

SALOME: REVIVING THE DARK LADY

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ABSTRACT

SALOME: REVIVING THE DARK LADY

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Salome: Reviving the Dark Lady is a rationale for an impending interdisciplinary reimagining of the literary Dark Lady for the early twenty-first century. The work comprises of poetry, dance, and film. This thesis recounts the history of beauty in the Early Modern Period and discusses the historical context of the Dark Lady to provide a frame for the journey of marginalized archetype into the twenty-first century.

The choreopoem itself is built upon Salome, the character from Elizabeth Cary's 1613 closet drama "The Tragedy of Mariam Fair Queen of Jewry." The choreopoem contains transliterated soliloquies of the princess interspersed through original poems and prose inspired by works of spoken-word artist Andrea Gibson, twentieth-century Afro-Scandinavian author Nella Larsen, and various literary and cultural critics.

Dedicated to
Annsoupia,
The Bad Bitch Brigade,
and the Memory, Life, and Dreams of Joyce Carol Vincent (1 July 1965-2003)

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PART ONE

The Imposition of Ugliness

Before we begin to discuss the Dark Lady, we must learn what we can about her history. As she is traditionally an unconventional beauty, it is important to recognize the context of beauty during the era of her origin.

Much like modern advertisements, art of the Early Modern period purveyed most of the mixed messages concerning the relation of a woman's appearance to her morality. As the glorification of beauty and truth, art in the early modern period turns to ugliness due to the rapidly changing and growing under society. During the prosperous reign of the Tudors, people flocked to London, the center of culture, religion, and national political power. In 1500 the population of London was little over 50,000 inhabitants. But by the end of the early modern period, the population had risen to establish London as the second largest city in Europe (Wilcox 21). People came to admire and to become part the splendor of Great London, where

People walked about to show off their fashionable clothes and painted faces, making outlandish fads that aroused the connoisseur's delight and the satirist's scorn a distinctive feature of city life. (Korhonen 338)

With its greatness came filth and a breakdown in social governances due to a concentrated populous, poor maintenance, and, most importantly social injustices. The combination of robust activity and exquisiteness of appearance was easily likened to the Early Modern woman. Both woman and the city come under harsh criticism in the early modern age for their vivacity and beauty. As Helen Wilcox states in "Ah famous citie': Women, Writing, and Early Modern London," "The city, though teeming with life of all kinds, does not yield her its bounty" (27) and thus, many authors of the period condemned beauty, not because the beheld is evil manifested, but because it draws attentions to women who were to be kept silent and unseen until they were called upon to perform their *natural* duties.

In women beauty was often seen as artificial and therefore wicked or ugly. Unlike the church, which sought to make a show of women's inner beauty by humiliation, subjugation, and modesty, art sought to glorify the natural and inherently ugly female form and make it beautiful by the way of artifice. As Naomi Baker states in her paper, "'To Make Love to a Deformity': Praising Ugliness in Early Modern England," by skillfully immortalizing ugliness, predominantly male artist transform it into beauty and

Reproduce the literary and cultural models of beauty and ugliness that they seem to interrogate, revealing the extent to which beauty is a masculine construct, imposed on a 'naturally' ugly female body. (Baker 87)

Numerous examples of this male-made imposition can be found in the poetry of the satirist Jonathan Swift.

Swift takes no issue with expressing his opinion of the state of society in - essays, most popularly in “A Modest Proposal.” Swift takes no issue with gnashing the bodies of women within his poetry. In “A Description of the Morning” and “A Beautiful Young Nymph” Swift anthropomorphizes London as low-class, quasi-respectable women where sex and violence have gone awry (Wilcox). Swift provides snapshots of the life of Londoner women and ironically applies Romantic tropes of the pastoral to urbanity, an insult to women injured by their placement in society.

In the poem “Description of the Morning,” a mock aubade, Swift provides glimpses of the busy early morning life of London’s working class. His verse sings of Londoners whose day has begun long before the city they serve awakes. Of those depicted within the eighteen lines, three are women: Moll(7), Brickdust Moll(15), and Betty, a young maid and parody of Aurora (3-4). By providing vignettes of these women’s lives, Swift addresses the silence forced upon women and the revocation of their bodies in urban society. Betty, the early-to-rise maid with whom the master will share his nights but exclude from his days (Wilcox 32) must be gone before business begins and may not even address her lover in the light of day. The presence of Moll is indicated solely by the movement of the air caused by the whirling of her mop(7). A low ranking scullery maid, she has no distinguishing features, or even a body to give, as she never leaves the house and rarely encounters persons of power.

Brickdust Moll, however is highly visible, “scream[ing] thro’ half a street” (14). And, of the women, comes closest to criticism. Swift points out that she is an unpleasant visage: 1) Her skin is tanned and toughened from 2) working out in the open street in which she sells the product from which she received her name which, brick dust being a scouring agent, is of no direct use to those within power. In addition to being a highly visible, lower-class and unfashionable woman, she is highly audible. As Anu Korhonen states in "To See And To Be Seen: Beauty In The Early Modern London Street," being heard is the greatest offence a woman of any class could make in a male dominated space (338) .

Whereas in “Description of the Morning” Swift describes the lives of the unsightly working women, he anthropomorphizes London in “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” as an unseemly *working* girl. Here, the satire for which Swift is known shows itself. In this parody of the pastoral, Swift’s beautiful young nymph, Corinna, is a decaying, sickly prostitute “for whom no shepherd sighs in vain”(2).

Though the dedication claims the work was “written for the Honour of the Fair Sex,” Swift uses misogyny as a distraction in his satirical sleight of hand. Wilcox explains that “Swift reveals the ‘nymph’ as a construct of artificial parts, as deceptive as the city itself whose social structures are built on hypocrisy and whose physical elegance is a mask for filth” (34).

The poem begins as Corinna, the “pride of Drury Lane”, makes her way home to rest after what appears to be an unsuccessful night of work. Upon first glance, it seems as though the woman is just having a slow night, given the evidence of her past success:

For whom no Shepherd sighs in vain;
Never did *Convent Garden* boast
So bright a batter'd strolling Toast (2-4)

This woman has satisfied innumerable customers, many of whom have raised a glass to her health. But as the poem proceeds, we see that well-wishing is not enough. As Corinna prepares for bed, Swift makes a show of the woman's disrobement by skipping over any description of clothing and going straight to the removal of the artificial-made-to-seem-natural: a wig, a glass eye, and artificial eyebrows made from the hairs of mice (10-13).

Swift deconstructs a beautiful woman; without her prosthetics Corinna is no longer beautiful, and the verse continues to reveal her as undeserving of the titles of either "young" or "nymph." Swift continues:

With gentlest Touch, she next explores
Her Shankers, Issues, running Sores
Effects of many a sad Disaster,
And then to each applies a Plaister. (29-31)

To the outsider, be they tourist or paying customer, London-Corinna is a beautiful, worldly prize coveted and had by many. In likening the city to a ravished prostitute, who without her fashionable adornments and beauty-enhancing poultices is exposed as a helpless, diseased, and nauseating creature, Swift comments upon the status of the paradoxical nature of the city. But in doing so at the expense of a woman doubly disenfranchised by her sex and social status, he exemplifies the manifestation of the notion of the exceedingly beautiful and the incredibly homely woman as wickedness in society.

But the condemnation based on aesthetic appeal arose from a deviation from the original moral code society upon which society based its beliefs. It is stated throughout the Holy Bible that that which is of God can only be beautiful. Given that Early Modern English society followed Judeo-Christian beliefs, its notion of beauty as evil is an anomaly, and its disapproval of beautiful woman is a deviation from the teachings of its holy texts. It is in this deviance that the misfortune of the Dark Lady begins.

