# BREAKING THE GLASS COFFIN: AFFECT THEORY AND THE FEMALE CORPSE IN SHAKESPEREAN TRAGEDY

LAUREN E REBHOLZ

Bachelor of Arts in English

Loyola University of Chicago

2018

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2024

We hereby approve this thesis for

LAUREN REBHOTZ

candidate for the Master of Education degree

for the English and

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S

College of Graduate Studies by

_____

Committee Chairperson, James J. Marino

_____

English Department, May 9, 2024

_____

Committee Member, Brooke A. Conti

_____

English Department, May 9, 2024

_____

Committee Member, Rachel Carnell

_____

English Department, May 9, 2024

Student's Date of Defense: May 9, 2024

BREAKING THE GLASS COFFIN: AFFECT THEORY AND THE FEMALE CORPSE IN SHAKESPEREAN TRAGEDY

LAUREN E REBHOLZ

## ABSTRACT

The impacts of patriarchal social systems on the physical, intellectual, and social lives of both men and women has been well documented in literary criticism. But what happens when the body under inspection is dead? Through a combined lens of feminist and affect theories applied to two tragedies of William Shakespeare, this paper attempts to expand the critical conversation of how society impacts and impedes the growth and autonomy of the gendered body, particularly the feminine body. This paper takes the socially constructed angel woman/monster woman dichotomy as a cornerstone to understand how gender informs social relationships between the self and the world, and how such dichotomies, when 'stuck' upon bodies, can ultimately lead to the demise of not just the self, but society along with it. From the 'angelic' Cordelia and Lavinia to their 'monstrous' counterparts in Goneril, Regan, and Tamora, the women of *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus* all end up dead in the finale, illustrating the inherent danger of the angel/monster dichotomy and other such social categorizations. The destructive ends of these Shakespearean tragedies open the door to deeper understanding of how such socially gendered dichotomies are intended function, and the disastrous consequences of their lived reality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: THE MONSTER IN THE GLASS COFFIN

Sara Ahmed's book *The Politics of Emotion* offers a new perspective through which to view the heavily trod critical landscape of classical works such as those of William Shakespeare, especially in the realm of feminist theory. These plays have served literary critical theorists for centuries, yet remain full of unopened doors. Ahmed's work provides a unique key to unlocking meaning in Shakespeare, offering a new vocabulary for understanding the function of patriarchal systems within these plays. In her book *The Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed explores the interactional nature of human emotion. Emotional experience, for Ahmed, is not merely an internal response to the world, but rather the body's physical reaction of "toward-ness or away-ness" to external stimuli that "shape the very surfaces of bodies… through the repetition of actions over time" (11; 5). Emotion is a simultaneous response to an embodied experience in the present and an association of historically dependent interactions and signs to those present experiences; for example, what creates fear in the past sticks on the skin, and prickles when

encountering a similar experience in the present. Ahmed describes this emotional movements as both "sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures and objects)" and "forwards and backwards (repression always leaves its trace in the present - hence 'what sticks' is bound up with the absent presence of historicity)" (71). Through her discussion of the perpetual horizontal and vertical movement of emotion across and between signs, Ahmed determines that "[t]he work of emotion" is "the 'sticking' of signs to bodies," bodies that then "take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others," (19; 1). For example, the embrace of a childhood friend induces significant comfort because of the historical associations attached to the person as not only 'friend,' but also a symbol for 'childhood.' The labels of 'friend' and 'childhood' not only impact the way that the Self views the Other, but also reflects back on the Self; the prior interactions with the Other positively impacted the Self in ways that allowed the Self to be shaped into friendship. In this way, "emotions are relational," dependent upon a necessary "gap in the determination of feeling" between the experience of the body and the evaluation of the mind (Ahmed 11; 8). Human emotional existence is thus composed of a myriad of repetitive transactional exchanges between bodies, creating vast networks of meaning across space and time.

Ahmed describes these networks derived from 'affective economies' in order to establish the social nature of human emotion. Affective economies are based upon the 'impressions' left on the body through contact with others, 'impressions' that shape the Self just as it shapes the external 'Others' to be harmful or beneficial, leading to the vertical and horizontal "'rippling' effect of emotions" which can cause these 'sticky signs' to infect proximate objects and lead some feelings to stick to Others who were not

present during the original interaction (Ahmed 12; 71). The mutual shaping of the Self/Other is made manifest in the signs 'stuck' to those bodies, the labels associated with the emotions the Other produces in/on the Self. For the act of 'sticking' signs on Others is often an act of self-preservation, one that initiates the reaction of the Self towards the other; in the words of Ahmed: "when others become 'hateful', the actions of 'hate' are directed against them" (19). Naturally, the process of affective 'sticking' is most often associated with stronger emotional responses that are deemed to be particularly beneficial or harmful to the Self, such as sexual ecstasy or physical pain, as these feelings tend to leave starker 'wounds' on the 'skin.'

In her book, Ahmed primarily takes her examples from modern day media, which allows for incredibly intriguing discussion of the ways humanity has devised to hurt itself. But Ahmed's theories also open interesting avenues to explore affective networks established in literature, the realm of textually practiced humanity. For example, Ahmed's affective economies provide another new lens to interrogate patriarchal social structures, specifically the institutionalized fear and subjugation of the feminine. In fact, Ahmed's theory echoes sentiments set forward in Gayle Rubin's seminal feminist text "The Traffic in Women." Rubin also establishes the idea of an interactive economy between bodies and social labeling, albeit in gendered terms. At the beginning of her essay, Rubin asserts: "A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone *in certain relations*," meaning that the signs 'stuck' upon the female body are the product of external interactions rather than inherent internal realities (902, my emphasis). These are the roles men require of their women to maintain patriarchal hegemony, and these roles are maintained through the continual

‘impression’ of patriarchal fear/contempt/love/lust upon these women until their bodies are molded exactly into the shapes imagined for them. The same could thus be said for the men these women interact with: it is only in relation to others that a man can be dubbed boss, father, failure, or cuckold. But this fact is, of course, intolerable to the patriarchy; the affective economy can only work in one direction, lest the feminine ‘infect’ the masculine. In this way, both masculinity and femininity become “constrained” mobilities in which the Self must perform ‘correctly’ in public to access respectability, otherwise anxiety will “[overwhelm] other possible affective relations to the world,” and lead the Self to be rejected (Ahmed 115; 109). Naturally, in patriarchal systems, anxiety is most often attached to signs associated with the feminine, functionally creating a one-way, hierarchized channel of affective communication in which female becomes insubordinate to male to maintain social order.

Gayle Rubin’s essay further examines the source of this one-way, parasitic relationship responsible for the commodification of the female body. Through an examination of kinship systems across time, specifically in gender-hierarchized societies, Rubin concludes that reproductive “oppression is not inevitable… but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it” (Rubin 906). She further explains how modern societies are “heir to a long tradition in which women do not inherit… do not lead, and… do not talk to god,” serving instead as tokens to be “given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold” for the purpose of establishing male kinship networks between families, status lines, and even empires (Rubin 904; 910). These long-established kinship systems create the unnatural gender hierarchy in which the female is subject to and dependent on the male, reducing them to

consumable objects. And, as object, women are expected to fulfill the roles assigned to them; she who is called 'wife' is expected to act different than she who is called 'whore,' and they are treated accordingly. Yet, these systems also establish male dependence upon the reproductive labor of the female to maintain its authority. Thus, to secure patriarchal hegemony, this dependence must be deeply hidden behind the myth of female subjugation. This system of mutual dependence and the continual efforts to hide it establish a transactional society relying upon the commodification of women to run properly. Women are used as "[conduits] of a relationship" between men "rather than a partner to it," rendering them, in the words of Stephen Orgel, "valuable… piece[s] of disposable property" (Rubin 909; Orgel 36). Orgel's use of the word 'disposable' adds a new, insidious dimension to Rubin's theory; not only are women dehumanized into transactional tokens, but they are rendered expendable, easily replaced. The female is stripped of its human quality as a means of preserving male power.

Although feminist critics have been saying this for decades, the consideration of how patriarchal affective economies function, how these signs are 'stuck' to female bodies and how they shape both male and female in tandem, provides a new angle of approach for feminist criticism. If it is only within "certain relations" that one comes to signify something, as Rubin says, then humans require a social system to dictate personal value, and, consequentially, those social systems are "dependent on relations of power, which endow" the self and "'others' with meaning and value" (Ahmed 9). And if the established relations of power involve patriarchal kinship systems, then all attributable 'meaning and value' becomes harmfully gendered and hierarchized. "Emotions are intentional," Ahmed states, "in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a

direction or orientation towards an object," meaning that "[e]motions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects" (4). Emotional experience is inherently interactional in that one cannot feel without an object to induce feeling. The Self needs an Other to impress and be impressed by; the physical boundary of the Self (the skin) is determined through touching external things. The patriarchal Self depends upon encounters with the feminine to define itself, specifically the labeling of those encounters as harmful to maintain a fabricated hierarchy. The rhetoric of male dominance necessitates "the suppression of natural [human] similarities" to maintain an "exclusive gender identity," and further requires "repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of "feminine" traits; in women, of the local definition of "masculine" traits" (Rubin 913). If the goal is to privilege the male over the female, then the male must be associated with power and life and the feminine with corruption and death in order to maintain the hierarchy. Patriarchal control becomes a game of labeling, of consistently, forcibly repressing traits that 'stick' to the skin in undesirable, emasculating ways. Thus, the relationship between the masculine and the feminine in patriarchal economies must be one of fear disguised as hate and disgust, necessarily reinforcing the gendered stereotypic dichotomization necessary to maintain the artificial power structure.

A key tool to the maintenance of the patriarchal affective economy is, to use Ahmed's terminology, the sticking of socially charged, binary signs upon the female body as a means of control. According to patriarchal systems, a woman can be either one of two things: angelic Madonna or monstrous whore. The 'Madonna-whore complex' is a term often used to describe "[p]olarized representations of women" that label them "as

either “good” (chaste and pure) Madonnas or “bad” (promiscuous and seductive) whores” based upon their external behavior and perceived sexual accessibility and ‘usefulness’ (Baraket). With Sigmund Freud credited as the originator of the term, the misogynistic foundations of the Madonna-whore complex are blatantly obvious, and it is no stretch of the imagination to say that the binary was devised to reinforce a gender-hierarchized status quo. But, with time, new vocabularies have been created to further define and deconstruct the underlying causes of all human interactions, especially pervasive harmful structures. For example, literary critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s book “The Madwoman in the Attic” further elaborates on the ‘Madonna/whore’ dichotomy through an analysis of Western literature, offering the terms ‘angel’ and ‘monster’ woman as sister substitutes for ‘Madonna’ and ‘whore.’ Gilbert and Gubar’s book interrogates how women are literarily separated into binary categories (the ‘angel in the house’ and the ‘madwoman in the attic’) and pitted against one another to further ensure their obedience to the system.

Both the labels of Madonna and whore are poisonous to the female body. The angel Madonna, which Gilbert and Gubar claim as the “most pernicious image male authors have ever imposed upon literary women,” is submissive, modest, chaste, and “wholly passive,” in that she “leads a life… whose story cannot be told because there is no story” as she simply “shines like a beacon in a dark world, like a motionless lighthouse by which others… can set their course” (20-21). Her sole purpose is to obey and serve others, leading an entirely “*self-less*” existence, surrendering all subjectivity to others (Gilbert 21, original emphasis). The paradox of the angel woman is that, while others are entirely dependent upon her care for them, she is simultaneously entirely

dependent upon them for her existence. In fact, the angel woman is *so* self-less that her most pure form, according to Gilbert and Gubar, is the dead princess locked in a glass coffin, sexually chaste and beyond physical deterioration (23). Thus, if the epitome of the angel woman is the dead Snow White, her opposite, the monster woman, is best encapsulated in Snow White's stepmother, the Queen. The monster women embody "intransigent female autonomy," and are "[e]mblems of filthy materiality" who "use their arts of deception to entrap and destroy men" (Gilbert 27; 29-30). Male authors often allude to the "secret, shameful ugliness" of female genitalia, thereby associating the womb with "hell, death and consumption… clearly [evoking] a concept of woman's sexuality that is both dangerous and corrupting" (Gilbert 30; Wynne-Davies 218). For if the womb is both "the entrance to death and the site of mortality," then, naturally, the patriarchal forces terrified of their own demise must demonize the threat (Adelman 6). For, as history as shown, "[t]he traditional response to anxiety about loss of control is to attach such fears to women, blame women for arousing rebellion, and assume that the womb is as troublesome as the penis" (Atkinson 29). Therefore, the angel and the monster are simultaneously the most important pieces of patriarchal society, yet have no real place within it; the maternal care of the Madonna is required for reproductive labor but is functionally dead, while whore is made into a common enemy that needs to be killed to maintain the status quo. The paradoxical nature of these identities muddles the means of affective communication and ultimately leads society towards collective death.

In fact, Gilbert and Gubar's terminology of the angel and the monster highlights the socio-historical association of the feminine with death in a way that the Madonna-whore designation does not. An angel is a spiritual being, an agent of God in heaven who,

in the "extremity of her alienation from ordinary fleshly life" is separate from the realm of human experience, and therefore proximately dead (Gilbert 25). And a monster, as the earliest of fairytales instruct, a source of endless chaos and harm, only exists as an obstacle to be killed, likewise separating her from humanity. But these two identities, Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate, are not the opposites they appear to be, and are inextricably linked. For neither the angel nor the monster woman could not exist without her counterpart, as Gilbert and Gubar explain: "for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of… the [female will]" (27-28). Every angel 'praised' needs a monster 'castigated' (Gilbert 28). To maintain her status, both the angel and the monster must constantly repress the other the contained within her; she can only be an 'angel' and socially revered if she actively chooses to obey the roles prescribed to her instead of 'giving into' her primal urges towards 'wicked behavior.' To describe this, Gilbert and Gubar again turn to the example of *Snow White*: while the "Queen struggles to free herself from the passive Snow White in herself, Snow White must struggle to repress the assertive Queen in herself" (Gilbert 40). The repression required to contain the angel/monster within the Self is sign and symptom of patriarchal failure; just as men must repress anything 'feminine,' women likewise must not only repress the 'masculine' but also the undesirably 'feminine.' Her ability to meet societal expectations determines her value, and this value is always necessarily linked to her sexuality. For the womb, while certainly susceptible to infertility, disease, or adultery, is ultimately the "[organ] of generation," and thus the main source of feminine power and patriarchal anxiety (Orgel 19). As an entirely social production, the association of the female body with death is

blatantly counterintuitive to the reality of the living female body, but is necessary to maintain the illusion of male hegemony.

