

“CRACKED WITHIN THE RING”: THE SPILLABLE FEMALE
BODY IN SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the myriad ways in which the invocation of the female body enriches Shakespearean tragedy. Beginning with an Aristotelian definition of tragedy and then moving through a survey of Elizabethan and Jacobean scientific and cultural beliefs, I will show how both depictions of the female body and connotations given to the female reproductive system enrich tragedy through the stimulation of pity and terror, both of which are key dramatic emotions for Aristotle. In an examination of several of Shakespeare's tragedies, I would like to suggest that the intrinsic connection between the female reproductive system and tragedy stems from the idea of the womb as a container, a container whose contents and continence, whether perceived or actual, are of utmost economic importance to the hero. The open womb, whether evoked literally in the bodies of mothers and daughters, or figuratively in the weak and failing bodies of tragic heroes, by virtue of its vessel-hood, becomes an embodiment of the possibility of spillage, of loss, of an ever-threatening tragic change of fortune. The theoretical foundation of my argument comes from the works of Gail Kern Paster and Thomas Laqueur, and over the course of the paper, I focus on *Macbeth*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello*, touching on other Shakespearean tragedies in a less in-depth manner.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to either Ruby or Henry—whoever gets here first—and to my fantastic husband, without whose support, encouragement, and delightful distraction this would not have been possible.

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TALKING ABOUT TRAGEDY: An Introduction

To say anything about Tragedy is to enter into a long and convoluted discussion, one that has been going on for two millennia. Influenced by Greek myth, legend, and wartime atrocity, tragedy, as a genre, has existed for nearly twenty-five hundred years and has been subject to classification and scrutiny since Aristotle's *Poetics*. Written around 335 BCE, the *Poetics* is Aristotle's corrective reply to Plato, his teacher, who held poetry to be at best useless and at worst detrimental, as it was without reason, misguiding in its teachings, "at two removes from reality," and encouraging of rash emotions (Janko xi). Unlike Plato, Aristotle was by nature a classifier and a pragmatist; according to Richard Janko, he "reasserted the value of studying the particulars of the perceived world," and he sought to "analyze and classify the phenomena we perceive with our senses" rather than considering reality, as did Plato, to be an imperfect reflection of the transcendental Forms, which are apprehensible through intellect and not through the senses (xi). In his *Poetics*, Aristotle performs what is perhaps the oldest surviving act of literary analysis. He seeks to dissect drama—and its subcategories, epic, comedy, and tragedy—into their respective sections and necessary elements, thereby providing a definition of sorts for his students and for future humanities scholars.

Since Aristotle, many critics have challenged notions of what actually constitutes a tragedy, and many authors and playwrights have blurred the boundaries, choosing, whether consciously or unconsciously, to incorporate some aspects and not others. With its roots in the Hegel's reconciliation of morals, Nietzsche's joyful affirmation of existence, and Freud's pleasure principle, modern literary criticism on tragedy begins with the intense character studies of A.C.

Bradley¹ and has no discernible end (or critical consensus) in sight. Speaking specifically of women in tragedy, the strongest opposition to Bradley's enduring scholarship has typically come in the form of either post-modern or feminist criticism. Bradley, although exhaustive in his analysis of character and supportive to the point of hero-worship, virtually ignores secondary characters (women) and “downplay[s] specificities of time and place” (culture) (Evans 30). Influenced by the French theorists, feminist critics of the 1970s began a wholly new interrogation of Shakespeare's work, focusing on issues like cultural context, patriarchy, gender, and the body. Although the zenith of this work has come and gone, it continues to open new doors for discussions on tragedy.

Each school of thought, whether critical or philosophical, brings with it certain definitions, requirements, and functions of tragedy, and each lens has its own particular issues and problems. For example, what can we make of the fact that the modern tragedy, *Death of a Salesman*, does not concern a man of high birth? Can we still speak of it with Aristotelian language, can we read it through an Aristotelian lens, even though it turns one of Aristotle's defining characteristics of tragedy on its head? Likewise, can we apply the machinations of psychoanalysis, a mind-science bent on sussing out the “pathological abatements and morbid aggravations” of Victorian sexuality, to conversations about Sophocles' Oedipus (Foucault 53)? Conversations about Renaissance drama are also problematized by this specter of anachronism. Can we use modern theory, much of which is rooted in contemporary social phenomena like psychoanalysis and women's liberation, to talk about Elizabethan and Jacobean drama? Can we

1 1851-1935; Published the influential *Shakespearean Tragedy* in 1904.

use Aristotle, who predates Shakespeare by nearly eighteen centuries, in an examination of Shakespeare's conformity to the “rules” of comedy or tragedy?

According to James Hammersmith, “[t]he native tradition of drama in England served [the English] handsomely with a rich heritage of tragedy which had nothing to do with 'classical' drama in any significant sense” (245). Here I would disagree with Hammersmith, for although the English dramatic tradition did indeed form rather independently of the more classically influenced continental tradition, and although no one was reading a pure translation of the *Poetics*, there exists an undercurrent of Aristotle's dramatic rules, even within the works of Shakespeare². Additionally, we see quite clearly the Roman influences of both Plautine comedies, with their clever word-plays, and Senecan tragedies, with their monomaniacal avengers, in Shakespeare's work³. For these reasons, I would like to assert that a strict application of Aristotle's principles to Shakespeare is misguided, but that application as a loose critical lens, honest to the temporal detachment of each source, can be quite fruitful.

So much has been said about tragedy that it becomes a critic's obligation to redefine, for his or her own purposes, both what is meant by “tragedy” and why the chosen definition is appropriate. In his introduction to the *Poetics*, Richard Janko claims that Aristotle's “analysis has already proved flexible enough to be applied to literary forms that did not exist in his time” and that “it would still be relevant even to a culture based exclusively on media like cinema or television” (xi). I find a profound truth in these statements and would like to take Janko's sentiments one step further and suggest that, positioned where I am in history, there is no more

2 There are references to the Unity of Time in *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale* and to the Unity of Place in *Henry V*.

3 Both playwrights are mentioned by name by Polonius in Act II, scene ii of *Hamlet*.

relevant source to which I can turn for my definition, especially in a consideration of the works of Shakespeare. Linking ancient Greek to Renaissance English to contemporary American culture is a focus on visual media in both arts and entertainment. In a culture where movies and television greatly outnumber print books as popular sources of literary engagement, any analysis of literary form based on observable performance rather than on the passive reading experience should hold more critical promise. With that being said, I am less concerned with performance theory or with cramming the works of Shakespeare into a strict Aristotelian framework than I am with using certain key parts of Aristotle's definition to make a claim about Shakespearean tragedy. *Parts* of Aristotle's definition of tragedy are key to the reading that I will undertake in the body of my paper; I will now examine those parts most relevant to my project.

WOMEN AND TRAGEDY

Tragedy, Aristotle reminds us, is an entity which concerns the actions of men; it is part of a larger subcategory, that of drama, which is so named because it “represent[s] *men* ‘doing’ (*drôntas*)” (first emphasis mine, 1.4.1). On the surface, tragedy concerns men in that, for the majority of the time, it enacts the words and deeds chiefly of men⁴. Of the main character, Aristotle notes: “Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice or wickedness, but because of some error, and who is one of those people with a great reputation and good fortune, e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and distinguished men from similar families” (4.1.1). So the hero must be a man, a great and

4 Exceptions include *Medea*, *Antigone*, *Electra*, and *Octavia*—and for Shakespeare (to some extent) *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

virtuous man, who, through no circumstances which might tempt the audience to see his punishment as just, commits some atrocious error which leads to his fall.

Scratching below this superficial description, we find that tragedy—along with all other permutations of drama—not only figuratively but also literally concerns acts of men, as women did not act on the Greek, Elizabethan, or Jacobean stage. Whereas, Dymphna Callaghan playfully but poignantly points out, Shakespeare’s stage direction “Exit, pursued by a bear” from the *Winter’s Tale* (III.iii.58) may actually have been performed by a trained bear, Juliet—like *Electra*—was most certainly never performed by a trained woman, at least within the author’s lifetime (1). Such “all-male mimesis” resultant from cultural and political prohibitions against females on stage, says Callaghan, “necessarily represents what is not actually there” (7). Regardless of this fact, however, and despite Callaghan’s admonition that “stage impersonations should not be understood as attempts to grasp a coherent, authentic identity,” for both Greek and Elizabethan/Jacobean audiences, the female body was indeed present—if only substitutionally—on the dramatic stage (11).

Returning once again to Aristotle’s prescription for tragedy, we may begin a search for the role of the woman—or, at least, the represented female body—in tragedy. In his exploration of plot, Aristotle extols the virtues of “Plots that arouse amazement,” noting them to be “necessarily finer” than plots consisting of random, horrifying incidents (3.3.2 1, 11). His criteria for these finer plots are thus: “The representation is not only of a complete action but also of terrifying and pitiable [incidents]” (3.3.2 2-3). “Pity,” according to the OED, is “the disposition to mercy or compassion; clemency, mercy, mildness, tenderness” and, more specifically, “tenderness and concern aroused by the suffering, distress, or misfortune of another,

and prompting a desire for its relief.” This second definition is perhaps more usable for the purposes of my argument, because, rather than discussing dispositions, I will be discussing feelings aroused at the sight of others' predicaments, feelings aroused both in the audience and in other characters. “Piteous” or “pitiable” in the original Greek, ἔλεινόν, also translates to “miserable,” adding emphasis to the emotional distress we experience in the presence of a pitiful character.

The second tragic emotion, terror, is defined as “the state of being terrified or greatly frightened; intense fear, fright, or dread” and also “the action or quality of causing dread; terrific quality, terribleness; a thing or person that excites terror; something terrifying” (OED). While the OED definition is maddeningly circular, we get a much more specific idea of terror by going to the Greek. Aristotle's original “terrible” is φοβερόν, which also means “fearful.” The word should be quite familiar; it is pronounced “phoberon,” as in “phobia”—that which causes us to experience dread or horror (OED). There is emphasis here on *morbid* fear which often results in uncontrollable shaking or shivering (OED “horror”)—that which we associate with our own impending doom, like an acrophobic person associating great heights specifically with their perception of the inevitability of falling. In all things terrible, we perceive our own inevitable destruction.

I will argue, then, that terror and pity are the realms of women because of the fundamental relationships between the men and women in a play (i.e. mother/son, father/daughter, husband/wife). Aristotle reminds us that there is nothing horrible or pitiable about a fight between enemies; it seems only natural. To evoke either terror or pity in the audience, he argues, the “sufferings [must] happen within family relationships” (4.1.2 19-20).

