is unreliable. We have no way of saying how Ophelia *really* came to her death as no one was there to see it. It occurred offstage and the only witness was Gertrude who may lie. This is where the "spin" of the death comes into play. The "spin" is a term and concept I adapt from Tina Packer who explains it thus, "So there's the reality and then there's the spin. And Shakespeare, at the earliest age started to understand that it was the spin that endured. The spin can be created out of many strands—it can be a mix of actual heroism and later storytelling (revision after the fact); it covers shame and lack of love; it's the human mind wanting the story to be other than it is."(p.166) Since they are reported--always presented to us in a re-telling--there is always a spin on the women's deaths from the moment they are written. Throughout these chapters multi-levels of spin will come into play: the text (the version told by the reporter of the death/ by the author), the director's spin (when dealing with stage and film adaptations or performances), and ultimately the performer's spin since these texts were written more for performance then literary analysis. The spin can sometimes remove us further from Ophelia, further from the woman we have lost. This tactic and trend in Shakespeare capitalizes on imagination or assumes the audience will fill in the gaps. Is it more powerful to leave the facts of the death up to the audience's imagination? Are we more grieved over Ophelia's death because we do not witness it and must listen to the news vs. if we did sit complicit as she drowned? We must think here about the ob/scene again. There is power in representation, but how do we measure power in absence?

This chapter has been analyzing the ways that Ophelia and Gertrude can be seen to perform defiance through death. This is also a spin. The idea calls forth Hamlet's words: "To

take arms against a sea of troubles/And by opposing end them?"(67-68) Were the women choosing to take themselves out of the game? Some feminist readings, desiring to give the characters more agency in their deaths, like to imagine the death acts as intentional rebellions. This imagines a choice was made to remove themselves as they were not being heard or seen and only used. But when we say that Gertrude knew the cup was poisoned and chose to drink to spite her husband, we also open the concept that she chose to sacrifice herself for Hamlet knowing the cup was poisoned and that Claudius intended it for him. This brings us back to the woman being forced into a fate of suffering. In the end her death is still about the man. If we attempt to better our perception of Ophelia and Gertrude's ends by saying they chose death, where does that really get us? There is danger in martyring our own deaths as a "progressive" option. The problem lies in this being their only option in the story for freedom. This is the trap we must get around. So, beyond the wish to grant agency in death, when I read this play as a woman I must inspect and call out the minutiae of gender politics which set women up to be sacrificed and frame femininity as a sentence to suffer.

Adaptations: Reversals and Removals

I will look now at some adaptations and re-workings of Shakespeare that try to offer up alternate tellings and endings for the story. In the first, we see the woman take on attributes of a tragic hero. She even gets a final monologue. But ultimately, she is still interrupted. Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, a 2006 Chinese film adaptation of *Hamlet*, attempts to subvert the fates and limitations of Gertrude and Ophelia. The film is considered innovative in that it allows the female character Empress Wan, who is an elision of both Ophelia and Gertrude, to do as much scheming and power play work as the men. She is also the last one left alive at the end of the

tragedy. The Ophelia figure, Qing Nu, dies in the midst of a drawn out dance scene. Instead of drowning, she drinks the poison. While she still sacrifices herself and still becomes a symbol of innocence or casualty, it can be argued that she made herself a symbol. Qing arrives to perform the Hamlet figure Wu Luan's favorite song as a sign of her undying love for him and in defiance of the Emperor/Empress. The scene is incredibly tense and agonizing because we know that the cup is poisoned and through the whole sequence we know Qing is going to die; even as she dances, sings, and the camera follows her masked face. The removal of the pale, emotionless mask to reveal a vibrant red streak of blood crossing her delicate face is a jarring clash and picture of corrupted purity. Red and white are contrasted throughout the film, white being purity and goodness and red being desire and power. This is especially apparent in the last scene as Empress Wan obsessively pets red fabric, the "flame of desire" as she calls it. Qing remains fallen on the stage throughout the ensuing scene as fighting breaks out around her. The Banquet divides Ophelia's character in two. Empress Wan is a Gertrude-Ophelia hybrid who manages to be the last player standing, something not usually allowed of the woman in tragedy. She plays the power game and she seems to succeed. By the end of the film every man has been killed and Empress Wan takes the crown. Qing took the Gertrude style death, so we think Empress Wan may evade the feminine death sentence. But still, she must die. The woman does not achieve hero status; her power cannot last and she is stabbed in the back. We still get two symbolic deaths: the death of the woman who remains in her role as symbol of virtue and the death of the women who attempts to escape the role assigned to her and threatens the institution. In both we are made culpable. We are privy to hidden information in Qing's scene and behind the perspective of the killer in Empress Wan's last scene.

Wu Luan (Hamlet) cries over Qing's body but then gets up to attack, filled with emotion. His next words are about the revenge he still wants for his father; not at all a reaction to losing her, someone whose death he is partly implicit in. This is that consistent pattern I have noted. The action moves on swiftly following the kindling event. Rebecca Chapman's essay "Spectator Violence and Queenly Desire in *The Banquet*" explains the strides the film takes to benefit and expand Gertrude and Ophelia. Akin to the issue I am addressing of the disappearance of Shakespeare's women into their deaths, Chapman speaks of "the vanishing of Gertrude." She writes: "Surveying the film adaptations of Laurence Olivier (1948), Tony Richardson (1969), Rodney Bennett (1980), and Kenneth Branagh (1996), Burton (J. Anthony)⁷ identifies an Anglophone cinematic tradition of minimizing Gertrude to a structural device in order to emphasize the development of those characters who become the real focus of the drama: Hamlet and Claudius."(p.1) The women serve as tools or plot devices to further motivate and complicate the male hero. This is a stratagem embedded in the source text and employed, consciously and unconsciously, in most productions of the plays. This film is seen as "feminist" and transgressive because it places Empress Wan at the center of the tale instead of the Hamlet figure. Empress Wan is portrayed as a better fighter and poet than Wu Luan and we track her ambitious rise to power despite the love she has for him. She "refuses to function as the sacrificial role of Queen Mother who willingly accepts a goblet of poison in the name of maternity."(p.4) This Gertrude has had enough of sacrifice and wants to rule. When Empress Wan attains power, she tries to dissociate herself from gendered titles and lineage by saying, "No one will call me Empress again. Instead, they will call me Her Majesty, the Emperor." Empress Wan is the one who

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⁷ Burton, J. Anthony. 2006. "The Lady Vanishes or, the Incredible Shrinking Gertrude."

poisons the cup and it is Ophelia (Qing) who drinks. She is the one who executes the act which brings about another's tragic demise rather than befalling a death of misdirection herself caused by someone else's scheming. This swap endows both women a degree more control over how they die and in that sense makes them stronger agents. Empress Wan takes control of her fate, is the one with the scheme, and the power to cause death. Qing takes on the ambiguity of Gertrude's death and with a calm smile to her father and brother she drinks from the goblet of poison. We are left to wonder if she knows the cup is poisoned and willingly chooses this end. This can either be a case for agency or an example of the way Ophelia is arranged as an unwitting victim of circumstance, innocent and pitiable until the end. It depends on the performance. But "the sacrificial role" is still a troubling concept. What are sacrifices in drama meant to do? Are they more about the saint who performs, or the living who benefit?

Empress Wan delivers a victorious tragic hero soliloquy at the end of the film. She speaks of her desire for power and determination to attain it. At the climax of her speech a sword comes flying from the eye of the camera and pierces her in the back. "Turning to face her attacker, she looks directly at the camera, forming an eye-line match with the spectator. With shock and betrayal written across her face, she points an accusing finger at us as the camera cuts away from her for the last time." (Chapman,p.5). The film ends here with Empress Wan mortally wounded, staring at her unseen killer. This cinematic regulation of female desire corrects a displacement of Gertrude/Ophelia into the role of tragic hero. She ultimately was still condemned to die, but this time in the manner of most male tragic heroes--by penetration. Chapman reads this more as a commentary on viewing practices and spectator expectations. By placing the point of view within the camera, the spectator is made overtly complicit in this murder. "Without the final

sequence and with Wan living on as ultimate ruler in the film, would we have accepted *The Banquet* as an adaptation of *Hamlet?*"(p.6) I don't think we would. *Hamlet* and the other tragedies are defined by the extinguishing of femininity and the favouring of male interiority.

The Royal Exchange Theatre's *Hamlet*, directed by Sarah Frankcom switches around gender in a way that deepens the tragedy of the relationships but still leaves Ophelia in a place of vanishing. Maxine Peake plays Hamlet, bringing to the role an incredible flexibility and fluidity of emotion. She is gymnastic in her variation of expressing Hamlet's woes. In interviews, Peake discusses the liberation of getting to play a part that is physically free, something not often found in roles for women. Polonius is also played by a woman. Where the gender of Peake's Hamlet is left ambiguous and the text unaltered. Polonius presents as a woman and the text refers to her as Ophelia's mother. Now, she has another woman in her life, but one who seems mostly uninterested in her, focused on business. In this version she loses a mother. This new narrative is emotionally striking in its double loss. A girl loses a mother. We lose the possibility created for two women to have each other. We watch a daughter mourn her mother and another mother (Gertrude) watch it play out. Frankcom also does something interesting with Ophelia's death. In her "Saint Valentine's" scene, Ophelia takes off pieces of her clothing as she speaks, leaving them on the floor until she is left in her shoes and undergarments. Later, the graveyard is represented by a heap of clothing. Ophelia's body is just an empty pinafore dress in a mass grave. These choices call to mind how the stage registers bodies and deaths as ob/scene but films need to put them on display. Both work to disappear the woman and her individuality whether or not consciously. From these pieces, we see that there is violence in both removing the body and directing gaze to it.

Part II.

Done and Undone: The Wake of Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth and her reported suicide are the main topic of this chapter. I will access the nature of her character's dissolution by exploring the other women or femme figures we encounter in *Macbeth* and her connections to them. This is an interesting avenue considering the fact that none of these characters (the three witches, Lady Macbeth, and Lady Macduff) ever appear together or speak to each other in the text. We will also give focus to the peripheral women, the "Gentlewomen". Each female character in *Macbeth* is fenced off in her own realm and mind; kept separate and critical of the others. There are film adaptations who have done some interesting things to subvert this feminine separation such as swapping character lines and inserting characters into scenes they do not originally appear in. We will explore instances of this and other directorial choices in productions of *Macbeth* which bring Lady Macbeth's body back after-death. In this play, as in the other tragedies, the gendered experience of characters is based off and filtered through their relationship to the masculine and their positionality in the social and political spheres. Like a reflector disc, the character of Lady Macbeth can be at least partially understood by first understanding how she relates or does not relate to the other characters in the story around her. Her experience, and how she has been received by audiences, is wrapped up in each of the "roles" she holds, or the gendered expectation of what those roles should be: the mother or anti-mother, the temptress, the hostess, and the wife.

Anti-mother

As a character in this tragedy, Lady Macduff represents the mother that Lady Macbeth is not. The only other woman of means to be mentioned as a part of the socio-political world of the

play, she is perfectly positioned to be Lady Macbeth's opposite in the expected characteristics of womanhood. She is presented as being more "feminine". Ross refers to Lady Macduff as his "pretty cousin" and the Messenger greets her as "fair dame".(4.2.29/72) These are descriptors that never follow or precede Lady Macbeth. In the one scene of the text that Lady Macduff appears in, her son is at her side. His very presence and discourse with his mother glaringly points out the absence of such a child at Lady Macbeth's side. Lady Macduff's actions in the play are linked with her children and her role in playing the "soft" and the "maternal". These are all things that Lady Macbeth outright refuses. Lady Macduff is displayed as the morally good woman and Lady Macbeth as the corrupt fiend woman. The largest chasm between them is that one is a mother with the "womanly quality" to nurture and breed, and one is not.

Lady Macbeth invokes the raven and ridicules the "milk of human kindness" which keeps her husband from doing what needs doing.(1.5.17) Lady Macduff invokes the wren, "the most diminutive of birds" and proclaims that her husband "wants the natural touch" so that he would have the courage to not flee what he fears.(4.2.11-13) They seem to take two sides of an argument. One advocates for coldness and cruelty to find strength and one for the natural touch of love to fight and protect. Lady Macbeth's path would enable her to pluck her nipple from the boneless gums of her newborn and dash the brains out. Lady Macduff's prepares her like the wren to "fight, her young ones in the nest, against the owl". But both are agreed on one thing: in the time of need they face what needs to be done, directly. This resiliency and self-reliance are assumed characteristics of womanhood which often result in women taking responsibility upon themselves. It places them in positions of care-taking and fostering the well being and the

success of others. Since the two women echo each other here, their opposition and the points where they diverge are brought into even sharper relief.

By not having a child, expressing outright willingness to kill her own child, and being complicit in the murders of heirs and children, Lady Macbeth's character challenges and questions the ability of the feminine to exist outside of the "maternal", and the "soft". She actively distances herself from such things. She disrupts lineage. She commands, "Come to my woman's breasts/And take my milk for gall".(1.5.54-55) Having and producing breast milk is something so inherently a part of nurturing an infant, so scientifically a part of a woman's biology, and she says remove it; corrupt it and replace it with venom. The notion that she has milk to give up to the "murd'ring ministers", as well as her line "I have given suck" (1.7.61), tell us that she has nursed before or was at least pregnant once before. She seems to say I will not mother, I will not mother, I am not the mother; but I have been. She knows what it is to be the mother and she either can no longer do so or she is choosing not to. Despite the active distancing from traditional ideals of womanhood through maternity that Shakespeare has written into the character, in Act 1 Scene 7 Macbeth immediately imposes that title of mother on her again. He endows her with the role of creation and genesis: "bring forth men children only/For thy undaunted mettle should produce/Nothing but males".(83-85) She may be iron fisted and "unwomanly" in her daring but she is still saddled with the job of reproducing; bringing men forth to succeed before and in place of her. Yet, because they are "men children" she is still removed from the act or need to nurture. The opposition of Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff where one is a villain and one a saint, frames Lady Macbeth's subversion of femininity as not progressive but condemning. Because she acts against the standard "feminine" and is not a

mother, she is not a true woman, therefore is not natural, therefore must die. Is this why she is written to come undone in the play?