Thus, the affective economy established in patriarchal social systems is dependent upon male inheritance anxiety, manufacturing the 'stickiness' of female sexuality. Patriarchal anxiety-fueled paranoia is mobilized against the offending object, the womb, through the repetitive 'sticking' of harmful labels upon the female body to reassert and reaffirm synthetic control. To reemphasize Ahmed's definition of ("[e]motions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others,") the perceived threat of the bloodline shapes the 'boundary' of patriarchal socio-historical systems, leading to the identification of female sexual autonomy as the harmful, 'invading' Other that threatens that border (Ahmed 5; 4). If attaching the emotion of 'hate' onto a person leads others to direct actions of hate towards them, when a woman is branded an 'angel' or a 'whore,' the 'appropriate' actions are likewise directed towards her. But in this case, 'appropriate' carries with it severe consequences. For the angel is not treated solely with reverence, but is also subjected to condescension, infantilization, idolization, and lust after her perfect chastity, while the monster receives not only fear and lust, but scorn, derision, and ostracism. The sign and its symptoms, of course, are never the woman's choice; society 'sticks' an association upon her, and she must deal with its consequence. Ahmed additionally calls to the socio-historical association of the feminine and the emotional as women are often "represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement," and, "[t]o be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather

than autonomous" (3). Yet the traits assigned to the feminine in Ahmed's statement purposefully play upon the same gendered stereotypes patriarchy evokes to control female sexuality; the relegating of emotionality, appetite, and weak will and judgement were all 'signs' imposed upon the feminine as a means of instating inorganic divisions between male and female.

When taken in tandem with feminist works that precede her, Ahmed's theories shine new light on the harmful structures and stratagems of patriarchal hierarchy, especially in the emotional exchanges between man and woman. But, if emotion is interactional, does it function the same when one of the parties cannot interact? For example, how does a dead body alter an affective network? The corpse is a uniquely 'sticky' object in that it is simultaneously human and non-human; all of the biological pieces are, presumably, still present, but there is no soul left to animate those pieces. The corpse is the 'being' left when the 'human' passes on. In this way, the corpse is also uniquely tied to prior histories of affective interaction, as the relationships the person established while alive still echo through their death. Additionally, the physical corpse is heavily associated with extra sticky emotions such as fear and disgust, reliant upon "perilously close" proximity towards an object that is "misread" as an "offense" (Ahmed 141; 102). "Disgust" as well as fear, are "clearly dependent upon contact," involving "a relationship of touch and proximity between the surfaces of bodies and objects (Ahmed 141). But even though they are teeming with prior histories, rife with affective possibility, a corpse cannot truly be 'impressed' upon in the way that Ahmed describes; any attempts to 'touch' or to 'stick signs' onto it would necessarily slide off because the exchange is no longer interactional. Instead of initiating an affective network between

signs, the corpse makes affective language impossible, stunting the flow of emotion to a one-way channel that is sure to suffocate itself.

The stickiness of the female corpse has disastrous implications for the patriarchal systems that create her. For the ideal woman is the dead princess in a glass coffin, per Gilbert and Gubar. But the angel woman cannot always be dead, otherwise she is not sexually available or useful, while the monster is only 'monstrous' when she transgresses against man-made rules. Thus, the dead 'angel' in her coffin must also be the epitome of the 'monster' woman, for when female sexuality is 'finally thwarted' in death, her generative capacity dies with her, and she is therefore no longer a token to be traded amongst men. The dead woman in her coffin becomes a "death angel" who simultaneously "suggests a providentially selfless mother, delivering the male soul from one realm to another," and "the fearful bondage of mortality into which every mother delivers her children" (Gilbert 25). In her death, all patriarchal fear becomes manifest, for she is beyond male control. While the living woman consciously chooses whether to adhere or not to 'socially acceptable' traits, the female corpse shatters them all because she cannot be 'impressed' upon. When the patriarchal hobgoblin of female sexuality is 'finally thwarted' in death, her generative capacity dies with her, and she is therefore no longer a token to be traded amongst men. The kinship networks she forged dissolve, as do the affective bonds tying her to father and husband alike. Once a woman's body becomes a corpse and loses all sexual capacity, the patriarchal imagination that formerly pressed upon, mutilated, and distorted her living body to bend to its wishes finds nothing but a hollow shell. The emptiness of the female corpse resists the 'touch' of her former 'impressors,' instead sticking those same signs back upon the hand that branded her in

the first place, revealing the flimsy malleability of the man-made boundary of gender hierarchy, and threatening chaos. Therefore, the female corpse, incapable of her generative purpose, becomes infectious, resisting society's attempts to 'stick' on her. She becomes too sticky to be enveloped; she is disgorged rather than swallowed because she is 'empty,' and such emptiness proves toxic to those who put her 'emptiness' on a pedestal in the first place. While the treatment of the woman's physical corpse may vary (for example, she may be lovingly entombed or spitefully thrown to the wolves), the contagious impact of her social existence resists dichotomization and collapses all affective communication networks. And the failure of affective communication reveals the illegitimacy, or impotence, of any social system that necessitates the death of its affective network.

This exact breakdown of affective language is seen in the conclusion of several of William Shakespeare's tragedies. While Shakespeare obviously was not aware of the theories of Ahmed, Rubin, or Gilbert and Gubar, it is no stretch of the imagination to say that he still participated in the types of human interactions necessary to the foundation of these theories. It is clear from his texts that Shakespeare understood the ways in which human beings impress labels upon each other, often as a means of self-preservation. There is no way to truly know what Shakespeare thought of any of this, but the way that his female characters are written and are treated by the male characters, and particularly the way that their deaths are presented textually can be read and understood as a critique of patriarchal social systems, like those in which Shakespeare lived, that severely limit the ways in which human beings, both male and female, can live their lives and present their emotions. The epitome of the angel women is said to be the dead princess lying in a

glass coffin, but this is a fool's fantasy. The female corpse is the culmination of epitome of the monster woman; subject to physical decay to match her perceived moral decay in life, and no longer at the whim of the patriarchal pressure to reproduce. But this reading only stands as long as patriarchal binaries. Ultimately, the dead woman symbolizes the death of gendered labels, and therefore cannot be Madonna or whore, but simply *is*. Thus, the tragedies of William Shakespeare provide a fruitful playground for studying how these modern day theories interact in the literary space.

By applying Sara Ahmed's theories of affective economies and the feminist works of Gayle Rubin and Gilbert and Gubar upon the textual bodies, both living and dead, of the women of three of Shakespeare's tragedies, this paper seeks to further explore Shakespeare's depiction of how the affective economies of patriarchal social systems are created, reinforced, and destroyed. The female characters of *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus* provide a comprehensive view of the different ways patriarchal stereotypes 'impress upon' and distort the living female body, yet all end with the vividly visible display of the female corpse, a consequence of the male character's anxiety-fueled actions. In this paper, I seek to explore the different ways in which these women, in their textual life, surrender to or resist the strictures patriarchal society presses upon them, and how, regardless of their varying degrees of surrender or resistance, all of these women end up dead, in order to demonstrate the social impact of the collapse of affective economies the corpse necessitates. From the monster-fication of Tamora, Goneril, and Regan, to the martyr-fication of Lavinia and Cordelia, and the angel/monster slippage of Desdemona and Emilia, these plays offer a rich playing field of gendered affective transactions to be explored. The inevitability of the death of the female in these

Shakespearean tragedies further reveals the horrifying truth held within the glass coffin: the reality of the female corpse upon the stage is simultaneously the actualization of the monster woman patriarchal society fears and the site of the ultimate collapse of the

## CHAPTER II

## "ARE YOU OUR DAUGHTER?" UNNATURAL DAUGHTERS IN *KING LEAR*

The characters of *King Lear* are caught in a patriarchal affective economy: to maintain power, the male characters 'stick' associations of death to the feminine as a means of maintaining power. The male characters use the women to establish kinship systems, seen in the marriages of all three of Lear's daughters, as well as Edmund's scheming to woo both Goneril and Regan, but are also quick to demonize those women when they 'misbehave,' a word *King Lear* defines as any action that breaks the titular king's fantasies. For Lear's imagination casts all three of his daughters as his personal angelic Madonnas, abdicating both his throne and body to their care, hoping for their "kind nursery" to save him from the perils of his mortality (I.I.124). Janet Adelman understands this line to mean that Lear has returned to a state of infantile dependence in which he is absolutely reliant relies upon his daughter's nursery in the same way a child needs its mother (115). However, there cannot be an angel without a monster looming near, and the instant that Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia push back against their father's

idealized boundaries, they are violently ejected into the realm of the monstrous, and their textual behavior reacts accordingly. The stickiness of the patriarchal labels of angel and monster are vibrantly apparent in *King Lear*; for the second a daughter is 'disowned' from her Madonna position, she is forced in inhabit the skin of the whore in conjunction with the father's favor. And, just as in *Titus*, all three women end up dead at the end of the play, regardless of their social delegation as angel or monster. It is the affective economy at work in *King Lear* that leads to these deaths, as Lear is ultimately unable to handle the reality of his daughters' aging and growing away from him in favor of their own independence, stinging of this own mortality. Thus, through a violent association of the female body with death, Lear attempts to suffocate their autonomy, and ultimately kills them all in the process.

Thus, through a lens combining Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies with Janet Adelman's interpretations of the maternal in *King Lear,* this chapter seeks to reframe the critical understanding of Lear's daughters, and the relationship between the royal family, demonstrating the inherent problem of equating the feminine body with death. Such an equation maintains the affective economies of fear generated within patriarchal dichotomies in which the female body is forced to inhabit roles that contradict autonomous action. This results in the privileging of women in relation to one another, made all the more evidence in the treatment of one corpse over another in accordance with the woman's behavior prior to her death. The very act of privileging one female body over another based upon the 'worthiness' of her death reenacts patriarchal gender hierarchies. If the connection between the feminine and death is removed, the female corpse loses its attachment to any prior meaning, yet is no longer 'empty;' she is now a

mirror that reflects back any attempted affective interaction, a glittering spectacle to be witnessed and one that points a damning finger back on those responsible for her death. To read *King Lear* as the story of the angelic Cordelia saving her father from her two wicked sisters, as Freud and several other critics suggest, decreases the scope of the play's thematic commentary, and reinforces the harmful ideologies that lead these characters to death in the first place. Instead, *King Lear* should be read as an exploration of how gendered social systems impact family dynamics, and the additional effects of how both personal affections and the process of aging impacts these relationships.

In *Suffocating Mothers*, Janet Adelman has commented at length on Lear's expectation that Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia will provide him with maternal care in his old age. Through an exploration of the simultaneously absent yet suffocating maternal presence in *King Lear*, Adelman situates the 'monstrosity' of all of Lear's daughters in the father's imagination; the play's central conflict is the result of the three women's behavior contradicts the roles their father has imaginatively assigned them, and Lear's continual association of their 'betrayal' with the "dark and vicious place of female sexuality" (115). Lear blames his daughters' 'bad' behavior on their sexuality, believing that this natural sign of growing up is the source of corruption in their household. The catalyst for Lear's physical and psychic decline throughout the play, is Cordelia's need for sexual autonomy, as he is unable to reconcile his idealized image of his 'perfect' youngest daughter with the reality that, like him, she is growing up and preparing to leave him fuels a rage that quickly burns out of his control. And this paternal rage generates the daughters' perceived monstrosity; Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia all become "exfoliations of what Lear's imagination makes of [their] betrayal: [their] sexuality and separateness"

(Adelman 118). All three women become unrecognizable and fearsome 'Others' to Lear on account of their desire for sexual autonomy, and Lear likewise becomes unrecognizable to them as he slips deeper and deeper into senility, causing the collapse of the familial affective economy, and fusing into a pit of chaos that leaves no one alive.

The patriarchal association of the feminine with death is counterproductive; the female is at the very center of patriarchal society's functioning, and any attempt to fight against her instead of work with her is proven futile. When the affective association of suffocation is stuck to the maternal, motherhood and femininity become hated, painful, feared; in this way, the patriarchy reaffirms its prejudice, while also providing its own kryptonite. Thus, from Cordelia's disobedience in I.I to Goneril and Regan's treachery throughout the play, the apparent monstrousness of these women is shaped by Lear's desperate need for them, glaringly apparent when he cries to his elder daughters, "I gave you all-… Made you my guardians, my depositaries, / But kept a reservation to be followed…" (II.II.444; 446-447). The impact of Lear's deteriorating behavior and grip on reality strains the already tense relationships between himself and his daughters, as well as those between his daughters, which is glaringly apparent when Lear is forced to rely upon Goneril and Regan instead of Cordelia, which none of the four ever prepared for (Adelman 115). Indeed, Goneril and Regan's truly vicious actions only happen after Lear has declared them "a boil, / A plague sore, or embossed carbuncle / In my corrupted blood;" the earlier actions of the ones that lead him to verbally disown his daughters are, in fact, perfectly normal behavior (II.II.418-420).

The relationship Adelman describes between Lear and his daughters simulates an affective network of fear, as per Ahmed. In *The Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed describes

how the experience of fear is inexplicably tied to love. She explains how "[l]ove is conditional, and the conditions of love differentiate between those who can inhabit the nation, from those who cause disturbance," and that interactions with such 'disturbances' generate the emotion felt as fear (23). Ahmed further illustrates how:

> [narratives of fear] work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject. The presence of this other is imagined as a threat to the object of love (68).

In the case of *King Lear*, Lear himself is the subject determining the conditions of love; his relationship with his daughters is dependent on the 'disturbance' they create in his imagined reality. Lear feels 'endangered' when his daughters assert their sexual autonomy because it threatens his access to their 'kind nursery…' Ahmed's language of 'the nation' resonates deeply within the text of *King Lear*, as the body of the aged king is fused with the concept of the nation, and the old man willingly surrenders both to his daughters, who quickly become objects of fear.