God Loves Ugly: Beauty in the Psalms

The Dark Lady is always beautiful, yet she is condemned for it. Though there are times when her actions deserve disdain, it is her physical appearance that is insulted, critiqued, or damned regardless of her morality. In a society whose holy texts embrace beauty, the Dark Lady receives little approval.

Concerning the praise of female beauty, most of the verses doing such within the Christian bible reside in the fourth chapter of the comparatively erotic *Song of Solomon* of the Hebrew Bible. At a less carnal level, the Bible notes in numerous verses that that which is created by God cannot be ugly and that beauty should be revered and enjoyed as it is a sign of divine greatness. David sings, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully [and] wonderfully made: marvelous [are] thy works; and [that] my soul knoweth right well. Considering your wonderful work in forming me, I cannot but praise you and fear your mighty power” (Psalms 139:14). In Ecclesiastes 3:11 it states that “[God] hath made every [thing] beautiful in its time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” These verses not only state that beauty should be appreciated but done so unquestioningly; it is blasphemous to consider anything in God’s creation to be ugly.

In addition to all things being beautiful by being formed by the Creator, according to the Bible, those who were closest to God are notably beautiful

physical appearance and spirit. In Ezekiel 16:14, Jerusalem is reminded that because they held God close to their hearts, he blessed them inasmuch that they became attractive to the pagans: “And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it [was] perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord”. Job, arguably the most tried yet faithful man in the entire Bible, is described as “perfect and upright,” or attractive without deformity, prior to his tribulations because he “feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). Those who love the Lord are often marked with a beauty indicative of His blessings due to their faithfulness.

But as not everyone is as perfect and upright as Job, or as comely as Jerusalem, there is countless scripture which highlights inner beauty. Many verses emphasize not focusing on outward beauty, including 1 Samuel 16:7 : “Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him: for God seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord beholdeth the heart.” Though physical attractiveness may be indicative of those covered by God to mankind, it is not how the Creator notes his faithful. Being an omniscient presence, God sees the inner-workings of the mind and the actions taken by an individual; the flesh is of no importance to That which works in the spirit.

As stated in the Isaiah 40:8, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” In addition to physical beauty not being of importance to God, the Bible states that outward appearances are not important because earthly beauty fades and all living things die.

“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vanity:
but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised”

Proverbs 31:30

According to many ontological theorists and scholars of the early modern era, the manifestation of wickedness within a woman could be indicated physically if a woman was either too beautiful or too homely. In his extensive investigative essay *women and religion during the Early Modern era*, “Renaissance Misogyny, Biblical Feminism, and Hélienne de Crenne's *Epistres Familieres et Invectives*,” Jerry C. Nash notes one such scholar, Gratein Du Pont, who authored *Controverses des Sexes Masculin et Femenin*, a work comprising of three books and over four-hundred pages dedicated solely to declaring and detailing the wickedness of womankind. According to Du Pont, “a man, even the most ‘wicked,’ we are assured, is of higher value in the eyes of his Creator (and thus in Du Pont's), than the ‘holiest woman” (Nash 381).

Given the historical misogyny within the scholarship of the Christian church in spite the words and actions of Christ, it is not unusual that it would take issue with the appearance of women. Numerous men of learning referred to biblical verses and to works of earlier misogynist scholarship considered reputable by the Church to support the subjugation of women. Much of the heavily-quoted misogynist rhetoric within Christianity comes from Paul the Apostle, formerly Saul of Tarsus, Persecutor of early Christians. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that “Women are commanded to be silent in public assemblies, and they are commanded to ask of their husbands at home”(1

Corinthians 14:15). Additionally, Paul is responsible for most of the biblical text condemning specifically *female* fashionable embellishment of appearance.

Though Jesus of Nazareth directly praises natural beauty in his Sermon on the Mount, suggesting that people learn to adorn themselves from lilies (Matthew 6:28), he does not condemn fashion and is not specific in regards to sex in his suggestion. Paul, however, concerns himself with feminine dress. He writes in 1 Timothy 2:9:

Likewise also the women, that they array themselves in comely apparel, with shamefastness and modesty, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly apparel/ But (as becomes women that profess the fear of God) with good works.

According to this verse if a woman were to aspire to wear the latest fashions, which are usually “comely,” though Paul directly instructs her to do so she is not behaving as a God-fearing woman should; a woman should be “shamefast” or embarrassed by the beauty of her “comely” garments insomuch as to not want to wear them as to do so would be evil and thus not fearing of God. Paul shames women for their beauty, despite them having been made by the Creator in his image, and having the ability to display God’s blessings upon them by the way of adornment and “comely” attire.

Although the Bible wholly supports beauty, including that of women, because of the basis of the culture in Judeo-Christian traditions verses the holy texts Early Modern society still considered attractive women to be wicked. This contradictory sentiment within the Christian society finds its root in the works of Early Modern religious scholars whose works focused primarily on the inferior

existence of women. These men used scripture as supposed proof to support “negative views of women's sexuality and her moral, intellectual worth” (Nash 381). The works of such scholars combined with the works of Paul provided an appropriate religious backing to paint a beautiful woman, regardless of adornment a wicked, darker hue.

Comparable to the aforementioned verse is 1 Peter 3:3-4, which discourages similar time-consuming adornment, such as braided hair. But unlike Paul's verse, this scripture suggests that women use the time saved to focus on inner-beauty without condemning. Though there are warnings against ostentatiousness, none directly associate beauty and embellishment with wickedness. However, because it deviates from traditional norms of beauty (e.g. fair, bright), an unconventional attractiveness can be considered ostentatious. By being dark yet beautiful, the Dark Lady creates paradoxical conflict; how can society embrace this beauty when it comprises of what its moral code advises it to beware? This discomfort creates a distance which places the Dark Lady on the margin. The remoteness renders her as an antagonist and an enigma to be condemned because no one really knows who she is.

Who is The Dark Lady?

Though the Dark Lady receives attention in texts for her allure, there is little devotion given to her story as she is the antagonist, there to impede the central character with her wickedness. However, the Dark Lady not only exists in texts, but is an archetype found throughout humanity. She is exemplary of what C.G. Jung called The Shadow, or “What lay furthest away from waking consciousness assumes as it were, a threatening shape” (Robertson 113). She exists on the periphery of the focus of society and her shadow poses a threat.

Though she makes her grand literary debut in the passionate and overtly sexual sonnets of William Shakespeare, The Dark Lady has existed for as long as humanity itself. As exemplified by the speculation of the origin of the Dark Lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets, the crafted Dark Lady is modeled after a living, breathing woman. A.L. Rowse declares Aemelia Lanyer to be the most tempestuous of the Bard’s muses in his book *Shakespeare the Man* as she fits the profile being darkly colored and on the margins of English high society. However, Rowse’s theory is debunked by Susanne Woods in the biography *Lanyer: a Renaissance Woman Poet*.

Though Rowse is incorrect in his declaration, Woods’s thorough research on Aemelia Lanyer’s life and her world gives insight into why she is a contender for being Shakespeare’s Dark Lady. She explores Lanyer’s Italian heritage, an

origin story which brings to light her continental (i.e. dark) heritage. Woods also covers many of the male authors with whom Lanyer had contact by providing: an introduction of a contemporary author; his place on Lanyer's timeline; his place on Lanyer's map; instances in which they might have encountered each other and mutual acquaintances; and literary evidence. Lanyer's affiliation with these men was professional but associated with so many men brought her morality into question even though she only had a relationship with Samuel Daniel, a poet with whom and whose work she without a doubt had contact and might have inspired and influenced her writing.