Though they never see or speak to each other, Lady Macbeth is not only aware of Lady Macduff but becomes grievously preoccupied with her murder. It is also significant that this murder plot is the first one where it seems she was not included in the scheming at all, not even a hint in the dialogue. The sleepwalking scene, generally considered her descent into madness as she is overcome by guilt, comes only two scenes after the murder of the Macduffs. Within her trance-like monologue that mostly re-visits earlier moments in the play, one line jumps out, unexpected: "The Thane of Fife had a wife/Where is she now?" (5.1.44-45) Lady Macbeth has learned, or strongly suspects, what has befallen this woman and her children. The fact that this stricken speech follows so quickly after the murderers attack Fife prompts the thought that discovering this deed, this final massacre, may have been the last thing she could not re-frame and keep herself from considering "deeply". The two scenes follow each other and suggest that Lady Macbeth was unable to remove herself from this crime because of how she identifies with Lady Macduff, her opposite. She too is a woman, the wife of a Scottish Lord--"Where is she now?"--look what happened to her. The question rings as an acknowledgement that the wives don't make it to the end, they are expendable. In Shakespeare's Suicides, Marlena Tronicke writes, "This line mourns the gradual extinction of all female voices within the play." (p.134). Lady Macduff appears for one scene and then she is gone. Lady Macbeth's presence in the play has a downward trajectory. She explodes onto the scene only to slowly fade and lose power completely by her death. By the end, Macbeth no longer needs the witches to spur him on, he is steeped in deep enough himself. In the final seven scenes of the last act the play transforms fully

into a world of men gaining and losing power. In a play that makes so much talk of being "woman borne", by the end it has lost all of its women.

In Orson Welles' 1948 film of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff share two scenes and moments they do not have in the play. Lady Macbeth replaces Ross in the first part of Act 4 Scene 2 and there is a passing but significant moment where we see Lady Macbeth consciously try to comfort, or perform comfort, for Lady Macduff. Not only this, but Lady Macbeth is personal witness to the other woman's last moments, she takes part in the conversation of traitors and honest men which adds irony, or perhaps self-awareness, to her character. Welles inserts her into the scene just before Lady Macduff and her children are slaughtered. Entering the room in silence, she goes to stand at the window, seeming to look out anxiously. In a few moments the messenger will arrive at the same window to warn Lady Macduff. This directorial insertion suggests that Lady Macbeth may actually be the one who sends the messenger and wished to try to warn her of the assassins. The son goes and addresses the question "What is a traitor?" to Lady Macbeth. She answers, "Why one who swears and lies." and confirms that all traitors must be hanged. Then, with the sense that she knows what is to be fall them shown in her sorrowful gaze, she leaves the room. Just after this scene, Macbeth comes to her and the screams can still be heard from the slaughter of the Macduffs. This filmic moment attempts to give Lady Macbeth even more cracks of doubt and remorse, fear and moral questioning. Here, we can argue that Welles enriches the women by giving them more interaction with each other. But having Lady Macbeth assume Lady Macduff's lines opens holes of hypocrisy in her logic, acting to humanize, but also to feminize by making her more like the "ideal" woman: Lady Macduff.

Witch-woman: Over and Under-sexed

Many tend to read the witches of *Macbeth* as radical feminist figures in that they exist outside of the social structure and gender limiting sphere of the class system. They are figures suggested to be feminine but they hold power to manipulate and shape without regulation. They set into motion the action of the play, influence the men, and live through it all unto the close. They are able to be "low", uncouth, fierce, and collaborative. They are the Weird Sisters, they have been privileged a sisterhood. Beyond this though, the witches are also queered characters in that they occupy a neuter territory between genders. "You should be women,/And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so."(1.3 46-48). They are situated to be somewhat ungendered, to occupy the danger and mystery of subversive female bodies and to skew perception by appearing unattractive, or masculine, in their comportment. In many productions from contemporary theater, the witches are often cast across gender with at least one performer being male identifying or genderqueer. I have seen this be the case in Punchdrunk's Sleep No More, Trinity Repertory Company's recent *Macbeth*, and more. In these ways the witches are made to be outside of tradition, free from the same limitations of other characters, because they are witches not women, witches not men.

The difficulty I find with this is that at the same time as the witches represent the unnatural, or super-natural, in reference to gender and ability; they are also being othered. They are these things because within the story these are traits which mark one as "other", bestial. The witches speak in riddles, they mystify, they confuse, they cackle. They are comparatively seen as excitingly strong and individuated female characters, but they also perpetuate gendered traits assigned to women who deviate from the genteel norm of the time: ugly, old, devilish, mean,

nasty, unfeminine. These are characterizations often seen in modern media directed towards women who dare to be unpalatable in any way; women who are loud, who talk back, who are too attractive, not attractive enough, women who do not bend. The witches are made to represent the maladaptive woman who is phased out of society's good graces: the elderly crone; the succubus; the poor woman; the violent woman. This makes them an excitement, a force to let loose on stage. These are maladaptive because they break from and trouble the qualities of women that are deemed profitable: beauty to secure a husband, money to offer a husband, youth and health for providing children, nurturing for raising children, strength for keeping a home.

The witches also emulate women as siren or succubus: the enticing woman who brings men to wreckage. Macbeth and Banquo hang upon the witches' words, they must hear more: "Speak I charge you." (1.3.81) In this moment, we see the witches have control over the men, because the men desire what they can tell them. But the witches vanish when they like, when they've said their part, a power held also by Hamlet's ghost. These women are disinterested in obeying, they function on their own time, they function to frustrate a masculine concept of control and reason. But here we also see again a male attention to the whimsical elusive that fascinates. The witches are secret mystique, seedy fantasy. They hold an erotic knowledge of power and future that the man would like to possess. Therefore Macbeth would like to possess and detain *them*. "Stay, you, imperfect speakers. Tell me more". (73) They are imperfect speakers because they withhold information and flatter just enough to provoke but not to satisfy. They are a "tease". Their speech does not wait on male permission. Macbeth cannot "charge" them to speak the way men usually grant or deny leave for women to share their part. Because they are women, and they possess such power of speech and foresight used to incite ambition, they must

be of the devil, "instruments of darkness". Three women together is made to be diabolic, or fiendish. The weird sisters playfully craft misfortune in the lives of those they envy, or circle menacingly around a pot of cursed objects and brew up trouble. What they do in collaboration is framed to come to no good. They are made to seem nefarious both by possessing not enough "womanhood" and too much.

We can view Lady Macbeth in relation to the witches in how she becomes the scapegoat for Macbeth's murdering crimes and "vaulting ambition" gone wrong. She is "the Eve", he Adam. The witches plant the seed but Lady Macbeth spurs him on. She is the schemer behind his actions, the devil in his ear. She calls on spirits, on the smoke of hell, and aligns herself with that which lies opposed to heaven, to goodness. She is trying to be like the witches, lacking the same mysticism that removes them from being punished for their transgression of gender expectation. Efforts to villainize Lady Macbeth utilize the same contradiction of over-sexualizing her, as a murdering seductress, and under-sexualizing her as displaying masculine qualities of cruelty and violence. Analytical discourse which traps the character between these two extremes, proves why Lady Macbeth does not want to be caught within a binary. She is barely established in her first scene on stage before launching into a speech distancing herself from the marker of "woman". Often overlooked in the discussion of Lady Macbeth's gender performance, particularly in this speech, is that what she desires is to be "unsexed"; she does not state a reassignment to the masculine, but rather declares a removal from sex entirely. She wants to exist outside of the category; to be unassociated with any kind of gendered moral standard, feminine or masculine, untethered like the witches perform. With this, Shakespeare notes that an assigned gender restricts and determines what one can and cannot do. All imagery and commands signify not

exclusively as unwomanly but also as inhuman. She wants "direst cruelty", no remorse. She calls for her blood, which makes her a living and mortal being, to be altered, thickened.(1.5.48-55) To her, anybody can and is the kind of weak she scorns: "full o' the milk of human kindness". Which is why the form she identifies herself with and advises her husband to embody is reptilian, laden with religious iconography of deception and mischief: "look like th' innocent flower/But be the serpent under't".(1.6.76-77) Be sweet, be pretty, but be smarter than them. This calls to mind a very trained discourse of girlhood and femininity in the modern world where girls are taught to perform submissiveness and respectability in order to protect themselves.

In Welles' *Macbeth*, the witches' faces are entirely shadowed. They remain unidentifiable and obscure for the whole film. Their gravelly voices and wisped grey hair work to present them as "the old crone", beldams to the extreme. They are the women men fear because their age has brought them to surpass where they know how to categorize her use. She is callous and too-knowing, she reminds them of their mothers. By contrast, Lady Macbeth first appears prostrated on a bed in a white shift with a voice-over speaking intimately to us. Here, she performs her femininity before she denounces it. She is sexualized and soft. Later, in the film after she has set her sights on regicide, her face begins to be more and more in shadow. She appears physically more like the witches, in dark or black dresses. When we come to the sleepwalking scene she is once again in the white dressing gown from her first scene, hair down. She sings "the thane of fife had a wife", which calls familiarly to Ophelia's song in *Hamlet* "he is dead and gone, lady". This winsome singing seems to be a strategy for depicting hysteria. The woman's ability to communicate breaks down into lullaby, she becomes childlike; lost in a dream as well as portraying a ridiculous mania. Welles provides another moment here that the

text does not. He shows us Lady Macbeth running up to the top of the battlements, distracted but seeming wide awake. She hovers over the edge of the precipice, the camera holds on her face and shoulders, and the actress performs an expression of ecstatic release before tossing herself over as if into someone's open arms. She falls. Here, the film has clearly made a choice about the details of Lady Macbeth's death which the text denies: that she threw herself from the battlements and she chose this as a way to be relieved from her distress; death is performed as bliss. I am always curious when productions, stage or film, make these calls especially because in the text Lady Macbeth is made simply to vanish from our attention and from life, as the witches do "into the air".

This film ends with the witches in silhouette watching Inverness from afar. They are the framing which bookends the film. Come to the end, they represent the shadow of women watching from the margins of history, the cry of women who witness and expose all these tragedies. Part of what provides this sudden sense of universal "woman-ness" is the delivery of the line "peace the charm's wound up", which comes at the start of the play in the text. It is spoken in a much more subdued tone than the other lines the witches speak in the film, it is remarkably more human. The voice holds a weariness, they have watched this occur too many times already. There is a trend of making the witches responsible for Lady Macbeth's body if it returns after the report of her death. The witches somehow come to be keepers of the lost woman. In Rupert Goold's 2010 Macbeth film, based on their Chichester Festival Theater stage production of the play, Lady Macbeth's covered body is wheeled into the hallway. At the end of the scene Macbeth leaves the body there in the flickering lights. The three nurses who escorted the body now return. Previously, the witches had appeared in the film dressed as infirmary

Macbeth. In this production the witches stand in for all the womanly roles unrepresented by the text. They are the women you do not notice: the nurses, the handmaids. They've been at your shoulder the whole time. They have the power to control if you live, and none of the men ever look them in the eye. Earlier in the film, Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches for the first time. They are still, statuesque, staring through them. Banquo speaks, "Live you? Or are you aught That man may question?". In response each witch places one finger to her covered lips and stares. This is a striking image of the silence we encounter from women in Shakespeare's tragedies. Are they refusing to speak or indicating the embargo on their speech placed by society. In what ways can we read these silences, gaps, and such portents toward them?

The Gentlewomen

To continue exploring that question we can look at mostly silent, unnamed characters such as the "Gentlewoman". Here is another woman, living in Lady Macbeth's home, but who we only see and hear from once. This is a character who lives in the gap, in the shadows. It is important to pay attention to such characters; to keep an eye on the witnesses that are silent. In Act 5 Scene 1, the gentlewoman does not want to report to the male Doctor what she has heard Lady Macbeth say in her sleep, knowing that she has "no witness to confirm her speech"(20). She knows she will not be believed. A woman's word is not taken to hold much weight. He already would not believe her report until he saw Lady Macbeth appear himself. This prospect of a secret kept between two women interests me. We get this often in the comedies but hardly ever in the tragedies. I am not even sure we can say that the Gentlewoman withholds the information to keep confidence with Lady Macbeth, rather she does not speak in fear that what she tells will

condemn herself. Regardless, there are unseen moments referenced to here that suggest the privacy of two women. If the Gentlewoman has no witness to prove her speech it means she was alone with Lady Macbeth. These missing scenes would take place in the spaces we don't get to see: the woman's bed chamber, the hushed halls in the middle of the night. These are the gaps of time and space that the feminine is confined to live within. But since they are an off-limits realm, it is possible that female intimacy can be born in those shadows.

The discovery of Lady Macbeth's death is marked by an utterance from one such offstage gap. The stage is occupied by Macbeth, Seyton, and some other soldiers: a world of men. The women of the play have been missing for five scenes now. A cry is heard. Sometimes it comes as a scream, sometimes a wail. Macbeth demands, "What is that noise?" (5.4.9). This sonic disruption is unrecognizable but chilling to him. It is the women from the shadows seeping through the cracks. "It is the cry of women, my good lord", Seyton tells him (10). I always found this use of the general curious. The suggestion is of one singular and feminine unanimous cry. What do they all howl for? Where are they? What is that noise? We then find out the cause of the cry, "The Queen, my lord, is dead." (19) Another death knell by pronouncement of a man. It is final, unquestioned. We may come to read that "cry of women" as a lamentation for the loss of a woman's voice. We have to interrogate why that cry can only come from offstage. What happens when the cry of women is no longer voices catching up from the past and intermittently breaking the surface, but an onstage howl that plainly confronts grief of women for women? It would be a reckoning with feminine death that does not only rely on a symbolic disembodied utterance.