Lear's behavior towards his daughters is a clear example of the simultaneous "turning away from the object of fear" and "*turning towards* the object of love, who becomes a defense against the death that is apparently threatened by the object of fear" (Ahmed 112). "In this way," Ahmed continues, "we can see that fear *is that which keeps alive the fantasy of love as the preservation of life*, but paradoxically only by announcing the possibility of death," establishing "the necessity of the fantasy" in establishing "a home or enclosure" within the loved object to ensure the "passing by" of the feared object (112). Yet the "second skin" that encloses the Self still " keeps open the possibility of

loss," and the passing by of the loved object rather than the feared object instigates fear itself (Ahmed 112). Ultimately, it is Lear's continually shifting assignment of the title of 'object of love' or 'object of fear' upon his daughters that drives him to insanity, and drives the entire family to death, establishing a dichotomy that can easily be substituted with Freud's 'Madonna-whore complex or Gilbert and Gubar's angel and monster woman.

Much of the scholarship on *King Lear* already participates in the dichotomous separation of Lear's daughters. Goneril and Regan are cast as 'evil personified,' complete with all the traits of the monster woman, and in contrast is their youngest sister Cordelia, the 'golden daughter' and Lear's angelic savior. Interestingly, a vast majority of *Lear* critics have privileged Cordelia over her older sisters, giving her both more space on their pages and a more glowing review. The overwhelming prevalence of Cordelia in the scholarship on *Lear* is intriguing, considering she is the sister with the least time on stage during the play, and this prevalence plays into the same dichotomy the text itself manufactures for these women. In the critical privileging of Cordelia as a Madonna-fied martyr, these critics generalize her relationship with her father and rivalry with her sisters; Cordelia becomes the inherently 'good 'daughter who 'truly loves 'her father, and is therefore worthy of praise and scholarly attention, while the other two become inherently wicked beasts from whom Cordelia must save him, and are more often than not written off in critical analyses. A major critical consequence of such a lens is that all three women are condensed into binary boxes, reiterating the patriarchal affective economy in which they must either be praised or chastised and nothing else. If Goneril and Regan are assumed to be inherently evil, the embodiment all of the nefarious traits of the monster women, (insatiable greed, voracious lust, and untenable cruelty), then their

chaotic loss of control once in power as queens can be written off as nothing more than the magnification of their 'inherent female wickedness,' leaving no room to consider alternative reasons for these women's fall. At the same time, if the elder sisters are understood as evil, Cordelia must be read as entirely pure, which is counterintuitive to her words in I.I. Such a reading of the play is thus reductive of the text, and founded upon the patriarchal assumption of a dichotomy between the monster and the angel woman. The text itself does not privilege Cordelia over her sisters just because she is ultimately the obedient daughter; rather, *King Lear* centers the complexities of the three sisters' different choices in their behavior towards their father to provide an exploration of familial dynamics as a whole, and how the patriarchy drastically twists such relationships, especially those between fathers and daughters. Indeed, patriarchal structures inform the familial dynamics under the dramatic microscope in all of Shakespeare's works, but this paper seeks to interrogate the critical tendency to reinforce those structures rather than join in with them.

The observable difference in Lear's treatment of his daughters despite the similarity of their respective downfalls reveals a deeply complex familial relationship tainted by social gender expectations. Lear's deteriorating mental state forcibly alters the family's affective economy, as the elderly father assumes the role of child, forcing his daughters into a maternal role against their will. Lear, of course, is an old man coming to terms with his mortality, but it is often glossed over that Lear's daughters are aging too; Goneril and Regan are already married, and Cordelia is on the precipice of marriage at the play's opening. All three women are 'growing up,' and Lear's inability to handle the reality of his daughters' autonomy is the source of the tragedy in the play rather than

Lear's giving up of his possessions 'too soon 'or refusing to give into death. Additionally, Lear's infantile need breeds rivalry between the sisters that, while assumedly already present, transforms them into binary representations of female subjectivity in accordance with their father's psychic need: the angel and the monster. Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia are squeezed into shapes foreign to them. Unable to inhabit the labels stuck upon them, all three women perish, reduced to three 'caskets' that bear the death of their father and, more importantly, the generative potential of his legacy. The female body in *King Lear* is thus a symbolic paradox: it is the source of life, yet also the origin of death. And, therefore, female sexuality becomes the object of fear, as "[t]he womb was traditionally understood as the entrance to death and the site of mortality:" (Adelman 6). In order to avoid death, Lear must rely upon his daughters to protect him through selfless maternal care. But such a demand instead leads to the death of the entire family, as once the women have perished, Lear cannot find immortality in their' maternal 'arms, and instead must meet death himself. Lear never would have been able to do attain his goal; as his offspring, their wombs are closed to him, save for heirs to carry on his bloodline, something seemingly of little interest to the aged king.

The affective network established among Lear's family in the play's opening scene suffers from several points of tension due to Lear's obvious favoritism of Cordelia and all three daughter's mistrust of their father's temperament. At the start of I.I, when it is Cordelia's turn to participate in Lear's love test, the old king asks "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" meaning that he had saved the best of his kingdom for last, regardless of what Cordelia would say (I.I.94-95). Later in the scene, Lear openly declares, "I loved her [Cordelia] most," and Goneril further confirms Lear's

favoritism: “He always loved our sister most” (I.I.123; 292). Lear’s textually-stated preference for his youngest child could be the basis for a sibling rivalry between the sisters, and one that is supported by the clear tension in the sisters’ relationship later in the scene. When Cordelia derides her sisters for their “glib and oily art / To speak and purpose not” and warns that she “would prefer him [Lear] to a better place,” Goneril advises her to “content [her] lord [France], who hath received [her] / At fortune’s alms” since she has “obedience scanted,” warning her to obey the whims of her new husband better than those of their father (I.I.225-227; 276; 279-80). The sarcasm and not-so-subtly veiled insults between the sisters reveal a tense relationship, bordering on rivalry, that is rooted in patriarchal gender norms. The behavior of the women in I.I is in fact an incredible example of the problems of the Madonna-whore complex on display. Goneril and Regan’s speech in I.I is clearly performative, but they are rewarded for it because they are acting in accordance with their father’s desires; they are the obedient daughters through whom their father has established kinship systems with other powerful men. Cordelia, on the other hand, who is in the midst of acting as conduit for Lear to establish a connection with a foreign power, does not obey Lear’s directions, and even though her silence is an act of love, it is read as monstrous defiance, and punished accordingly. In this singular scene, the actions of the Lear’s daughters demonstrate the danger of the angle/monster dichotomy: the angel woman and monster woman are one in the same, and are entirely dependent upon the woman’s conformity to gender norms.

The first daughter to disturb Lear’s imagination, and thus the catalyst for the sudden intensity of his rage, is Cordelia, the golden youngest child. As Lear’s stated favorite, Cordelia is often automatically pigeon-holed into the role of the angel woman,

which has catapulted her into the critical spotlight. Like many other *Lear* critics, Adelman spends a significant portion of her chapter on *Lear* discussing how Lear's imagination punishes Cordelia for her disobedience in Act I Scene I. Adelman asserts that Lear's aging upsets the familial dynamic already at work between himself and his children, and Cordelia's actions in I.I and subsequent banishment further aggravates the situation, as Lear is forced to rely upon the 'maternal malevolence 'of his two elder, and admittedly less favored, daughters (Adelman 115). As his favorite child, Cordelia is expected by Lear, and the text with him, to love him most, anticipating that she will pass his love test with flying colors, take care of both him and his country in his old age. Adelman argues that Lear's childish desire necessitates the sacrifice of Cordelia's subjectivity, in that he needs her to fuse with him, stifling her separateness, in order to achieve immortality, which is something Cordelia is unwilling to give at the start of play (124). Indeed, the opening scene of *King Lear* is not just about Lear's test to divide his kingdom among his daughters, but also Cordelia's choice between two suitors, France and Burgundy. Even as Cordelia later chides her sisters for their abuse of Lear's desperation, she advocates for the independence they have in marriage, and therefore refuses to be a part of Lear's 'choice of three caskets,' as he is interrupting her own 'choice of two suitors. While the text reveals that Cordelia does appear to love her father best of the three sisters, ("I am sure my love's / more ponderous than my tongue") she remains reticent during the love test to not only prove her love for her father, but also to stake her claim for her right to sexual independence (I.I. 77-78). Cordelia's choice to stand mute reveals her awareness of her father's overbearing dependence on her, as well as her desire for the autonomy of her older sisters. In her insistence upon her answer of

'nothing,' Cordelia challenges Lear: “Sure I shall never marry like my sisters / To love my father all” (I.I.103-104). In this way, Cordelia disrupts Lear’s ‘rightful’ use of her to establish kinship systems with the suitor of his choice who, in this case, is Lear himself. While Cordelia’s pure intentions are clearly emphasized throughout the play’s opening scene, she is the first to defy Lear, initiating his psychotic break with her plea for autonomy. Cordelia is thus the daughter who throws the wrench into the established affective economy.

The worst punishment Cordelia receives is the failure of her break for autonomy. All of Cordelia’s attempts to break the system in I.I disappear with her long absence from the stage. When Cordelia finally returns in Act IV, she immediately surrenders her interiority to become Lear’s“ sacrificial antidote” to her sisters“ ’maternal malevolence,” finally dissolving herself into him and transforming into the angelic Madonna mother figure he imagined for her (Adelman 124). There is no mention of Cordelia’s husband or other relationships of any kind after her return; her sole focus is her father, and all of her previous concerns have disappeared. She changes from a ‘flesh and blood ’character to a creature of Lear’s need, from subject to object, and her characterization from Act I to Act IV is complicit in this (Adelman 124). Even when Cordelia attempts to ‘shape’ herself with meaning independent of her father, Lear still wins in the end. The autonomous queen Cordelia is intolerable to Lear, driving him further into insanity, so much so that her return and acquiescence to his needs is not enough to ultimately save him, or her. As Lear, and the text in accord with him, reshape Cordelia to inhabit the mold of his imagined, idealized martyr mother, he destroys them both in the process. Even the means of death are stolen from Cordelia; while Edmund’s orders were for her death to look like

a suicide, she is hung. Lear's Objectification of Cordelia terminally infects them with the mortality he desperately wanted to escape from. Cordelia's play for autonomy thus costs her life, her father's life, and the lives of her sisters, as her choice causes Lear to spiral into even more dangerously symptomatic behavior that consequently earns him the 'malevolence' of his elder children.

While Adelman ultimately critiques the social order present in Lear that punishes all women who attempt to circumvent the rules of patriarchy, she still asserts that the cost paid by Cordelia is greater than that of Goneril and Regan. Cordelia, after all, is the only one to sacrifice her subjectivity for Lear. She is Madonna-fied, a martyr made to serve her father's needs in a "sacrifice regularly required of Shakespeare's women," achieving the level of selflessness required of the epitome of Gilbert and Gubar's 'angel' woman in that she is nothing beyond what she provides for others (Adelman 125). In retracting her 'nothing' from I.I, Cordelia becomes nothing. Yet, arguing that Cordelia's subjective dissolution must be worse than the fate of her sisters is also a reductive perspective playing into the generded binary that constricts the characters. Such a reading ignores that the Madonna-fiction of Cordelia only comes after she is ejected from Lear's good graces into the realm of the monstrous whore, while also neglecting to acknowledge how the same forces that make Cordelia a martyr transform Goneril and Regan into monsters. While the elder two sisters may not abandon their subjectivity for Lear, they are stripped of their humanity and rejected as objects of fear for their failure to inhabit the roles Lear has imagined for them, just as their younger sister before them.

The critical vilification of Goneril and Regan often begins from the play's opening, with their performative declarations of love to Lear in Act I Scene I. These

speech acts are often interpreted as deceptive acts of greed, particularly after Cordelia shames her sisters 'actions: "Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides, / Who cover *faults* at last with shame derides" (I.I.282-283, my emphasis). However, some critics have attempted to argue for other motivations behind Goneril and Regan's actions. For example, Stephen Reid, in his aptly named article "In Defense of Goneril and Regan," locates the origin of the two women's apparent hatred for their father in reawakened primal jealousies rather than inherent wickedness. While much of Reid's article is also based upon psychoanalytic conjecture, his thesis is still poignant: Goneril and Regan are human beings driven to wickedness in the same way as other Shakespearean characters such as Othello, Cassius, and Claudius are: envy. In a patriarchally informed affective economy, women are pitted against each other, fighting for male favor, whether that be the delight of the father or the infatuation of the husband. Other women become the object of fear, representing a threat to the relationship with the loved object. In the case of *King Lear*, the father's obvious favoritism for one daughter over the others is demonstrated numerous times, and therefore could be cited as a legitimate, affective reason behind Goneril and Regan's wicked behavior. These women are simply living out the consequences of the powers that be.

Similar to Reid, Derek Cohen's analysis of scapegoating in *King Lear* attempts to define a reason for Goneril and Regan's monstrosity. Cohen demonstrates how the true 'evil 'of the play is not any of its players, but instead "the forces of order" that have "crucially assisted in the breakdown of social stability," casting blame upon a scapegoat who is "made to assume the burden of endangering the group" and by whose death "the community is encouraged to believe it has been purged of the poisons that are claimed to

have been the original source of social discord" when the actual 'evil' has been these forces of order all along (386). Even though Cohen's article identifies Cornwall, Oswald, and Edmund as the scapegoats of the play, Goneril and Regan fit the bill as well as their deaths are written off as nothing more than a cosmic consequence of their immorality, their removal seemingly returning the world back to status quo. Yet there is nothing 'cosmic' about the deaths of these two women; rather, they are victims of the Madonna-whore dichotomy. Cohen's 'forces of order' echo both Ahmed's affective economies and Rubin's 'certain relations,' yet again implying that identity is a relational composite of social interactions. The powers in control of the narrative world of *King Lear*, the laws of patrilineal hegemony, naturally put Goneril and Regan in a tough spot as Lear clings to both his daughters and his power after abdicating his throne to them. They are made monsters because they rationally refuse to inhabit their father's diseased fantasies, and their increasingly wicked behavior is sign and symptom of society's rejection of women who defy the rules.