Woods expertly places Daniel and Lanyer in similar social circles at court and during their time as tutors to Anne Clifford. The author also establishes herself as an expert extricator as she precisely establishes references to Daniel's *Cleopatra*, *A Letter from Octavia*, and *Rosamond* in Lanyer's work. It is evident that Woods takes scholarship seriously, but as one reads her book, one cannot help but think it was written to spite A.L. Rowse, who insists that Lanyer is Shakespeare's "Dark Lady." She makes no mention of it at all in the biography, but in her expounding of Daniel's dedicatees, she suggests that *Delia* might represent "Daniel's Aemelia" in a mockery of Rowse's declaration (Woods 40).

In the chapter "Lanyer and Shakespeare," Woods spends much time expounding upon why Lanyer could not have been Shakespeare's "Dark Lady," declaring that the poet's supposed promiscuity is entirely based on the sonnet cycle which is following literary conventions of the time and reminding the reader that such indiscreet sexual behavior would not have been tolerated in Queen Elizabeth's court (Woods 97).

In addition to disproving Lanyer as the Dark Lady of the sonnets via social analysis, Woods makes literary arguments, including a comparison of Lanyer's work to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* in which she concludes that both paint similar pictures of male desire (Woods 90). But where Shakespeare dwells on feminine vulnerability and beauty, Lanyer rejects the latter as a topic of praise because it is what makes a woman so vulnerable; it is this rejection that most closely aligns Lanyer to the dark lover in the Bard's sonnets.

Though Lanyer may not be *the* Dark Lady, her rejection of male praise because of its ability to increase women's susceptibility is a key element to the figure. Additionally, she is a writer; a woman doing men's work. In this sense, the Dark Lady is anti-feminine (Minh-ha 19); she does not succumb to the woman's inheritance of physical, political, and social weakness. Since there is no specific Dark Lady, but rather a series of traits which make a woman such, it is better to inquire "what" rather than "whom."

What makes the Dark Lady dark? Maybe she was kept in mental darkness and strives for an enlightenment that society keeps from her; perhaps her knowledge casts a daunting shadow. Maybe she is naturally timid when social protocol dictates she be convivial. Perhaps she is a sociopath like Lisa from Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*, or simply has a different and unpopular view of the world. Regardless the shade of the Dark Lady's obscurity, she is ultimately an outsider who has been treated unfairly; refuses her placement within society; and actively fights against the supposed weaknesses of her situation to achieve that which she desires. She is active when she should be passive, bold when she should be timid and light when she is labeled darkness.

Often physical darkness compounds the struggle. The physicality of the darkness may be phenotypic. She is raven-haired, not-fair skinned, and dark-eyed—the antithesis of a classical beauty. She could be a beautiful taboo like the incestuous Hagar of Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Or the physical nature of her darkness originates in her residence; she may be from the wrong side of the tracks, of a condemned people, or wanders from place to place like the heroine of Larsen’s *Quicksand*.

The subjectivity of physical attractiveness trapped women within the paradox of finely dressed, poorly formed, poorly dressed, and too finely formed, and labeled them as inherently evil. “Go Catch a Falling Star,” “The Indifferent,” “Two Loves I Have of Comfort and Despair”—there is no shortage of creative works from Early Modern writers condemning or lamenting the beautiful woman. Society paints her as a temptress; given the magnetism of her beauty, she is either too emotionally distant to the desirous eye, or in too close of a proximity, endangering the morality or discipline of a kept man. The imposition of the role of femme fatale, a woman whose talent for ruination comes from her attractiveness, upon a female usually stems from an ignorance of he who casts his gaze; he desires to know her. The shroud of mystery covering the Dark Lady and the magnetism of beauty inspires inquiry and fantasy of her being, and more importantly her enigmatic origin.

Although the Dark Lady is a tragic figure of the Early Modern period, her refusal to submit is modern. As time progressed, she becomes less of an antagonist and makes audiences reconsider darkness as the antithesis of that which is good. In the twentieth century, the Dark Lady boldly questions society’s

beliefs and reveals a more sympathetic picture of the marginalized woman. But though the twentieth century affords the Dark Lady the opportunity to be at the center of things, be she character or author is still doomed. The tragedy awaiting the Dark Lady at the cusp of success in the twentieth century is largely found in the lives and works of women of color who are triply condemned by being female, Other, and writer.

Some Disgusting Sensual Creature

Don't wanna be your exotic

Like some delicate, fragile, colorful bird

Imprisoned, caged in a land

Foreign to the stretch of her wings

Not Your Erotic, Not Your Exotic, Suheir Hammad

Given the inevitable tragic ending of the Dark Lady, it is no surprise that work produced by women of color comes under fire. The writing of women, especially which is written by women of color, has been treated as a second- or third-class citizen in the literary world. Their diaries, musings, and closet dramas until recently have been kept away from the centers of study; their account of the world was no importance within the grooming of learned men, and such men would only read words penned by female hands if it were credited to a masculine name or no name at all. This tradition of anonymity of the female voice plagues modern women writers, not so much in finding a place that will publish their work, but in the response they receive from readers. Inputting race or sex to the creative act has long been a means by which the literary establishment cheapens and discredits the achievements of non-mainstream women writers” (Minh-ha 6). One only needs to go to a post authored by a woman, and, regardless of the height of its brow, there will most likely be a snide remark concerning her style or

a dismissal of her view issued in-jest. This is further complicated if she is of color, regardless of whether she mentions race in her piece. Minh-ha elaborates the struggles of a woman writer of color; she struggles through critiques that take her racial and sexual characteristics and identity in for an inappropriate amount of consideration which celebrates her for the wrong things or ignores her entirely (6). The female writer of color cannot forget her skin for her audience will not let her, lest they forget her. This was the fate of Nella Larsen.

Her novels *Passing* and *Quicksand* found an audience within the contemporary movement which gave voice to the rising class of black artists known as the Harlem Renaissance, but was forgotten as quickly as it gained recognition—ignored until later that century. Her work was not black enough to be canonized with other Harlem Renaissance writers; how many authors popularly associated with the movement openly have roots in a Scandinavian (i.e. very white) country?

Additionally, the characters in Larsen's novels are none too feminine; they are highly mobile, intelligent and well-educated women and therefore dangerous. "Learned women have often been described in terms one might use to describe a thief. Being able to read and write, a learned woman robs a man of his creativity, his activity, his culture, his language" (Minh-ha 19). The characters of Larsen take agency that is not inherently theirs. Helga travels unaccompanied from place to place using her own words and money to envelop herself in different cultures for her own reasons in *Quicksand*. More closely to the thievery of which female writers are accused of is the secret climb of the racial hierarchy by the women of

Passing. Larsen is not only a master thief of man's culture, but those which she inherited. She discloses the desire of her black contemporaries for acceptance in a world whose rules would never work in their favor that she broke not only in her work but in life, and gives a firsthand account of what it is like to be subjugated to a white man's fetish.

Women of color constantly fight against the projected images of their sexuality, struggling against the impression of promiscuity placed upon them by popular culture and pseudoscience. Of all of the questions about the Dark Lady's identity, she asks the most. The images thrust upon her obscure who she may really be and during the fight to reclaim herself she always has her tragic fall. . . . "The 'white man's burden,' his sexuality and its control, is displaced into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female" (Gilman 107). Too often Western culture exploits their sexuality in textual and photographic displays; the most infamous of this degradation is the case of Sarah Baartman.