By the end of the sleepwalking scene, the Doctor has witnessed what the Gentlewoman said to be true. She has had the ability to confound the intelligent man of science, struck him

silent, he can only "think, but dare not speak".(5.1.83) The presence of a male physician in this scene who clinically appraises the troubled body and mind of Lady Macbeth as she walks about in her nightgown, reminds me of accounts of hysteria through the early modern period and encompassing Jean-Martin Charcot and Freud. This idea of general confusion and mystification around the female body--how it works/ what it does--and the pairing of a male scientific authority with a woman figure who is dazed, soporose, or "in fits", parallels Charcot and his experimentation in treating female patients at the Salpêtrière. Charcot was attempting to study and name "hysteria" in a time where it was still mostly believed that the wandering womb was the cause of many health problems to women. When Shakespeare wrote his plays it was a general understanding that the uterus moved throughout the body, displaced and wreaking havoc. This shows not only how inexplicable the female body was thought to be by the mostly male medical sphere, but also the desperate attempts that were made to denominate and correct women's "malfunction"⁸. When I look at the intimate photographs of Charcot's patients in various "poses" and "attitudes passionnelles" from Georges Didi-Huberman's Invention of Hysteria, I see the visual obsession of a fascinated man more than a physician's photographic records. This is the kind of figure the Doctor in *Macbeth* represents. He gazes at the paradoxical body of Lady Macbeth, "a great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching", and is intrigued(10). He notes her movements, her sighs, her utterance. He watches from afar with his notepad. The body is observed here as a signifying object as it is in Charcot's

^{8&}quot;—Putting the animal-womb back in its proper place, meaning the lowest point. Ambroise Paré, to take but one example, informs us that "the womb, out of a natural instinct and a peculiar faculty, recoils from things that stink and enjoys the fragrant." The therapy deduced from this was to have the women inhale the most horrid smells through their nose: bitumen, sulfur and petroleum oils, woodcock feathers, hairs of men and billy goats, nails, animal horns, gunpowder, old sheets—all burned! This forces the womb to "descend" (repulsion, toward the bottom)." Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpetriere, Didi-Huberman

photographs. "Madness" is used to bring focus to the woman's body as an obscure sexual object for male gaze. If her mind is believed to not be there, an empty skull, the body can be unabashedly examined.

Lady Macbeth exits the scene and the Doctor admits, "My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight."(82) There is a romance of discovery and challenge that develops between a man like Charcot championing his study of a new disease and the patients who he uses as his examples, his stars. The Salpetriere functioned as a theater for Charcot to stage his hypotheses and experiments, to stage and speculate the woman's body in a think tank of other men. The woman has "mated" his mind, defeated it but also claimed it in desire. One of the dangers of this kind of romance is that the male gaze falls for the object body as it holds all the potential of his own intellect, the causes for him to uncover. He lusts after an image; the woman behind, within, and inside it is not what is seen or represented. She becomes a hostess for the pleasures and catharsis of others: her audience. When we view the corpses of women in art, or romanticize the death of the woman, we make the character and the actress our hostess too. Looking at the Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière, it becomes apparent that the actual women who were Freud and Charcot's patients are missing from the study of their ailment. They are given fake names and they do not speak for themselves in the case studies. The hysteric does not get to tell her own story but instead a narrative is imposed on her. The camera does this in the *Iconographie* and Charcot's words do it through labeling the photos of his patient's bodies as: moquerie, extase, erotisme etc.(Didi-Huberman, p.85-97) There is the need again to name and categorize in order to control. We so often see the women in Shakespeare done away with by "madness" or likened to the image of a "hysteric". Madness here is a social construct, a tool, to

remove autonomy and credibility; the label is used to control and silence divergent voices. The woman becomes a victim of herself, both the perpetrator and the casualty of her own female malady. We see this very clearly with Ophelia and Lady Macbeth, whose suicides are both structured to depict a decline of the mind. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is popularly read as an unhinging, a loss of control. In *Suffocating Mothers*, Janet Adelman consider her "entirely absent to herself".(p.145) This is the first of a two phased death: mind/consciousness and then the body. Hamlet sees ghosts and plays with the title of "madness". Macbeth reaches for phantom daggers and spirits. But we remain with *their* minds until the end. Would we call them hysteric? In comparison, it takes only the doling out of flowers, singing of songs, and sleepwalking to declare the women "mad", to decide they have "lost it".

In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helene Cixous writes that "women have always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing ...)"(p.880). Didi-Huberman discusses how hysteria is described as "a fire of paradoxes, paradoxes of all kinds" (p. 74) It is impossible to talk about how women are represented, performed, and understood without coming up against these paradoxes of "type" and expectation. Shakespeare kills the women from his plays following moments of discovering paradox and multiplicity. Do they die because they come so close to exceeding the limit of divine composure previously set for women in society? Getting so close to unlocking the expanse of what women are is an eruption that kills the subject. Cixous declares a woman must be torn away from this structure by writing herself and "inscribing the breath of the whole

woman". The women of Shakespeare do not write themselves. They become, or exist only as, women without bodies: images, "shadows", "the cry of women". Do we inscribe the breath of the whole woman by bringing her further on stage or does she remove herself from it as a place that creates her? We have looked here at how women's bodies are seen as transgressive both on the stage, too in focus, and off, missing from the narrative entirely. Here we have a tension between two forms of contradicting erasure. One, is the act of pushing the woman's body and voice offstage and utilizing the guilty "idea" of her. The other, involves using the woman's body as a site for speculation and surveillance, separated from any consideration of her sentience or awareness.

Dearest Partner

The "ladies" of the play are never named. Titles we have for them are only those attached to their husbands. We do not get a history or past for Lady Macbeth other than her marriage to Macbeth and the possibility of a lost child. Her life as we read it begins with him. Her words to Macbeth ring consistently with reminders to suppress and forget: "Consider it not so deeply", "Be not lost so poorly in your thoughts".(2.2.41/2.3.91) She has mastered the art of her own thinking, or thinks she has; she does not think of the deed but of the plan, the trajectory. She warns Macbeth against this, seeing it get to him, but it is her fear. It is finally her doom to become lost in her thoughts. Their two trajectories move distinctly opposite each other, and reflect the other. As Macbeth grows more proud, more desperate and begins to make the plans after he becomes King, Lady Macbeth recedes in the other direction. She becomes guilt-ridden, anxious, and uninformed. He eventually surpasses and excludes her. Meanwhile, she fears their fall but can no longer stop it.

As foil to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth represents the steadfast woman. As a symbol, she is consistent with the female serpent iconography throughout the text. It is the serpent who tempts humanity to original sin. The serpent and Eve who are biblically aligned. When Macbeth says "We have scorched the snake, not killed it/She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice/ Remains in danger of her former tooth" (3.2.15-17), the pronoun is notably feminine. At the feast she must perform hostess, must protect their reputation and secrets. Consistently her task is to cover up his slippages, his mistakes. She is the support base. But when they attain the crown, her dear partner of greatness turns his back. Previous, their planning was conspiratory, hatched together. But by Act 3, Lady Macbeth no longer is privy to what is to be done, what dreadful deeds her husband has decided to go ahead with. She is no longer leading this charge. He tells her, "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck." (3.3.51) He begins to adhere to a regressive perception of her as too innocent to hear his plans. As Macduff says, "The repetition in a woman's ear would murder as it fell"(2.3.98-99). Suddenly, she is too much woman and too soft to handle the dreadful, even though she was the first conspirator. Instead she is "dearest chuck", demeaned to a term of endearment and shut out from the intimate sharing of intention which was holding them together. I see this breakdown of communication and her isolation as the root of her fall. We can compare it with Brutus and Portia's relationship in Julius Caesar. Brutus and Portia seem to have the closest thing to a healthy marriage, true partnership, that we get in Shakespeare's tragedies. But, when Brutus keeps the assassination and midnight plotting from Portia, it upends them. Portia, pushed away by her husband and facing the futility of her tongue in getting him to speak to her, swallows hot coals. Lady Macbeth is similarly affected when Macbeth shuts her out and confines her again to the 'womanly place' of waiting and not

knowing. Juliet Dusinberre notes in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* that "the frustrations of women trapped in the political world are many-sided. They are Cassandras, foreseeing doom but unheeded."(p.280) Lady Macbeth witnesses her husband recite a monologue in Act 3. Scene 3 very like her own from Act 1:

----Come, seeling night,

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day

And with thy bloody and invisible hand

Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond

Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow

Makes wing to th' rooky wood. (52-57)

She watches as he calls on the same spirits, on the night, to make him blind and hide him from his deeds. He surpasses her, assumes her power and place. He has taken her words and moved on from her, leaving her to assume his role of doubt and fixation. She becomes isolated and must face what she ignored

In their relationship, we also see that Lady Macbeth herself prescribes to a toxic idea of masculinity. She continuously holds gender expectations over her husband: "Are you a man?". Her concept of what his strength, constancy, and courage should be is wrapped up in a traditional standard that when one receives grieving news or difficult challenges, a man responds with action, revenge, and rage. It is a convenient plot furthering standard but also representative of gender norms regarding how men feel pain and emotion. This same standard is at play in the scene where Macduff and Malcolm are informed that his family was slaughtered. For a moment Macduff complicates this unrealistic expectation of brevity for manly grief, he seems to point to

it. To Malcolm's "Dispute it like a man" he cries, "I shall do so, but I also must feel it as a man". He seems to say--No we will take the time to feel this tragedy. But in the end he allows Malcolm to spur him into the expected revenge plot, pushing into the denouement of the play as a stricken and enraged Macduff, ripped of his whole family, sets out to kill Macbeth. At the close of the scene, Malcolm confirms that, "This tune goes manly".

I focus now on Macbeth's reaction to the report of Lady Macbeth's death, a tune which may or may not go manly. Seyton informs him, "The Queen, my lord, is dead". He replies, "She should have died hereafter".(5.5.19-20) The potential paradoxes within this line are fascinating. It seems such a despondent and quick way to reply to news of your wife's death. Here "should" can mean either what was supposed to happen/the correct way or, if we consider how in earlier usage of English "should" and "would" were somewhat blurred or interchangeable, the line reads she would have died hereafter, meaning her death was inevitable anyway. This is a stark contrast between sentiments. One version has Macbeth wish there had been more time; this is not how or when his wife was meant to die. The other is dismissive, a reminder to the self that she was going to die at some point anyway, as we all do. Depending how one takes this line, the "Tomorrow" speech then rings differently too. One version is provoked by grief, grappling with a sense of meaningless now that he is alone and the other is already resigned, nihilistic. Taken as a genuine statement, the line chillingly points to the repeated premature deaths of tragic women. The spin of performance comes heavily into play here. This line reads as drastically different colors based on the choice an actor makes. In some Macbeth portrayals, the actor playing the title role delivers "She should have died hereafter" so flippantly it is almost cruel; he has ceased to care. Patrick Stewart's Macbeth from Rupert Goold's film (2010) plays the line and beginning of

the monologue to Lady Macbeth's body, tenderly lingering over her face. Then, he swerves. "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury" is almost directly into the camera, he is practically breaking the fourth wall. The sound of war, confirmation of the witches' omens, spurs him back to his masculine pride and away from the body. Heading back out of the hall with a growl, he stops by the gurney once more: "At least we'll die with harness on our backs". With this, he sharply throws the sheet back over her face. This is his final revenge on her questioning his masculinity and a disapproving judgement of what he sees as her surrender. Lady Macbeth's characterization in death both victimizes and demonizes her. It says, the woman cannot be so unnaturally wicked and live. Her mind cannot be made to handle it. Since her agency "finds its expression in evil deeds, it must be silenced again". (Dusinberre, pg. 136) In order to make her more appealing, she is weakened and ruined.

Exhumation

We are never told or offered an idea of how Lady Macbeth dies. It is all gaps, except for Malcolm announcing: "tis thought, by self and violent hands/ Took off her life" (5.8.83-84). Most adaptations and performances create a resurrection. They demand an after death viewing of the body that is not written in the text. Is this the need for closure? The need for dramatic display? The need to not let her merely disappear from the story? In most cases I would argue that it does not occur for the sake of the character but instead for the sake of the dramatic, to turn her into a symbol of tragedy for the other characters and the audience to write upon. After all, in modern culture, wakes and post-mortem ceremonies tend not to be for or about the person who has died. They are for the living; to give them something to gaze upon, something to understand. There is a 2002 film adaptation of *Macbeth* called *Someone Is Sleeping in My Pain* (dir. Michael Roes) in

which the actor who plays the director of the documentary film being made also takes on the role of Lady Macbeth. At the end, he rises from the spot where he lay as her corpse, cast in sunlight from an open window. Then he recites the "Tomorrow" monologue. A filmic gauze is put over this scene which distances the character. The scene is more a heavy handed opportunity to reinforce themes of the play, a grand statement of the director, than about giving the character a chance to speak last words. The character is brought back as fully diluted symbol, and abstracted.