Within this familial stricture, however, characters may be free to either have intention or not—they may “act knowingly,” “be about to act, in full knowledge, but not do it,” or they may “do the dreadful deed in ignorance” (28-31). Whatever the circumstances behind the actions perpetrated, Aristotle gives women, by way of their familial relations with male characters, power to sway both the actions of the play and the emotions of the audience. This power is manifest in Shakespeare’s tragedies—in both his terrifying wives and mothers and his pitiable daughters.

Echoing Aristotle’s relationary language, but in Self/Other rather than familial terms, Shakespeare scholar Linda Bamber notes that “the feminine...is that which exists on the other side of the barrier, a barrier of sexual differentiation. In Shakespeare the Self is always, as it were, referenced to the Other. What happens on one side of the barrier can be seen as alternately the cause or effect of what exists on the other” (4). Despite the subtle difference in the power relation between Aristotle’s mother/son and Bamber’s Self/Other, each is a pair in constant dance, at once influencing and being influenced by the other. The words and actions of the women, of the Other, have both direct and indirect bearing on the course of the play. The critical crux for Bamber in her *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* is the existence of opposing treatments of gender privilege in Shakespeare’s comedies and his tragedies. Bamber notes that “often the women in the comedies are more brilliant than the men, more aware of themselves and their world, saner, livelier, and more gay” (2). Tragedies, on the other hand, show the dynamic in stark reverse. The “nightmare figures” who populate Shakespeare’s tragedies, the “castrating mothers, fiendish daughters, [and] bearded witches” are often purposeful agents in the fall of the Self/hero (3). Even more disturbing for

feminist critics has been the degree to which, in tragedy, the faulty female reproductive system has been almost intrinsically connected to the downfall of the hero. “How are we to account,” asks Bamber, “for these terrible portraits, charged as they are with sexual antagonism? For these characters are not just women who happen to be evil; their evil is inseparable from their failures as women” (2). I do not seek, as does Bamber, to account for the “why” of this phenomenon; rather, I would like to explore, within the confines of an Aristotelian definition of tragedy, what this connection accomplishes and how it accomplishes it.

As suggested earlier, the familial relationality of Shakespeare's female characters to his heroes allows the women to be key players in the suffering and loss necessarily experienced over the course of the action, but it appears to be the perversion, real or imagined, of women's reproductive capabilities in particular which evokes pity and terror from the audience and great suffering from the hero. In an examination of several of Shakespeare's tragedies, I would like to suggest that the intrinsic connection between the female reproductive system and tragedy stems from the idea of the womb as a container, a container whose contents and continence, whether perceived or actual, are of utmost economic importance to the hero. The open womb, whether evoked literally in the bodies of mothers and daughters, or figuratively in the weak and failing bodies of tragic heroes, by virtue of its vessel-hood, becomes an embodiment of the possibility of spillage, of loss, of an ever-threatening tragic change of fortune.

Scholar Madelon Sprengnether writes the following about Shakespeare's women: “We will never know what they know. The subject position not only of Shakespeare's tragedy but of tragedy defined as a genre in the Aristotelian tradition seems to preclude this very possibility” (1). Unlike Sprengnether, I am not trying to ask what they know—I am more interested in who

they *are*, what they *do*, and how their construction as metonymic literary devices (as leaky or unruly wombs) offers enrichment to tragic drama. I am not interested, as is Jane Smiley⁵, in finding female subjectivity in *King Lear*; rather, I am interested in how figures like Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, as both beings and bodies, interact with and affect Lear on an economic or material level. I am uninterested, for the sake of this project at least, in entering into more contemporary conversations about subjectivity and reclamation of the feminine self/voice. I want to meet Shakespeare on his own socio-historical turf and to consider the implications, for tragedy as a genre, of the ever-present, spillable female body.

In her introduction to *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, Sprengnether counters the claims of her predecessor Richard Levin, who suggests that “the nature of the genre...might determine the nature of the gender relations portrayed in the play, rather than the other way around” (qtd. in Sprengnether 10). Sprengnether asserts that if, as Levin claims, “genre is responsible for producing a specific configuration of gender relations, then there is no point in analyzing their effects” (10). Although I would also like to avoid drowning in this conversation, I must admit that, given the difference in characterizations of the feminine in Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies illustrated earlier in my exploration of Bamber's work, genre does seem to have at least *some* bearing on constructions of gender for Shakespeare, and I would argue that this fact does not rob the issue of investigative value. There is still much we can say—especially for tragedy.

5 Smiley, Jane. *A Thousand Acres*. New York: Random House, 1991.

WOMAN—An Early Modern Anatomy

You can see something like [the female genitals] in the eyes of the mole, which have vitreous and crystalline humours and the tunics that surround these and grow out from the meninges, as I have said, and they have these just as much as animals do that make use of their eyes. The mole's eyes, however, do not open, nor do they project but are left there imperfect and remain like the eyes of other animals...

---Galen of Pergamum, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*

When speaking of women's bodies—especially of their wombs—it is necessary to take into consideration cultural constructions and scientific understandings specific to both time and place. Although the bulk of my later argument comes from textual analysis, a dip into both history and criticism will bolster a particular aspect of my original claim—that women's bodies may be seen as containers prone to leakage. My primary texts for this examination will be Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* and Gail Kern Paster's *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, and I will rely, to a lesser extent, on the works of Gayle Rubin on the body in commerce. Although I invoke historical conceptions of the female body and reproductive system, my comments must not be taken as blanket statements about actual historical gender relations. As Phyllis Rackin warns, “the construction of a historical narrative inevitably involves multiple selections,” and we are slowly becoming cognizant of the fact that our former (feminist) tendency to see only the repressive and the oppressive in the lives of early modern women only reveals part of the picture—a picture that includes women who owned land, managed estates, ruled countries, and, as borough owners, chose Members of Parliament (Rackin 20). My

comments refer to the relations between characters in the primary texts that I consider, regardless of whether or not such constructions are mere fantastical representations, and my historical information is, for the most part, limited to period anatomical treatise and commentary thereupon.

For a modern reader, it is not a stretch to conceive of the female body as a vessel or container. Most of us learn in our early teen years—whether because we possess them or have been forced to stare at them on health class walls—what female genitals look like on the inside and the outside, and most of us as adults have at least an elementary understanding of menstruation, conception, and birth. For the modern person, it seems logical that wombs are made both to hold things and to let things go. The early modern conception of women's genitalia, while similar in some ways, contains several aspects probably unfamiliar to a modern reader. Based on the second century CE works of Galen of Pergamum⁶, the early modern understanding of reproduction adhered to what Thomas Laqueur calls the “one-sex/one flesh model” (25). In the one-sex model, male and female genitals, rather than being wholly separate entities, were seen as mirror images of one another. More specifically, the exterior and interior female genitalia were seen as inverted/under-formed versions of the male genitals, “cascad[ing] vertiginously back inside themselves” with the ovaries as undescended testicles, the womb as an inverted and emptied scrotum, and the vaginal canal as a concealed penis, with the cervix/glans at the top (28, 26). As Laqueur exemplifies with sketches and woodcuts in his aptly titled

6 Galen of Pergamum (also Claudius Galenus, Aelius Galenus) was a Greek physician and philosopher and Roman citizen who lived in what is now Bergama, Turkey. His scientific thought was heavily influenced by Hippocrates, and his ideas about the body held sway throughout Europe until 1628 when William Harvey introduced the idea of blood circulation in his *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus*.

subsection “Seeing is believing,” dissolution in the 16th century of the ban on human dissection, coupled with the still-relatively-new printing press, temporarily strengthened the one-sex model, as renderings of flayed and splayed women often depicted internal organs in terms of their male “counterparts” [See Appendix A].

When considering the womb/uterus specifically, the Galenic model stressed the “retentive faculties” of the organ, noting its ability to retain its contents for an extended period of time (qtd. in Laqueur 27). Laqueur notes that because of this quality, this vessel-hood, the womb was seen as both physically and symbolically linked to both the stomach and the mouth—at each end of a woman, you find both a way in and a way out of a retentive organ (27). Mere retention wasn't the only job however; the womb in the one-sex model was also generative. Not a completely passive vessel, the uterus was thought to contribute the material “stuff” of life. Aristotle, a pre-Galenic proponent of the one-sex model, notes the following: “the male and female principles may be put down first and foremost as the origins of generation, the former as containing the efficient cause of generation, the latter the material of it” (qtd. in Laqueur 30). While the male seed was thought to carry the soul or life-force, the female seed was thought to provide the physical matter of life. Channeling Aristotle, Laqueur makes an ingeniously clear comparison to illustrate the point. He notes that “no part of the carpenter merges with the bed he crafts”; likewise, the male seed shapes and vitalizes the female matter, imbuing it with soul, and then leaves/leaks out (41).

Although the one-sex model ascribes certain functions solely to the female/womb it also relegates it to an awkward, almost undefinable status. Tying the model to both its Classical origins and its Renaissance permutations, Laqueur notes that “[i]n a public world that was

overwhelmingly male, the one-sex model displayed what was already massively evident in culture more generally: *man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category” (62). The one-sex model was not a juxtaposition of separate-but-equal beings; it was a conception of masculine as perfection and feminine as short-coming. There were men, and there were almost-men. For Aristotle and Galen, the inverted or “unexpressed” organs of women were “signs of the absence of heat and consequently of perfection” (28).

The most pressing problem with women's lack of vital heat, and the issue that will ultimately bring us into an examination of the female body in Shakespearean tragedy, is the perceived lack of bodily continence due to an inability to process excess blood. Humoral theory held that the body contained four fluids, or humors: blood, phlegm, cholera or yellow bile, and melancholy or black bile. This “[p]hysiology of fungible fluids and corporeal flux” needed to be kept in balance at all times, and both excess and shortage manifested as certain physical symptoms (Laqueur 35). Of the four fluids, blood was the most transmutable, as it was thought to be the base material for all bodily “fluids” including semen, female ejaculate, fat, and breast milk (35). The notion of female incontinence or leakiness stems from the Galenic belief that, due to a woman's lower vital heat, she cannot process or make use of all of the blood produced by food/nourishment. Unlike men, whose heat allows them to make use of all food, a woman has three options: she can either menstruate, provide matter for new life, or breastfeed to clear the surplus (36). Each option makes use of the excess blood thought to drain from the veins into the uterus, but each also exposes woman as a body predisposed to incontinence.