"Call girl, joy girl, working girl. Lady and whore are both bred to please" (Minh-ha), women of color constantly fight against the projected images of their sexuality, struggling against the impression of promiscuity placed upon them by popular culture and pseudoscience. "The 'white man's burden,' his sexuality and its control, is displaced into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female" (Gilman). Too often Western culture exploits their sexuality in textual and photographic displays; the most infamous of this degradation is the case of Sarah Baartman.

Baartman, a South African slave shipped off to Europe in the early

nineteenth century, served as an exhibition of steatopygia and the elongated labia typical of Khoisan women. As Freud notes, no “male human being is spared the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of female genitals.” This fixation on the genitalia indicates a perceived threat to the dominance of the patriarchal male society, even more so because of Baartman’s black skin. Under the guise of science, she stood upon a pedestal, naked in the intemperate European climates. Numerous illustrations, novel and degrading were made in her image. After a few years of such treatment, she allowed herself to be objectified even further by willingly posing for paintings that focused on her erotic peculiarity. Scientists cast molds of her genitals to be showcased in museums. These same museums displayed her remains until the early nineteenth-seventies, “remain[ing] a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it” (Freud 200) until the early 2000’s.

The fetishizing of Baartman is an extreme and tragic case, (once the West had had its way with her and its fascination dissipated, Sarah Baartman fell to alcoholism and prostitution) but nonetheless representative of the correlation between sexual attractiveness and the unusual physical traits associated with living Dark Ladies within the Caucasian cultural psyche dominates Western culture. The “vehicle both of denying and of asseverating” (Freud 203) becomes a greater obsession when women of mixed race are taken into consideration.

The fascination with the neither-this-nor-that visage appears repeatedly through art, usually through flashy depictions of women from the lower classes and whores. The mystery of their background fuels the curiosity; it is easier to objectify a person without an acceptable origin. A great amount of these raceless

women are not accepted into any of the cultures from which they descend, and are therefore forced to rely only on themselves to survive. Some stand strong; eschewing any attempt of society to make a spectacle of their existence. Others, less sure of themselves, buy into the lie that they “belong to [themselves] alone and not a race” (Larsen 64). As delightful as that sounds, society forces people into categories continually. By thinking this way, these women fall into position to be become a spectacle. Western culture expects and pressures a woman of color to flaunt her non-European beauty, displaying it as though she were a prostitute and society the john. Not knowing any other way, the less-confident succumb and give into the hegemony, and as is the case of Helga Crane, the heroin of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, flout their unusual features to gain what they perceive as acceptance.

Most children mature out of the need to be the center of the universe. These children have been socialized properly and have a home life. In this home, they gain a healthy and stable projected personal image that has been nurtured by loving caretakers. Individuals like Helga Crane are not so fortunate and, thus, will take any recognition that they can get. Helga's attention-seeking behavior began while she was in fair Denmark as a child. “She had only been eight, yet she had enjoyed the interest and admiration which her unfamiliar color and dark curly hair, strange to those pink, white, and gold people evoked,” (Larsen 55). At this young age, Helga bites the bait out of ignorance; instead of relying on her communicability, she relies on her appearance to earn the attention of others. Thus, society begins to groom another lost female of color to be its object of admiration and sexual desire.

As a woman who descends from two distinctly different worlds but belongs to neither, Helga is as unprotected as the aforementioned Baartman. Having neither parents nor a culture to guide her, she is doubly an orphan. Helga is in the position of being doubly marginalized in that no matter where it is to which she runs, she will always be of and not; she can never be completely same or other. “Just be ‘like’ and bear the chameleon’s fate, never infecting *us* but only yourself, spending your days muting, putting on/taking off glasses, trying to please all and always at odds with myself who is no self at all” (Minh-ha 52). After her Scandinavian mother's death, her uncle, who believes that she will not amount to anything respectable otherwise, sends her away to the unfamiliar African American world of her father.

At first she embraces the atmosphere; it contradicts the oppressions of her childhood, and teaches her that “because one was dark, one was not necessarily loathsome, and could, therefore consider oneself without repulsion” (Larsen 23). But as she watches her classmates reunite with their families during holidays and breaks, she realizes that she is different. The lack of family leaves Helga without guidance and, more importantly, a name on which to rely.

“Nor was the general atmosphere of Naxos, its air of self-righteousness and intolerant dislike of difference, the best of mediums for a pretty, solitary girl with no family connections. Helga's likable and charming personality was smudged out” (Larsen 5). Helga attempts to fit into an exclusive and hierarchical community but her difference continually sets her apart. “You could be queer, or even attractive, or bad, or brilliant, or even love beauty and such nonsense. if you had a family” (Larsen 8). Helga embodies all of these traits but, due to her

suspected illegitimacy and lack of a Naxos-approved name, she has no right to be. Like many women of indistinct race, Helga becomes a black sheep for not having a family. Helga alienates herself intentionally and unintentionally by, respectively, dressing fashionably and flamboyantly, and being physically attractive. Like many in her situation, she resorts to emphasizing her differences. But for Helga, it is an act of objectification rather than defiance.

In an attempt to belong and to reclaim ownership of her image, Helga falls into the trap of auto-exoticization by relishing in the distress ostentation causes her peers.

Dark purples, royal blues, rich greens, deep reds, in soft, luxurious woolens, or heavy, clinging silks. And the trimmings-- when Helga used them at all-- seemed to them odd. Old laces, strange embroideries, dim brocades. Her faultless, slim shoes made them uncomfortable and her small plain hats seemed to them positively indecent. (Larsen 18)

Without a family or a connection to the Naxos community, Helga to guide, at the age of twenty-two, Helga's ultimate goal in life is to be a plaything. "What just did she want? Barring a desire for material security, gracious ways of living, a profusion of lovely clothes, and a goodly share of envious admiration, Helga Crane didn't know, couldn't tell" (Larsen 11). Despite being intelligent and securely employed, she wants nothing else but to be objectified, to be a "decoration. A curio. A peacock" (Larsen 73) that she was, and will become again in Denmark. This need to be a spectacle continues to grow, costing Helga her job,

the symbol of independence, stability, and success that young, unmarried orphans usually cherish.

Ms. Crane's auto-exoticization proves detrimental. Her emphasis on captivating onlookers with pleasurable attire gives her the “air of a prostitute” and she is mistaken for such on multiple occasions during her travels. It alienates her from the few people with whom she has a mutual trust and understanding. Her obsession takes precedence over all, even the long-awaited return of her good friend, Anne.

Here mind trailed off to the highly important matter of clothes.

What should she wear? White? No, everybody would, because it was hot. Green? She shook her head, Anne would be sure to. The blue thing. Reluctantly she decided against it; she loved it, but she had worn it too often. There was that cobwebby black net touched with orange, which she had bought last spring in a fit of extravagance and never wore because... Anne had considered it to *décolleté*, and too *outré*... She smiled as she decided that she would certainly wear the black net. (Larsen 56)

Despite the celebration being for the sake of the friend who disapproves of the ostentatious garb, Helga wears it to prove herself more worthy of admiration than Anne. But even in her unique gown, her presence is short of spectacular: “Africa, Europe, perhaps a pinch of Asia, in fantastic motley of ugliness and beauty, semi-barbaric, sophisticated, exotic, were here. But she was blind to its charm, purposely aloof and a little contemptuous, and soon her interest in the moving mosaic waned” (Larsen 60).