Trinity Repertory's Macbeth directed by Curt Columbus also brought back the dead. In this production I found that Lady Macduff made a stronger presence than Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth seemed to get lost in the style of the play and became a caricature. But, they did something poignant which was a departure from other things I have seen in the last moment directly following Macbeth's beheading and preceding Macduff's victorious entrance. This production makes use of the trope I've discussed of bringing back the woman as a "beautiful specter" to haunt the man and the audience. You get one last glimpse, a moment to gaze on what you've lost, while she, silent and emotionally absent, absorbs your pain and catharsis, then disappears again. Here, Macbeth and Macduff jump from a catwalk structure into a net suspended above the stage and lunge for each other. The lights cut out and a spot beams up on stage left: Lady Macbeth in her white nightgown, a ghostly image. But she has been given a stand mic. She begins to sing. This is the last of multiple other musical occurences in the show, each following the murder of a character. Duncan and Banquo each sang a few bars after their bloody end. Lady Macduff, in dim light, approaches the body of her son center stage in a stilted walk, singing a moaning acapella rendition of Delta Rae's "Bottom of the River". Alone at the microphone in the dark, the actress playing Lady Macbeth croons out the refrain "I did what I

had to do", a melancholy wail that attempts to frame the events from a perspective of agency. This is trying to give us some final access to her thoughts, her reasoning. What is it she means though? She did what she had to do, aiding and abetting atrocity to gain power? Or, she did what she had to do to relieve herself of her pain and position, to escape the remorse, and commited suicide? Whichever sentiment the audience chooses to absorb, the reaching of her voice seems to provide the actor some catharsis but it is both difficult to watch and seems draining for the character.. It feels like witnessing a spirit tied down, unable to move on, made to haunt and be haunted. Or, like watching the constricted, breathless howling of a child who can't immediately remember how to not be upset, how to breathe normally. It is beautiful in a way, perhaps gives some satisfaction, but there is also the urge to make it stop.

Then, halfway through a line of her song, Macbeth appears from the shadow behind Lady Macbeth. He puts a hand on her shoulder and her song cuts off abruptly at the contact. She turns with him out of the light, both of them exiting off stage together. I interpret this exit in two ways. In one, we finally see Lady Macbeth and Macbeth attune to each other in some way. They face their guilt and fate together instead of abandoned in isolation. His touch says "it is over" and gently they abdicate their remembrance to the play. The other I can't help but to see is the man cutting off the woman's part. Her song is interrupted, because in the end it does not change anything and he can control when she is forgotten, when the story is over. There is a version where the song is Lady Macbeth's final word: the one that she is not allowed to have in Shakespeare's text. And by cutting her off, Macbeth is continuing the trend of policing the woman's tongue. In this version, instead of their exit together being a rarely gifted moment of acceptance and tenderness, it is the submission and removal of Lady Macbeth again.

In lieu of exhuming the body, no information can prompt our curiosity, create a noticeable gap, and force us to not be able to accept that she is just gone. We are denied an image, a story to tie her up in. In a way, not bringing the body back on stage for death or afterwards, denies the audience the twisted pleasure of looking on her. But what this also does, other than allow her a "dignified" exit as some argue, is make it possible for her character to fall away and in its place in our minds is a symbolic figure: the manifestation of loss, guilt, estrangement. Earlier in this chapter I briefly discussed the Gentlewoman as witness. How do we as an audience also function as witnesses in this story? When productions bring back the dead for some sort of direct, or indirect, address to the audience, what are they trying to reveal more of? It does not give the dead anymore power or redemption. It only gives us something more to look at. We are packaged a new symbol. In 2017, I performed as Lady Macbeth and you do feel the immensity of the role in terms of well-known monologue and reputation. So, it came as a surprise to realize how quickly the play came to an end for me. Performers too must confront the disappearance of character. But to re-enter as a spectre does not feel like a solution. Having enacted such a moment in the production here at Brown, I remember feeling like a prop in a dress. I was there to inspire regret in Macbeth and the audience, but forced to be silent as they gazed. When I see productions resurrect Lady Macbeth now, I think of Alain Corbin discussing dredging up blank figures in *The Life of an Unknown:* "No resurrection can be anything other than a prelude to ultimate erasure."(p.viii) In The Public Theater's recent "Under the Radar" festival, Whitney White presented her piece *Macbeth in Stride* which I think is an interesting example of a performer investigating ways to explore the voices of the women of Shakespeare

without re-inscribing a cycle of destruction or creating a symbolic apparition. Her piece gives them new motion and turbulence.

The last words spoken by Lady Macbeth in the play are "To bed, to bed" (5.2.71). This instruction to self to return to bed and hope to find safety there in sleep is the whisper which becomes the woman's refrain. But as we know well from these stories, the bed is by no means a place of comfort or protection from death. Lady Macbeth calls herself, calls Macbeth, back to bed. Bed where they murdered Duncan, bed where they murdered him asleep. We must think forward to Desdemona, smothered and killed, quite literally in her deathbed. It would be nice to think that the offstage "bed" she exits to is a site of respite, even deliverance. But as we consider the death that will soon be reported, and the distracted way this scene is generally performed, we must instead hear in these last words an impending dread that we will not see this woman again. To bed indeed, and not to wake.

Part III. Cleopatra

The Stillborn Erotic: Excesses and Gaps

Antony and Cleopatra is an interesting case for us to look at in the way Cleopatra as a character occupies space on the page and in performance that is usually reserved for the tragic hero and the male protagonist. First, Antony dies before her and she performs grief over his body on stage. Second, she dies *on stage*, by her own hand. Third, she does so with an extended poetic monologue, an orchestration of her own death. She frames it as liberation, a last victory. This is not unlike the way we might read the other women's deaths in the tragedies. But, Cleopatra's suicide, signifies differently from Ophelia's, Portia's, and Lady Macbeth's because of the power and height she holds, her lore. Cleopatra prepares for her death, plots and designs it. She is the crux of the last act rather than the concealed feminine ending. Instead of being tragedy performed in the imaginary realm of the wings and brought forth by the aching voice of the tragic male hero, Cleopatra's death is prepared for and witnessed on stage. One of the main lacks I have been interrogating is the omittance and refusal of women's last words. But Cleopatra can seem to be an exception to that rule. Yet, this does not exclude her from the woman's fate of objectified symbolization in tragedy. In the process of her death she too ceases to be just a character that dies off and instead becomes a monument of herself, the myth of the "Egyptian Queen", the "serpent of Old Nile" (1.5.30). She is not herself, she is her nation; perhaps this is always the lot of a queen. She is not a singular woman, but a symbol of feminine power and erotic excess. She still transfigures into a token, even if she herself is the agent as well as the subject of that symbolization. I continue to come up against this question. Do all characters stop

being a character upon death, or do they just disappear from the narrative? Do they immediately enter the plane of symbol by nature that they are no longer living? It happens particularly with female death in art: the romanticizing of deceased women and what they stand for.

I will begin the investigation of this section with a look into how Cleopatra, and her death, are defined by both excess and gap. She is both too much and incomplete right down to her last words. In Ellis Hanson's essay "Aught a Eunuch Has" from Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare, he discusses the concept of "gaps" in Antony and Cleopatra: "Her gaps occupy her, they interrupt her lines with a dash, they even trail in her wake as if by some languorous reverberation of feminine lack."(p.48). Hanson addresses the scene between Cleopatra and Mardian, where, thinking obsessively on the absent Antony, she interviews Mardian on what it is to be "unseminared". Hanson uses the concept of feminine lack to take a more Freudian view of how Cleopatra feels about her own "gaps" and "lacks" i.e. "I would I had thy inches."(1.3.50) But I'd like to take this idea in a perpendicular direction. "Gaps" is a way to describe the space that women in Shakespeare occupy in life, but mostly in death. This does not only apply to the central female characters I discuss but also to figures like Fulvia, who exist in the peripheral, who are only really mentioned in the dramatic action when they die. Fulvia's name is spoken an absurd amount of times in Act 1 Scenes 2 and 3 considering she never appears and is for most intents and purposes, a side character and an unappreciated wife. "Fulvia thy wife is dead, Fulvia is dead, Fulvia?, Fulvia is dead, Fulvia, in Fulvia's death, Can Fulvia die?, So Fulvia told me" etc.(1.2.131,172-5). Fulvia only becomes relevant in her death. Hers is an entirely imagined body. She exists in the gap, and she only performs from the gap.

What is it exactly that Fulvia performs then? How does an unseen, unheard character perform? I would argue she performs the silent judge, the cry for virtue in a play about seduction and indulgence. Merely a reported death of an invisible character, she operates to propel Antony both closer and further from Cleopatra. He is freed from a wife but obligated and urged to leave Egypt to grieve her, reminded of his duty. Antony says, "She's good, being gone." (141) He only realizes her value when he can no longer possess it, he announces her "great" once she's a spirit. In Enter the Body Carol Rutter, discussing performances of King Lear and the way the body of Cordelia is treated lying dead on stage, writes that "Women, it seemed, were easier to love dead than alive."(p.23) Being gone, the woman becomes an unblemished and easy thing to love, a place to project desired moral holdings. Fulvia functions as the incentive for widening the gap between desire and duty, Cleopatra and Antony, fantasy and reality. She is never allowed to leave --just as with Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Portia--we never see her again in the text. Once they exit off into the gap, they are gone and their names, if used, are uttered to haunt. Antony and Cleopatra is structured to keep pulling the titular characters a part. Leaving gaps in space and time. Cleopatra calls for mandragora so that she "may sleep out this great gap of time" (1.5.5) because her Antony is away. Everything is extended or stretched out in angst, with all the drama centered around the gaps where Antony and Cleopatra do not occupy the stage together. They spend the play loving on or condemning each other from opposite sides of this gap. And ultimately they both throw themselves into the permanent chasm of death, unable to close the gap, unable and unwilling to reconcile symbol from self.

Women, specifically women with power like Cleopatra's, are positioned as a breach of the natural way of things. To the masculine Roman rule they are nature pushed to its limits, an unorthodox and bewitching deviation. This is played out in the central role that performative storytelling has in the scenes of this play. When anyone begins to speak of time spent in Egypt in the court of Cleopatra, a romantic gauze drops down over their speech and the audience is regaled with ornamental symbolic language sentimentally painting a picture of the exotic fantasy of the Queen of Egypt, "a wonderful piece of work" (1.2.170). Enobarbus to Agrippa in Act 2 recalls Cleopatra on her barge as such a striking sight that she outdid images of Venus where "we see the fancy outwork nature" and the wind itself "but for vacancy/Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too/And made a gap in nature."(254-256) The largeness of this woman, the seduction of her, disrupts nature, unravels things. This goes back to the ideas of feminine excess involved in such male imposed diagnoses like hysteria which I touched on in Part II. The hysterical woman could not contain herself. Her emotion--her body--was unruly, over-sexed. Shakespeare writes Cleopatra to configure herself as larger than life, and to be viewed by others as an erotic vision to behold. She loves all the way, obsessively. She rages. She experiences jealousy. She desires fame and to reach the status of figures of legend. Her body has smell, color, adornment. She is tall. She is dramatic, she talks back. Enobarbus again: "her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report."(1.2.162-165). This kind of romantic language, used to mythify, works in its elevation to deny a woman a place as a being with perspective and voice, and instead makes her a Muse. 9

⁹ "To put a woman on a pedestal gives a man a Muse without allowing her any right of reply. Historically this attitude has been the most subtle influence in confining women's power to a sphere not governed by reason, difficult to combat because it is done in the name of respect and love."--Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, Juliet Dusinberre, p. 141

When we think about Cleopatra in this way; existing in a language of gaps, never fully satisfied, yet at the same time living as a grand image of adulation towering her self; what do we call the cause of death: lack or excess? Is Cleopatra's suicide driven by losing Antony or besting Caesar? Must the cause always be in relation to the men? When she applies each asp, is she operating under passion or politics? Does she blur the lines of both? When Shakespeare writes that she has "immortal longings" (5.2.336), perhaps we are meant to look to her ambition, her being that teems forth, impatient to outdo the gods as cause of death. This woman was just 'too much', too vigorous for the mortal world. It could not sustain her. Her only future was to transcend all things that limit her power. We come back to the question of what do we see as the things women in Shakespeare are not allowed to have, not allowed to say, which mark them for death? Is it the freedom to desire more than what they have been given; the allowance to be erotic without being a symbol of perversion, to be powerful without being a representative of evil? How is the erotic at play here beyond manifesting in the sex appeal, temptation, and exoticising of Cleopatra and of Egypt?

Womanist writer Audre Lorde reconfigures the erotic as power in her essay "Uses of the Erotic". She explains how modern western understandings of the erotic as pornographic and "low" are configured to police women's understanding of themselves, and convince them to fear the erotic as a concept that can demean their credibility and respectability. But Lorde's erotic goes back to the Greek origin of the word, *eros*: "the personification of love in all its aspects - born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing,

our loving, our work, our lives." To be in touch with this erotic then is to be near to the wild heart, to have full access to the taproot of one's body, mind, and soul. For Lorde, this erotic is inherently gendered¹⁰, intrinsic to womanhood. If we follow this back to Cleopatra and our other women, they too contain this erotic but they exist in a system (the time period of the plays, the fact that they are characters in a male dominated and male written play) that values feminine obedience, virtue, and civility. They are female in a society where their worth and existence is shaped and defined by men. They are kept "at a distant inferior position to be psychically milked---But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough. The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation." We have operated with this "misnaming" for so long that women, not just men, use the erotic against each other in this way. Each tragic woman is denied this very thing which Lorde believes is necessary for women to obtain in order to survive and thrive. They are driven to turn away from their erotic selves, or told it is wrong, and therefore it is not possible for them to continue on. Simply, they cannot progress. Unable to reconcile "the lifeforce of women" with what their status as women demands of them, they die, disappear, remove themselves, seek alternate exits through suicide.