One clear indicator of Goneril and Regan's rational refusal of their attempted mother-ing is their wariness of Lear's visible symptomatic behavior, and their clear understanding of the precariousness of their father's temper. The elder two daughters report that Lear's behavior in I.I is not surprising to them, that he has always been prone to fits of anger, yet there is an urgency to their words that indicate a new level of discomfort at the severity of Lear's fury. Right after Lear banishes both Cordelia and Kent from England, Goneril reiterates Cordelia's former status as favorite she says, "and with what poor / judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly," to which Regan replies, "'Tis the infirmity of his age, yet he hath ever / but slenderly known

himself" (I.I.292-295). Regan's comment that Lear has "but slenderly known himself" certainly demonstrates both a present lack of faith in her father's mental capacities and a history of instability in Lear. Goneril's further comment that Lear's "best and soundest" state "hath been / but rash," and that she fears an "unruly waywardness that infirm / and choleric years being with them" in her father also divulges details of a lack of faith in Lear's ability to care for and control himself (I.I.296-297; 299-300). Goneril's final line in the scene, that she and her sister "must do something, and i'the heat," acknowledges that their father, considering these new symptoms of old age, can no longer be tolerated, and must be dealt with immediately (I.I.308). The elder two sisters view their father's behavior as a problem to be solved, and their solution is reason rather than indulgence, which is what Lear wants. Without Cordelia to be the 'cordial 'of Lear's age, Goneril and Regan must care for their father, a task that they perceive differently than Lear, who expects his daughters to appease him in his old age as a mother does her child. The elder two daughters, however, still uphold the boundary of the established parent/child dichotomy, and, rather than coddle their father, seek to curb his childish behavior, earning them Lear's ire and banishment from the realm of the angel to that of the monster.

Goneril is the first of the elder daughters to face Lear's wrath. After the events of I.I, Lear takes up residence with his eldest daughter, and begins to act disruptively. Goneril reacts accordingly; she "is now queen of half of Britain, concerned with order and rule," and Lear's childish behavior poses a significant threat to the kingdom's stability overall, as well as her handle over her new power (Foakes 203). Goneril complains that Lear's coterie of one hundred guards "infect" her castle with

"disordered… debauched and bold… manners," with "rank and not to be endured riots" that require "instant remedy" (I.IV.194; 233-234; 238). Not only is she frustrated with the bawdy and violent behavior of Lear's "insolent retinue," but Goneril is also concerned that Lear "[protects] this course and put it on / By [his] allowance," revealing in him dangerous signs of childish behavior, and making a mockery of her kingdom (I.IV.192;198-199). The repeated reference to disease and corruption throughout Goneril's description of Lear's guards activates the type of 'sticky' language Ahmed discusses, initiating a network of disgust between daughter and father. But Lear misreads this network and interprets it according to his own imagination, reading anger in his daughter's exasperation that causes fear within himself. When Lear, unable to believe disobedience in another child, asks, "Are you our daughter?" Goneril simply requests that he "put away / These dispositions, which of late transport you / From what you rightly are," attempting to remind Lear of his new position underneath her, as well as the manners the elderly are expected to follow (I.IV.209; 212-214). Lear's refusal to restrain his knights' behavior threatens Goneril's newfound power, and she is reacting accordingly as a political leader. But Lear instead understands this reasonable request as an act of betrayal; while Goneril is focused on the political ramifications of her father's behavior, Lear's focus is more personal, expecting his children to care for him. Stephen Reid argues that Goneril was not emotionally prepared to accept the power of queen, or as 'mother,' because "Cordelia's share of the kingdom," the land itself and care of their father, "was to have been far larger" than hers, and in the sudden absence of Cordelia, the elder sisters acquire more power than they "have the emotion experience… to understand" (228). Thus, Goneril takes on the role of the 'mother' who must chastise her

'child's' misbehavior, which Lear interpets as an act of betrayal because she is performing 'motherhood' differently than he wants. A dangerous affective loop is set up between father and daughter, in which Goneril's temper is diseased by Lear's behavior, and Lear is, in turn, infected by Goneril's rage, spoiling his imagined, idealized view of her, which contaminates her physical body and transforms her into a villain.

The monster-fication of Goneril is the consequence of her inability to inhabit the maternal role Lear thrusts upon her. Goneril's displeasure in I.V distorts Lear's imagined version of her; instead of coddling him, she has taken on the role of the malevolent, punishing mother in reaction to his infantile behavior. Lear's language in I.V initiates a vocabulary that transforms his daughters into monsters worthy of the emotions they incite in him, a process begun in I.IV at Lear's line "Are you our daughter?" (I.IV.209). Lear more violently distances Goneril from him when he insists: "I have another daughter, / Who I am sure is kind and comfortable: / When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails / She'll flay thy wolfish visage" (I.IV.298-301). The visceral imagery of Regan 'flaying' Goneril's 'wolfish' face further paints Goneril as less than human. In Lear's eyes, Goneril has become a monster, and the sign of her monstrosity is the feminine outpouring of emotion Lear himself experiences. Thus, the source of Goneril's monstrosity is motherhood; as Lear's surrogate mother, Goneril becomes wicked when she performs motherhood 'incorrectly.' Although Cordelia's bid for sexual freedom was the sting that started it all, it is this second betrayal of Goneril after her verbal promise to fulfill Lear's needs that throws his internal sense of logic into complete chaos and "[shakes] his manhood" intolerably (I.IV.291). In an analysis of Lady Macbeth, Anna Maria Cimitile concludes that "the process by which women become evil is exposed in Shakespeare's

plays as a construct, a strategy deployed both for the preservation of masculinist power and as a way to mask the patrilineal structure's own ruthlessness and violence" (543). The same can be applied to Goneril; she is marked as 'wicked' once she has threatened Lear's sense of his own masculinity.

Ultimately, Goneril's actions in I.IV result in Lear cursing her womb, directly attacking the perceived source of evil: female sexuality. Lear verbally strikes against Goneril's womanhood in retaliation for her perceived threat upon his manhood, futilely attempting to return her to her place in the power hierarchy. Just as Cordelia before her, Goneril has proven herself a bad mother to Lear, and Lear attributes her failure to perform to her corrupt sexuality. Upon Goneril's perceived betrayal, Lear proclaims:

> Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
> Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful!
> Into her womb convey sterility!
> Dry up in her the organs of increase;
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
> And be a thwart disnatured torment to her!
> Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
> With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
> Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
> To laughter and contempt; that she may feel

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is

To have a thankless child! (I.IV.267-281).

Lear's curse attacks Goneril's sexual potential, which he believes to be the source of her displeasure and site of her wickedness. Lear is no longer in control of his daughter's womb; he has given access to her husband, yet he attempts to reestablish his claim upon Goneril's 'kind nursery' as a means to avoid the power of death. When Goneril denies Lear the exact 'nursery' he desires, he lashes out against the perceived 'source' of her power, displacing blame off of himself, when it is in fact his 'fault' that she has this power over him. Thwarted by Goneril's 'strict parenting,' Lear redirects his punishment towards that very body, phantasmatically ruining his daughter's body so as to make it an object no longer worth wanting. Lear's appeal to nature directly attacks Goneril's "organs of increase," with the intention of blocking her maternal potential. In these 'organs of increase' is found the "epitome of the woman who refuses to stay in her proper place," who "turns up at the very center of masculine authority, in the king's own body… undermining the gender divide and so shaking the foundations of masculine identity" (Adelman 114). Goneril is such a woman as this, refusing to remain in her traditional place as obedient daughter once Lear has handed her the crown, an action that mimics the process by which a virgin becomes a whore. But because this process has happened entirely in Lear's imagination, Goneril is unwilling to take up the role of madonna mother when Lear transforms himself into her son, instead begrudgingly becoming the malevolent mother that symbolizes death rather than immortality, as Lear later cries: "Go to, they are not men o'their words; they told / me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof" (IV.VI.103-104). Lear's choice to abdicate his throne and body upsets the

strictly established gender hierarchy, and destabilizes not only his sanity, but the affective relationships of all involved. Thus, Lear rages against what he sees as the source of his daughter's malevolence: her uterus, an organ which infects her with immorality and him with mortality.

Goneril's ultimate act of monstrosity is the poisoning of her sister, Regan, an act born of jealousies invented within the affective economy of competition Lear's love test initiates. As the final daughter to 'betray' Lear, Regan receives the least direct manifestation of her father's rage, yet still suffers the same as her sisters. Lear turns to Regan for solace after both Cordelia and Goneril have 'betrayed' him, disappointing him in his quest to escape death through a symbolic return to childhood. Just as her sisters, disgust with her father's childish behavior motivate Regan's act of defiance. Upon reaching Regan's castle, and despite reminding her of "[t]he offices of nature, bond of childhood, / Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude," and "[t]hy half o'the kingdom" which he gave to her, Lear is met with resistance. Rather than indulge Lear's curses against her sister, Regan chides his "unsightly tricks" and insists he must return to Gonreil's care and "be ruled and led / By some discretion that discerns your state / Better than you yourself" (II.II.346; 337-339). Regan knows that her sister's request for Lear to 'act his age' and control his coterie are reasonable, and in no way break her due duty to him, and therefore she upholds the same argument. Yet Regan also knows the risk involved in denying Lear, as she says, "[s]o will you wish on me when the rash mood is on" when Lear promises to never curse her as he did her sisters (II.II.358). Regan acknowledges the volatility of her father's anger, yet refuses to submit to his irrational requests, continually asserting that she had not expected her father so soon and is "out of that provision / Which shall be

needful for your entertainment," and that the sisters' request for Lear to downsize his train in order to "[restrain] the riots of [his] followers," (II.II.394-395; 323). Her argument in II.II is not a wicked corroboration with Goneril to hurt Lear, but rather a reasonable request that their father 'act his age.' Yet Regan's reason, like Goneril's, is interpreted as an attack upon Lear, who expects indulgent obedience from his daughters, and the elderly king likewise initiates the same language of monstrosity against her as he does against Goneril.

This language of monstrosity is what transforms both elder sisters into villainous characters. In Act III, for example, Regan participates in the play's most gruesome scene: the blinding of Gloucester. While it is her husband Cornwall who actually gouges out the old man's eyes, Regan is viscerally present and involved in the drama, and even kills a servant who mortally wounds her husband, ramming a sword straight through his back (III.VII.79). In the absence of Lear, Gloucester is the one who maintains the language of monstrosity, explaining that he has betrayed the sisters because he "would not see [Regan's] cruel nails / Pluck out [Lear's] poor old eyes; nor [her] fierce sister / In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs" (III.VII.55-57). Thus, Regan's assent to and participation in Gloucester's blinding is a reasonable reaction, similar to her denial of Lear; Gloucester is a traitor to Regan's reign, and she is therefore doling out the consequence for such an action. Yet the blinding of Gloucester is met with outrage from the people, and is textually presented as an intolerably villainous act, one that can only be settled in the death of the perpetrators.

Regan's death is a consequence of female competition: both Goneril and Regan want Edmund to be theirs, and Goneril ultimately makes the more drastic move. Regan

says as much to Oswald: “I know your lady does not love her husband…/ She gave strange oiellades and most speaking looks / To noble Edmund…/ My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talked, / And more convenient is he for my hand / Than for your lady’s… / And when your mistress hears thus much from you, / I pray desire her call her wisdom to her” (IV.V.25; 26-27; 34; 36-37). Goneril’s insistence that they all must “[c]ombine together ‘gainst the enemy, / For these domestic and particular broils / Are not the question here,” (V.I.29-31).

*King Lear* ends on the sight of four corpses: Lear and his three daughters. While Lear collapses on stage after bearing forth Cordelia’s body, all three women die offstage, but are forced back into the public eye. The women’s deaths are made a spectacle to be witnessed, and culminate in the death of their father, a situation brought about because of the old man’s fear of death. If Lear had abdicated his throne only and not the care of his body to his daughters and had not held the three women to impossible standards of maternal submission, then the entire conflict of the play could have been avoided. The attempted Madonna-fication of all three of Lear’s daughters leads all three in turn to be monster-fied, until Cordelia returns in the image of the Madonna martyr, yet all these paths lead directly to the death of all three women. The fact that all three women die regardless of the their status as angelic Madonna or monstrous whore demonstrates the baselessness of such binaries; if women are expected to act virtuous always, why must they die as martyrs just the same as their witch sisters? The hypocrisy of the Madonna-whore dichotomy is hyper-visible throughout *King Lear*, as patriarchal dependence on the feminine takes center stage: Lear needs his daughters’ care to circumvent his mortality, an impossible task requiring the women to uphold impossible standards. The

impossibility of the labels creates an unsustainable affective network that leads to a collapse of communication and kills everyone in its path. Lear rejects each daughter in turn as she attempts to stake a claim for autonomy, desiring complete surrender of his daughters to his need for immortality, a desire for which he is ultimately punished. Thus, the harsh visibility of the female corpse at the end of *King Lear* leaves a chilling message: mortality cannot be escaped, and the death of the feminine is its harbinger.

# CHAPTER III

## "BEASTLY AND DEVOID OF PITY:" POLICIING THE FEMININE IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

Similar to the opening of *King Lear*, the narrative world of *Titus Andronicus* centers around a power vacuum, albeit one of necessity rather than the whim of an aged king. When the general Titus Andronicus returns home to Rome victorious against the Goths, with their queen as his captive, the empire itself is struggling without a head: the emperor is dead, and his sons are grappling over who gets the throne. The vacant throne threatens order and initiates a similar patriarchal fear script in this play to that of *King Lear*. Symbolic of the patriarchal fear of the feminine lying in wait to overtake the masculine, the fight for the Roman throne allows the male characters to overlay his fear script over both the feminine body and any feminine-seeming affect, reducing the female characters in an effort to reassert the predominance of gender hierarchy that was threatened by Tamora's status as queen. To combat this primitive patriarchal fear, the male characters in *Titus* specifically engage in a power struggle for honor and favor to

reiterate the established power structure. Titus himself has the most powerful chips in his hand: Tamora is his prisoner to give away, and his daughter Lavinia is his property to defend. Throughout the play's opening scene, both women are shuffled between hands, given in marriage and seized in contempt, treated as little more than pawns for Titus, Saturninus, and the rest of the male Romans to forge their place amidst the power structure. Consistently during this opening scene, and throughout the rest of the play, both women are boxed into easily accessible female stereotypes that allow the men to use them as they wish, until the pressure of such stereotypes upon their bodies presses them to death, and take the Roman monarchy down with them.