Unable to call attention to her by simply being, Helga is incapable of enjoyment, more so after seeing the man she is begrudgingly attracted to cavorting with more-confident version of herself. Though she finds a place where she is not ostracized for her boldness or her physical appearance, Helga is robbed of her power to entice. It is this moment that inspires her return to Denmark, a place where she will truly stand out and be “free of that great superfluity of human beings, yellow, brown, and black... that had so oppressed her”(Larsen 63). This is the tragic flaw that causes the downfall of the Dark Lady: when she loses the power to control her destiny, she gives herself over to hegemony.

The image of exotic entraps Helga so much so that she believes it better to parade about as a “veritable savage” than to blend in with “those dark, segregated people.” In Denmark, Helga lives as a carefree socialite; her dark skin and hair allows her to become the center of attention without effort. “Helga enjoyed these dinner-parties, as they were usually spirited affairs, the conversation brilliant and witty, often in several languages. And always she came in for goodly measure of flattering attention and admiration” (Larsen 76). She receives everything she has ever wanted: Anything that makes her the most beautiful-- bright colors, dramatic jewels, risqué cuts; anything that draws all eyes upon her body. She adopts and embraces the visage of the whore Western culture wants her, a beautiful woman of color, to be. “True, she was attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way, but she wasn't one of them. She didn't count at all” (Larsen 70). It takes her over a year of parading to realize what everyone else, especially the gazing men, have seen all along: She is willing to sell herself, not in monetary terms (Larsen 34), but for a life of luxury and constant admiration (Larsen 67).

Helga's transformation into a sexual object is completed within a commissioned portrait by artist (i.e. visual storyteller) Axel Olsen. Upon first viewing the portrait Olsen paints of her “Helga, who had a stripped, naked feeling under his direct glance, drew herself up stiffly” (Larsen 86) literally sees herself as the “pink, white, and gold” people do. Despite her outrageous dress and ostentation on the streets, she believes herself to be an honorable lady, and is shocked and offended by the proposition of sex instead of marriage from her portrayer. The work, being a portrait is a history, “Then, since fictional and factual have come to a point where they mutually exclude each other, fiction not infrequently means lies, and fact truth” (Minh-ha 120). Helga receives recognition as the all-desirable plaything for which she longed, but finally sees the kind of woman society deems her to be.

She had never quite...forgiven Olsen for the portrait. It wasn't, she contended, herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature with her features. Herr and Fru Dahl had not exactly liked it either, although collectors, artists, and critics had been unanimous in their praise and it had been hung on the line at the annual exhibition, where it had attracted much flattering attention and many tempting offers. (Larsen 89)

Olsen has portrayed her as a clothed *Grande Odalisque*, an exotic beauty of distorted proportions but without the reserve of Ingres' nude. Helga's portrait, disliked by its subject, her Danish family, and those closest to them, “Story writing becomes history writing, and history quickly sets itself apart, consigning story to the realm of tale, legend, myth fiction, literature. “ Much to the chagrin

of the Dahl's and Helga, the "history" is all the success for which they initially hoped; the family gains the social standing it desperately wants and Helga is immortalized (Larsen 87), forever to draw the attention and interest of those looking upon her image-- a contemporary *Odalisque*. But whereas Ingres' harem woman carries an air of divine disinterest and shares her magnetism with the elaborate fabrics and detailed objects surrounding her tawny form (Bard), Helga's image is one of the come-hither seduction; an embodiment of the refusal to share the spotlight thinly veiled by an aloofness in life outside of the painting (Larsen 34). She loses control, and the society keeps its fetish.

It is this image that living Dark Ladies have and continue to fight. The exotic image of hypereroticism exemplified by Baartman, and the complacent cool seduction of Ingres' dark nude are symbols of colored women's insatiable sexual appetite fixed upon them by the desires of white men.

Voiceless women of color, Baartman and Helga Crane fell victim to exoticization-- Baartman, ultimately, in death, and Helga in humiliation and loss of pride. But in the passage of time, women have gained a voice and are standing up to fight. The twentieth century was full of women standing up and taking back their rights. White women gained bounds in sexual freedom while women of color still fight against the impressed images of erotic, exotic desire.

Revolutionaries and writers of the 1970's, such as Angela Davis and Alice Walker gave a voice to black women. Today in our hyper-sexualized world, women of color combat eroticized images of Hottentot-*odalisque* hybrids like Amber Rose, Black China, and Kim Kardashian found in music videos and advertisements, and the lasciviousness image that their various lifestyles promote. The struggle to

reclaim identification as human instead of sensual decoration has increased in difficulty in the twenty-first century due to the cultural appropriation by white celebrities such as Miley Cyrus, and the fetishization of Lupita Nyong'o's skin.

Women of today have many outlets to speak against such exoticism that South African Baartman, Afro-Scandinavian American Larsen, and their contemporaries could not have been able to conceive. Much is still being done by traditional methods such writing and protests but new technologies make it easier for women of color to get their voices out there via blogs, social websites, and media sharing. "Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment" (Minh-ha 52). The World Wide Web has proven to be a powerful, double-edged tool fighting against the objective Othering women that it also promotes.

But as more women of color receive and embrace the opportunity that the internet provides to connect and educate like-minded individuals, the eroticism and exoticism that the digital medium enables will soon be recognized as the injustice it is. Minh-ha and Larsen wrote "out of compulsion" to be heard and to lead. Women writers are not given their due and this is especially the case with Larsen. She wrote to tell her story and her experience; she only published the two works. Yet, those two works are discredited not only for the aforementioned lack of femininity and blackness, but because her works too closely resembled her exceptional life and is therefore uncreative despite the novel developing from tales inspired by thinly veiled gossip. But whereas the predecessors of Larsen's form of choice were written solely to entertain and gained popularity for their

hint of improbable probability, *Quicksand* and *Passing* are all but forgotten in print; perhaps reading in black and white the subjugation of female Other is not as satisfying as gazing upon a piece or person, or piece of a person in a gallery. It is this implication for which I create *Salome*.



The Dark Lady

PART TWO

Revival

The Dark Lady has too long been a doomed figure. But for all of her tenacity, literature and life almost always condemn the Dark Lady to a tragic end. Either her triumph is short-lived, or she never achieves her goal. Since her grand debut and throughout the twentieth century, the Dark Lady the story of the Dark Lady has been one of tragedy. Though she made it to the twentieth century, she still perished there. In literature and legend, she is arguably guaranteed to die, sometimes by a slow-death like the endless cycle of pregnancy and childbirth of Larsen's Helga; and in life she succumbs to oblivion, lest she be ideologically dark, like Norma Jean Baker, and then she suffers an untimely and mysterious death. But for the triple-threat Dark Lady, she who is physically, cognitively, and socially shadowy, like African American women of the twentieth century, obscurity is almost certain. Zora Neale Hurston, Josephine Baker, and Nella Larsen, for all of their achievements and fame were at one point doomed to obscurity. They were highly celebrated, and then forgotten; in most literary circles Larsen is still unknown. But the trope of the Dark Lady is not limited to historical figures, legends, and celebrities. For example, consider the case of Joyce Vincent.

The “mostly skeletal” remains of Joyce Carol Vincent were discovered in 2006, nearly three years after she died. The eloquent west London woman died alone watching television in the apartment provided to her by an organization for survivors of domestic violence, a fate that, according to interviews of her friends and acquaintances did not align with the witty, outgoing beauty they knew—or thought they knew (Morley). In an attempt to solve the mysterious circumstances of such an end, Carol Morley’s documentary *Dreams of a Life* actually reveals and creates more questions than it answers. The director interviews Vincent’s associates, many of whom are just learning of their beloved Joyce’s death, and brings light to the shadows that surround the history of Ms. Vincent.