Though Laqueur's analysis is detailed and thorough, it does have one implicitly acknowledged shortcoming: it lacks “a sustained account of experience in the body” (23). This absence of experience, of a cultural account of being-in-the-body, is precisely where scholar Gail Kern Paster begins in *The Body Embarrassed*. Paster's argument, while supporting many of the same claims about the early modern body, deviates slightly from Laqueur's original work in that it emphasizes humoralism's “broad and pervasive effects on the discourse, experience, and expression of bodiliness and on the enculturation process in general” (Paster 17). Influenced by the works of Foucault and Lacan, Paster cannot help but see beyond simple biology to the complex matrix of forces at work in enculturation, in the formation of ideology through instruction and repetition.

Paster voices concern with Laqueur's oversimplification, noting that, in his one-sex/one flesh paradigm, “hierarchical differences [are] effaced” (17). When sex is reduced to one category, and male and female genitalia, rather than being sharply differentiated, are understood as “inversions of each other in structure and homologous in function,” we fail to give nod to any notion of gender difference or subjective experience (17). “The body,” says Paster with reference to the ideological theory of Jean Howard, “is materially at the center of ‘what is lived as true’” (4). We sometimes (like Laqueur) fail to acknowledge the “operations of ideology upon emerging subjectivity” because we tend to relegate embodiment to the “domain of the *merely* natural” (5). But the body is not *mere* nature; it is also culture and experience—it is the understanding of oneself in terms of, within, or outside of the dominant ideology.

These disagreements aside, Paster does accept many of the Galenic principles mentioned in *Making Sex*. She notes that “[e]very subject grew up with a common understanding of his or

her body as a semipermeable, irrigated container in which humors moved sluggishly” (8).

Another point of agreement between Laqueur and Paster is the degree to which the absence or presence of vital heat influenced the actions of the humors within the body container. “The humors,” notes Paster, “moved with greater or less fluidity within the bodily container and exited the body with varying degrees of efficiency. The key differentials were heat, which in the mean promoted solubility, and cold, which hampered it” (9). As mentioned earlier, a woman's lower vital heat meant that she could neither effectively process aliment nor make use of her whole blood supply; she was, therefore, “effluent, overproductive, out of control” (21).

Paster's larger project marries the foundational work of Laqueur to that of Elias, Bahktin, and Foucault, producing an eloquent and timely argument for the “place of physiological theory in the social history of the body” (3). Though her work centers around a more general notion of “humoral embarrassment,” Paster's particular analyses of female incontinence and of blood and bleeding will be of great importance to my investigation of Shakespeare's tragic women and will allow me to show how leaky, spillable women are always a liability to the tragic hero and always represent, by virtue of their relationality, familial or otherwise, the possibility of utter and irreconcilable material loss (19).

Earlier, I suggested that, if we imagine the womb as a container, then both the contents and the continence of that container, whether real or perceived, are of utmost material importance to the tragic hero. By contents, I mean the potential contribution of matter towards the production of offspring, and therefore the continuation of the bloodline and the formation of kinship bonds; and by continence, I mean the civilized and properly managed flow of material into and out of the maternal body. Leakiness is not always a problem per se; indeed many of its

aforementioned permutations—childbirth, nourishment through breast milk—are of utmost economic value to patrilineal hereditary systems. The issue becomes then, who controls this leaking, this traffic in hereditary matter. Leakiness, on one hand, represents the ability of matter to flow through women—and thus into the control of men—however, civilization seems to crumble to ruins when women find their containers compromised, when the cracks are stopped up and the flow of material goods is interrupted, or when, in a moment of great dramatic irony, a continent or virtuous woman is simply misjudged.

I cannot, of course, speak about the economic worth of women, and specifically of their place in the “traffic” of matter, without giving at least a nod to Gayle Rubin, whose 1975 essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” furnishes me with a theoretical framework in which to examine women as sites of production and material liability. Rubin's essay, an attempt to arrive at a definition of the “sex/gender system” through a critical reading of the works of Levi-Strauss, Freud, and Lacan, examines the scope of conversation, from Marx onwards, of capitalist production and kinship ties, in an effort to locate (or at least problematize) the source of women's oppression. Rubin's project picks up on a point brought up but then abandoned by Engels, that there exists a culturally significant “second aspect of material life,” that is, the (re)production, secondary to the production of traditionally defined capital, of flesh-and-blood human beings (qtd. in Rubin 90). One of Rubin's points, which will be very useful in my later examination of daughters in Shakespearean tragedy, is the idea that women, within the bounds of the kinship system, are gifts to be freely given in order to establish familial ties and expand ranges of male power. Before there are daughters, however, there are wives and mothers, so it is with these women that we must begin.

“MOTHER[S] STAINED”--Shakespeare's Monstrous Mothers and Wicked Wives

May not this be one of the principal roots of the whole masculine impulse to creative work—the never-ending conflict between man's longing for the woman and his dread of her?

--Karen Horney

Tragedy, says Aristotle, is concerned with misfortune, with bad luck or wrong decisions which culminate in loss, in a fall from great height. For Shakespeare, this great fall generally entails a systematic stripping of a literal fortune and culminates in the death of the hero and the reestablishment of order. As per Aristotle's recommendation that suffering involve family, Shakespeare's tragedies usually befall amidst the crumbling of familial relationships and the dissolution of bloodlines, and this fact is best highlighted in an examination of the relationships of heroes to their mothers (or mother-figures) and their wives. With regard to the potential for economic loss represented by the unruly bodies of mothers and wives, Marion Wynne-Davies notes the following:

The womb is not only the centre of female sexuality, but also the repository of familial descent. Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, writes that the rules governing sexuality in the early modern society in France and England were determined by blood relations, and that it was through them that the mechanisms of power were able to function. Control of the womb was paramount to determining a direct patrilineal descent, and when this exercise of power failed and women determined their own sexual appetites regardless of procreation, the social structure was threatened with collapse. (136)

In her reading of Coppelia Kahn's *Man's Estate*, Phyllis Rackin notes that “power over women given to men by patriarchy made men paradoxically 'vulnerable to women' because 'a woman's

subjugation to her husband's will was the measure of his patriarchal authority and thus his manliness” (18). Caught in a double bind then, the tragic hero finds himself, on the one hand, desirous of his wife's subjugation and, on the other, completely and utterly reliant on her sexual continence for the continuation of his bloodline. Based on what I have already established about the nature of the female body as dictated by Galenic science, Shakespeare's tragic heroes seem to be doomed from the start. As Gail Kern Paster notes, “[r]epresentations of the female body as a leaking vessel display that body as beyond the control of the female subject, and thus as threatening the acquisitive goals of the family and its maintenance of status and power” (25). If women cannot control themselves, then all Hell is bound to break loose—and all fortune to be lost—when they try to control their husbands. Though my analysis could be extended quite easily to characters like Volumnia—with her overbearing and obsessed relationship with her son—and to Gertrude—with her fickle loyalty and frail sensibilities—I will focus in the following section on Lady Macbeth and Tamora, whose stoppages and appetites most clearly demonstrate my point.

* * *

“If chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,/ Without my stir,” muses Macbeth upon confirmation that the three witches' prophecies will indeed manifest (I.iii.143-144). Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and Banquo's offspring shall be kings after. At the end of the encounter with the weird sisters, Macbeth intimates that he will not interfere in the unfolding of his fate; this passive stance, however, lasts a mere sixty lines or so, as he is soon reminded that there are others in line ahead of him for the throne. Malcolm, the recently named Prince of Cumberland represents one of two hereditary stumbling blocks for the

newly titled Thane of Cawdor: “The Prince of Cumberland!--That is a step/ On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,/ For in my way it lies” (I.iv.48-50). Macbeth has thus far accepted that he will inherit the throne after Duncan dies, and he has not shown any desire to hasten the process. When he becomes recognizant of Malcolm and Donalbain as claimants to the Scottish throne, however, he realizes that he is, at best, third in line. Heredity and the desire for control of the bloodline is then, the catalyst of all destructive actions in *Macbeth*. Whoever has the throne is master of the dominant bloodline and therefore has the power—and the fewer contenders the better.

In her chapter entitled “Laudable Blood: Bleeding, Difference, and Humoral Embarrassment,” Gail Kern Paster notes that:

[Blood] is the bearer of a robustly hierarchized, elaborate semiology, chiefly, though not solely, because in preindustrial English society where all the key structures of exchange and distribution of resources—whether material, symbolic, or libidinal—were still based on hereditary transmission, the key social attributes of blood could never be simply symbolic or metaphoric. The importance afforded to a physical continuity located in the blood was one rationale for the culture’s notorious obsession with female chastity, for example. (66)

No longer content to leave things to chance, and in an effort to ensure for himself both Paster's “physical continuity” and the control of “key structures of exchange,” Macbeth sets his mind upon the idea of killing Duncan's heirs⁷ and inserting himself, so to speak, into the economy of

7 It is Lady Macbeth who suggests killing Duncan I.v.60-70.

the throne. After all, as the tragic hero, Macbeth must first attain great social height before, as Aristotle reminds us, he suffers and loses all.

In keeping with Aristotle's definition of tragedy then, we know that the most lamentable and searing of sufferings happen between family members, and I have already suggested that this stipulation allows for mothers, wives, and daughters to be loci for both Aristotelian terror and pity and for the possibility or reality of utter loss. Macbeth's looseness of plan and non-specificity of action is picked up on by his wife even before he returns home. Upon reading his good tidings in a letter, and noting that her husband is “too full o'th'milk of human kindness,/ To catch the nearest way” and that, although he has ambition, Macbeth lacks the “illness should attend it,” Lady Macbeth sets in motion a gross physical transformation whose ramifications are felt throughout the play (I.v.17-18, 20). She begins to embody what Janet Adelman calls the “primitive fears about male identity and autonomy itself...the looming female presenc[e] who threaten[s] to control [her husband's] actions and...mind” (215).

Lady Macbeth's call for transformation is perhaps one of the best known and most terrifying scenes ascribed to any of Shakespeare's tragic women. Upon realizing that her husband is too noble and good to spill blood in order to attain his deserts more quickly, and unaware of the irony inherent in “hurrying” to manifest one's fate (something “unalterably predetermined from eternity” (OED)), Lady Macbeth imagines that she can transform her body into what she knows her husband's body not to be—that is, one full of “illness” (I.v.20). In order to become this entity, Lady Macbeth entreats certain spirits to “unsex” her, to “fill” her with “direst cruelty,” to “make thick her blood,” and to “stop up th'access and passage...That no compunctious visitings of Nature/ [shall] Shake [her] fell purpose” (I.v.41,42, 43, 43, 44-46).