But Tamora and Lavinia are not simply powerless pieces for the men to use as they please. At the play's opening, both women demonstrate a striking amount of personal autonomy and control over their sexuality, albeit in different ways. While Tamora uses her body to seduce the new emperor and worm her way into the Roman monarchy, Lavinia plays up her loyal virtue to end up with her preferred husband. Yet even when both women appear to lose this sense of control, Shakespeare does not leave them defenseless, instead giving them access to "the convention of revenge tragedy, normally assigned to male characters," through which they, "evade containment within the sign of property and [lay] claim to an independent self, unrestricted by gender conventions," a status that "the play… offers up… as an acceptable, indeed desirable, alternative" to the current social order despite the men's continual refusal of such an alternative (Wynne-Davies 216). While alive, Tamora and Lavinia actively participate in the demise of their enemies, and, once dead, their corpses continue this work on a larger scale. Even as the surviving characters attempt to reclaim Lavinia's mutilated body

within the arms of patriarchy and cast Tamora's body out of its reach forever, the very existence of these corpses is a reminder of the system's failure. For Lavinia's death does not erase the shame done to her family through her defilement, just as Tamora's death does not undo the political instability her cuckoldry of Saturninus unleashes. These corpses resist all attempts to be impressed upon; the boundary is too sticky, thick with the accumulation of past histories that deny any attempts of the living to project upon it. Instead, the living must encounter the corpse and its reflection of the living society's failure to protect it.

At first glance, the women of *Titus Andronicus* appear to be the most dramatized version of the Madonna-whore dichotomy on display in Shakespeare's tragedies. The text immediately establishes Tamora as a cunning temptress in contrast to Lavinia's appearance as a modest saint, the former scheming for vengeance while the latter passively allows herself to be traded between fiancés at her father's will. On the surface, it is obvious that Lavinia is painted as the epitome of the 'sacrificial Madonna,' praised for her virtue until she is mutilated and accordingly declared a martyr, while Tamora embodies the wicked monster, wreaking havoc upon her captors. Yet the play repeatedly resists these easy classifications of its women, and, in consequence, Titus Andronicus, acting as the hand of patriarchal hierarchy, kills both women for their perceived 'monstrosity,' in that their behavior is irreconcilable with the projections the patriarchal imagination imposes upon them. Tamora's immediate presentation as a monster woman, (captive property, failed queen, overtly sexual, etc.), poses the most visibly viable threat to the Roman empire and its gender hierarchy, marking her for death almost immediately. Yet it is Lavinia's subversive use of her own sexuality that is perhaps even more

dangerous to the powers that be. Even while she is lauded for her chastity and obedience, Lavinia's silence in Act I Scene I also works to undermine Titus' control of her as property, threatening the already unstable social system rooted in the exchange of women. Lavinia's case becomes even more muddled when her status as Rome's pure jewel is physically ripped from her in the act of rape and mutilation, disrupting the men's view of their 'perfect angel,' with a viscerally physical reminder of not just her impurity, but their culpability in her suffering. Even though the mutilated Lavinia is the angel woman incarnate (silent and dependent), her physical body is horrifying and a monstrous reminder of the shame wrought upon her and her family. And therefore, like an actual saint, Lavinia cannot live either.

Throughout the play, Tamora and Lavinia are required to inhabit shapes born from the fantasies of the male characters, both in terms of political power and sexual desire. Both women are presented as "similar'"changing pieces,'" with "their images "[oscillating]"" between those of the angel and the monster throughout the play in accordance with what shape the men require of them (Eaton 65). Because the ideal woman "*has no story of her own*," in the words of Gilbert and Gubar, patriarchal affective networks are established on the premise that all women can be fit to whatever mold men need for society to function, be that a lovely prize or a hated scapegoat (21, original emphasis). But these networks therefore create an inherent problem: women are not self-less objects devoid of establishing their own affective connections. As Sara Eaton has put it:

> Both [Tamora and Lavinia] are motivated by the need for revenge, Tamora's by the death of her son, Lavinia's by the deaths of her brothers and husband.

> Tamora's bloodthirsty words are countered by the image of Lavinia holding the bowl in her mouth under Chiron's and Demetrious' slit necks. If Tamora marries Saturninus too easily given her preference for Aaron, similarly Lavinia will marry either brother as her father or brothers dictate (65).

Neither Lavinia nor Tamora allows herself to fully inhabit the roles the male characters stick upon them. While Lavinia claims the title of the 'chaste wife' and Tamora employs her sexuality to her political advantage, both women are in full control of their sexuality, regardless of the men's imagined ownership of it, and when that control is threatened, both are given access to a revenge script previously withheld from them. In their participation in acts of sexual autonomy and vengeance, Tamora and Lavinia destabilize the long-held norms of patriarchal Rome, coming into dangerous contact with the patriarchal fear network. And because this transgression is ultimately intolerable, Titus, acting in the best interest of the Roman patriarchal hierarchy, murders both women in the play's final scene, a brutal, public spectacle presented as necessary for the honor of Rome: Tamora is the enemy that must be eradicated, while Lavinia's death is the only conceivable antidote to the family's shame. Yet, in death, Tamora and Lavinia's transgressions become all the more powerful. A society that must kill its women for 'acting out' is a corrupt society; the act of murder alone speaks volumes about the depraved nature of Roman values, and the corpses of the women in *Titus Andronicus* thus project back upon the brutality of their murderers.

Additionally, in contrast with their sisters in *King Lear*, Tamora and Lavinia's monster-fication is a conscious choice rather than an unconscious phenomenon. The transformation of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia into monsters and Madonnas,

respectively, occurs in Lear's imagination before any of the women's actions align with such labels. In *Titus*, however, Tamora and Lavinia choose to embody the labels stuck upon their bodies, own their sexuality, and take the path of vengeance of their own accord. While Goneril turns on Albany only after Lear dubs her 'monster,' Tamora manipulates Saturninus into marriage for her own benefit and cuckolds him for her pleasure. Likewise, while Cordelia willingly surrenders her voice and autonomy for Lear, Lavinia is physically stripped of her tongue and hands, forcing her to return to Titus' will, and even then, she chooses to participate in acts of violent vengeance against her violators rather than sit silently. While the women of *Lear* seem to unconsciously adhere to the angel/monster dichotomy as a result of the pressure of the patriarchal imagination, the women of *Titus* resist these fantastical overlays and choose to embody monstrosity for themselves, demonstrating both the artificial and relational nature of these binary distinctions.

Ultimately, when seen through a combined lens of feminist and affect theory, the female corpse in *Titus Andronicus* is even more condemnatory of patriarchal social systems than the spectacle at the end of *King Lear*. Not only do the deaths of Tamora and Lavinia take place on stage, but the nature of their deaths is even more brutal; both women are killed 'for the sake of Rome.' The narrative portrays an empire on the brink of collapse ultimately 'collapsing' in on itself, spurred by the anxiety of impotence to lash out in hate and disgust against the perceived source of instability, the feminine, only for it to destroy the very engine of generation. In killing the 'maternal monster,' in sewing shut the problematic 'swallowing womb,' the men of *Titus Andronicus* effectively stop up all generative possibility. It is no coincidence that the final scene of *Titus* sees the

Roman empire once again headless; even as Lucius is crowned emperor to fill the void, the specter of the empty 'O' appears again in the form of the dead women strewn about the banquet table. This scene reveals that the female corpse is the realization of the imaginary 'swallowing womb,' infecting all those implicated in its demise. The patriarchal imagination has no control over the dead body; no dichotomizing projections can penetrate the affective 'skin' of the corpse because the affective exchange is not mutually experienced when one party is nothing but body. Instead, the affective impressions the living body attempts to stick to the corpse reflect back tenfold, becoming even stickier and more distressing to the 'self' that cannot distance itself from the fear object 'other.' Thus, even as the men of *Titus Andronicus* attempt to consume or disgorge the female corpses left on their stage, the affective resonance of these dead body sticks, leaving a residue of trauma that will continue to plague the empire for generations. The conclusion of *Titus* reveals how murdering the monster will not only kill her, but will contaminate her (often male) murderer, and the society that put the knife in his hand. Through Tamora and Lavinia's struggle for autonomy and the spectacle of their ultimate failure, the women of *Titus Andronicus* emphasize the imaginative nature of the angel/monster dichotomy, and serves as a vicious condemnation of the degrading power of the objectification of femininity rampant in patriarchal societies, and the ability of the woman, always ultimately rendered monstrous, to continue to infect and threaten the patriarchal imagination even after death.

My exploration of this theme in *Titus Andronicus* begins at the play's end. The final speech of the play comes from Lucius, Titus' only surviving child and newly crowned emperor of the once-again-headless Roman empire. His task is to reassemble a

structure of power that Tamora and Lavinia have thrown into chaos; through their acts of vengeance, these women have upended social norms to a dangerous, intolerable degree. Tamora's transformation into a blood thirsty monster and Lavinia's irreconcilable mutilation are sign and symptom of the dishonorable and dangerous nature of Rome's socio-political structure. Yet Lucius' final words attempt to reassert those norms of patriarchy in the face of its disruption, rather than making change in light of this brutality. His final words "thus enacts a final circumscriptive location of women in relation to the dominant male body," in which a dead woman may be "reintroduced into the patriarchal value system," or, "if her irregularities prove too virulent," be ejected from it (Wynne-Davies 230). It is no shock that Lucius' language accepts Lavinia's corpse back into the fold while simultaneously rejecting Tamora's corpse:

> My father and Lavinia shall forthwith
> Be closed in our household's monument;
> As for the raven tiger, Tamora,
> No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial,
> But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey:
> her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
> And being dead, let birds on her take pity (V.III.192-199).

According to Lucius' words, now that the 'raven tiger' has been slain, under his leadership, the patriarchal imagination is able to assert itself once again over both the body politic and the female body, returning the empire to its social status quo. Tamora is thus denied funeral rites and burial, literally thrown to the wolves as she herself is treated

as an inhuman beast, a monster, for her irreconcilable disruption of social norms. To use Wynne-Davies' term, Tamora's behavior proved too 'virulent' for the patriarchal political body to handle. In contrast, because Lavinia's sexual and vengeful actions ultimately aligned with the goals of her male kin, and because she is now permanently silent in death rather than shameful mutilation, she is linguistically transformed back into the precious jewel from the play's opening, wiped clean upon her father's sword only to be put back into her display case. The end of the play attempts to recast Tamora and Lavinia into these dichotomous roles, forcing their corpses to reinhabit easy designations that permit the continuance of the established status quo.

Yet Lucius' speech only *appears* to reaffirm this patriarchal status quo he claims to reassert, while the reality of the female corpses on stage are actually a sign of the reverse. Lucius' final speech, which concludes the entire play, is only ten lines long, and eight of them are devoted to the women, with Tamora claiming six out of the eight. Though Lucius' words disparage Tamora, diminishing her to a creature "devoid of pity" fit only for "beasts and birds of prey," the final words of the play return the focus of the audience to the body of the dead empress (V.III.198-199). The female corpse is the center of the play's end, not the new emperor, political intrigue, or the pieces of this broken empire. Tamora's body has irreparably disrupted the patriarchal social system of the Roman empire; through the seduction of its former emperor, and, more importantly, the cuckolding of said emperor, Tamora has effectively destabilized her political enemy, whose victory predicates the entire play. A foreign and political 'other,' an aggressive female monarch, broke the boundary of Rome's patriarchal hierarchy, like a nail piercing the skin, and the infection continues to fester even after her death. As Lucius attempts to

engage with Tamora's corpse, to physically dispel her from sight, he is unable to extricate himself the affective stickiness of her body. Tamora's corpse is affectively charged with the histories of 'ugly feelings' she engendered in life: fear, paranoia, disgust, hate, and, most terrifying, desire[1]. Simply 'disgorging' the corpse of Tamora is not enough; her memory will stick and haunt the empire for years to come (Wynne-Davies 230). Similarly, even though Lucius is able to re-envelope Lavinia in words, her corpse is also sticky with the brutality of her defilement, a shame nothing but death could undo. Lucius' prolonged focus on Tamora's corpse in his final speech re-centers the female body within the narrative, and his lack of focus on Lavinia demonstrates a continued sense of shame surrounding said female body, ultimately revealing the failure of patriarchy to consume or control the bodies of women, despite the reliance of such systems on the dichotomization of those bodies.

It is no stretch of the imagination to define Tamora as the epitome of the 'monster' woman stereotype. She is clever and ruthless, confident and sensual, often exhibiting, "behaviors generally regarded (at least in the sixteenth century) as intrinsically male: deception, manipulation, cruelty, and strong sexuality" (Routh 101). Indeed, it is Tamora's control of her sexuality that is her greatest weapon, allowing her to appropriate the mindset of the Roman men and subvert the expectations impressed upon her body as 'female' and 'Other' through control of the Roman emperor, Saturninus. When the play opens, Tamora is currently experiencing something deeply traumatic: her physical imprisonment because of a political defeat, and, more importantly, the imminent sacrifice of her eldest son. This presentation of Tamora as prisoner is meant to serve as an

[1] The term 'ugly feelings' is derived from the book of the same name by Sianne Ngai, a work that, while not quoted directly in this paper, was heavily influential at the outset of this research project.

immediate condemnation of her power; here is a queen publicly brought low, a woman whose very existence threatened the patriarchal power hierarchy returned to submission. As an aggressive female "ruler, engaged in battle," Tamora violates the "boundaries of her feminine role," at least according to the patriarchal status quo at work in the Roman empire (Sentov 29). Therefore, Tamora must be publicly punished in Act I Scene I as a necessary measure of control. If Titus cannot contain Tamora immediately, then she threatens to upend everything his society stands for. Much emphasis is placed on her status as a captive object, an "Other" that the men in power need to brand as "a foreigner, a barbarian and a female monarch who dared to defy Roman rule" to reassert their power (Sentov 29). She represents the type of 'other' Sara Ahmed identifies as the root of the public display of disgust, in which "[t]he threat of such others to social forms (which are the materialization of norms) is represented as the threat *of turning and being turned away from the values that will guarantee survival*" (130, original emphasis). Tamora's resistance to patriarchal social norms threatens those very norms and invokes a sense of disgusted fear in the Roman power structure that ultimately leads to its demise. In condemning Tamora's behavior at the start of the play, the men of Rome attempt to return her to her proper place, to strip her of that which makes the woman monstrous as a means of self-preservation. Thus, the men of Rome consistently project an imagined ideal of submission upon Tamora's body, while simultaneously reveling in its opposite, and allowing themselves to feel a lustful desire for her body that they likewise deny her.