She never kept a journal, or stayed very long in the same place, but neither of these was due to a lack of direction. A friend recalls, "Wherever she went and whatever she did, there were people trying to get her into bed. It was a burden that she was so beautiful and she was very clever, a lot more intelligent than she let on. I think she had several lives" (Morley). An old beau recalls how she was always moving and changing jobs she otherwise enjoyed because of sexual harassment; another tells of Vincent’s musical aspirations and successful networking with industry leaders and is shocked to find that Joyce, for all of her talent and personality never made it in the business. No one knows who Vincent was hiding from in the safe house or what she was doing for work at the time, but they knew that this ambitious, brilliant woman of the twentieth-century did not deserve the tragic end she met. Multiple interviewees state that if social media

had gained popularity a few years earlier that Vincent would still be around today, and, given the permanence of the digital world, perhaps a great success. Morley's film, in spite of critical response, saves Vincent and her story from the novelty of a bizarre news headlines and, ultimately, obscurity as her documentary inspired an episode of the increasingly popular show starring Gabrielle Union.

In addition to rekindling fond memories for Vincent's associates, *Dreams of a Life* brings to life the importance of liminal figures to humanity and calls attention to the non-literary reality of the Dark Lady. The Dark Lady may not always be of a high socioeconomic status, but she has high aspirations that she, and often those around her know that she is more than capable of achieving. Vincent was so close to her goals, but ultimately failed. Morley revives Vincent, a liminal Dark Lady, and her life and dreams to tell the world the story of that all but forgotten radiant woman.

Figures like Vincent build bridges between eras. Though Vincent did not survive to achieve all that she strived for, she inspired others during her life, and posthumously by the way of media and the arts. *Salome* aims to do the same for the Dark Lady. The work revives her and gives to her the life she always wanted and knew she could achieve. In the twenty-first century, the Dark Lady lives and lives well; people are letting go of their fear of the unknown and allowing their curiosity to educate them. People have access to different cultures and ideas, and are able to inquire about new perspectives and interact with strangers that they may never meet face to face. The digital age has eliminated borders, walls, and the taboo of the unknown. The Outsider is becoming accepted as a member within the Western psyche; here, the Dark Lady will thrive.

The development of technology and visual media has opened the eyes and mind of the world to what is beautiful. Women such as Naomi Campbell, Iman, and Eva Mendes who epitomize beauty in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would not have achieved that celebrated status a century ago, never mind the Early Modern period. The integration of television in the mid-twentieth century, and the internet in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries placed exotic strangers in the homes of people around the world. However, the latter technology provided a means for introduction as well as discussion to make the strange familiar.

Given the complexity of her archetype, it is only reasonable that the Dark Lady be revived through the combination of disciplines. Her interdisciplinary reimagining comes by the way of a choreopoem, a concept inspired by Ntozake Shange's "*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Unuf.*" Like Shange's work, *Salome* will contain interconnected lyrical works. But additionally, this twenty-first century choreopoem is a multimedia piece; it will utilize the technological advances of this digital age by layering dance, music, film, and social media. Much of the writing and visuals are original work, but the choreopoem will draw upon and incorporate the works of other poets, musicians, and artists. In one scene the actors mime in front of a recording of a performance of spoken word artist Suheir Hammad, and in another a player delivers a soliloquy over Angel Haze's "Same Love." But most notably, the will draw from the work which inspired its creation: "The Tragedy of Mariam Fair Queen of Jewry."

Lives Salome

There is no shortage of caricatures of the Dark Lady from the Early Modern period; is the contemporary femme fatale of the era. She appears most infamously in William Shakespeare's sonnets and, most ferociously in his *Titus Andronicus*. Though the Bard's vengeful Tamora is epitomic of the Dark Lady in her time, Cary's devising Salome is a better fit for the twenty-first century. She is witty, decisive, and most importantly, not all bad; she is simply a woman of action who believes that women can do as well as men. This, too, is why Salome lives.

By utilizing a woman's play from England's Golden Age of theater, I place it with those written by contemporary men and allow the issues of misogyny, women's rights, marriage, prejudice, etc. that appear via Salome to be heard. Unlike Cary's work, those of her contemporaries have had centuries in theatres and in the hands of critics to refine and define their stories. *Salome* affords the work the opportunity to catch up, and perhaps surpass the famous works of her generation. Given the social discussion within *Salome*, the issue of didacticism arises. But as previously mentioned, Salome is exceedingly clever, and it only makes sense for a supposedly-doomed Dark Lady to utilize dark humor. In Cary's play she is a tragic figure, but *Salome* uses the flaws to combat and ultimately disarm misogyny.

The choreopoem gives light to the duality of the infamous Salome, and helps change the way supposedly historically antagonistic female characters and figures are read and portrayed. It reveals the private thoughts and preparations of the silent Early Modern women to a twenty-first century public that is ready to hear the closeted drama. In the choreopoem, Salome not only lives but gives life revealing the struggles of the Dark Lady's history and discussing those within her present.

PART THREE

Dramatis Personae

In *Salome* the performers play multiple characters who present different facets of a literary archetype. The multiplicity not only provides depth, but represents the transition of the type from its Early Modern origins into the twenty-first century.

Salome/Agnus -The Dark Lady

Mariam/ Lynn- Fair Beauty

Constabarus/Leo/Johnny- The Man

Amante/Jon/ Nelle- Androgynous Other, Beloved to the Dark Lady

Herod/Judge- Brotherly Figure to the Dark Lady, Political Voice of Reason

The Shadows- Minor characters, Chorus, and stage crew



Salome and Amante

Excerpts

These excerpts are presented in no particular order. They include scenes, verse, and soliloquies featuring a shade of each character in *Salome*.

“Beneath the Mulberry”

Projected on the curtains: “Fie, treacherous hue that will betray with blushing /The close enacts and counsels of the heart.” Aaron, Titus Andronicus IV, 2, 1806

AGNUS:

Why there's the privilege your beauty bears:
To reveal your true feelings with a blush.
You stifle anguish and wipe away tears
But the fair roses of your cheeks still flush.
Oh how you wish the screaming red would hush
When the one for whom you pine passes by,
Or smother coolly flames which brightly rush
'Round brimméd rims when passion wets your eye.
What a gift to have a face that won't lie!
Be not envious of my copper hue
Or how it turns true sentiment awry.
I'd rather errant thoughts my face imbue:
Had more of my true heart my face betrayed,
Lighter and less lonely would be this maid.

“Chopin/ Salome: Champion of Women Scorned”

DOWN STAGE, STAGE LEFT IN FRONT OF CLOSED CURTAINS A DANCER wrapped in a long cloth attached to an upright piano sits. A PIANIST enters from STAGE RIGHT and then sits. Pianist begins to play Chopin's Prelude Op.28 No.4 and DANCER begins to move, unraveling herself from the sheet to reveal that the sheet is covered in the notes the PIANIST plays. Eventually they

sync and they go back and forth between the PIANIST controlling the DANCER and vi-versa. They eventually sync up. The curtains open and a spotlight is put on a VOCALIST who harmonizes with the music until the dancer is complete unraveled. DANCER then pushes the piano and PIANIST UPSTAGE to form a diagonal across the stage with the sheet. EXUENT. Lights go up to reveal SALOME's ROOM. There is a vanity with chair. Stilettos hang on the back of her chair and her closet door is ajar. A bottle of wine with a bow that says "FROM AMANTE" sits on the bed. ENTER SALOME wearing a silk kimono-like robe. She walks across the DANCER's sheet to her vanity and sits. There is a camera in the mirror and her image is projected above her. She begins to simultaneously dress and apply make-up.