Because I am working with both Laqueur and Paster, this notion of becoming a stopped-up body full of illness carries with it three implications, at least two of which are most likely not anticipated by Lady Macbeth. First and foremost, we must understand that Lady Macbeth's "unsexing," in the Galenic mode of understanding, does not actually make her a man, or even particularly masculine. (She does, after all, leave the business of killing to her husband.) In her afterword to *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Catherine Belsey reminds us that "the resisting, protesting, offending Lady Macbeth demands a place, an identity and a specificity which is not masculinity, but an unsexing that takes her altogether outside the realm of the human" (265). From this vantage point, Lady Macbeth imagines that she, like the weird sisters, can influence and/or direct her husband's every move.

The first unanticipated side effect of Lady Macbeth's chilling spiritual entreaty becomes apparent in an application of Galen, Laqueur, and Paster. In the Galenic model, menstrual blood, one of myriad female leakages, is resultant of "a plethora or leftover of nutrition" (Laqueur 35). This overage of nutrition is the result of what, for Galen, is the root of difference between men and women mentioned earlier in this paper: the abundance or lack of vital heat. The female body, due to its cool nature, has "undercooked" or under-expressed genitals. Although all of the makings of perfection are there, the anatomy is not in full projection and is, therefore, inferior in nature; and because women lack the vital heat necessary to become more efficient, they cannot process everything that they eat and must shed the excess blood as waste. Although Laqueur paints an anatomical picture of the one-sex model, it is Paster who adds important social connotations, noting the fundamental difference of menstrual blood from other types of blood. Countering Laqueur's "emphasis on homology as the central component of the one-sex model,"

Paster suggests a very real social value system ascribed to the various types of blood (i.e. that of men, women, children, the elderly, people of color, etc.). In order to differentiate menstrual blood in particular, Paster points out that “menstruation [as opposed to something like bloodletting] is an involuntary and thus to some degree a punitive process” (82). “Monthly bleeding,” Paster continues, “signifies as a particularly charged instance of the female body's predisposition to flow out, to leak” (83).

Returning to Lady Macbeth, we can now identify the first unanticipated problem: her inevitable metaphysical impaction. Unlike the truly “unsexed” (and non-human) witches, Lady Macbeth is flesh and blood; they are supernatural—she is bounded by physical and material nature. When Lady Macbeth metaphorically stops herself up then, she is blocking an excretory passage. Later calling menstrual blood “doubly excremental⁸,” Paster notes that it constituted “a special, though recurrent, instance of plethora. On one hand, it could be classified as one of the body's natural forms of evacuation...[but] [o]n the other hand, menstrual blood itself was always regarded as a form of excrement, blood that should not be retained” (81, 80). When Lady Macbeth takes control of her own contents and continence, thickening her blood and stopping her womb, she dooms herself to a slow and painful poisoning from a metaphysical buildup of waste. “[T]he cessation or suppression of the menses,” writes Paster, “was...blamed for all manner of physical and emotional maladies particular to [women]” (82). The same proves to be true for a figurative suppression.

8 Galenic science understood that the body went through a series of “concoctions” during digestion. In general, blood was produced by the liver in the second concoction. The waste, or blood that was “vomited away by the flesh” in the third concoction was thought to travel from down the vena cava to the womb, making menstrual blood the waste product of a waste product (Paster 81).

While Lady Macbeth accomplishes her murderous goals through filling her body with illness, she learns too late that the self-induced malady is incurable. The poisoning climaxes in Act V when Lady Macbeth's inner turmoil manifests physically as guilt-plagued sleepwalking. During her episodes, she imagines that her hands are bloody and that, even when washed, they still bear the smell of the murdered king's blood. Duncan's blood, which she imagines that she cannot rub out, is a figurative example of what Paster calls "blood's power to blazon guilt" (65). Although she has called for the stoppage of her own bleeding, it is the imaginary blood of another that pronounces her guilt to her doctor and lady-in-waiting. The "damned spot," could just as easily be a psychological manifestation of the buildup of her own excess, of her "true" womanly nature trying to break through (V.i.33). The last, and ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the doctor to "raze," "cleanse," and "purge" Lady Macbeth—all references to the period practice of bloodletting—shows that what she has done cannot be undone; she cannot be made to bleed again, except by her own hand, and at the cost of her life (V.iii.42, 44, 52).

Returning once again to the social hierarchy of *Macbeth* and to the economy of the familial bloodline, the second unintended effect of Lady Macbeth's sinister transformation turns out to be her rather ironic self-sterilization. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth turns his sights to Banquo, who, according to the weird sisters, "shalt [unlike Macbeth] get kings" (I.iii.67). What good is a throne, after all, when it cannot become part of a hereditary legacy? Secure in his new position as king, Macbeth has but to ensure that he can pass the title on to sons. Before he can do this, however, he must *beget* sons. The issue of Macbeth's heirs has provoked much critical conversation; although Lady Macbeth intimates that she has nursed before ("I have given suck, and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (I.vii.54-

55)), no heir is ever named specifically. Speculation as to the existence or possible past death of a child is not important for my argument; I am much more concerned with the capacity of the Macbeths to produce offspring in the future.

Two particular instances make this patrilineal realization virtually impossible. Most crucial is the fact that Lady Macbeth all but denies her own reproductive capacity when she calls upon the spirits to stop her up. Second to this is her chilling vow that, had she sworn to do so, she would, “while it was smiling in [her] face,/ Have plucked [her] nipple from [her baby's] boneless gums,/ And dash'd the brains out...” (I.vii.56-58). Lady Macbeth fails to realize that both her self-imposed stoppage and the dashing of the babe's brains, no matter the payoff, are contrary to the necessary next step in securing familial power—the engendering of a younger generation of rulers. Stephanie Chamberlain suggests a darker possibility. Lady Macbeth has already, in goading her husband to kill Duncan, established herself as a disruptor of patrilineal lines. Chamberlain suggests, then, that “[e]ven after the bloody deed is done, even after her husband seizes an unlawful throne. Lady Macbeth expresses no concern for Macbeth's extinguished patrilineage. As Macbeth agonizes over his 'barren sceptre,' his wife merely cautions 'what's done is done' (3.2.14); she has, in essence, sold Macbeth's heir for a little, fleeting power” (84). Lady Macbeth's fantasy of infanticide represents “a crime against both person and lineage,” and it proves that she would go so far as to deny Macbeth's posterity for even the shortest of forays into power (75). If we agree with Chamberlain then, Lady Macbeth, the “fiend-like Queen,” is terrifying because she is void of any and all sense of nurturance toward either family or state (V.ix.39). She extinguishes life, adding “each day a new gash” to Scotland; she usurps not to make better but merely for the sake of usurping (IV.iii.40).

Toward the end of the play, Shakespeare provides his audience with a maternal foil in the form of Lady Macduff, the “ideal” feminine vessel. As Linda Bamber points out, it is Lady Macduff, not Lady Macbeth, whose death is properly mourned by her husband. Because Lady Macduff positions herself as the vessel through which offspring flow and from which patrilineal lines emanate, her death is acknowledged with sorrow, and she—like the daughters I will discuss later—becomes a well-spring of pity for the audience (94). She and her children, Macduff’s “pretty ones,” represent the “natural” orientation of woman as the conduit for man’s offspring (IV.iii.217). Macbeth’s brief comment on the death of his own childless wife—“She should have died hereafter”—seems a rather half-hearted eulogy; his wife’s death is simply another occasion for Macbeth to reflect on the brevity and emptiness of life (V.v.17).

For Lady Macbeth then, the problem is not one of spillage; it is one of stoppage and of ill-conceived and ill-directed continence. It is a failure to participate appropriately in the economy of reproduction and to accept her role—within the Galenic model—as the passive receptacle of seed. In the beginning of the play, she vows to “pour [her] spirits” into her husband’s ear, in one of many gross perversions of the Galenic model of reproduction (I.v.26). The woman, says Galen, is the vessel, the possessor of the retentive organ, and she is the material cause in reproduction (Laqueur 27). The man is the “active principle,” the “efficient cause...in a larger economy of the one flesh” (59, 33). In pouring her spirits into her husband’s ear, in driving his actions toward their terrifying and inevitable end, however, Lady Macbeth engenders little more than the mental equivalent of mola, a self-fertilized, under-formed, and nonviable entity bred in her husband’s mind and destined for death (Laqueur 58). The only thing that she does bring about by the end of the play is the complete annihilation of her family and the

subsequent reinstatement of another line of kings. “The demonized maternal agency which enables the murder of patrilineage,” notes Chamberlain, “is by play's end supplanted by a revitalized, if altered political authority. Malcolm succeeds to his father's usurped throne as the descendents of Banquo's line eye their future patrilineal succession” (87). Order is restored, and the dead return to their rest, but only after Macbeth has lost all, and only after, in death, his wife's unnatural and terrifying machinations have ceased to drive the action of the play.

* * *

In considering the tragic female body as a container whose contents and continence help determine the fate of the hero, we must consider not only the womb that stops producing, but also the womb that, in an unnatural reversion of the process, actually begins consuming. Mythology scholar Barbara Walker notes that the consumptive womb—often figured more specifically as the *vagina dentata*—has existed as a mythological trope in countless cultures throughout history, from the literal beliefs of the Plains tribes of North America and the South Pacific tribes of Vanautu, to the figurative beliefs of card-carrying Freudians. With regard to women's anatomy and the English language, Walker notes,

“Mouth” comes from the same root as “mother” – Anglo-Saxon *muth*...Vulvas have *labiae*, “lips,” and many men have believed that behind the lips lie teeth. Christian authorities of the Middle Ages taught that certain witches...could grow fangs in their vaginas. They likened women's genitals to the “yawning” mouth of hell, though this was hardly original; the underworld gate had always been the yoni [Sanskrit; vagina/birth passage] of Mother Hel. It has always “yawned” -- from Middle English *yonen*, another derivative of “yoni.” (1035-1036)

This connection between the mouth and the vagina also factors heavily into Galenic anatomy, as Laqueur points out through a linguistic analysis of his own: "...*vulva* in medical usage usually meant vagina, from *valva*, gateway to the belly" (27). As noted earlier, the womb is characterized by Aristotle/Galen as a retentive organ, much like the stomach; it reaches the outside of the body via the neck (in both instances, a *cervix*), and it can be penetrated or can serve as a passage for matter into and out of the body. This linguistic conflation of belly/stomach with belly/womb, notes Laqueur, facilitates a larger association between the processes and functions of both ends of the body—one that, as Laqueur points out in his endnotes, still exists today as evidenced by the sentence "Mommy has a baby in her belly" (27, 251).