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¹⁰ Lorde's work on the erotic comes from a moment in feminism where figures like her were introducing what we now call "intersectionality": that feminism must not ignore the co-occurring oppressions of race, class, and sexuality as factors of difference in women's experience as well as advocating for sexual liberation. She speaks of the erotic as "uniquely feminine", and a "deeply female and spiritual plane" because she is taking up and reversing the idea of the erotic (capacity for deep love, sexuality, softness, rawness) as something historically used to shame women and mark them as inferior (weak, promiscuous, over-emotional, irrational) to be in actuality a universal root of empowerment and knowledge for women to reclaim. But being of the generation of feminist thought and understandings about identity that I am, I do not believe the erotic in this sense should be taken as *exclusive* to cis-women. Rather, it is something we all as humans, and surely anyone who identifies strongly as femme or genderqueer, have the same right to access as an empowering concept. It has been marked as "female" by misogyny and feminism both due to our systemic understanding of gender roles and gender as a binary.

I believe Lorde would agree that most of the women in the tragedies are struggling within their structures to find and claim the erotic, not fully understanding what they need but knowing if they could fully realize it they could cement themselves a deeper place within that structure, or uproot the very patriarchal structure which holds them back. Because they are externally defined and steeped so intensely in a discourse of feminine purity and assumed innocence, they fear the erotic and are kept limited as subjects who "conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's."(Lorde) But Cleopatra presents some departures. In her, I see a woman who has embraced the erotic in Lorde's sense, at least in the way she is depicted by the narrative. If we think back to Enobarbus's descriptions we can see a lot of similarities to Lorde's writing. "Her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love" and the erotic is "the personification of love in all its aspects". Cleopatra, surrounded by music, dancing, and liveliness, fosters an environment of creative energy which she sits at the center of. The idea of her and her court seduces not only Antony but the world. As an image, she embodies the sensual. She is also, one of the few feminine figures in tragic Shakespeare who has close confidential relationships with other women, though their confiding functions mostly as a place for Antony, an object of affection, to occupy space even when he is not on stage. Iras and Charmian contribute to the understanding of Cleopatra and her domain as erotic because they produce a communicative feminine space when they occupy the stage alone, together. They seem to have attained, or at least be allowed the potential of attaining, Lorde's empowering erotic energy. They desire, they laugh, they love, they argue; and they are dramatised by the onlookers, the narrating outside voices within the play like Enobarbus, as living most full. So, why can

Cleopatra too not survive the play? Iras and Charmian? Why, just like in *King Lear*, are we left at the end with a tableau of female corpses to speculate?

In "'Immortal Longings': The Erotics of Death in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra" Lisa Stark writes, "Cleopatra performs her suicide as an act of passionate love and erotic release--not as a sacrifice, like Antony, but as a transfiguration into an immortal goddess"(p.252). Cleopatra, then, even though she is "erotic" and "powerful" is not able to fully exercise this power in her world. Caesar is the masculine systemic counterpoint to her feminine disruption, and instead of being forced to submit to him and oppress her erotic, she skews her conception of erotic life and chooses death as a way to maintain her abundance by reconfiguring herself as an obelisk. I think the play reinstates the male control of power and the oppression of women by continuing the trend of female suicide as an escape. Cleopatra is not allowed to survive the play because in the patriarchal world, the erotic cannot be sustained. Her erotic becomes vilified, the source of blame for Antony's ruin, "a right gipsy, as fast and loose." causing her to announce: "Ah women, women! Come, we have no friend/But resolution and the briefest end"(4.15.104-105). This is almost a blanket statement for the reasoning and structure behind killing off Shakespeare's women and imagining their agency in it. What would their fates have been otherwise? Functioning within a system of gendered power and male chauvinism, these women cannot get the life they deserve, even with all their apparent ambition (Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth) and instinct to break the wheel (Cordelia). So, is their fate always inevitably to die, because the world cannot accommodate or contain them? Ultimately, Cleopatra loses the battle against both the tragic genre that demands her death for completion and the dominating definition that objectifies what "erotic" is.

Antony and Cleopatra does the work itself of highlighting a central part of this thesis: that tragedy, and female symbolization, are all about the reactions to the death. It is self aware of the performance of grief and death in tragedy; it anticipates an audience, within and without the play. Cleopatra is a conscious performer. The tradition of the death of the tragic hero involves a self lamenting monologue, a performance of dying that is not only unrealistic, but self aggrandizing. This structure endows the flawed tragic hero with some redeeming sentiment, gets us to pity him, or at least admire his nobility and beauty in death. Since Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed, it is this tradition that sets up the star-turning performance of these roles for male actors who lust after the opportunity to play these dramatic death scenes. Cleopatra's power and positionality in this play troubles the usual male prerogative of tragedy. In a reversal, Antony takes the typically feminine position of a bleeding, breathless signifying body that is manipulated on stage and she takes the role of traditional tragic hero, mourning in monologue over Antony's body and driving to the last act where she monologues herself into death, going so far in performance as to costume herself. But Cleopatra differs from the tragic heroes in "being a self-conscious performer, as opposed to their unconscious self-dramatization." (Honigmann, 169) We see this in her premeditated suicide, her dressing of herself, her speech, and the importance she puts on reactions to death. When Antony tells Cleopatra of Fulvia's death and that he must go, she remarks that seeing how he speaks of the death of his wife, she can tell how he will react to her death:

So Fulvia told me.

I prithee turn aside and weep for her;

Then bid adieu to me and say the tears

Belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene

Of excellent dissembling, and let it look

Like perfect honor. (1.3.91-96)

She uses language of performance here, "play one scene", and suggests the element of false ringing "played-up" grief that we see surrounding the death of women in Shakespeare. Cleopatra knows how it goes, she can see how this plays out. He will weep for the loss of his wife who he deserted, decide he never should have taken her for granted, then in an artful turn frame it to her so that he truly weeps to leave Egypt, to leave Cleopatra. "Let it look like perfect honour": she acknowledges the privilege of tragic men to present themselves as honorable, despite misdeed, by their power to paint themselves in a good light with words and not be questioned. Meanwhile, the last word on the women always belongs to the men of the play.

Later, when Cleopatra sends a messenger to tell Antony she is dead, she does so intending to get a rise out of him and fully aware of the effect it may produce. She wants information, she wants confirmation of love through the reaction to death. She knows passion in tragedy can be measured by the extremity of reaction to a reported death. This fake suicide directly parodies and subverts the usual routine of female death by suicide in Shakespeare: they are always reported, always off stage. In this case of reported death, we know the agent behind the information, we see the act, or lack of it, before the announcement. This draws attention to the possibility of doubting all those other deaths and why they are not questioned, why there is a seamless transition between, "She is dead" to a vocal lamentation of loss and a quickening of the plot. It is especially questionable when there is no body, no reliable witness.

When Antony does respond by falling on his sword, Cleopatra steps into the role she has watched performed by the men. She mourns him with grandeur. She speaks over his body with such drama, no room is left for his speech:

ANTONY: "Give me some wine, and let me speak a little."

CLEOPATRA: "No, let me speak." (4.15.49-50)

I find this moment deeply comedic as well as poised to be a victory. The woman finally claims space for her voice and gives the male narrative a taste of its own medicine. But in this moment Antony also cries, "I am dying, Egypt, dying." (48) Here, not only does he maintain the privilege of declaring his death he also places her once again as an emblem. Antony addressing Cleopatra as 'Egypt', conflates the woman, who holds him as his lover, with her country, her iconography. He looks past her to the general theatricality of the play that sees Cleopatra not as a woman but a goddess of an "exotic" dream. She denies him speech, but he still announces his own death. He accepts it, frames it to be honorable; "a Roman by a Roman/Valiantly vanquished. Now my spirit is going/I can no more."(66-68) Then, he is finally dead. Where the womens' deaths are so brief they are never seen, the men tend to have ridiculously drawn out demises. It is comically impossible sometimes that they speak so long when mortally wounded. Romeo, Hamlet, and Othello each blame a higher power for their fates, their deaths, call themselves victims, and victims of fortune at that. But the women attempt to claim agency more even when denied it, even when unable to fully speak. Desdemona, for example, says she killed herself, only her own fault, when Othello has just lifted the smothering pillow(Othello). Cleopatra plans.

We get to see her moment of choosing as opposed to the others, it is written in her lines,

"Show me, my women, like a queen." (5.2.277) In calling herself to be dressed for her death scene, Cleopatra prepares and quickens her own symbolization and "transforms herself into a visual monument" (Tronicke). Here we can discuss the problematic nature and danger of romanticizing and seeing suicide as a communicative act. It is a tactic used at length in Shakespeare's tragedies to dramatize the extremes a character will go to due to the deep wells of their emotion and to exploit the sense of sacrifice that suicide creates. For women, passion and death/ love and pain are intrinsically linked in these plays. But we, as interpreters, as readers, as performers also must confront this, even when we put forth the argument that the women of Shakespeare commit suicide as acts of rebellion, as escapes, as disobedience. We must be careful of the instinct to create narrative, to promote the idea of martyring ourselves. Mourning and lament in art, as often in life, elevates characters to a beloved image that becomes distinct from the actual body that lies there. Lear does this to Cordelia, Cleopatra does this to Antony. And we are always at risk of this in our own lives when we characterize death as beautiful, and suicide as a fruitful communicative act.

Cleopatra, like Lady Macbeth, casts off not just an attachment to "woman" but an attachment to mortal being. She receives the smuggled asps and says,

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing

Of woman in me. Now from head to foot

I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon

No planet is of mine.(291-294)

She declares herself marble: a statue, an untouchable monument that will bear her image through time. Instead of a woman, "I am fire and air; my other elements/ I give to baser

life."(344-345). Cleopatra's theatricality in these moments is akin to the drastic, embellished monologues of the men in the last act of most plays. She is beginning to weave her after image, as they do. When Caesar leaves them in Act 5 Scene 2, Iras laments that the "bright day is gone/ And we are for the dark."(232-233) These three women have foresight of what their fate is now, unlike the others. They see where they will end, they see the gap opening up before them. And Cleopatra tries to dress them up for it. She will do it "well", like a Queen. In this last moment of Cleopatra staging and decorating her death, the words of Enobarbus back in 1.2 echo: "I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying."(157-160) The narrative would like to frame death as the most beautiful thing that could happen to Cleopatra. But this is not her victory. She dies a symbol, a marble structure to be tucked away in the archive and brought out again for the enticing legend. In the play, Antony seems to derive a great pleasure from hearing himself exclaim, "Eros!", telling by the amount of times he calls the character in such a way. Eros is asked to kill Antony but kills himself instead to avoid it. The erotic cannot live; Eros cannot live. Eros will not participate. It is no coincidence that in a play dealing so much with tones of the erotic, there is an entire character named after the Greek god of love and desire. Antony calling for Eros is representative of the erotic being configured as a thing desired to be at beck and call, but that ultimately will not play along.

Cleopatra dresses up, and monologues to us with each asp she applies, but in the end she is interrupted and Caesar still has the last word on her life and control of her dead body. We still close the play with three women's bodies on stage, carried off into the gap by the men left standing. I find the interruption very curious, Cleopatra speaks: "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,--/O Antony!--Nay, I will take thee too./(Applying another asp to her arm)/

What should I stay-----"(5.2.371-373). And then nothing, she dies in the middle of her line. This interruption, this denying of the end is similar to *The Banquet* except the agency of the killer is different. We do not get to know how Cleopatra would finish her sentence, if she was experiencing a change of heart, or if she wished to deny death. This creates an experience akin to reading Sappho's fragments. The character, the life is unfinished, disrupted. Ultimately she does not get the satisfaction, she dies before she is ready, dies off-schedule of her own playbook. The controlling hand of the patriarchal play structure rears its head at the final moment. There was a student production at Brown last semester with a female director that chose to cut Cleopatra's last monologue with the interruption but also chose to keep Iris and Charmian living. This is another example of how we try to find potential redemptive or hopeful ends for the tragedies, thought they give the women none. We make erasures, additions, rebellions against the text, hoping to intervene or leave a window open. But the question we need to be asking is what are the limitations in place in out artistic practices and our world which force feminine subjects to sever ties with "womanhood" in order to survive? There should be better ways to address this than by cutting the parts which disappoint or baffle us. Looking closely at Cleopatra's performance of herself, how she "puts on her death", indicates further the way female sexuality is either mythologized or punished. It brings forth nuanced concepts of how women may perform themselves when asked, or use a refusal of femininity as protection.

Part IV. Desdemona, Cordelia, and Emilia

Deviant Daughters and the Error of the Moon

The women in King Lear and Othello all die following acts or pronouncements of defiance. Each woman, when compared to the values of early modern society, marks some sort of deviance after stepping out of the norm. And each woman either spoke too loud, too much, or not enough. The death of each woman listed also qualifies as murder, except for Goneril, who takes her own life after killing her sister. We have in these two plays a series of cases where women cohabit scenes and entire plays but are also instrumental in each other's ruin. Though there are perhaps more women on stage at once in these two tragedies than the others we have discussed, they still never establish feminine friendship. Instead, the women are placed in antagonistic relationships, and by the end of the play must either take on attitudes of villainy or piety. We see Desdemona and Cordelia sanctified in their last moments and characters like Goneril, Reagan, and even Emilia are transgressing, condemned and cast aside. Where in these texts can we find breath and hope for these women? The ways they are trapped and manipulated by male perception and intention bar them from the many other ways these storied could have gone. We will look at the statements about women that are made in the text and discuss how we might question what opinions the plays themselves take up. I will touch on the significance of how men in power shape public opinion of women as well as women's relationships with each other; the poetic obsession with connecting women and the moon, what defense this enables; and ultimately how the killing of women on stage is used here to craft a martyr for the play to champion and love, but at what cost?