Indeed, Tamora is an intensely sexual being. Not only does she use her body as a tool to manipulate those around her, Tamora is also initially marked as sexually accessible because she is already a mother. Her fertility is on full display in the moment

she weeps on her knees for her son; she has a son to weep for, therefore she has a functioning womb for the taking. Even as Tamora represents significant danger to Roman social norms, and her body *should* inspire disgust in a true Roman, her physical beauty and sexual appeal simultaneously make her captivatingly desirable. At the play's opening, Titus is in control of sexual access to Tamora as her captor, and, not desiring her himself, he gifts Tamora to Saturninus, hoping to establish a kinship system with the new emperor a la Gayle Rubin's exchange of women. Saturninus' quick promise to "use [Tamora] nobly" further demonstrates the commodification of the former queen, phantasmagorically molding her into the purely carnal image of the monster's twin, the 'whore' (I.I.264). As a sexual woman, Tamora is regarded as a site for lust, while other women like Lavinia are preserved from such thoughts because of their physical chastity.

Yet, as a sexual being, Tamora is in full control of her body and refuses to allow the men around her to simply project their lustful fantasies upon her. Instead, the former queen uses the emperor's obvious lust as a tool to her advantage and seduces him into marrying her. Tamora willingly offers herself as a marriageable substitute for Lavinia, and promises, "here in sight of heaven to Rome I swear, / If Saturnine advance the queen of Goths, / She will a *handmaid be to his desires*, / *A loving nurse, a mother* to his youth" (I.I.334-337, my emphasis). Playing into the ideal images of the 'angel woman,' the obedient handmaid reverently serving her master, the doting nurse healing all that which hurts her charge, and the caring mother maintaining his family tree, Tamora successfully deceives Saturninus, who quickly takes her as his wife. Saturninus' feelings are certainly not mutual between them; Tamora's only goal in marrying him is to "punish Titus and his family" using the power she gains from ruling the empire and its emperor (Sentov 29).

Tamora entices the emperor by stroking his inflated ego, and her entreaty, "My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last" in I.I. foreshadows the power she carries throughout the rest of the play (I.I.447). Tamora's 'monstrosity' is predicated on her ability to satisfy the idealized version of her imagined by these men while performing the opposite, all because of her eldest son's murder.

Again, it is important to note that Tamora's identity as a sexual being is inseparable from her identity as a mother, and, therefore, her classification as a 'monster' woman cannot be twain from her status as a mother. For the maternal in the Renaissance world that produced *Titus Andronicus* was always a hair's breadth away from the monstrous; the same womb that embraced and delivered the infant sat in wait to devour the man. And Tamora embodies all of patriarchy's worst fears about the maternal, specifically those of the grieving mother. An anxiety-inducing image, "[m]aternal grief," in Shakespeare's time, "was seen as real and agonising, but also irrepressible; its expression was often out of the mother's control" (Couche 157). As Tamora faces countless humiliations at the hands of her captors in I.I, it is the merciless sacrifice of her eldest son that motivates her bloodthirsty desire for vengeance. In Tamora's most human moment, pleading upon her knees for her son's life, she is met with disgust and distrust, culminating in a refusal of mercy that fuels her transformation into the devouring monster the Romans imagine her to be, employing all the tools at her disposal when her children are threatened. It is significant that Tamora chooses to plead for the life of her son over anything else when she is mocked in I.I. Upon her knees, Tamora pleads for her "gracious conqueror, / Victorious Titus" to regret "[a] mother's tears in passion for her son!" attempting to appeal to Titus on the most human level of one parent to another: "if

thy sons were ever dear to thee, / O, think my son to be as dear to me" (I.I.107-111). Instead of pleading as a political rival, Tamora chooses to emphasize maternal identity because, as a political rival, she understands that she is now a piece in their game, a token "brought to Rome / to beautify thy [Titus'] triumphs," (I.I.112-113). But Tamora can handle her own degradation; it is the loss of her children that she cannot stomach, and in her desperation, she makes the fatal error of equating her maternal love to that of Titus' paternal love.

These emotions are not the same, though, at least not in the patriarchal system in which these characters operate. While paternal love rests in the honor and glory of the continuation of a family line and reputation, maternal love is often regarded as a necessary evil: tender in infancy, then stifling and suffocating ever after. Even as Tamora paints the picture of the caring Madonna mother, fighting to save her son with the devotion of the Virgin Mary, her captors do not acknowledge her pleas. Titus remains deaf to Tamora's request, and has her son Alarbus sacrificed, even as he sends his own dead sons to rest "[i]n peace and honor," in "silence and eternal sleep" in the Andonicus family tomb (I.I.158-159). The blatant hypocrisy in Titus' actions are the catalyst for the play's tragedy; the soldier dares to try the patience of a tiger, and is devoured. Once alone in I.I, Tamora declares: "I'll find a day to massacre them all, / And raze their faction and their family, / The cruel father and his traitorous sons / To whom I sued for my dear son's life, / And make them know what 'tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (I.I.455-460). The slight to her as a queen and a woman is not lost on Tamora, but her primary motivation for her later cruelty is due to her maternal identity. Because of Titus' refusal of humanizing mercy, Tamora sets in motion a bloody chain of

events beginning with her seduction of Saturninus and ending with her death at a feast where her own sons are the main course.

But Tamora's status as a villain is legitimate. Not only is Tamora the 'dam' of the 'cubs' who mutilate Lavinia, she is also the 'whore' who interrupts the Roman royal bloodline. When Saturninus takes Tamora as his wife, it is imperative to the stability of the Roman empire that she give him a child; Saturninus barely clinched his familial right to the throne, and therefore needs an heir to maintain his inheritance and legacy. "Patriarchal society," according to Adelman, "depends on the principle of inheritance in which the father's identity—his property, his name, his authority—is transmitted from father to son," and thus the pressure is put on Tamora to 'make good' on Titus' business deal, and to provide Saturninus, and the empire, with an heir (107). But Tamora, a woman in full control of her sexuality, deceives Saturninus yet again and becomes pregnant by her lover, Aaron, rather than her husband, a fact made blatantly obvious by the infant's complexion. In cuckolding Saturninus, Tamora commits the ultimate act of revenge against her political adversary: destroying the royal bloodline (Routh 101). Additionally, this action 'confirms' the history of pain Titus and the Romans project onto Tamora; they believe that she will destroy them, and according to patriarchal laws of inheritance she does. In choosing her sexual partner and having an affair with Aaron, Tamora actively disrupts social order. Tamora is a monster because her refusal to be "owned sexually" endangers the Roman royal line (Harris 388). In a social system where "[c]ontrol of the womb was paramount," a woman determining her "own sexual appetites regardless of procreation" was a significant threat to social order (Wynne-Davies 219). The monster woman disrupts social order, breaking the norms assigned to her gender, and

threatens to dismantle gender hierarchy itself by proving it wrong. Tamora's infidelity does just this.

Worse yet, Tamora issues an order of infanticide against her illegitimate child. The refusal of motherly instinct apparent in the empress' order for Aaron to "christen [their child] with thy dagger's point" labels her monstrous even more so than her vengeful stratagems (IV.II.72). The fear of infanticide, which was "deemed a criminal offense, one punishable by hanging" in the early modern period, reveals "early modern anxieties about the inherent dangers of maternal agency both to helpless children as well as to a patrilineal system dependent upon women for its perpetuation (Chamberlain 75;77). Stephanie Chamberlain, quoting Susan Staub, further concludes that "the murdering mother embodies both her society's expectations and its anxieties about motherhood by showing motherhood to be at once empowering and destructive," as her actions including "maternal infidelity, nursing, and infanticide" could "irreparably" alter patrilineage (77). Tamora is thus a textbook example of a murderous mother who threatens patrilineal descent in Rome. The words of the nurse clearly demonstrate Tamora's murderous intent: "Aaron, it must [die]: the mother wills it so" (IV.II.84). If a woman's patriarchal purpose is to reproduce and ensure the continuation of the family line, then Tamora openly defies this, refusing to inhabit the role assigned to her in favor of self-interest. This violent denial of motherhood juxtaposes the horrific moment at the play's end when Tamora's final action is ingesting her own sons. This moment is another patriarchal fear come to life: the feminine swallowing, enveloping, incorporating the masculine back into itself, or the maternal reclaiming the child in its mortality. If the central conflict of the narrative is that "Titus, representing patriarchy and the father

figure" must bring Tamora "to heel," then he only does so when he "makes her womb or stomach, the site of her power, "swallow her own increase" (V.2.191)" (29). Titus ultimately uses Tamora's maternal identity against her, forcing her to re-ingest that which she issued forth, as a means of punishment for her defying of patriarchal norms. Tamora is, for all intents and purposes, a textbook definition of a monster-whore woman.

However, while sexual promiscuity and attempted infanticide mark Tamora as a 'monster' woman in the eyes of the patriarchal norms pressing upon her, it is in fact her absorption of and participation in those very norms that truly monsterfies her. While in *King Lear* the mouth that projects the image of monster upon Goneril and Regan's bodies is that of a disgruntled patriarch, the mouth that speaks Tamora's monster-fiction into being is that of another woman: Lavinia. Tamora's most monstrous act in the play is sanctioning Lavinia's rape because she is participating in the same structures that oppress her. Initially, Lavinia is absent from Tamora's revenge plans; she only mentions "[t]he cruel father and his traitorous sons" (I.I.457). Yet, once Tamora recognizes that she can use Lavinia just as the men do, she does. And just as Tamora misjudged Titus' paternal feelings in I.I, Lavinia misunderstands Tamora's rage in II.II; the younger woman pleads, "O Tamora, thou wearest a women's face-" seeking mercy on behalf of their shared feminine experience (II.II.136). Lavinia assumes Tamora will spare her because she *knows* the importance of a woman's chastity, but Lavinia has made a fatal error. The empress *does* know exactly what will happen to Lavinia, but she actively desires that outcome. Tamora gains autonomy over Titus at the expense of Lavinia, reducing her fellow woman to nothing more than currency and abandoning her to a fate she knows is worse than death. The empress is a fast learner; while she may display 'monstrous' traits

prior to Alarbus' death, after the Roman patriarchs deny her mercy, she adopts the same strategic mentality to claim revenge. Yet, even as she adopts the same phantasmatic dispositions as these men, Tamora's perception is inherently colored by her identity as female and Other (not Roman), and therefore, she recognizes Lavinia's value as a beautiful, chaste woman in a way that is inaccessible to Titus and his kinsmen. And in Tamora's choice of personal vengeance over the life of her fellow woman, Lavinia dubs Tamora a "beastly creature / The blot and enemy to our general name," thereby divorcing her from the realm of the feminine and the human (II.II.182-183). Thus, Tamora's choice to inhabit the labels attached to her and participate in the horrifying reversal of the exchange of women in which she mutilates Lavinia's body to destroy Titus' kinship systems is the true source of her monstrosity, not for its transgression against patriarchal gender norms, but for its implication in those very systems.

Because Tamora's monsterfiction requires the usage of Lavinia, her actions also monsterfy *Lavinia*. Tamora's scheming costs Lavinia not only her sexual purity, but also her physical beauty and primary agency to speak for herself, muddying Lavinia's position on the monster/angel spectrum. Physically mutilated and sexually ruined, Lavinia has become 'damaged goods' in an economy in which her value is dependent upon remaining 'pure' in both body and mind. In her newfound inability to meet the standard for a 'good' woman, Lavinia has become monstrous. But she is now also perfectly silent and has no choice but to obediently follow those who will care for her despite her deformity, marking her as 'angel,' or, as her family will define her, 'martyr,' acknowledging the 'sacrifice' she has experienced. The common denominator of the two identities is a loss for Lavinia: she is robbed of her autonomy. Lavinia's role in the play is thus much more

problematic than Tamora's. For like Cordelia, Lavinia is presented as a martyr Madonna figure, expected to be the 'cordial 'of her father's age, and while she attempts to break away from her family's vise-grip, she is eventually returned to her father's embrace. But, unlike Cordelia, Lavinia's physical body is horrifically marred because of rape and mutilation, and she is physically denied access to speech, a privilege Cordelia has, even though she does not use it. As a result of her ruination, Lavinia is transformed into a spectacle of female sexuality, one that no longer fits into the prescribed models of her society and therefore creates uncomfortable affective exchanges with all those who encounter her and attempt to fit her into the old mold.

At the start of the play, Lavinia is presented as Tamora's antithesis: the epitome of the angel woman. The daughter of a great military hero, Lavinia is placed high upon a pedestal of purity, dubbed "Rome's rich ornament," and lauded for her remarkable beauty and grace (I.I.55). She is obedient, modest, and, most importantly, quiet. She says but ten lines in the opening scene of the play. But Lavinia is loved and lauded only insofar as she is sexually valuable to the men around her, a fact Aaron makes vividly clear: "This petty brabble will undo us all… What, is Lavinia then become so loose… / That for her love such quarrels may be broached / Without controlment, justice, or revenge?" (I.I.561; 564; 566-567). Indeed, Lavinia may cause "such quarrels… without controlment" because she is not "so loose" as Aaron chides; it is her chastity that is Lavinia's most powerful asset. For male alliances in Rome are forged through the giving and taking of women as gifts, using marriage to establish kinship lines between powerful families, and through the transaction of women, "it is the men who give and take them who are linked," rendering "the women… a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it" (Rubin 909). So even

as she is touted as a pinnacle of virtue, all actions related to Lavinia center on her sexuality: Titus uses her as a bargaining chip for his family's reputation, Marcus uses her as a culmination of perfection, and both the brother duos, (Saturninus and Bassianus, and Demetrius and Chiron,) use her as a site of sexual excitation. Thus, in a strange reversal, Lavinia the chaste angel woman is reduced to Lavinia the sex symbol. Her body becomes a tool for giving and gifting power, and one that both the men and women on stage wish to use to their advantage.