Laqueur touches briefly on the correlation between digestive and sexual appetites (51), but it is again Paster who focuses in on the more sinister implications of the association. She notes that the "demonized womb, for example—fully animate, capable of movement, sensitive to smells—was 'so greedy and likerish' for male seed, according to one midwifery manual⁹, 'that it doth euen come down to meet nature, sucking, and (as it were) snatching the same'" (45-46). She also notes the proverb "A likerish tongue a likerish tale," and she demonstrates with a reading from *Bartholemew Fair* the ways in which "the greedy mouth" was equated with "the greedy womb" in Early Modern drama (46, 56). In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, we find one such greedy womb, but when it comes to Tamora, she is not simply likerish for seed—she's likerish for blood and for the utter destruction of the tragic hero.

9 *Complete Midwife's Practice Enlarged* (1659)

In her book *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, scholar Coppélia Kahn notes a very interesting fact about Titus's family:

The extremely fecund mother of the twenty-six Andronici—never mentioned in the play, and conspicuously absent from the funeral rites of the first scene—has been excised from Rome, displaced onto Tamora, the Gothic outsider...When Titus offends Tamora's maternity by sacrificing her son and facilitates her incorporation into Rome by mishandling his political and filial responsibilities, she becomes the breeding-ground of outrages, as much a spur to others' wickedness as a source of it herself...One crime spawns another, and the ultimate source of all is the offended, alienated mother. (55)

Although not directly related to Titus, Tamora becomes a sort of stand-in for the absent mother to the Andronici and, as empress, a figurative parent figure for Titus; both positions give her the closeness described by Aristotle as necessary for the maximization of terror and true suffering. Tamora's speedy and utterly unpredicted ascension to the throne causes a tremendous problem—Titus' ritual sacrifice of Tamora's son Alarbus, sanctioned at first by Roman law and custom, becomes, at the moment of Tamora's acceptance of Saturninus' hand, a crime against the imperial family. What was simple *ad manes fratrum* blood-for-blood has at once become an impingement upon an *empress's* bloodline, so Tamora refocuses her energy from reproduction to destruction, setting in motion a terrifying chain of events that will tear Titus to the ground.

Shakespeare's formulation of Tamora the Goth as a swallowing womb, as a maternal figure bent on consumption, is most artfully embodied in his description of the dark and woody landscape of Act II. After having enacted the first part of her plot to consume the Andronici—she has had her sons rape and mutilate Lavinia and kill Bassianus, dumping his body into a pit—

Tamora plots to pin the crime on the sons of old Andronicus. She has Aaron lead Quintus and Martius, under the pretense of a panther hunt, to the hole that contains Bassianus' dead body. Upon falling in—as was Tamora's original intention—Martius reports on the dread contents of hole. Over the next fifty lines, the pit morphs into a terrible and unnatural sight. The brothers use phrases like “detested, dark, blood-drinking,” “ragged entrails,” “fell devouring receptacle,” “swallowing womb,” “gaping hollow,” “hateful,” and “misty mouth” to describe the pit once they see it for the grave that it is (2.2.224, 230, 235, 239, 249, 236). At this point, we can see a clear description of Tamora’s ravenous womb; “the imagery is blatant,” asserts Marion Wynne-Davies, “the cave [pit] being the vagina, the all-consuming mouth of the feminine earth, which remains outside the order of patriarchal Rome” (135). Arden editor Johnathan Bate also notes that “the language becomes darkly obsessive, evocative not only of death and hell but also of the threatening female sexuality of Tamora” (9). Rather than producing life, the pit/womb sucks it in and devours it—and it does so using dead bodies as bait.

Like Lady Macbeth, Tamora becomes the embodiment of terror because her desire, both “ravenous” and “insatiate,” holds within it the power to bleed both family and state completely dry (V.iii.194, V.i.88). Over the course of the play, Tamora continues her quid pro quo campaign against the Andronici; having already orchestrated the ruin of Titus' only daughter, Tamora proceeds to deprive him of Quintus and Martius—executed for the alleged murder of Bassianus—and by virtue of his militant stand for his brothers, Titus' final son, Lucius, is banished from Rome. Tamora achieves a taste of her ultimate goal when, under the false pretense of saving Quintus and Martius, she has Aaron demand an excised hand from Titus. We are later clued into Tamora's final desire—for the life of Titus—in her conversations with

Saturninus, who is ill-at-ease with the thought of the newly banished Lucius leading the Goth army against Rome, and then again in her charade as Revenge, during which she suggests that Titus lure Lucius home and that they host a dinner for the emperor and empress. She does not blatantly suggest to Saturninus that they kill Titus and Lucius, but her vengeful desire to obliterate the Andronici suggests that, given the chance, she would do so.

Juxtaposed to this insatiable appetite for blood is another covert reality perhaps even more threatening Roman civilization: Tamora's wildly incontinent sexual appetite. We know that she has already born three sons, and apart from her sanctioned relationship with Saturninus, she also has an illicit affair with Aaron the Moor. Tamora's body is first explored in detail in II.ii, the scene in which she is caught with her dark lover deep in the woods. In an act of deflection, Tamora turns the attention from herself back to Lavinia and Bassianus, making false accusations that turn out to be full of ironically accurate imagery. She cries to her newly arrived sons,

Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?

These two have 'ticed me hither to this place:

A barren detested vale you see it is;

The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,

O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe;

Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds

Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven. (II.ii.91-97)

Tamora has, perhaps without knowing it, laid bare, so to speak, the condition of her own motherhood. She calls the vale "barren" and "detested," yet at least two plants—like two

sons?—grow there. She says that “nothing breeds,” yet the owl and raven—one, a predator of the night and one, a creature of darkness—proliferate. She has touched upon the essence of her own threatening and terrifying nature. She can only give birth, metaphorically and physically, to things that live in darkness and feed off of the life around them.

Moving into a more vivid and specific description to her sons of the “fate” awaiting her at the hands of Lavinia and Bassianus, Tamora lies,

And when they showed me this abhorred pit,
They told me here at the dead of night
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
Would make such fearful and confused cries
As any mortal body hearing it
Should straight fall mad or else die suddenly. (II.ii.98-104)

In this passage, Tamora seems to partake of a bit of role reversal. She states that “they” showed her an abhorred pit when, in reality, it is she who has shown them. By allowing herself to be caught with Aaron, Tamora has revealed herself as the threatening womb, gaping and ready to engulf matter. Her language of proliferation—“thousands of fiends,” “swelling toads”—reveals her own reproductive capabilities, and her feigned fear at the end of the passage could easily represent the threat that others might feel in her life-devouring presence. She continues the deflection,

And then they called me foul adulteress,
Lascivious Goth, and all the bitterest terms

That ever ear did hear to such effect.

And had you not by wondrous fortune come,

This vengeance on me had they executed. (II.ii.109-113)

Of course Tamora *is* a “foul adulteress” and a “Lascivious Goth,” but she effectively purges herself of these sins by projecting them onto Lavinia and Bassianus in the form of accusations; and since her sons believe her, she is able to manipulate the truth into a destructive force. With regard to her use of the word “vengeance,” we already know that it is Tamora, not Lavinia and Bassianus, who wants vengeance. Because she is a mother scorned, she wants blood for blood, and because she is a mother, she has sons who are willing to get it for her.

Tamora’s relationship with her sons is fleshed out later in the scene when Lavinia is left to plead for her life. Tamora’s original plan is simple: blood for blood. “Give me the poniard,” she commands; “[y]ou shall know, my boys,/ Your mother’s hand shall right your mother’s wrong” (II.ii.120, 120-121). Lavinia’s subsequent reaction toward Tamora further enriches the nature of Tamora’s motherhood. “O Tamora,” she cries, “thou bearest a woman’s face” (II.ii.134). Beneath the woman’s face, however, is a fecund womb that, like Lady Macbeth’s “poison’d chalice,” is filled to the brim with deadly intent (*Macbeth* I.vii.11). Unlike Lady Macbeth, however, Tamora also possesses a hand ready to wield her own dagger. Demetrius urges Tamora to be “as unrelenting flint to drops of rain” in the presence of Lavinia’s tears, although one can imagine that Tamora needs no encouragement (II.ii.141). Continuing the theme of unnatural hardness, Lavinia tells the brothers “the milk thou suckst from her did turn to marble;/ Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny” (II.ii.144-145). This perverse passing of evil through lactation, a nourishing act fundamental to the life of a child, suggests corruption at the

basest of levels; it calls into question not only Tamora's continence—by exposing her “goodly gift in horning” (II.ii.67)—but also the quality of her humoral contents. Tamora creates things that destroy; the softest, warmest parts of her body can only breed and nurture things cold and hard.

Tamora's extramarital relationship with Aaron the Moor, as uncovered by Lavinia and Bassianus, represents what is perhaps most terrifying about Tamora as a mother. Tamora's body is a locus for reproduction, both metaphorically and physically. Metaphorically, Tamora is a way for ‘otherness’ to reproduce within Roman walls and, even worse, in the highest echelons of its government. With Saturninus under her influence, and with an army of Goths conceivably ready to avenge her, Tamora holds the fate of Rome in her hands. She is the pollutant, she is the hole in the fence, she is the wild animal that threatens the tame. While Tamora is empress, Rome is not safe from outside forces, as is evidenced by the fact that she has given birth to Aaron's illegitimate child. Because of her lack of sexual continence, Tamora becomes an out-of-control womb, a “feral mother,” who threatens to turn Rome into “a wilderness of tigers,” and it falls upon Titus' shoulders to “confront and recontain” this threat (Kahn 68, 69).