On the texts: Speech Acts and Male Control of Narrative

All the drama in *Othello* is imagined, fabricated. Nothing substantially actually *happens*. The acts which are performed and which constitute the "drama" of the play in performance spring from a place of jealousy, manipulation, and lies. *Othello* is a mind game played by Shakespeare through Iago with the women perish as collateral damage. Their destruction and abuse is what demands my attention and what I point to as being the focal point of the play, rather than Othello's tragic hero track. There is a lot to be critiqued and discussed in this play in terms of race theory and the eroticising of race in Shakespeare's time. But my concern in this essay is with the way we come to the end of the play and find that Desdemona and Emilia have literally and figuratively laid their entire selves out on the stage but Othello gets the big final moments and in performance: the first bow. I find this particularly striking to witness because this play truly has women as the crux of its issue; the women are where we are led to place our sympathies but the women are who we are denied. We are made to watch as they are silenced.

This silencing occurs in a few myriad ways as we have seen in our discussion in previous chapters. Here, we will focus on the manipulation of women's character by men as leading to a suppression of their voice, even to the point of death. Iago and Othello enforce this on Desdemona and Emilia, and Lear on Cordelia. The woman must always be granted permission from the patriarchy to share her part, to speak to her side of things. She is only summoned for once everyone else has been heard, as Desdemona is by the Duke to confirm Othello's story of courtship.(1.3) Think of Emilia, who must beg to be heard, beg for her truth to be believed. It does not take a strong nudge to see how this resonates with our moment of #IBelieveHer movements and the garish saturation of doubting women's claims in cases of sexual assault,

where defense cases are "fram'd to make women false"(441). Popular treatment of women as a "type" has been to qualify them as gossips, manipulators, two faced, sly, attention-seeking, "playing the victim". Womanhood cannot be seen as a genre orf recipe with all the "expected" ingredients listed above. The trouble is popular culture and classic literature often love to depict it as such. Shakespeare's texts do so as well but when is it the male characters, like Iago and Brabantio who represent a restrictive patriarchal society, contextualizing the women in this way and when is it the play itself that is upholding and enforcing those standards on female characters and the performers who embody them? Are these two sides of the coin inseparable from the other?

In the first scene of the second act, near the Quay awaiting Othello, Desdemona clocks Iago right off as "slanderer". Her astute judgement of him is like ash in the mouth of repeat readers, as we know that it does not help to unfix the fate that will befall her. He proves indeed to be a "most profane and liberal counselor" to Othello against *her*.(2.1.179) This scene is a perfect set up for how dangerous opinions about women and the ability of men to dictate those opinions with their free tongues functions to create the drama of the play. "You shall not write my praise", Emilia says following Iago's unfair public jesting of her character which paints her as a woman guilty of giving him lip and being a chiding wife. He proclaims wives/ women are "pictures out of doors, bells in your parlours, wild cats in your kitchens, saints in your injuries, devils being offended, players in your huswifery, and huswives in your beds."(121-129) This speech shapes a mercurial opinion of women. Desdemona with her accusation of "slanderer" and cry of "She has no speech!" expresses a surprise and seeming objection to Iago's defamation of Emilia. She acknowledges the clear commandeering of speech and the self-contradictory nature of his insult.

She then says, "What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?" (131). We can gather from her aside to the audience that by joining in, Desdemona hopes to seem merry when she is not. It is an effort to conceal her true feelings of worry or anxiety as she waits. Can we read her invitation as an acknowledgment of Iago's bogus position, his biased misogynistic words? Or is she validating his assessments and recordings of character as valuable by joining his game? I see it as a challenge, a needed rebuffing. Desdemona uses her class position to challenge Iago's jester-like disparagement of his own wife and "women" in general, she dares him to speak the same of her to her face. Iago, in the "entertainment" he provides here, marks the expression of male power and authority over narrative and speech. Through his gossip and manipulation of nearly everyone's perception of one another, especially Othello's perception of Desdemona, he highlights how in history, in the archive of society, women's stories are always at risk of being altered and told by men. Their reputations are distorted and their worth diluted by the authority men hold in the realm of discourse. In these plays Desdemona, Cordelia, and the title of "woman" in general function as blank pages, paper "made to write 'whore' upon" (4. 2.83). In Iago's mind and Othello's judgement, women are either whore or virgin. In King Lear's reasoning, they are either acquiescing angels or demons.

In *Othello*, Iago takes the "woman's part" of gossip and temptor i.e Lady Macbeth: "hie thee hither that I may pour my spirits in thine ear"(*Macbeth*). He asserts a logic and belief on the play that "registers female virtue only in absence, the absence of expression"; the absence of a voice or of defiance.(Rutter, p.147) A good woman is silent. But all women speak, therefore every woman in this play is named a "whore". Desdemona is so named for the infidelity her husband insists she committed, Emilia for speaking and feeling against her husbands schemes,

and Bianca works as a prostitute and is abused in love by Cassio. In the end, Desdemona's character seems to accept this erroneous syllogism. In her quarreling and her death scenes with Othello, she is mostly silent while he raves. Her words are of defense but never dare to be loud or pointed enough to accuse him. She is written to take it virtuously, like a martyr, while he has all the words of abuse and monopolizes the dialogue. Ultimately, she holds her tongue and does not say that he murdered her. She withdraws her voice in a pious defeat, stating "nobody" has done the deed.(5.2.152) She fulfills the role of silent, and therefore "good", woman. This happens in order for the memory and symbol left in her wake to be one of righteous beauty, worthy of grief from the audience. The audience writes her eulogy, as Gertrude does Ophelia's. By contrast, before Othello kills himself he claims his space to deliver his own eulogy:

A word or two before you go.

I have done the state some service, and they know 't.

No more of that. I pray you in your letters,

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,

Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;

Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,

Perplexed in the extreme. (5.2.397-406)

Maddeningly, his speech removes all sense of responsibility and guilt from his exit. His concern is not with grieving the wife he murdered or his destructive mistaken beliefs, but instead with reminding everyone that he has still done good things for the state. His speech romanticizes his

violent and ignorant actions as results of passion. He may have mistakenly jumped to conclusions and believed Iago over his wife, but it was just because he loved her too much. He killed her because he just *loved her so much*. Othello's last monologue centers only around his own reputation, he is concerned only with how he will be spoken of in the telling of these events.

There is an emphasis, both in *Othello* and *King Lear*, on speech and the utilization of language to confuse or deceive. Words are endowed with power to make things manifest in these plays because of how the male led law systems function. A man enunciates a title such as "strumpet" toward a women, and the word is glued to her hereafter. Men give the orders that are fulfilled, the last words that initiate the exit and fall of the curtain. Lear merely speaks the words, "Here I disclaim all my paternal care/Propinquity, and property of blood/And as a stranger to my heart and me/Hold thee from this forever"(1.1.125-128), and Cordelia is exiled and stripped of social and familial power. Similarly, the father's words have the power to enact marriage, the exchange of goods. The words of men create the reality and shape of women's lives and what happens to them. Meanwhile, the words of women fall short, unheeded, and too late.

This form of silencing derives power from instilling doubt and confusion. Women are often ultimately triumphed over in debate, in court, in testimony when they are made to either doubt their own conviction; fear falling into the trap of "overbearing woman" and therefore invalidated in the public eye for being "emotional"; or hope to "forget" and not relive the trauma they endure. ¹¹ Iago dismisses Emilia's true suspicion that some "base notorious knave" has

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¹¹ In the recent Kavanaugh sexual assault case, Dr. Blasey was discredited as just trying to "slander" Kavanaugh because he was up for the Supreme Court and more: "the deployment of misogynist attacks against women who have stepped out of line by stepping forward to intervene in national politics. These attacks take the form of an attempt to annihilate the women as epistemic subjects. Every stupid remark ("She admits she was drunk," "She's mixed up," "Why didn't she report at the time?") is designed to dismantle her status as a knower. Structuring the hearing as if the accuser were on trial by hiring a sex-crimes prosecutor to question her discloses the real purpose of the process." Bonnie Mann, "Trump's New Taunt, Kavanaugh's Defense and How Misogyny Rules". We can also

planted these ideas of slander in Othello's head. He dismisses Desdemona's worry, her fear of what her husband is thinking and feeling. He has been granted by society and by Desdemona's seeking of him for authoritative male counsel, "Am i that name, Iago?" (4.2.137), the power to smother their natural instincts and misdirect them. Desdemona consults him, not the woman right next to her (Emilia), to confirm or deny whether Othello is right in calling her "whore". He can suppress the truths they know which could protect them, their intuition. Iago works to convince Desdemona all will be well, there must be some other factors she does not know that make Othello act this way; and he tells Emilia it is "impossible" that a man "devised the slander".(156) Like a good magician, or politician, Iago is an expert in misdirection and attaining false trust.

Of note in this discussion of silencing women is the fact that in *King Lear*, Cordelia exercises her rebellion and power by *not* speaking. Rather than exercising speech being the disturbance, choosing not to do so is. The court wishes her to speak false love with the purpose of gaining something. This she denies. What she is ultimately punished for is voicing rational truth not passive silence. Beyond being condemned for speaking or making any sound at all, the rule seems to be women who try to speak truth, who disagree, who talk straightforwardly or unexpectedly are doomed to die. Whether it is for the purpose of silencing them and "restoring proper roles", or to martyr them as indicators of the wreckage caused, this is the sentence given to all deviant tongued women in Shakespeare's tragic theater.

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look at the case of USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar and the many young women who didn't come forward for years because of fear they were "overreacting" and the trust they had in their institutions and authority figures as having the power to "know what's best"; and related but different examples on television news outlets of female political figures, like Alexandra Lugaro a past candidate for governor in Puerto Rico or Alexandria Ocasio Cortez or Hillary Clinton, antagonized to irritation and then bashed for being "uncivil" or "emotional".

Possession and Suppression: Father Daughter Death

In *Enter the Body*, Rutter states that *Othello* is a "narrative whose subject is suppression" (p.145). This can become incredibly clear even by just looking at the apparent causes of death. Both Desdemona and and Cordelia are killed in a manner of asphyxiation. Desdemona is smothered and Cordelia is hanged. Both, symbolically, are about taking away the ability to make noise and the ability to breathe. These deaths match up with the discussed theme of suppression and specifically suppression of women who speak with an edge of honesty and justice. But their asphyxiations began well before their murders as we have observed. A large part of this is their wing-clipped role as daughters to co-dependent and possessive fathers.

Cordelia and Desdemona are both painted as the loyal, prized daughters of fathers who wish to control and mandate their lives. For the time, this is a given. By all intents and purposes, daughters were the possession, currency, and political pawn of the early modern father. And due to this, the usually over-zealous love portrayed borders on disturbingly sensual, something often made visible in performance: "The queasily incestuous love story Stephens's [Robert Stephens, Adrian Noble's 1993 King Lear] Lear played out on Cordelia's sexualized body read like necrophilia--he pawned the corpse, then straddled it as he loosened the noose. Women, it seemed, were easier to love dead than alive".(Rutter,p. 23) The daughter is a trophy the father would like to keep for himself but awards others for his own benefit; his "jew'l" (Brabantio, 1.3). Therefore, a daughter is valued for her virtue and obedience because of how marketable it makes her. Both Cordelia and Desdemona begin and mostly end the plays embodying these values but through the course of the play, other characters and the plot do the job of painting them as errant and unruly, as opposing these standards and falling from their father's graces. She becomes the

cast-out daughter who dies before she can be forgiven or can redeem her father in his own flaws. She is made a symbol of innocence and virtue, lost due to the foolishness and selfishness of the men who loved her, but somehow still punished herself for divergence.

This troubled relationship of merchandise and love between father and daughter creates many strange eruptions in these stories. The death of the daughter in each play is linked to the fate of her father as well. A daughter's love and loyalty is expected. And, for her, maintaining this is a necessity as to him she is "bound for life and education". (1.3.210) Her future, property, and health are all determined by the father and the husband. On the figure of the daughter is hung: hope for class improvement, expansion of bloodline/power, and assurance of caretaking. We have in Cordelia and Desdemona two daughters who deviate from the expected and throw their fathers into tantrums. In the first scene of Othello, Iago and Roderigo inform Brabantio that his daughter has gone to meet Othello unbeknownst to him. Iago hopes to incite him to rage against "the Moor". He crudely says, "Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul/Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/Is tupping your white ewe."(87-89) Word choice here makes sure the image conjured in Brabantio's head is an animalistic one. It frames Desdemona as livestock that has escaped the pen. Brabantio cries, "How got she out? O, treason of the blood/ Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds/By what you see them act."(170-172) Again, "how got she out" frames the daughter as the property meant to remain where it was last left, and to act at all without the father's approval is a "treason of the blood". Her duty as a loyal daughter is defined only by chastity and obedience. Like many men in Shakespeare, Brabantio now generalizes about his experience: all fathers mistrust all daughters, they have hidden intentions.

Lear publicly humiliates Cordelia immediately after she simply says that she loves him in a non exclusive way and were she to marry she'd also give her love and respect to her husband. This statement is immediately followed by a rage so bitter that he calls her two suitors forth and strips her of all dowry and financial worth. In front of all, he states her lack of value to a man, how they should drop any idea of her and find someone more "worthy". After loving her most and planning to "set my rest on her kind nursery", Lear declares Cordelia a "wretch whom nature is asham'd".(1.1.243) Both fathers proclaim themselves betrayed by their daughters, and therefore unloved, because she declares that half her love and half her duty will go to another man. She does not even dare to say she keeps any of it for herself. The mere suggestion that the daughter is no longer his sole possession before he is ready to trade her, provokes the father to punish the daughter with shame and exile. Now all of the woman's future actions and reputation are taken with her father's cursed grain of salt which imagines her as a wicked vixen, "She has deceived her father, and may thee." (Othello, 1.3.334) The fathers hold the same sentiment as Othello who finds the "curse of marriage" to be that men "can call these delicate creatures ours and not their appetites." The last thing he wants is to "keep a corner" in "the thing" he loves "for other uses" (3.3.268-273). This thinking leads to the disciplining of these women through expulsion and death for being perceived to put themselves to other uses.