At the start of the play, Titus holds claim to Lavinia's chastity. Titus has control of this precious resource because, "as her father… he can presume control of sexual access to her body," through which he "can mark his power as specifically masculine," because he can use her to establish a kinship relationship with other man, namely the new emperor (Harris 390). Indeed, when Titus names Saturninus emperor, Saturninus repays the father by claiming the daughter's hand in marriage: "And for an onset, Titus, to advance / Thy name and honourable family, / Lavinia will I make my empress, / Rome's royal mistress, mistress of my heart, / And in the sacred Pantheon her espouse," an honor Titus joyfully accepts: "in this match / I hold me highly honoured of your grace" (I.I.242-246; 248-249). Thus, as "Rome's rich ornament," Lavinia is objectified, reduced to the role of a priceless jewel waiting to be sold to the highest bidder. In this way, Lavinia "is a conduit for power" though which "both Bassianus and Saturninus attempt to secure access to Titus' power," and Titus likewise seeks to attach himself to their power, (Harris 391). Lavinia is regarded as little more than a piece to be exchanged in the men's games of power, as she must; the daughter in social system dependent on the exchange of women plays the important role of her father's bargaining chip to earn his way into

power and prestige. Thus, a daughter must be kept ‘marketable,’ meaning that, above all, her virtue must be protected for her to fulfill her function as a conduit for male power.

Lavinia thus employs her silence disruptively in I.I when she remains completely silent as Bassianus objects to Saturninus’ claim to her. Lavinia chooses to remain silent when Saturninus claims her and when Titus willingly gives her away but is still silent when Bassianus ‘seizes’ her and declares “this maid is mine” (I.I.280). When Titus demands that the “Traitor, restore Lavinia to the emperor,” her brother Lucius replies, “Dead if you will, but not to be his wife / That is another’s lawful promised love,” insinuating that Lavinia already ‘belongs’ to Bassianus (I.I.301-303). While “nothing [Lavinia] says reveals more than loyal obedience to her father and husband,” there are also no lines indicating that she resists being ‘seized,’ implying deviation from her expected obedience to her father’s wishes (Eaton 65). Harris argues that Lavinia’s silence “implies some volition on Lavinia's part,” in Bassiasnus’ claim, “for betrothal presumes a contractual agreement,” and if Titus is unaware of any such prior claim, “who [else] but Lavinia could negotiate this alliance with Bassianus?” (390). Lucius’ acknowledgement of a prior bond between his sister and Bassianus possibly implies that he was part of this arrangement, but regardless, Lavinia’s silence can be interpreted as a sign of independent female autonomy. If “Lavinia [offered] prior consent, independent of her father,” then she has destabilized the patriarchal economy of exchange in which sexual access to her is Titus’ means of establishing power bonds, meaning that “[i]t could very well be Lavinia who bars Titus' "way" in Rome” (Harris 390). Lavinia’s silence in this case “is useful to her,” because “silence [is] recommended as a virtue for women,” and therefore it becomes “shrewdly convenient” for her as her refusal to “offer assent or resistance” to

Bassianus' claim obscures any conception of her complicity in the exchange (Harris 390). If indeed Lavinia made a prior contract with Bassianus, acting on her own feelings, then Lavinia gains a sense of autonomy even while playing into the stereotypes of the perfect angel woman. Her staunch obedience to all three men - father, emperor, and suitor/lover - in effect "[destabilizes] power arrangements and negotiations" between them because "Lavinia can potentially function as a primary agent for the construction of masculine power and authority for any one of them," as she is the piece that establishes kinship bonds (Harris 390). In theoretically choosing her husband, Lavinia threatens the patriarchal powers that be, yet she can avoid detection through the guise of obedient silence. While Lavinia appears to mold herself to fit the shape society has set for her, she is able to use those very structures to subversively undermine the system. As a 'changing piece,' Lavinia can employ her sought after sexuality to establish her own kinship systems, at the expense of the men attempting to use her.

This source of autonomy, however, is only available to Lavinia long as she is chaste. Lavinia can only be an exchangeable good, can only belong to Titus and be the "cordial of his age," while she is a virgin, or a 'chaste wife' (Harris 392). Lavinia's power as a 'changing piece,' able to slip between the reality of her chastity and fantasy of her sexuality, is irrevocably disrupted when Demetrius and Chiron murder her husband, rape her, and mutilate her body. With the loss of her tongue, hands, and husband, Lavinia no longer has access to the tools she did in I.I, and language and expression have become next to impossible for her. Where Lavinia's body once served as her means of power in the world, her body is now unrecognizable, even to her, and therefore cannot signify in her social environment. Lavinia is unable to escape the reality of her pain, and the same is

true for all of those who look upon her. As Harris explains, "After Lavinia [is maimed], she has no recognizable value. She becomes an unfamiliar, unknown presence to the men around her," and to herself, "[w]hen Lavinia's role as a 'changing piece' is used up, she becomes deflated currency and can be discarded" (Harris 393). There is no more differentiation between the reality and the fantasy of Lavinia's body; her mutilation is an outward sign of her inward sexual 'corruption,' meaning she is no longer sexually desirable or accessible in the way she was before. 'Unknown' and 'unfamiliar' also strike particularly true, in that Lavinia's thoughts are now inaccessible to all. Sara Ahmed describes pain as a "lived… return to the body, or a rendering present to consciousness of what has become absent," an intensity of feeling that seizes one back to the body, and also "suggests that pain can often lead to a body that *turns in on itself*," (Ahmed 41, original emphasis). If Lavinia's value is linked to her sexuality, especially the maintenance of an obedient chastity, then this violent act has turned her inside out and made her a spectacle of the exact opposite: gross, horrific female sexuality. And such a spectacle disrupts existing affective networks, and makes communication impossible for those unwilling to abandon the old system.

Yet even in its most grisly truth, Lavinia's mutilation also renders her the epitome of the angel women: silent and helpless. With her tongue, hands, and chastity ripped from her body, Lavinia physically becomes the perfect, sacrificial 'saint' her family already assumes she is. But Lavinia attempts to avoid her martyfiction just as vehemently as she fought against her monsterfiation. Her most prominent fear in the moments before she is raped is that her ruination will be witnessed. When pleading mercy from Tamora, Lavinia says: "O, keep me from their *worse-than-killing lust*, / And tumble me into some

loathsome pit / *Where never man's eye may behold my body*" (II.II.175-177, my emphasis). Lavinia not only begs Tamora for death rather than rape, but even further pleads for her dead body to be hidden from the eyes of men. It is the spectacle of the impure body Lavinia wishes to avoid; her identity and autonomy are tied so closely to her chastity that she cannot bear even the thought of others witnessing her body as anything but chaste that she would rather be dead. But Tamora's vengeance, primarily seeking "reparations for Alarbus 'death," specifically aims to "mar Lavinia to a state of value that equals a dead son," and that equivalent means leaving Lavinia physically and sexually ruined, but very much alive (Routh 103). Thus, in a worse than sickening reversal of Lavinia's request, Tamora sanctions her sons to render Lavinia's body even *more* visible, mutilating her into a spectacle of pain, rage, and shame. Lavinia's pleas for mercy, like Tamora's, fall on deaf ears. Demetrius chides, "This minion stood upon her chastity, / Upon her until vow, her loyalty, / And with that quaint hope brave your mightiness. / And shall she carry this unto her grave?" and cheers on Tamora with the promise that "let it be your glory / To see her tears," while Chiron goads that they "will enjoy" Lavinia's "nice-preserved honesty" (II.II.124-127; 135; 139-140). These men make a mockery of Lavinia's chastity in both word and deed, seemingly demonstrating the harsh reality that no woman in a male-dominated power structure, even the most 'angelic,' is able to inhabit the expectations 'stuck' upon her body.

The spectacle of Lavinia's mutilation leads her family to project upon her the image of the madonna-esque martyr. When Lucius asks, "Speak, gentle sister: who hath martyred thee?" he is equating Lavinia's disfigurement with death (III.I.82). In a way, Lavinia *is* already dead; she has lost her sexual currency, she cannot touch or interact

with the world in the way she could before, and, most importantly, she cannot speak or reason with anyone. Lavinia's voice was already limited, yet she was able to use a seemingly obedient silence as a tool to maintain social power in a system with the cards stacked against her; now, her silence is enforced, and she is unable to access her prior source of power, becoming the full property of the men around her. Even though the Andronici men appear to truly wish to protect Lavinia from further harm, they continually speak over her and reduce her to an object of adoration rather than a living being. When Marcus likens Lavinia to a wounded deer, Titus' response reclaims ownership over Lavinia: "It was my *dear*, and he that wounded her / Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead" (III.II.92-93, my emphasis). At this point in the play, Titus had already, willingly or not, given Lavinia to Bassianus, relinquishing his claim on her while maintaining her chastity as she moved from his care straight into the arms of her husband. But now Lavinia is husbandless and sexually ruined, the epitome of damaged goods. But Titus still attempts to reclaim Lavinia as his own, focusing on the visual of his daughter:

> Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,
> It would have madded me; what shall I do
> Now I behold thy *lively* body so?
> Thou has no hands to wipe away thy tears,
> Nor tongue to tell me who hath *martyred thee* (III.I.102-107, my emphasis).

The antithesis of the words 'lively body' so close to the phrase 'who hath martyred thee' highlights the conundrum of the mangled Lavinia: she has become the equivalent of a walking corpse. This mangled body standing before Titus is Lavinia's 'lively body,' her

living flesh, that has been irreconcilably deformed. The fantasy of desire can no longer be read in the "crimson river of warm blood" that flows from her mouth, reminiscent of "the bloody pit of rape itself" (Anderson 371). It is easier to read Lavinia's pain as death rather than impurity, or the shame her mangled body reflects onto the family.

Indeed, the Andronici men continually read Lavinia's pain as a sacrificial burden she must bear rather than the bloody product of their actions. Titus continues his lamentation on Lavinia's body:

> Thy husband he is dead, and for his death
> Thy brothers are condemned, and dead by this.
> *Look, Marcus, ah, son Lucius, look on her!*
> When I did name her brother, then fresh tears
> Stood on her cheeks (III.I.107-111, my emphasis).

In another horrifically ironic reversal of Lavinia's wish to be 'hidden from the eyes of men,' Titus calls attention to her body, demanding Marcus and Lucius "look on her!" Titus' command implies a turning away from the spectacle of Lavinia; Marcus and Lucius seemingly attempt to hide from the image in front of them, choosing not to see the disintegration of their perceived fantasy of Lavinia, and potentially refusing to acknowledge their role in Lavinia's undoing, initiating a shared historical network constructed of "the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (Caruth 192). Titus appears to acknowledge his involvement in Lavinia's pain, but his attempt to comfort her through witnessing her pain does the exact opposite. Lavinia herself wishes to remain out of sight; she immediately hid from Marcus when he first came upon her. The act of hiding implies that the shame Lavinia feels is inexpressible, not only because she is

unable to speak, but also because "[t]he vocabularies…available for describing pain" are grossly "inadequate in the face of the feeling" (Ahmed 35). Lavinia is terminally restricted by "her unutterable need," left to have her 'sighs' interpreted by Titus, who says he "can [interpret] all her martyred signs," but proves his inability to do so when he refocuses attention on his daughter who wants to be hidden (Anderson 369; III.II.36). Titus can no longer understand his daughter because she cannot properly inhabit his affective vocabulary; Lavinia's mutilated body is ejected from the realm of the exchangeable, and Titus is, at first, unable to reconcile with that truth. As a result, Titus and his male relatives continually infantilize Lavinia, treating her like a child because she is unable to speak her true needs. Lavinia has been irreparably separated from human communication as the men around her stick onto her the label of the angelic martyr, already considered a dead woman walking before Titus murders her in V.III.

Returning to Lucius' final speech, just as the prolonged focus on Tamora's corpse serves to re-center rather than eject her, a similar occurrence takes place for Lavinia. In the two lines dedicated to his sister's corpse, Lucius attempts to reabsorb Lavinia's body back into the proactive arms of patriarchal protection. Lucius' words repeat the pattern the Andronici men establish after Lavinia's tragedy and fashion her into the shape of a martyr, an innocent victim, to rationalize her deformity and suffering through their conditioned social lens. Because Lavinia's mutilated body breaks the binary models offered for women in this narrative world, her male relatives are forced to extend a new definition to keep her contained when their old vocabulary fails, something that Titus believes can only be solved with the elimination of Lavinia. Lucius, however, speaking with the voice of patriarchal authority that once belonged to his father, never

acknowledges the responsibility such authority played in Lavinia's undoing. Thus, Lavinia's very death is a condemnation of the systems at play, and her corpse lies in stark antithesis to Lucius' attempts to reclaim her. Titus says that he kills Lavinia to free her from her physical and sexual shame: "Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with *thy shame thy father's sorrow* die" (V.III.45-46, my emphasis). Titus' language here is noteworthy: Lavinia's shame is his sorrow. Judith H. Anderson interprets this phrase as Titus' understanding of Lavinia's desire for death:

> Titus' very last words," thy father's sorrow," they seem to refer less to Lavinia's shame as the cause of sorrow, hers and his, than to Lavinia's embodiment of sorrow and Titus' abiding sorrow for his present action. There is little reason not to read Titus' last two lines as his assent to what his daughter wants. Like Shakespeare's Lucrece and Cleopatra, Lavinia might know best what this is,

hinting to Lavinia's potential suicidal desires and her foreknowledge of the Ovidian myth which informs her own tragic situation (381). While this interpretation is appealing, there is more to it than just Titus satisfying Lavinia's death wish. Titus' sacrifice of Lavinia brings to fruition the martyr fantasy he created for her in III.I.