Marion Wynne-Davies notes that “[i]t is the excess of Tamora's subversive signification which demands that she be finally removed and the breach repaired...[I]f [the aggressive woman's] irregularities prove too virulent, too ingrained, then she must be ejected from the system altogether” (146). Ultimately, Tamora's insatiable appetites for both sex and blood do indeed prove too virulent to be allowed to persist, and the ending that Titus serves up for her puts

an end to her threatening presence. In V.ii, in a “curative” preparation that would have made even Galen proud,¹⁰ Titus tells the bound and gagged Chiron and Demetrius that he will

...grind [their] bones to dust,
And with [their] blood and it...make a paste
And of that paste a coffin...rear
And make two pastries of [their] shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, [their] unhallowed dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase. (186-191)

Kahn notes that, through this gesture, Titus “insults [Tamora’s] womb (the word also means stomach), the site of her power, by making her ‘swallow her own increase’” and that “he confronts the mother and repossesses the initiative that she had illicitly seized; he reestablishes patriarchal control over a matrix made evil...” (70). By ‘stopping up’ Tamora’s womb, by forcing her to eat “the flesh that she herself hath bred,” Titus doubles Tamora’s corrupted bloodline back in on itself, and by stabbing Tamora, he kills the potential for future taint (V.iii.60). In what scholar Louise Noble calls “a dubious act of therapy,” Titus removes the threat posed by uncontrolled fecundity, and although he pays for the deed with his life, his actions do in effect restore order as the returned Lucius assumes the throne of Rome (678).

¹⁰ Galen ascribed to the ancient Arabic inclusion of *mumia*, or preserved human remains, within the medical pharmacopoea. He believed that ground bones were of particular medicinal importance (Noble 681).

“DOWERLESS DAUGHTER[S]”—Shakespeare's Tainted Gifts

What belongs to you on this earth? Only death. No power on earth can take that away from you. And—consider explain tell yourself—if happiness consists in the possession of something, then hold fast to this sovereign happiness—to die.

--Monique Wittig, Les Guérillères

For Shakespeare, mothers and wives prove to be the most effective sources of tragic terror because they hold in their hands the ability to deny their husbands access to heirs. They can, like Lady Macbeth, plug up the traffic in hereditary matter for the sake of a few moments of power, or, like Tamora, they can attempt to devour competing bloodlines and proliferate abundantly, shirking the patriarchal control of their own bodily continence and redirecting the flow of hereditary material. In each of these instances, the heroes lose nearly everything—only Titus hangs onto a shred of his former self in that Lucius, his only surviving son, succeeds the murdered Saturninus to the throne of Rome. But what of that other great emotion ascribed to tragedy by Aristotle? What of pity? We've already caught a quick glimpse, in the character of Lady Macduff, of how the correctly oriented, controlled, passive female reproductive system can elicit pity, described in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as “a kind of pain in the case of an apparent destructive or painful harm *of one not deserving to encounter it*, which one might expect oneself, or one of one's own, to suffer” (qtd. in Konstan, emphasis mine). Surely, then, pity is the emotion that the audience experiences in its connection to the sufferings of the hero, but for Shakespeare, there is another rich source of pity—his tragic daughters. I will argue that daughters, because they represent a social liability to their fathers and future husbands, often find themselves victims of a misplaced male anxiety about leakiness and loss. Although I focus in

this section on Ophelia and Cordelia, I must note that Juliet and Desdemona—whose trespasses against the wishes of their parents set in motion their own demises—and Lavinia—whose body is defined more so than any other woman's by its literal leakiness—are equally valuable as points of inquiry.

Although daughters do not hold the direct bloodline of the family in their hands—this is reserved for firstborn sons—they do represent something very important to their families in general, and to their fathers specifically. They represent (but only in virginal purity) valuable objects for exchange and inroads to wider reaching kinship systems. They are the repositories of value that their fathers may trade at will. I will return very briefly to a caveat that I gave earlier in my paper: my exploration of the worlds of Shakespearean tragedy, worlds whose creation is deeply influenced by, but not necessarily a mirror image of, Early Modern culture, is not meant to offer a totalizing view of Elizabethan and Jacobean gender systems; rather, I want to consider each tragic world as a self-contained entity whose creation bears the marks of a particular time, place, and parcel of social and biological beliefs.

Returning to the notion of women as objects of exchange, or as “gifts,” I would like to look to Gayle Rubin's germinal essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex” for a theoretical examination of what Rubin calls the “sex/gender system” (159). According to Rubin, one has but to take a short foray into linguistics to get a sense of “a woman's place” within most social systems. She notes that “[w]omen are *given* in marriage, *taken* in battle, *exchanged* for favors, *sent* as tribute, *traded*, *bought*, and *sold*” (175 emphasis mine). Rubin locates the need for her particular exploration of the sex/gender system in Marx's lack of discussion on the subject of women, despite relentless attempts by feminist scholars to

read through a Marxian lens. Building on the works of Engels, who raises the woman question but does not analyze it fully, and considering the works of both Levi-Strauss and Freud through a Lacanian lens, Rubin rereads women's oppression not as some inevitable consequence of capitalism—many non-capitalist societies oppress women—but rather as “the product of the specific social relations which organize [a given social domain]” (168). Rubin suggests that “the exchange of women,” rather than being the primal foundation of culture, is actually “an acute, but condensed, apprehension of *certain aspects* of the social relations of sex and gender”; that is, the exchange of women is part of a larger system of exchange that concerns the place, power, and linkages of all individuals of a society, not just the women (176 emphasis mine). She does, however, concede that “more constraint is applied to females when they are pressed into the service of kinship than to males” (182). Essentially, Rubin seeks to assert that oppression of women—or oppression in general—is one symptom of “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (159).

Although Rubin relies on Freud's psychoanalytic theory as much as Levi-Strauss's anthropological ethnographies, for the purposes of my argument, I will focus on the latter, as I feel it holds greater promise and poses fewer problems with regard to cultural relevance, considering “the nonmodern character of [Levi-Strauss'] data base” (198). “Since Levi-Strauss sees the essence of kinship systems to lie in an exchange of women between men,” notes Rubin, “he constructs an implicit theory of sex oppression¹¹” (171). While Rubin disagrees with Levi-Strauss on the implicitness of oppression within the construction of culture, she does bring up two points of his argument that are of particular importance when thinking about the place of the

11 *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969 [1949])

daughter in society, two “chess pieces [which] are particularly relevant to women—the 'gift'¹² and the incest taboo¹³, whose dual articulation adds up to [Levi-Strauss'] concept of the exchange of women” (171). While Marcel Mauss is credited with theorizing “the gift,” it is Levi-Strauss, notes Rubin, who recognizes that “marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious gifts” (Rubin 173).

“Kinship is organization,” asserts Rubin, “and organization gives power” (174). Implicit in this statement is the fact that it is, for the most part, the men who are doing the organizing and enjoying the resultant power; this is certainly true for Levi-Strauss, and it holds true for the worlds of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* as well. Both plays, like *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*, concern the organization of kingdoms and the expansion of kinship through marriage, and both are very preoccupied with the quality of the gifts being offered via marriage. This notion of quality—or of perceived quality—causes a great deal of male anxiety in both plays, because in each instance, so much is at stake. “In one respect,” writes Marion Wynne-Davies, “familial, social, and political stability in a patrilineal society resides in the policing of a woman's womb,” and in an effort to assure power by assuring the purity—and therefore viability—of gift-daughters, Shakespeare's male characters, I would argue, are rather prone to *over-policing* their daughters (137). By understanding that they are investing so much of their power into something that leaks, fathers perceive an inevitability of loss where they should perceive the possibility for

12 Mauss' *Essay on the Gift* “proposed that the significance of gift giving is that it expresses, affirms, or creates a social link between the partners of an exchange. Gift giving confers upon its participants a special relationship of trust, solidarity, and mutual aid” (Rubin 172).

13 According to Levi-Strauss, the incest taboo originates to ensure that, through exogamy, alliances and kinship structures can be built and organized (Rubin 173-174).

production, for a strengthening of political ties. With Shakespeare's daughters, then, it is not always an issue of the actual contents/contenance of the woman; rather, all is dependent, in the end, upon men's anxious and often misguided perceptions thereof.

* * *

I will begin with Ophelia, as her position is rather unique. She is a daughter, but she is not Hamlet's daughter; neither is she his wife—yet. Ophelia represents a gift to be given, at some future time, to the Lord Hamlet, and so her value at present resides with her father, Polonius, a character who, it could be argued, is a secondary sort of tragic hero in *Hamlet*, losing all because of his assumptions and misjudgments. Ophelia's liminality—as not-quite-wife—is mirrored in the liminal state of Denmark. *Hamlet* opens, as do the other plays so far under consideration, at a critical moment of political change, a moment when the structures of power are most open to reorganization and when social bonds and acts of gift-giving have the largest amount of transformative power. Old Hamlet is dead, his brother Claudius has usurped both throne and wife, and the new king calls Hamlet, once his “cousin,” his son (I.ii.64). Claudius immediately addresses and assures those who fear Denmark to be vulnerable that such is not the case; he has written to Norway to staunch the efforts of Young Fortinbras who “hold[s] a weak supposal of [Claudius'] worth” and “think[s]...[Denmark] to be disjoint and out of frame,” which, of course, it ultimately proves to be (I.ii.18, 19-20).

Soon after the picture of a shaken Elsinore is painted via the political speeches of Claudius and the emotional lamentations of a very forlorn young Hamlet, Ophelia enters, musing on a love note. While it is tempting, after a reading of Rubin, to delve into a psychoanalytic profile of Ophelia, such an endeavor would be a digression from my original argument. My

focus here will remain on the first half of Rubin's essay—on Ophelia's bodily participation in a kinship system of exchange and on her value as a “gift.” Before engaging in a reading of her gift-hood, however, I would like to return briefly to Gail Kern Paster for some information on how leakiness factors into gift-giving language. In her chapter entitled “Leaky Vessels,” Paster sets two very high standards for female continence through an invocation of both Tuccia and Queen Elizabeth I. According to legend, Tuccia, in order to prove her continence and her chastity, carried water in a sieve from the Tiber River to the Temple of Vesta, and in a show of like qualities, Elizabeth was often painted holding a sieve (Paster 30)[See Appendix B]. These two figures are problematic at best, as Paster intimates:

For women less politically motivated [than Elizabeth I] to maintain the virgin state, the iconographic representation of Elizabeth's self-command produces an unflattering implication: if not leaking becomes something of a mythological miracle reserved for a long gone Roman lady [Tuccia] and the occasional virgin queen, then leaking remains the normal punitive condition for women.... (50)

Relegated as women are to a life of biologically predestined leakage, it is not enough for them to *be* chaste, they must also *seem* chaste, as is evidenced by the paintings. “Thus,” affirms Paster, “the conventional Renaissance association of women and water is used not only to insinuate womanly unreliability but also to define the female body even when it is chaste, even when it is *virgo intacta*, as a crucial problematic in the social formations of capitalism...” (Paster 25).