In these plays we see the extent of patriarchal claims on the daughter's body; especially, in their deaths. As corpses the women are firmly and finally silent, they become convenient "props for anguish" (Adelman, p.127). Think of Lear's grand monologue played out over Cordelia's body which brings him to a climax of his own death; or Brabantio's odd death mentioned only upon the discovery of Desdemona's murder. Gratiano says to the now cold

daughter, "I am glad thy father's dead/Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief/Shore his old thread in twain." (5.2.244-246) We learn that following Desdemona's departure with Othello, he died apparently as a direct result of his daughter's deception and desertion. The cause of the father's death is located in the fall of the daughter. The fact of the foul murder serves to prove the father right in his premature grief.

Cordelia never stopped being her father's sole jewel; to her death he never had to share her. Her death functions to keep her firmly in place as the honest and true daughter, who was proven to love her father best. In her end, Lear is allowed to attain her absolute devotion because, as she says in her last living scene, "For thee, oppressed king, I am cast down." (King Lear, 5.3.6) Over her still body Lear marks his child returned to his arms and for her part, Cordelia performs what she first attempted, "Love, and be silent." (1.1.68) Of interest to me are productions and scholarship that entertain the idea of Cordelia doubling as the Fool by having the same actor play both roles. What does this pairing suggest about the death of both characters and Lear's relationship to them? Juliet Dusinberre points out that women and fools hold similar places in literature and seem to serve akin purposes in the lives of men: "To be permanently providing light relief to serious men, to be in essence a symbol of that light relief in one's very being, allies women with professional Fools." Both Fools and heroines in Shakespeare "stand on the periphery of the serious world of men, assessing its wisdom from the perspective of not being of any account".(p.114) They both express disapproval of the actions of men, but their voices entertain rather than harm, because they have no power in the court of opinion. Lear holds his dead daughter in his arms and cries, "And my poor fool is hang'd".(5.3.369) Cordelia and the Fool are both hanged, both silenced. They both lived as 'fool' for Lear, caring for him with

guidance, truth, and unappreciated loyalty but not without constructive criticism: "His Fool and his daughter share the same area of his consciousness" (Dusinberre, p.114) We also see this in the paternal tenderness Lear diverts to the Fool in the absence of Cordelia.

Dead bodies on stage are used in these plays by the tragic hero as signifying props. The body itself becomes a symbol for his failure, his pride, his grief, his hope, his heaven, his desire. Lear controlling how the limp arm or head of Cordelia gesticulates, or how her body is moved onto, around, and off the stage is playing out the patriarchal fantasy of complete control over the daughter's body and how it carries or lacks meaning. Another image conjured by Carol Rutter on Robert Stephens' zealous performance of Lear comes to mind. The actor stands, looking toward a light above the audience, and drags Cordelia's limp body with him by the arm as he crosses the stage, "Even in death she went where he wanted".(p.23) Sam Gold's new production of King Lear with Glenda Jackson, which just opened April 4th, utilizes Cordelia's body in a display that brings to center stage a horror that the text relegates to the wings. Commonly, Lear carries the corpse on stage after already discovering his daughter strung up. In the new production, the woman's body drops down into the middle of the scene from the fly loft. She is left hanging over the stage with a rope around her neck. This garrish display, a corpse left swinging, is a bold choice but one that I think evacuates the body more instead of allowing the death of a character to be grieved greater. Cordelia's hanging is shown here for dramatic currency and shock value, it does not add to an audience's experience of story. I believe it would be different if we saw Cordelia's last moments, were with her as she stares down the noose. But instead, she and we are denied that, as we are in the text, and instead we are only force-fed the awful moment of her body--dropping. These displays of feminine death that are favored at the end of both *King Lear*

and *Othello* clearly are asking an audience to have a point of view about the stages littered with only female death. But are these displays of feminine death on stage "devastating critiques" or just devastating? What is the real tragedy of tragedy? The main male character who through reckless action, bullish emotion, and inflamed ego brings about his own destruction, rightly punished? No, I find the true tragedy to be those who are pulled down with them, who are lost in their wreckage and left littering the stage.

Women and the Moon

Shakespeare's texts, and literature writ large, frequently pair femininity and the moon. I primarily reference here a line from *Othello*: "It is the very error of the moon/She comes more near the earth than she was wont/And makes men mad." (5.2.135-137) This line is spoken by Othello just after he has smothered Desdemona. Emilia gains entrance to the room and informs him that "yonder foul murders done". Not yet discovering her mistress, Emilia refers to Cassio's murder of Roderigo, but Othello hears this and immediately blurts excuses to remove himself from responsibility for his actions. He blames the night's violent events on the moon. The moon's forces, being too close to the earth, are driving men to act inexplicably. Shakespeare often makes reference in his writing to the moon controlling the tides and equates men to the sea as being governed by it(*Henry IV*). I find this trend of astrological fatalism in Shakespeare related to the fashion of blaming harm enacted on women on the presence of the women themselves. In *King Lear*, Edmund communicates disdain for this, "when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were fools by heavenly compulsion." (1.2.126-129). I believe the moon in

Othello's speech also stands for women, for Desdemona, and given Edmund's words we are meant to see that Othello voices "the excellent foppery of the world".

The moon and sun are very clearly gendered in literature. In Shakespeare alone, the sun is consistently "he" and the moon "she". There is a sense of women and the moon being related in fluidity. The moon as controlling the menstrual cycles of women along with the tides is disputed over in science but held aloft in lore and many kinds of holistic health practices. Whether true or not, the moon as a symbol alludes to many of the same signs associated with women: fertility, monthly changes, beauty, inconstancy, mysticism. We can think back to Cleopatra declaring herself no longer a woman by announcing "now the fleeting Moon no planet is of mine." The suggestion of women being ruled by the moon here is not a positive one. To be ruled by the moon is to be transitory, unlasting, emotional. The convenience of blaming the moon for chaotic and unsettled behaviors on Earth is that humans can source blame in an external power. We see this tactic used with women too. The woman "was asking for it". The woman went where she wasn't supposed to, tried to be more than she was permitted. Othello saying that the moon came closer to the earth than it should and made men mad, is an allusion to Desdemona stepping off of his expected pedestal for her, or as he imagines taking more of her share of love and sex outside of marriage and driving him to such rage and grief that he commits murder. She causes his emotions to run so high, that he explodes. He says, "But I do love thee! And when I love thee not/Chaos is come again."(3.3.101-102) In this pattern of thinking, the woman is the cause and women become saturated signs, made to hold every symbol creators and spectators would like to put on them. We can say this is the case for all character, but this is done to women in life just as frequently as in literature.

Othello jumps very quickly between doubt and rage. One could almost believe that some lunar shift is dictating his mood swings. But the swift bouncing between states prompts us to see that the propensity for extreme jealousy was in him always; all of Iago's swindling and planting of suspicious notions in his mind tips him almost immediately into accusations of Desdemona. "Furnish me with some swift means of death/For the fair devil" is a drive to murder and damnation for Desdemona that comes almost comically fast once the seed is planted.(3.4.544) The conclusion to be drawn here is that it is not only Iago, a canonically "evil" character, (or the moon) who is to blame for the course of action Othello follows, but the mentality towards relationships that Iago stands for. The culture is to blame; the societally sponsored jealousy, that allows men to be validated in such aggressive possession of a woman's sexuality and such blind refusal of her own testament. This was standard practice in the 17th century and it is certainly a beast with fangs still sunk into our own world which we call "modern". We can look to Bianca and Othello's jealousy as analogous indicators of the rot in the heart of the play. Bianca becomes distraught over seeing Cassio possessing another woman's handkerchief, Othello spirals believing his wife consorts with Cassio and gives away beloved gifts. His jealousy grows to violence, Bianca's gets her dragged from the play to the perimeter, an irrational raving woman. The ideas of justice in these plays skew towards shaming women. Upon discovering Cassio with the handkerchief, Othello launches into various fantasies of how he will kill Desdemona. Iago, with an odd way of trying to pacify him, suggests, "strangle her in her bed, the bed she hath contaminated"(4.1.228-229). Othello replies, "the justice of it pleases." This relates as well to themes of confusing, dulling, and appealing the senses in both plays. King Lear in particular is a play that calls us to look and not just to listen. Kent entreats the old man, "See better,

Lear".(*Lr*.1.1.180) This even echoes Ophelia's "See what I see!".(*Ham.*) Lear consistently has trouble recognizing people, there are many occurences of "What's there" and "Who's there" in his speeches. We also have the plucking out of Gloucester's eyes. As for ears, you cannot trust words and speech you hear in *King Lear* and *Othello*. Desdemona facing an onslaught of Othello's angry accusations says, "I understand a fury in your words/But not the words" (4.2.38-39). We have a cast of characters whose senses are misfiring. This breakdown of communication and perception brings only slaughter.

Insertions on Stage and Screen

There is a moment between Iago and Emilia in the scene where she taunts him with the handkerchief which is added in both the Shakespeare in the Park and RSC productions of *Othello*. It is the mauling of wife by husband, he forcefully embraces her, performed as a violence that leaves Emilia abused and discarded as he takes the handkerchief. This added physical display reinforces a sense of transactional intimacies and the tension of Emilia's own wish for affection. There is a confusion between violence and pleasure. The scene suggests a blurred line of domestic assault. Related to this is the presenting of women's suffering as beautiful. The Gentleman reports to Kent how Cordelia reacted to news of her father's state and says, "Her smile and tears/Were like a better way". A woman crying becomes "pearls from diamonds dropp'd".(*Lr*.4.3.21-25) This is how the symbolizing of Cordelia occurs, she becomes a pillar of grace in the face of destruction and abuse. Cordelia's last words on stage are, "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?"(5.3.8) I find this a very interesting thing to be left with as it questions whether or not we will see the women again. It calls attention to the roles the women fulfill familially, and the unseen: the not permitted meeting of women. The next time we

hear of Cordelia it is Edmund admitting that he gave orders to "hang Cordelia in the prison, and/To lay the blame upon her own despair/That she fordid herself."(5.3.304-306) We have another case of the woman's emotional capacity being exploited to devalue her and undo her. Here at the end, simpering over his child's body, attention is called again to Lear's ability to see. He finally admits to Kent, "Mine eyes are not of the best", but he repeatedly requests the men around him, and the audience, to "Look on her, Look there!!".(337) We are demanded to look on a woman's body, to recognize it as a focal point of horror as well as pleasure.

I have viewed many adaptations of *King Lear* where Cordelia is blank and bland, a golden obedient maiden made to write 'saint' upon. One such production is a 1975 Soviet drama film directed by Grigori Kozintsev, Korol Lir. In the film, Cordelia is tall, fair haired, and acted with disconnected vacancy by Valentina Shendrikova. As she is articulated in this version, quiet and idyllic Cordelia serves as a symbol of desire, something to be won, the "perfect" maiden that tempts all men: an object of value. Carol Rutter discusses how Cordelia's death returns her to her "proper" place of *good* womanhood: "Dead silent, Cordelia finally achieves female excellence. Now, saying nothing, Lear approves her: 'Her voice was ever soft,' Gentle and low, an excellent quality in a woman/'."(p.4) This "compliance" to male expectation reads then as a confirmation of patriarchal power. But an example of an alternative take is Peter Brook's filmic intervention (1971) which "denies the audience the morbid pleasure of looking at Cordelia's body. Once Lear puts her down, the corpse is not on camera again. Denying us the body, it denies our cultural fascination with the death of the beautiful woman, a trope of classic Hollywood cinema."(p.20) Brook does not indulge the voyeuristic pleasure in a camera traversing the body, "the close-up that eroticizes death but at the same time frames sexuality inside the ultimate taboo of

unattainability, morbidity.."(p.21) This adaptation also refuses the "spectator roles that Shakespeare writes inside the scene--by cutting them--for in Brook, Kent and Edgar do no looking at Cordelia, or feeling for her, and there are no reaction shots placed to mediate, to normalize what is happening." Instead the camera becomes Cordelia's gaze on Lear, we see from her dead eyes; a place that bestows cold judgement on the father.

Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* also tries to provide a looking from Desdemona's dead eyes. This is an example of a piece that imagines a redemptive "after". This piece places words in the mouth of Desdemona and creates a new presence, a character previously left unrealized in the gap, in Desdemona's childhood maid called Barbary. *Desdemona* provides an inversion of the male focused nature of *Othello*, seen even in the titles. It is about Desdemona telling the story, recounting the wrongs. But this opportunity to speak from beyond the grave, post trauma, can sometimes dangerously suggest a peace via hindsight that seems somewhat unwarranted. *Desdemona* presents a resolution between character that we do not get from the play. But the reason we do not get resolution may be because the crimes do not warrant reconciliation. This is a piece that constantly makes me question the playwright/theater makers' positionality in writing new words for old characters. What is it to prescribe voice?

We have seen that allowing a woman to be the last one standing is significant in this landscape of work, simply because of how rare it is and the prevalence of male speech in the archive. Which is why, to me, gender bending cannot be done casually or without intention in these tragedies. It *means* something to have changed the gender of Albany, for example, in a production of *King Lear*. I played this role in a student production where the titular character was also made "mother" and the show was billed simply as *Lear*. Making such changes does not only

mean that there is now an opportunity for a female or femme identifying actor where before there was only space for a man. Or that Albany and Goneril's relationship becomes queer. It also means that the character who speaks the last words of the play¹² and who remains living among so much death, is a woman. And it is a woman who is left in power.