SALOME:

Removing lipstick

But now ill Fated Salome, your tongue
To the man by itself is tide,

smiles and sticks tongue out

And now, except I do the him wrong,
I cannot be Amante's blushing bride--

Turns away from mirror and grabs stilettos, struggling to put them on sitting, stands up and shoves them on her feet

What am I thinking? Why stand now
On honorable points?

She struts down music sheet

It's been so long since shame could be seen on this dark face:

She faces mirror

To show it would indeed prove dishonor.

She sits again, still facing mirror. Pulls back hair and begins applying liquid foundation

Had I upon my reputation stood,
Had I affected an unspotted life,
That sorry sack of a man would still be here
And I to him had liv'd a sober wife.

She turns towards audience with "unfinished face"

Then had I never cast an eye of love
On my "husband's" now detested face;

She turns back towards mirror, applies rest of make up

Then had I kept my thoughts,
 a dab of concealer
And blushed at motion of the least disgrace.
 a bit of rouge
But shame is gone, and fidelity wiped away,
 highlighter. Now blending.
And Shamelessness on my forehead sits;
She bids me work my will without delay,
 She stands up, rushes to closet sifts through wardrobe
And for my will I will employ my wits.
 *She pulls out a 3-piece tailored grey lady-suit and walks back
towards vanity placing suit over the back of the chair*

He loves, I love; what then can be the cause,
Keeps me for being Amante's wife?
 *She removes robe. Beat. She admires herself in the mirror before
continuing.*

It is the principles of Moses' laws,
 *Removes stilettos and begins to dress, occasionally going back to
mirror and applying finishing touches to make-up*

For hubby dear still remains in
life.

If he to me did bear as true a hate,
As I to him, for him it would come with ease:
A separating bill might free his fate
From such a yoke that did so much displease.
Why should such privilege to man be given?

Slips on jacket

Or given to them, why barred from women then?
Are men a greater gift to God in Heaven?

applies red lipstick

Or cannot women hate as well as men?

I'll be the custom-breaker and begin

She is still standing, puts on stilettos, this time with ease,

To shoe—to show my Sex the way to freedoms door,

*She walks back to closet, sorts a bit and pulls out a lady-briefcase.
She carries it to the bed, stopping in front of the mirror to admire
herself*

And with an off'ring will I purge my sin;

*She takes the wine from the bed and removes the note before
placing it in the briefcase, which she opens away from audience,
out of sight from the camera*

The law was made for none but who are poor

She puts on costly ostentatious, yet fashionable eyeglasses

END SCENE

“Dear Leo”

The stage is dark. A scuffle can be heard. Projected on the screen: “The Aspiring Actress Writes An Angry Letter after a Fight with her Manager.” The following is projected at the bottom of screen “ Unsent and saved for future biography.” The scuffle ends as prerecorded video of Lynn’s hand writing a letter at an antique writing desk projects on the screen. LYNN is not seen but heard. The projection gradually fades to dark as a spotlight slowly illuminates LYNN standing barefooted. She is dressed in a 1940’s fashionable ladies’ suit. She holds her shoes and her hat is crooked.*

LYNN:

June 8, 1947

Dear Leo,

If you insist
that I “behave,” which must be an act,
pantomime, or puppet show you pander,
then let me not paint my face
pulseless
but lacquer my lips
a palpitating red.

Blackout. An argument between LEO and LYNN. In a brick ally outside of the stage door. LEO wears three-piece grey suit, his hat is dirty. LYNN wears the same ensemble she does on stage but more put together. They are screaming at each other. Lines are mostly ad-libbed and over lapped. Video lasts 45 seconds

LEO: You would be nothing but another bubble-headed Quin without me. Ad-lib

LYNN: No! Fuck you, Leo! Ad-Lib

LEO: Fuck me? You already did that, along with every other crumb Charley in a five-mile radius. *He lunges towards her.*

Projection ends. Audio of scuffle. A glass breaks. LYNN screams “No.” LYNN continues over the sound of LEO moans/ pants and running is heard. Spotlight is back on LYNN

LYNN:

If I must keep my feet on the ground,
then let me cut a caper in broken glass, damn it.
Let joy bleed from my bare soles
(Projection of wine bottle falling/breaking)
and brand the earth sanguine
because, in the end, that’s where we’ll all be—
ashes to ashes, dust to dust, baby!

SHADOWS are dressed as 1940’s stage hand and begin to mark the ground for the next scene. They move quickly, setting up a director’s chair with the back to the audience facing a mock studio apartment. Images project on the screen as they are mentioned. A pale sheet being spread across a bed. A picnic blanket on a sunny day. LYNN and LEO blowing out birthday candles.

All the world’s a stage
and we’re simply players under a Director
commanding only that we give
our all.
But if you insist
that I must lay low and keep it “cool”,
I’ll wrap myself in a sheet of frost,
a glistening sangfroid
beneath a blanket of shimmering sunshine,
I am no walking shadow.
My life is to shine today
and you cannot control which dusty way
the light scrapes.
You cannot blow my fire out;

my passion is no brief birthday candle—
But if I must act my age, I will.

*SHADOWS bring out a couch with LEO laying on it with his hat over his face.
He slowly sits up a moment after being put down. His eye is black. LYNN
approaches the couch and sits next to him and places her hand on his lap. He
takes it gently.*

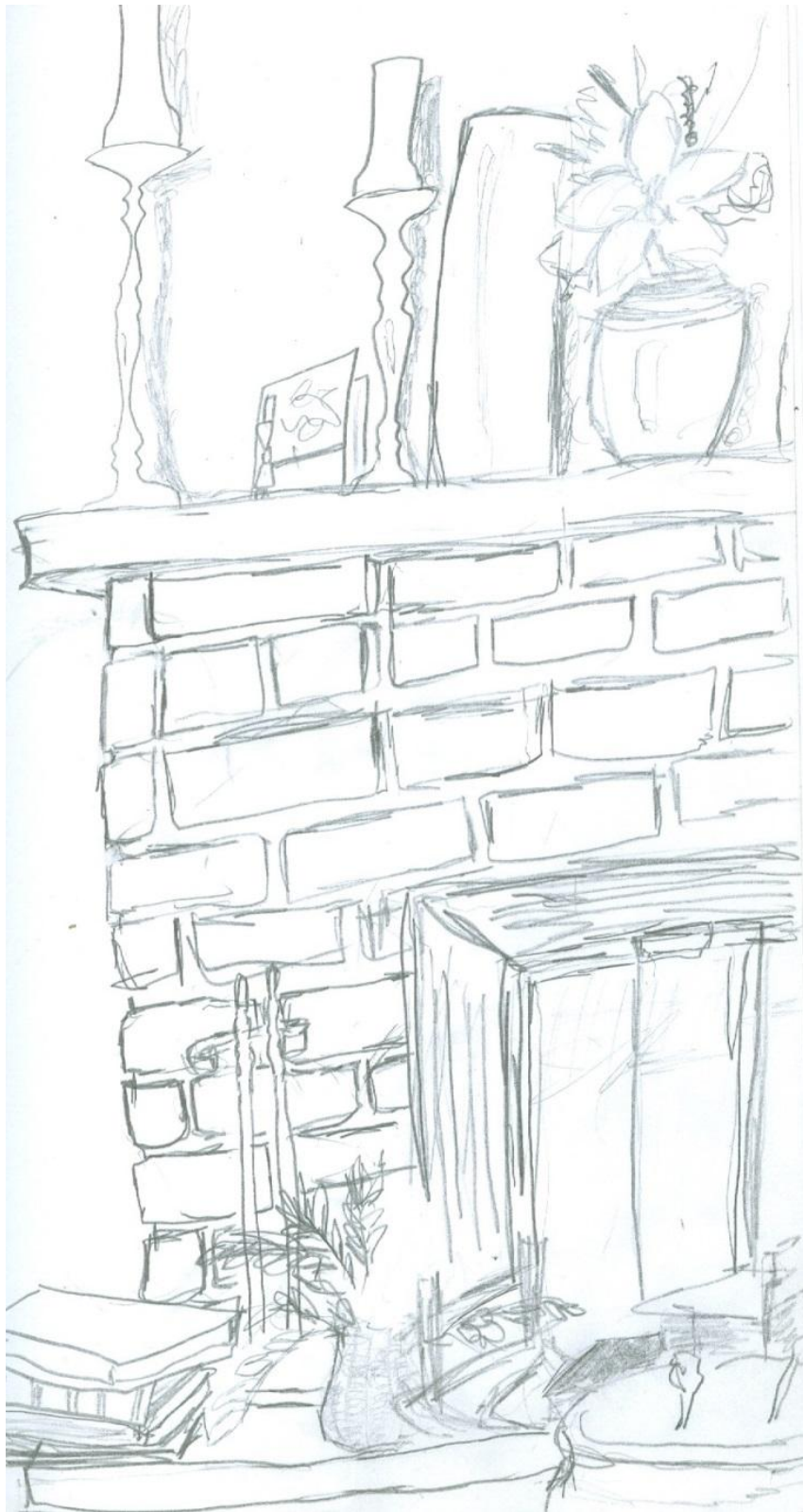
LYNN:

I am not the complete fool
that I seem to be; I know that I know naught.
My head may be hard, but my heart bleeds
from sharp words and bruises from verbal beatings—
If I must, then you must, too, Leo.

LYNN and LEO stand facing each other in a spotlight as the lights go down

Mind your words,
(*MIND YOUR WORDS is projected above LYNN and LEO*)
and I may mind you,
Lynn

END SCENE



Backdrop for Lynn and Leo's Living Room

“Gilded Lemons”

JUDGE:

I paint my lemons gold
‘Cause I make my own luck
‘Cause life gives more sour fruit
Than it does good and dirty fucks

When here comes the revolution
I know which institutions
I’m burning down
The ashes blow, flow high from the ground
Up to the golden sky in a soot river cloud.

Black clouds crying capitalist tears
Of failed economic fears
Releasing sleeping seeds of wealth
Within those without health
Insurance, without monied endurance
Without a beautiful face
Without charm and grace
Without a mother at home
Without the desire to roam
Without a hope or care
For lack of knowledge and prayer.

I want to be the gilded leaf producing golden life
Protecting and serving strife a gold fist to the face
Letting the world know that this is my place

And his. And yours. Hers. And ours.
We’ve taken it back and made damn sure
That it’ll be us in the black.

“Taster’s Choice”

Images of gold-painted lemons flicker into images of two LITTLE GIRLS and a little BOY chasing each other on the screen as Angel Haze’s “Same Love” begins to play.

NELLE:

The first time that I heard
Angel Haze’s “Same Love” I cried.
It was the first time that I heard
Someone express what I had felt.
A few days ago, I listened to it again.
Cried again.
A few days on, my mom asked me
If my boyfriend is gay. I answered,
“I don’t know.”
She brought it up again last night
And I said, “I don’t know.”

“I CAN’T CHANGE” is projected onto the screen. It fades into a blue sky.

I listened again before I went to bed,
And then again when I woke up.
I’ve been listening to it on and off
Throughout the day and I was reminded
Of something that happened
When I was a little girl.

LITTLE GIRLS and BOY are now playing on stage.

We are playing,
Melissa, Brandon, and I.
We were playing marriage.
I thought we were all
Going to marry to each other,
Me and Brandon and Melissa;
It didn’t occur to me
That that was an impossibility
Until one of them--
I think it was Brandon
Who said that I couldn’t marry them
Because only a boy and a girl can be married.
It didn’t upset me so much then.
But why couldn’t we all be married
If we were all happy together?

One LITTLE GIRL runs from the other children and sits downstage as the others continue to play.

Why did Melissa get to marry Brandon
Once it was established
That getting married happens
Between only two people, a boy and a girl?
Was I not a girl, too?
Didn't Brandon like me,
if not more than Melissa?
Why was I number 2?
Why was I not allowed
to play pretend marital bliss?

Images of tongues project on to the screen.

In fact, Brandon gave me my first kiss;
We wanted to know what tongue tasted like.
We couldn't know because our tongues
Being tasters couldn't taste themselves.
So we licked each other's' tongues and
Immediately scraped the Other's flavor away—
Tongues were gross.

CHILDREN: Eewwwwwwww! *Exuent.*

Brandon is white,
Melissa is Korean,
And I am brown.
Brown girls always come last,
Even when they are better,
Even when they are first.
How much that little moment
In the world of children's games means.

I've always dreamed of being married
While also being opposed to it;
If it was not meant for someone like me,
why should I admit to wanting it?
Not only will someone I love choose someone suitable
but would have to exclude anyone extra.
I could not grow up to marry
the boy and the girl I loved because
marriage is for a boy and a girl, a
And I would never be the boy's final choice.

“Violets and Raindrops”

Blue sheer fabric is stretched across the stage and manipulated by THE SHADOWS dressed in blue. Single DANCER dressed in green begins the dance. Six or seven other DANCERS wearing violet fan from behind her and continue to dance as AGNUS sings and strums an acoustic guitar. She is accompanied by a VIOLINIST. On the screen images appear: dry dirt, bright blue sky, storm, water, field of violets.

AGNUS:

Spoken

A single violet transplant
The strength, the colour, the size
(All which before was poor and scant)
Redoubles still and multiplies

Sung

Rain drops on my window screen
Save me from feeling so green.
Spare me the feelin' of feelin'
So brand new ever since I was washed up
And dried out by you.

And God I pray that the rain keeps fallin'
'Cause the pain, yes, the pain keeps callin'
I just don't know what to do
Ever since I was washed out by you.

“On Time”

AGNUS: Is the future? Waiting, all dressed up and ready for a lift a ride to a place to go? Waiting alone in the half-dark, under storms threatening to put out your lights? Reading, writing, waiting. Perhaps I'll just go to sleep.

JON: Isn't that what we're all ultimately waiting for?

AGNUS: I miss having a clock in my room, one that tocks and doesn't just sit there and glow at you. There's something comforting in the measured sound. It calms, leading you to that realm of infinite possibility when we can occupy only when give up our bodies to sleep. The tick-tock presses us to ever move forward is never-waiting time—

JUDGE: But it does match the lub-dub of the human heart. A tick-tock clock is more natural than any am-fm alarm; digital time just reminds us that we've got to get a move-on. A clock is a metronome. But unlike our unsteady pitter-patter the clock keeps its pace, bringing us back and keeping us synchronized.

You are awake.
Bodily alarms strike.
Away go night's projections
in a soundless wave;
only stills remain.
They slide into gilded frames
of memory to be hung
in the gallery of the unreal.
You are awake.
Slip off the sheets,
feel the cool breath
of the room across your shins.
Take it in , expel as you
Stretch.
A memory newly fitted
flashes from gold encasement.
You have arrived. Gaze.

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