While I, like Rubin, will shy away from pushing the “capitalism” button too much, I find it worth noting that Paster does effectively illustrate how value and perception of value are of utmost importance to marriageable women.

In scene iii of Act I, Shakespeare neatly spoon-feeds Ophelia-as-gift to his audience. The language is overt, as both her brother Laertes and her father Polonius lay out the value of her contents and the utmost importance of bodily continence in her dealings with Hamlet. This scene contains a wealth of male warning and advice, illustrating what Levi-Strauss would call “a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products” (Rubin 158). Not going quite so far herself, Rubin suggests that, rather, “[i]t is a truism to say that societies will inculcate in their young the character traits appropriate to carrying on the business of society” (189). So rather than conceiving of Ophelia as a capitalistic product, we should conceive of her as a woman gone about her father's (and brother's) business, the business of creating and securing proper kinship ties.

In his goodbyes, Laertes becomes a font of advice to Ophelia about her dealings with Hamlet, a man whose will, though at present is not “besmirch[ed]” by either “soil” or “cautel,” is in the end “not his own” (I.iii.15, 17). Hamlet's bride will be chosen by the State, by his aunt-mother and uncle-father, so Laertes knows that, until Ophelia is named as that chosen bride, any demonstration of affection on Hamlet's part is at best frivolous and worst detrimental to Ophelia's later marriageability. He advises:

Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister, (28-32)

Laertes' words put the brunt of responsibility on Ophelia: she should not give credence to Hamlet's claims, she must not let him into her ears or into her heart, and, most important of all, she must not open her "treasure" to him. In short, Ophelia, who by nature is prone to leakage anyway, must board up all entrance to her body until such time as she becomes a legitimate vessel for heirs.¹⁴

The formulation of Ophelia's womb as a treasure chest is quite rich and telling, for like a sieve, which when filled with water by its nature then leaks it out, treasure chests are as often for looting as they are for containing. Laertes takes preventative measures against this metaphorical looting, however, by first pouring his own content, in the form of words, into Ophelia's ear and then locking it behind. He is cultivating and protecting her gift-ness, and although he is brother, not father, Ophelia grants him a great deal of control over her body. In acceptance of his advice, Ophelia swears, "Tis in my memory locked/ And you yourself shall keep the key of it" (84-85). This locking becomes a figurative sort of chastity belt for Ophelia, making her clearly a valued object for exchange, but only if she is given with her key—for what good is an un-openable treasure chest? [See Appendix C]. Thus she establishes herself as the gift and the key bearers (her father and her brother) as the gift-givers, as the organizers and the bond-builders, as the arbiters of her exchange.¹⁵

14 It is perhaps a more modern tendency to feel pity for Ophelia because of her "lot" as a gift, so I will focus more on the ways that Hamlet's later inappropriate projection onto, and rejection of, Ophelia make her pitiful both to the audience and to the other characters..

15 It should be noted, however, that Ophelia does not lack awareness of her status. She playfully mocks Laertes' admonitions by suggesting in I.iii.44-49 that he be sure to follow his own advice.

As concerned as Laertes is with the state of his sister's honor, it is Polonius who holds the power to offer Ophelia—or not—to Claudius and Gertrude as a potential wife for Hamlet. Polonius' own warnings come hard on the heels of Laertes', and he turns Ophelia's naïve words back upon her, replacing her right to be adored with her obligation to be traded. She says that Hamlet has “of late made many tenders/ Of his affection to [her],” and immediately seizing on the ironic appropriateness of her language, Polonius throws it back in her face in terms not of affection but of financial transaction (98-99). He warns that Hamlet's tenders should not be taken for “true pay,” that she should “tender” (or value/offer) herself at a higher rate, and that, if she doesn't, she will “tender [Polonius] a fool,” a reference to the three possible outcomes: that she will make a fool of her father, or of herself, or, in a worst-case scenario, she will present her father with an illegitimate child when Hamlet's “tenders” become too invasive (105, 108). To prevent any of these inevitabilities, Polonius does what anyone with a treasure—even a locked one—would do: he hides it. “Be something scanter of your maiden presence” he advises, before drowning Ophelia once more in financial language and “charg[ing]” her to avoid any further communication with Hamlet (120, 134).

Both Laertes and Polonius forbid Ophelia's emotional and physical contact with Hamlet, not because they do not value him, but because it is the marriage contract, not tender and unfounded vows of love, that is of the greatest value to a daughter's father. With Ophelia securely locked and hidden, we see the convergence of two circumstances that will, in the end, destroy her. The first circumstance is Hamlet's madness—whether feigned or not is of no importance here—and the second is Polonius' offering of his daughter to the king and queen as Hamlet's bride. We get the first glimpse of Hamlet's assumed “antic disposition” in Act II when

he bursts into Ophelia's sewing room, disheveled “[a]nd with a look so piteous in purport/ As if he had been loosed out of hell/ To speak of horrors” (I.v.170, II.i.79-81). Remembering my earlier definition of “piteous” as something either full or deserving of mercy and compassion, we might identify Hamlet as at once a pitier and an object of pity. Further into the passage, however, the situation becomes much less ambivalent:

He falls to such perusal of my face
As 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so;
...
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes
(For out o' doors he went without their helps)
And to the last bended their light on me. (II.i.86-88, 91-97)

Though Hamlet seems pitiful to Ophelia, it is Ophelia who is the true object of study in this scene. Hamlet examines her face closely and doesn't remove his eyes from her visage as he leaves the room. The sigh is for her—the pity is for her.

This confusing and rather troubling incident prompts Polonius, who now thinks Hamlet to be mad with affection, to hurry things along and formally suggest the marriage match. Approaching the king and queen with news of Hamlet's lunacy, Polonius offers up a verbose and misguided explanation of the events. “I have a daughter—have while she is mine,” he begins,

establishing Ophelia at once as an item on the table, “Who in her duty and obedience, mark/
Hath given me this [love letter from Hamlet]” (II.ii.105, 106-107). Polonius, mistaking
correlation for causation, assumes that the “prescripts” that he gave to his daughter “[t]hat she
should lock herself from [Hamlet's] resort” have caused Hamlet's curious “declension” from
“sadness...into a fast...to a watch...into a weakness...to a lightness...[and finally into] madness”
(139, 140, 146, 144-147). Gertrude and Claudius agree with Polonius's plan to test Hamlet by
“loos[ing]” Ophelia to him under their remote surveillance (159). Polonius is so sure that he is
right that, though perhaps only in jest, he stakes his job on it.

Under ordinary circumstances, Polonius would have effectively preserved Ophelia's
value as a gift and then successfully proposed kinship ties between his family and the royal
family; however, just because a gift is given does not mean that it will be accepted—the
unfortunate timing of Hamlet's mental instability guarantees, in this case, that it will not be.
Returning to an earlier scene, we may begin to tease out why in particular Polonius' offer of
Ophelia seems to rattle Hamlet to his very core. In Act I, scene v, the ghost of Hamlet's father
reveals to Hamlet that his death was actually a murder, that his brother Claudius had poisoned
him in his garden as he slept. In that moment, Gertrude, who has already been called frail and
incestuous for her swift remarriage into her own family, becomes, in Hamlet's mind, complicit in
some way in his father's murder (I.ii.146, 157). We see Hamlet, after his conversation with his
father's ghost, ascribe to Gertrude many of the very same qualities of motherhood explored
earlier in this paper. She is “pernicious,” a “smiling damned villain” with “a wicked tongue”
who lives “In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed/
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making
love/
Over the nasty sty”—she is “a mother stained” (I.v.105, 106, III.iv.11, 89-92, IV.iv.56).

She becomes for Hamlet what Tamora is to Lavinia, Bassianus, and Titus; she, as the Player reminds us, is the antithesis of Hecuba, a woman willing to stand and die beside her husband, a woman whose wails of mourning move even the gods to pity. No, Gertrude, like the Player Queen of “The Mousetrap,” is wooed with gifts into the incestuous bed of her husband's murderer, and when she should be opening her eyes for tears of mourning, she is instead opening her greatest treasure wantonly to those interested in the taking (III.ii.128.9-10).

But we aren't talking about mothers—we're talking about daughters. The reason that Gertrude is so important in an examination of Ophelia is that she shapes, for Hamlet, the very notion of what it means to be a woman. She is a measure of the worth of woman-as-gift, and when Hamlet finds Gertrude lacking (or, leaking, as it were), he transfers his anxieties to Ophelia. Essentially, Hamlet refuses Ophelia-as-gift because he (mis)judges her to have the same sexual continence issues as his mother. This transference is most clearly illustrated during Polonius' clandestine investigation into Hamlet's madness. Baited by an apparently alone Ophelia, Hamlet feels moved to disclose that he no longer loves her, but his reasons seem more geared toward his mother than toward Ophelia. He famously exclaims to her, “Get thee to a nunnery!” so that she cannot become, as Gertrude has become, a “breeder of sinners” (III.i.119, 121). Illustrating the point that I made earlier that even chaste women are doomed to succumb to male anxiety over leakiness, Hamlet follows his command with a curse that, if Ophelia does get married, even if she is chaste and pure (as she arguably seems to be), she will not escape slander (which Hamlet so perfectly demonstrates). “God hath given you one face,” he accuses, “and you make yourself another”; although, in this case it is Hamlet who gives Ophelia another face—he

gives her Gertrude's (III.i.142-143). Because Hamlet cannot conceive of Ophelia as an intact vessel, chaste and soon to be at his disposal, he simply disposes of her.

In *Comic Women, Tragic Men*, Linda Bamber further complicates Hamlet's inability to accept Ophelia as a gift. She points to not only Hamlet's problems with his mother, but also his own crumbling sense of subjectivity and control as a contributing factor in the deterioration of his and Ophelia's relationship. She notes that in Shakespearean tragedy, “[t]he Hero's view of women reaches bottom at the moment when he is out of control of himself and his world; women are whores to men when it is no longer possible for men to reconcile themselves to what they are,” and she notes more specifically in the chapter on *Hamlet* that he, “like the other heroes, rages against women when he loses his place in the sun” (15, 72). Returning again to Bamber's Self/Other relationality, we see that when men lose their self knowledge, as does Hamlet when he “wipes away all trivial fond records,” thus freeing up all brain-space for his impending revenge, they lose the referential bearings of Self and no longer know how to encounter the Other (I.iv.99). Although Ophelia represents complete fidelity, utter continence, Hamlet's loss of subjectivity, coupled with his obsession over his mother's sexual incontinence, blinds him and obscures his relationship with his would-be wife. It is not Ophelia, but rather Hamlet's misjudgment of her, that stands in the way of his acceptance.