The Living Room and the Angel

I end this chapter by talking about what I dub "living room": the space and potential for recovery found in intimate communication between women, in sharing and in gossiping. These are the things we are very much denied from women in Shakespeare. Patricia Meyer Spacks says that "gossip provides a resource for the subordinated, a crucial means of self-expression, a crucial form of solidarity." It "imagines what goes on behind closed doors, trafficks in forbidden knowledge, exploits an erotics of power and exerts imaginative control"(p.158). The lack of this communion between women is something I have discussed as being intrinsic to tragedy. The tragic women of Shakespeare are not afforded any room to expand, learn, change, disclose. They are stuck on a track which delivers them directly into the gap. Getting to see two women speak alone as Emilia and Desdemona do at the close of Act 4 is a gift, but one given too late. Because while Emilia imparts some wisdom the secret still remains between them that may save both their lives if shared. Instead, Emilia puts Desdemona "to bed" and will not reveal what she knows or suspects of her husband. She does not attest to the part she has played until she finds Desdemona there in bed again, dead. Rutter writes about this scene between Desdemona and Emilia as one brushes the other's hair, an act of caretaking, as restorative: "As they talked, history---women's stories, different from those told by men---flooded into the scene, connecting

¹² Notably in some versions Edgar is given the last lines

these two women to generations of mothers and maids and wives and abandoned loves whose lived lives, not male culture's secondhand constructions, told 'what women are'".(Rutter, p.169) But I wonder, isn't this still Shakespeare's authorship, a second hand construction by male culture? I find, it is in performance that we can face and push this. In performance, breathing actors speak the words, women embody the woman on the page. The story is now transmitted through a body that can make it hers to make it true. The bedroom occupied by Desdemona and Emilia alone in this scene could be an example of "living room". It is a space where the doors are shut for once to allow them private intimacy, not to isolate them: "here was a space that belonged only to women, that opened an aperture on to an alternative narrative that might have been."

(p.176) I want contemporary creators to focus on forcing open this aperture even more.

I read Emilia as the voice of clarity, the proclamation of the play. She imparts sharp reflections on the dynamic between men and women which feel as if they are her talking back to her own play:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man

They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;

They eat us hungerly, and when they are full

They belch us. (3.4.120-123)

This speech works not to just perform the injustice but critique it. The women provide us with the tools to understand the inequality, to see the jealousy and the possession at the heart of this play's tragedy. So why then do we still receive an ending of destruction, a fulfilled prophecy of shutting up the woman? The case remains that in Shakespeare, and history, those who remain alive at the end of the play are afforded the authority of telling the tale. So, the women do not get

to tell their own story, to try their tongues. But would it be a "tragedy" if they did? If Emilia fully tried her tongue and unfolded to Desdemona, we could write a romance where the two escape their abusive husbands together. Desdemona would hear Emilia say, "Is not this man jealous?" and heed her.(116) But, instead the two remain held apart enough by class and mistrust fed by their husbands that their words only half-reach each other. They remain only as corpse figures to dress the stage, a display of the tragedy to spectate and project on.

Virginia Woolf writes about a phantom "Angel in the House" that she struggled to kill in her career as a writer. The "Angel in the House" was the male conceived notion of the ideal woman. She "was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily."(p.2) And above all, she was pure. This is the symbol that Desdemona and Cordelia are asked to live up to in their texts. Desdemona's obedience, acquiescence, and "virtue" even in the face of Othello's brutality and blame work to support this traditional idea of "grace" to make her more of a symbol which the audience mourns to see slandered. The fact that she does not object, does not rebel, goes when he asks, and does not strike back make her more of a martyr in early modern eyes. But what this also does is hold up the belief system that this is what a good woman does. After she responds to being struck by her husband with "I shall not stay to offend you", Lodovico remarks, "Truly, an obedient lady".(4.1.280) We are prompted to value this character because her submissiveness is the "right" in face of "wrong". She is an angel, and Othello is mad. She says, "Whate'er you be, I am obedient".(3.3.99) Desdemona is made to take it. He has all the attack and abuse; she is only allowed words of defense. Failure of communication is in effect again when Emilia asks "who hath done this deed?" and Desdemona replies, "Nobody, I

myself".(5.2.149) But Emilia ultimately refuses to remain a failed witness. Time and again we have seen her experience and witness violence without protest. But when her husband tells her to "charm" her tongue, she refuses: "I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak/My mistress here lies murdered in her bed."(220-221) This is the last straw for Emilia, she cannot look on Desdemona dead in her wedding sheets and allow Iago's lies to be believed. She now understands the extent to his deceit. In this scene something is threatening to burst from Emilia, the buildup of years of silence and complicity. "Twill out, 'twill out: I peace?/No, I will speak as liberal as the north/Let heaven and men and devils, let them all/All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak."(260-263) She is beyond caring how they will punish her speech, whether or not they will believe it. She still must speak. Emilia here is charged to do the lashing back for Desdemona. But for this very unleashing of her tongue, Emilia is also murdered by her husband, silenced at the source.

The frustration of *Othello*, especially realized watching it performed, is that we can sense from the very start the inevitable deathly end of the play. It is not a surprising plot. We are in on the deception, the folly, the high emotions the whole time and all we do is watch the destruction play out. Desdemona is snuffed out because of jealousy and a dangerously uneven perception of how women are allowed to behave and permitted to advocate for their own reputations. As an audience, the end does not surprise us. It disappoints us, outrages us, saddens us. But we do not disrupt, do not look away. Why? What about the hopelessness of these characters ever wising up do we find captivating, watchable? Do we actually suspend belief for a different end; for the triumph of the witness? Or do we watch to remind ourselves of the mistakes, the trivial pitfalls of jealousy, manipulation, compliance, abuse? The treatment of women in both *Othello* and *King*

Lear derives their ultimate deaths as being the result of their deviance as daughters and as wives.

The cruel language the men use to punish and discard the women rings hotly following each play. But what I think lingers longer are the words of Emilia, who in the one incomplete moment

she has in "living room" with Desdemona, clocks the disparity that cages them all:

Let husbands know

Their wives have sense like them: they see and

smell

And have their palates both for sweet and sour,

As husbands have. What is it that they do

When they change us for others? Is it sport?

I think it is: and doth affection breed it?

I think it doth: is't frailty that thus errs?

It is so too: and have not we affections,

Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?

Then let them use us well: else let them know,

The ills we do, their ills instruct us so. (4.3.104-115)

In Emilia, we have a woman who is bursting for her own stage, her own soliloquy. In her, the desire for communication, warning, instruction, validation, and love between women is planted. Its failure to bloom, therefore enabling the structures that confine people to their own minds and circumstances, conveys us to tragedy.

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Conclusion

Last Rites

Woolf and Cixous both write that we must kill a part of ourselves in order to be fully realized: "We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman." (Cixous, p.880) Womanhood is constantly sheathed in the language of death where the feminine is always doomed to die. Even if the woman is to thrive, she is told she must kill something. But, I offer, what if instead we let something live? I am tired of seeing women's dead bodies paraded on stages and grief for them used to teach us a lesson. We should recognize the importance of paying witness to these stories of harm that have been, are, and continue to be enacted in life. But it is currently more imperative for us to create and foster narratives that allow womanhood--as an identity that is expansive, inherently colorful, various, and queer--to *survive*. Not only this, but to survive whole.

This writing was a deep dive into characters and language that I care deeply about. Through research and reflection, I have been able to engage with the women of these texts as intimate figures of our theatrical history. But having fully immersed, I needed to resurface through a different outlet of investigation: performance. It was vital to gather others and exchange questions; to find out what they found most lucid, most immediate within this conversation of death, symbols, silence, women, and tragedy. The first stage of this manifested in what I called, "Women of Tragedy/Revival or Reformation: A Thesis Roundtable" which was an event held in February that invited women and femme identifying individuals to share space in a room and discuss all the intricacies of this project's line of questioning. The conversation was opened up around such topics as isolation, silence, the feminine mystique, violence, ghosts,

grief, disruption, defiance, hero, gaps, excess, elegy. The process of this roundtable itself was an interesting study and experience of women communing together. So much of what I draw focus to in Shakespeare's plays is how women are kept apart and not allowed this support through sharing. Not only did this meeting allow me to hear back from the community about their interest in this conversation but it also revealed a lot to all of us about the unique way women work in a group meeting space. I went in hoping for a popcorning of ideas, a think tank type--speak when you think energy. The room was more focused than this. Rapt attention was paid to each person who spoke. There were usually moments of lapse between thoughts and speakers, each person busy absorbing and reflecting on what had been said. The tendency for women to apologize for taking up too much space was also displayed. No one wanted to speak for anyone else in the room, or take up more time. Statements were often preceded or followed by qualifiers or veiled apologies for nothing. Even in an environment of open discussion where opinions differed, the instinct for care taking and generosity of spirit was the most tactile thing in the room. But we still harbor the worry of speaking out of turn and out of line; the reflex is still to qualify our statements, or minimize them, as we speak them.

Following this event, I gathered an ensemble of makers to devise a performance piece sourced from this thesis. It was important to me to find out what stories we could tell together within this frame. We distilled a single question collectively to drive our piece: How do women lay to rest and how are they laid to rest? If we consider the treatment of the women of Shakespeare as improper and incomplete burials, we asked, what would be a proper one? We spoke about ritual and inversions of caretaking and preparation of self. We settled on the structure of a vigil and therefore a durational, experiential performance which plays all night for

one night. At the time of this writing we are still in process, but that process is precisely where the heart of this project lives for me. We have been exploring what it means to rehearse for death constantly. When the purpose femininity serves in art and theater is to die beautifully or suffer with grace, we are limited to a cycle where women cross our stages merely to indulge or improve us and are never able to get past the threshold of harm. Death is used too much as a convenient plot thickener and a punishment for feminine, and queer, "guilt". These subjects are never fully laid to rest in these texts. Death from the narrative is different from "rest". Even when she is killed, she is kept in her loop--her emotional currency being in the audience's mental replay of her tragic loss. Cixous says, "her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble." Is performance a way of resisting death, or trapping one within a doomed cycle?

Through performance, these women die over and over again; on screen and stage, across culture. In this repeat, she never truly departs.

Our ensemble set out to explore how we might repeat with a difference. Or, create something new in conversation with these characters and Shakespeare's text. We have discussed the ethical danger of devising a history or relationship and grafting it onto the character; putting our words in mouths that did not ask for them. But we also want to push against the silence that exists; the gaps, and the empty space. It is difficult to perform absence. We are always trying to point at the thing that disturbs us--that outrages us--and name it. But naming invisible things is difficult. Naming acts of disintegration is difficult. Pinpointing the moment of disappearance: difficult. In practice we have been drawing from Viewpoints technique, taking cues from Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. We want to engage the audience with us in our "rites", immerse them. In attempting to create, we experience "the exquisite pressure of time". So do these characters.

So will our performance as the hours between 11pm and 4am drip by, revealing the ways we unfold, unmake, and revive ourselves and others.

A great deal of our devising has been playing with the moments we don't see. Not only in Shakespeare but also the parts of our own lives that we keep secret from each other for various reasons, the parts which occur in the margins. How do we unconsciously silence and tame ourselves due to our trained behaviors? Working on this, I am continually trying to keep in mind the inherited forms that we work within when we make theater. In the rehearsal room, we each have different personal connections to characters like Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra. Why do we care so much for them? Why do we feel the loss of them the way we do? Are Shakespeare's women, women? It becomes the difference between performance and the page. By now, these characters have a very long history of embodiment by women. When suddenly she breathes, it becomes harder to lose her. When I think of these characters, I also think of all the women I know who have been them, voiced them, and enacted these deaths. I think of the women in my life who have been exploited in ways that echo in these stories. I think of my own voice speaking unheard, the moment of departure when I whispered my last word as Lady Macbeth: a lost woman, a frightened woman, and a converted ghost.

The things we learn from these women when we are first introduced to them can be both relatable and dangerous. One of my ensemble members in the first Roundtable shared that a few years ago, caught in an unhealthy relationship, she found that Ophelia's story taught her that "the ultimate act of loving a man is suffering". Perhaps, we can re-train our own ideas of the proper way to love an other, and our expectations for receiving love, by remedying the ways we learn about the women of Shakespeare in the classroom and how we see them on stage and screen. We

must use the wealth of nuanced information that can be found when looking at the ways women die, are handled in death, and are disappeared to help us look closer at the ingrained biases and learned habits which uphold a structure that propels the feminine, the queer, or racial other to early graves. We hold a common fear of dying without witness. But I find the thing which aches most to be the women who watch the other women go. Mothers and mother figures send their daughters into the same fires they walked through, realize they cannot change the world for them, are made to fail. Women with shared pains and shared loves, keep themselves from themselves and from one another. In these plays we watch each other die. But theater spaces allow us to come back, re-shape, mend, make new. Not as a symbol, but as a body that still breathes. Here, "a woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor--once, by smashing vokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction--will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language."(Cixous) In these spaces of our own invention, we have the opportunity to play our bodies the way we hear them; to show how womanhood is not as simple as the one who gives birth, the one who waits, and the one who dies but lives on in man's poetry. Women are still primarily valued for what they give. They give love, time, caretaking, wisdom, pleasure. Life. But placing worth in only what we can give up and give away, unfairly ignores our right to also receive. Forget worth. We are important subjects simply because we live, because we are here. Our art should reflect this fact more. By giving focus to feminine death in tragedy, we open our awareness to think critically about the ways our world fetishizes the suffering of women and the silence of women. We listen more closely. We look with eyes that may see in the dark--offstage-- where she performs her own last rites.

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