Lavinia's death is textually framed as an act of honor for the sake of Rome. Such a frame removes Titus' blame in her shame; when Tamora asks "Why hast thou slain thy only daughter thus?" Titus replies "Not I, 'twas Chiron and Demetrius: / They ravished her and cut away her tongue, / And they, 'twas they, that did her all this wrong," further removing any implication of wrongdoing from himself (V.III.54-57). But, if Titus had not wounded Tamora, if he had not put so much stock in Lavinia's purity as a game piece to be leveraged for political power, if he had not upheld a sex-gender system dependent

upon the exchange and objectification of women, then Lavinia might have escaped shame and pain entirely. Lavinia's death does not undo the horrors forced upon her body, but rather serve only to right the dishonor done to the Andronicus name. Her corpse, instead, is a lasting reminder of those horrors, and the social system that engendered them. As Wynne-Davies asserts, both before and after Lavinia's death, "the play forces recurrently before our eyes… an evocation of rape so horrific that, while we recognize its ideological location, we cannot help but question the values of a society which allows such a violation to occur" (232). Even if Lavinia herself craved death as an end to her physical torment, the death itself and the corpse that is its product are a condemnation of the social system that allowed the events that necessitated such a death in the first place. In the end, "the innocent Lavinia dies to preserve the honor of a family that has, for the entirety of the play, been behaving dishonorably in its quest for revenge" (Routh 102). As Lucius linguistically attempts to reclaim Lavinia from her shame, the affective histories of the woman's trauma and pain form an impossible equation that the play cannot answer: how can these men lay claim to a corpse they allowed to be martyred in the first place?

It also must be acknowledged that the angelic Lavinia is given access to the revenge script like her 'antithesis' Tamora. Yet there are two major differences: one, Lavinia is dependent upon others to help her achieve her revenge while Tamora chooses to command others to do her will, and two, the immediate subject of Lavinia's revenge happens to be the same as that of the patriarchal forces around her, while Tamora is fighting those forces head on. Although Lavinia's prior source of power as 'Rome's rich ornament' is destroyed, she is allowed to participate in acts of revenge that would normally be withheld from her because of her monster-fication, allowing her to reclaim

some of the power taken from her, as Lavinia's acts of revenge all center around her mutilated body parts. The taking of Titus' hand into her mouth can certainly be read as a moment of degrading feminine obedience, but it can also be interpreted as Lavinia's metaphorical willingness to do whatever it takes to have her revenge. Even more striking is Lavinia's use of her mutilated body to reveal her rapists' identities, using her teeth and stubs to guide a stick through the sand in IV.I. While several critics have seen phallic imagery in Lavinia holding a stick in her mouth, or have likewise interpreted her bloody mouth as the image of a wounded vagina, Anderson instead frames it as an aggressive use of Lavinia's 'teeth' rather than an invocation of sexual passivity, suggesting a different visual:

> Clenched between Lavinia's teeth, as the stick would likely be for stability, it more outrageously and appropriately suggests the mythic *vagina dentata*, recognized to pertain to the tusked boar in Spenser's vaginal cave beneath the *mons generis* of the Garden of Adonis…. Add the mythic *vagina dentatato,* a metonymic emblem of fellatio, and Lavinia enacts a promise to destroy the potency of her violators with a biting excision, or an incision, as later happens, in Titus' knife-wielding hand (378-379).

The "bloody pit" of Lavinia's mutilated mouth is not a passive spectacle of pain, but rather a site of female aggression Lavinia is still able to use against her violators (Anderson 371). For as alluring as the connection of mouth and vagina may be, Lavinia's mouth is an instrument of speech, not sex; she uses her teeth to write words that lead to pain and punishment for her abusers, not her sexuality.

But it is not a stretch to say that Lavinia is granted the same 'teeth' of the *vagina dentatato*, the feminine monster, when her body physically becomes sign and symbol of the monstrous. Through the loss of her voice and agency, Lavinia gains the 'teeth' to strike back against her enemies. The culmination of Lavinia's revenge comes when she "'tween her stumps doth hold / The basin that receives [Demetrius and Chiron's] guilt blood" (V.II.182-183). She is actively involved as her father and brother murder those who have destroyed her, punishing these "villains," for their crimes against her:

> Here stands the spring whom you have stained with mud,
> This goodly summer with your winter mixed.
> You killed her husband, and for that vile fault
> Two of her brothers were condemned to death,
> My hand cut off and made a merry jest,
> Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear
> Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,
> Inhuman traitors, you constrained and forced.
> What would you say if I should let you speak?
> Villains, for shame you could not beg for grace. (V.II.169-180).

Even as Titus claims to kill the brothers in Lavinia's honor, his very words acknowledge her irreconcilable deformity; she has been 'stained with mud,' her summer mixed with winter, conditions impossible to remove. She has been forever mutilated from Madonna to whore, a change she comes to embody with dignity. Lavinia's very participation in this act likewise reinforces her transformation into a monster, and, despite her

father/uncle/brother's attempts to martyr-ize her, this willing participates on Lavinia's part renders an avenging angel rather than a sacrificial Madonna.

While the ending of *Titus Andronicus* appears to reassert the patriarchal system of its narrative world, it is in fact a condemnation of such limited systems. On the surface, the women of the play appear to fit Gilbert and Gubar's definitions of the monster woman and angel woman perfectly, as "Tamora uses her sexuality to gain power as empress and employs revenge tactics against Titus and his family," while, "Lavinia performs her duties as a daughter and a wife flawlessly" (Routh 104). Yet, both women are "subjected to the male honor code of a patriarchal system and [suffer] capital punishment due to factors beyond [their] control," regardless of their status as 'madonna' or 'whore,' and both end up dead by the play's conclusion (Routh 104). With both women dead at the end of the play, "*Titus Andronicus* suggests that within a patriarchal society, women will ultimately bow to male power regardless of how they react," whether she "[imitates] the male power structure and [uses] it for her own gain," or she follows the rules flawlessly, she will ultimately be at the mercy of men who "decide that the women are insufficient or unworthy" (Routh 104). But this is not the full story. Instead, Lavinia and Tamora consistently problematize these roles. As Wynne-Davies asserts, a main facet of the play is its "rejection of the common stereotyping of women into virgins and whores," encouraging a narrative that "appears both to enact and to confuse these treatments of women," as "feminine power and female sexuality are inextricably linked, simultaneously provoking and repressed" (217-218). Tamora's use of her sexuality to obtain power within a system the oppresses her, while ultimately condemned by the narrative, is rooted in maternal anger at the social system that killed

her son, and she is still very much portrayed as the ideal monster woman who plays upon angelic qualities to manipulate the men around her. Lavinia, though, is also a sexualized and sexual being. Her silence during Saturninus and Bassianus' fight over her, seemingly a sign of her unwavering obedience, may in fact be a hint into her desires; she lets Bassianus 'seize' her because she *wants* him to. And if Lavinia is, like Tamora, fully in control of her sexuality but choosing to follow the rules regarding the 'chaste wife,' then she is only repressed once her husband is murdered and she is mutilated. Lavinia's rape and mutilation render her monstrous; the physical ruination of her body transforms her into an unavoidable spectacle of pain and shame, while her sexual ruination devalues her within the patriarchal exchange of women, disrupting the impulse to simply label her an 'angel' woman. Even as her male family members infantilize her and project the label of 'martyr' onto her disfigured body, Lavinia's sexual impurity and desire for vengeance continually disrupt such labels through a form of vengeance that men endorse. Just because Lavinia is now silent and dependent upon men does not mean that she is the saint they imagine her to be. Lavinia is a rare female character who actively participates in a revenge script despite her physical disfigurement, and the image of her writing in the sand with a stick in her mouth, often interpreted phallically, could also represent the image of a vagina with teeth, the great patriarchal fear.

In the disruption of that dichotomy, the women of *Titus Andronicus* ultimately condemn the social system that attempts to enforce these labels upon their bodies. Their deaths serve as a chilling reminder: a patriarchal society does not care about women as anything more than property to be used and abused as the dominant men see fit. The living female body is manipulated and bent into whatever shape the patriarchal

imagination sees fit, projecting impossible standards upon the female 'subject rendered object.' But the female corpse fights back, infecting the male characters and audience alike with the chilling reality that the death of a woman is not the end of her power. Rather, she continues to press back upon those who pressed upon her in life, resisting the projections of the patriarchal imagination, and serving as a constant reminder of the instability of a man-made system. Even as Tamora's corpse is disgorged and Lavinia's is consumed, the fact that the play's final words give center stage to these dead bodies reifies their power. The female corpse is an 'other' that cannot be ignored nor escaped, but a reality of dishonor and chaos sown by patriarchy.

# CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION: THE ANGEL IN THE TIGER'S DEN

Sara Ahmed's book *The Politics of Emotion* offers a new perspective through which to view the heavily trod critical landscape of the works of William Shakespeare, especially in the realm of feminist theory. Combining Ahmed's theory of affective economies with the work of critics such as Gayle Rubin, Janet Adelman, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar bolsters the arguments already at work, providing a new vocabulary for understanding the function of patriarchal systems. If an affective economy is the emotional network established through human relations, and those relations are responsible for the creation of the Self, then the socio-historical circumstances of the society surrounding such emotional networks determine the relationships allowed within them. Several branches of criticism have called attention to the synthetic nature of patriarchal hierarchy, and an interrogation of the generation and perpetuation of the Madonna-whore complex through affective economies likewise proves the danger of such man-made social orders. The necessity of imposing binary, stereotypic labels upon

the female body, forcing her to inhabit either the role of the angelic Madonna or the monstrous whore, proves a corrosive path of mutually assured destruction, as the line between angel and monster becomes increasingly blurry. For the angel cannot exist without the monster, and indeed everything feminine must ultimately be rendered 'monstrous' in patriarchal affective systems, otherwise the gender binary would collapse in on itself. The sticking of dichotomous labels onto the female body will ultimately result in her death, as she will either be unable to perform 'Madonna-hood' correctly and will be punished for it, or she will perform it too well and will perish along with her subjectivity.

There will never be a clear way to know what William Shakespeare thought about patriarchal gender roles, but his texts provide for nuanced readings of human relationships regardless. Ahmed's theory of affective economies is clearly demonstrated through the fraught family dynamics of both *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus*, both of which end with the spectacle of the female corpse upon the stage. The women of these plays could easily be divided along the lines of the Madonna-whore dichotomy, yet deeper consideration reveals the blurring of such lines; for all these women truly want is autonomy within an unfair system, and even those who play fairly for it end up dead. Indeed, in "dramatic texts such as Shakespeare's where "female characters are few," they "must represent much," and the women in *Lear* and *Titus* represent the duality of the monster/angel woman, providing that all women are not one or the other, but both (Routh 99). There is no Tamora without a Lavinia, nor a Cordelia without Goneril and Regan, and vice versa; all pieces of the puzzle are needed to create the whole picture. Any social system that requires people to inhabit dichotomized roles is doomed to fail, as they

require a continual repetition of those roles that is bound to breakdown eventually. And a system built on inevitable break down is simply held in limbo until the inevitable explosion. Thus, the true ‘angel’ woman is also a ‘monster’ woman, holding tightly to both categories and refusing to let either define her.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adelman, Janet. "Suffocating Mothers in *King Lear*." *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest.* E-book ed., Routledge, 1st Edition, 2012, 103-129. Kindle

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. E-book ed., Routledge, 2015.

Anderson, Judith H. "Staging the Literal in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus: Lavinia's Suffering and Marcus' Speech." English Literary Renaissance, vol. 51, no. 3, Sept. 2021, pp. 356–82. EBSCOhost, https://doi-org.proxy.ulib.csuohio.edu/10.1086/715423.

Atkinson, Clarissa W. "Physiological Motherhood: The Wandering Womb." *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West*, Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 23–63. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvn1t9zn.6. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

Bareket, Orly, et al. "The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy: Men Who Perceive Women's Nurturance and Sexuality as Mutually Exclusive Endorse Patriarchy and Show Lower Relationship Satisfaction." *https://psycnet.apa.org/*, American Psychological Association, 2018, https://socsci3.tau.ac.il/nurit-shnebel/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-Madonna-Whore-Dichotomy_-Men-Who-Perceive-Womens-Nurturance-and-Sex....pdf. Accessed 10 March 2024.

Caruth, Cathy. "The Body's Testimony: Dramatic Witness in the Eichmann Trial." *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, vol. 40, no. 3, Nov. 2017, pp. 259–78. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi-org.proxy.ulib.csuohio.edu/10.3366/para.2017.0234.

Chamberlain, Stephanie. “Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England.” College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies, vol. 32, no. 3, 2005, pp. 72–91. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2005871215&site=ehost-live.

Cimitile, Anna Maria. “Macbeth: Criticism, Gender and the Tragedy of the Human.” Textus: English Studies in Italy, vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 2007, pp. 539–554. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2008650998&site=ehost-live.

Cohen, Derek. “The Malignant Scapegoats of ‘King Lear.’” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 49, no. 2, [Rice University, The Johns Hopkins University Press], 2009, pp. 371–89, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40467494.

Couche, Christine. “The Macbeths’ Secret.” “Rapt in Secret Studies”: Emerging Shakespeares, edited by Michael Neill et al., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 155–169. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2010653464&site=ehost-live.

Eaton, Sara. “A Woman of Letters: Lavinia in Titus Andronicus.” Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender, edited by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether, Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 54–74. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1997024413&site=ehost-live.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The madwoman in the attic : the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Veritas Paperback E-book ed., 2020.

Harris, Bernice. "Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus.'" Criticism, vol. 38, no. 3, 1996, pp. 383–406. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23118107. Accessed 21 June 2023.

Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.

Reid, Stephen. "In Defense of Goneril and Regan." *American Imago*, vol. 27, no. 3, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, pp. 226–44, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26302628.

Routh, Danielle. "'Enforced, Stained, and Deflowered': Considering the Reactions of Tamora and Lavinia to the Patriarchal System in Titus Andronicus." The Sigma Tau Delta Review, vol. 14, 2017, pp. 99–106. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018302303&site=ehost-live.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Third Edition, Blackwell, 1998, 901-924.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear.* The Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works, edited by G. R. Proudfoot et al., The Arden Shakespeare, London, UK, 2021.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear: Third Series*. The Arden Shakespeare, edited by R.A. Foakes, Bloomsbury Academic, 1997.

Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works*, edited by G. R. Proudfoot et al., The Arden Shakespeare, London, UK, 2021.

Wynne-Davies, Marion. "'The Swallowing Womb': Consumed and Consuming Women in Titus Andronicus." Shakespeare's Tragedies, edited by Susan Zimmerman, Palgrave Macmillan (London), 1998, pp. 212–36. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1998055391&site=ehost-live.