Although Hamlet's refusal to accept Ophelia does throw into question her value as a bond-building gift, it is the death of Polonius, at the hands of Hamlet, that delivers the crushing blow, reducing Ophelia to a babbling wretch whose “mood will needs be pited” (IV.v.3) Indeed it is at this moment when she becomes the very embodiment of pity. Like Lady Macduff, Ophelia is not deserving of the harm that she encounters, and therefore we—like Gertrude,

Claudius, Laertes, and perhaps even Hamlet—pity her. When Polonius dies, Ophelia loses her largest social referent. Both loverless and fatherless, she goes mad from lack of place and purpose. Ophelia commits the most symbolic of suicides, immersing her body—and ultimately filling it—with the water that has symbolized, for her father, brother, and would-be husband, the inevitable incontinence of her sexuality. “Killed off before she can deceive or defile Hamlet,” notes Valerie Traub, “it is clear that only in death can Ophelia-as-whore regain the other half of her dichotomized being, chaste virgin. Contaminated in life by the taint of Gertrude's adultery, Ophelia reclaims sexual desirability as a dead, but perpetual, virgin” (219). Ironically it is Gertrude who points this out in her speech at the funeral, as she decks the would-be “bride-bed” with funeral flowers (V.i.234). “Ophelia, of course, represents possibilities that have been lost in the *Hamlet* world...The deaths in *Hamlet* are final, including the death of sexual possibility; but that possibility, we now feel, was something innocent and valuable, not something rotten to the core” (Bamber 73).

* * *

Conceiving of daughters as gifts sets a father up for the experience of anxiety about daughter's worth. Although Laertes and Polonius speak of Ophelia's maidenhead as a treasure—one to which they alone hold keys—there is a very tangible difference between a woman and a treasure chest: the chest can be opened, and inventory can be taken of the contents. With a woman, on the other hand, all we have are hopes, conjectures. We don't know, for instance, whether or not Ophelia and Hamlet are already sexually involved; all we have is Hamlet's comparison of her to Jephtha's daughter¹⁶, and all Laertes and Polonius have is Ophelia's word

16 In the Book of Judges, Jephtha makes a burnt offering to God of his virgin daughter in fulfillment of a vow.

that she is honorable. The notion that a woman's inventory of worth can only be taken through her words, or through male perception, brings us back to an anatomical connection made earlier in the paper—the intrinsic connection, in form and function, of the mouth and the vagina. The connection between northern and southernmost bodily orifices (and between what stays in or comes out of them) is perhaps even more of an issue in *King Lear* than in *Hamlet* because, in the world of *Lear*, the crumbling of an entire nation centers on one very short, very simple speech act committed by a woman. With her “nothing,” or perhaps more accurately, with Lear's misreading of her “nothing,¹⁷” Cordelia sends her aging father on a terrifying tirade that breaks down nearly every kinship bond present prior to that moment and reduces the only worthy “gift” to an object of pity for all who “see better” than Lear (I.i.159).

Before further examining the opening scene in *Lear*, I would like to briefly survey another scholarly work on the connection between the mouth and the vagina, and then I will return to Cordelia and her “glib and oily” sisters (I.i.228). In her essay, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member,” scholar Lynda E. Boose performs a critical reading of another work of Shakespeare's—*The Taming of the Shrew*—in light of the Early Modern cultural connection between loose tongues and loose tails. Boose notes that,

For Tudor-Stuart England, in village and town, an obsessive energy was invested in exerting control over the unruly woman—the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of a man. As

17 “Nothing” can be understood here as both no words and also no-thing, a euphemism for vagina, emphasizing the dual nature of Cordelia's continence.

illogical as it may initially seem, the two crimes—being a scold and being a so-called whore—were frequently conflated. (195)

I have already performed enough of an analysis of Galenic anatomy and physiology for it to be apparent whence this conflation comes, but the point that Boose stresses is that being a scold, being judged as in some way verbally effluent and unruly, was equated with loose sexual morals and was actually *punished* in a similar, or even more heinous, fashion. Scolds, Boose notes, were subject to a range of punishments, from cucking stool dips into cold water to cart parades around town, a punishment which, notes Boose, was normally reserved only for “capital offenders” on their way to death (190).

The punishment of the cucking stool seems oddly appropriate if considered in the light of my earlier exploration of the association of women and water. Not only a source of public humiliation, the cucking stool ritual forced a woman to come into actual physical contact with the perceived fluidity of her bodily nature. Adding further nuance to the term, the OED notes that to “cuck” something is “to throw or to cast” but that it can mean, more specifically, “to void excrement.” Often, notes Boose, the cucking stool was actually made from a privy stool, adding yet another association with bodily continence to the ordeal (185). As Paster reminds us, “[i]n both [liquid expressiveness, excessive verbal fluency] the issue is women's bodily self control or, more precisely, the representation of a particular type of uncontrol as a function of gender” (25). This “uncontrol” was remedied for women in much the same way that one would remedy a dog's urinary indiscretions—rub its nose in it, and hope it learns its lesson.

But what happens when the organizer, the bond-builder, the patriarch, fails to recognize the threat posed by uncontrol and actually, in a horrendous misreading, infers instead a lack of

content due to a lack of leakiness? What happens to the female-body-as-gift when the one who should be keeping the valued treasure under lock and key decides that its contents must be poured out on the table for his own counting pleasure? When Cordelia answers her father's gratuitous request for a verbal profession of love—"I love your majesty/ According to my bond, no more nor less"(I.i.92-93)—she does so with plain and honest truth, and her words are in keeping with ideas of gift-based kinship. Had Cordelia expressed the sentiment that she "love[d] her father all," she would have been invoking the incestuous possibility¹⁸ which kinship building, at its most fundamental level, seeks to obviate (I.i.104). Anticipating her impending gifting from father to husband, Cordelia notes: "Haply when I shall wed,/ That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry/ Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (I.i.100-102). It is only Lear who finds this answer to be unacceptable, and the punishment that he exacts strips Cordelia (and her dowry) to the bone. Kent calls this misjudgment madness, noting that Cordelia "does not love [Lear] least,/Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds/ Reverb no hollowness¹⁹" (I.i.153-155). Happily for Cordelia, France too sees the gross error and decides, even though, as Lear says, "her price is fallen," that he will "seize upon" the "unprized" and "precious maid" and take her for his wife and queen (I.i.198, 254, 261).

Backing up a bit in the text, we can make the greatest sense of Kent's sentiment by examining containers that *do* reverb a hollowness, namely, Goneril and Regan. Although Lear

18 In *A Thousand Acres*, author Jane Smiley picks up on this perversion of father-daughter dynamics and actually establishes an incestuous past between Larry (Lear) and his daughters Ginny (Goneril) and Rose (Regan). Also, scholars Lynda Boose ("The Father of the Bride") and Coppelia Kahn ("The Absent Mother in *King Lear*") address the incestuous overtones of Lear's initial interactions with his daughters.

19 It is not until V.iii.270-1 that Lear recognizes this as a positive quality: "Her voice was ever soft,/ Gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman."

admittedly goads them on, inviting turgid professions of adoration, Goneril and Regan both profess to give to Lear more love than is available for the taking, and their incontinent display of false “mettle” reveals to everyone but Lear the emptiness of their hearts²⁰ (I.i.69). Although not (yet) scolds, Goneril and Regan do show themselves to be quite loose at the tongue, and besides their eventual capacity to scold Lear to the point of childish tears, this looseness forebodes both sisters' later adulterous sexual openness to Edmund. Lear's first misstep, then, before his blindness to the honor and devotion of Cordelia, is his misdiagnosis²¹ of Goneril's and Regan's filial logorrhea as a show of their true content, of their value to him as both a king and as father.

Just as Kent sees the true nature of Cordelia, however, so too does Cordelia see the true nature of her sisters. Before parting, Cordelia tells Goneril and Regan that “like a sister [she is] most loath to call/ [Their] *faults* as they are named” and that “Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,/ Whose covert *faults* at last with shame derides” (I.i.272-273, 282-283, emphasis mine). Even the fool recognizes, in the mock trial, that “[Goneril's/Regan's] boat hath a leak” (III.vi.26). Although Lear has taken the pouring-out as proof-of-worth, Cordelia, like the fool, knows Goneril's and Regan's leakiness to be a fault—“a lack,” “a blamable quality or feature,” “a crack,” especially as concerns, as Gloucester intimates earlier in his conversation with Kent,

20 In his introduction to the Arden *King Lear*, R.A. Foakes notes that, in an earlier version of the play (*King Leir*) the characters Gonorill and Ragan are given an unfair heads-up that their father is about to test their loyalty and so, unlike Cordilla, are able to prepare their speeches (97). However, Foakes also notes that Shakespeare's version “turned a tragicomedy into a tragedy, selecting only what would contribute to his bleaker and more powerful vision of the story,” so my focus remains on the tragic irony of Lear's familial choices (99).

21 See Kaara L. Peterson's “Historica Passio: Early Modern Medicine, King Lear, and Editorial Practice” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.1 (Spring 2006)) for Lear's misdiagnosis of his own affliction as *hysterica passio*, or “The Mother”—a disease relegated to women only.

an open vagina²² (OED). Because Lear lacks the insight, because he lacks the ability to connect Cordelia's verbal continence to her civilized self control, he attributes the “fault” to her instead (O most small fault,/ How ugly did'st thou in Cordelia show” (I.i.258)); he interprets her failure to flatter him, to provide him the wasteful fluency which he seeks, as a fault in her economic viability.

“Mend your speech a little,” Lear advises Cordelia, “Lest you mar your fortunes” (I.i.94-95). The idea of “mending” a woman's speech is also touched upon in Boose's essay. The cucking stool and the cart were only two of a number of humiliating contraptions employed for the punishment and correction of verbally wayward women; the correction that Lear would give Cordelia, figuratively at least, is the scold's bridle [See Appendix D]. “If the chastity belt was an earlier design to prevent entrance into one aperture of the deceitfully open female body, the scold's bridle, preventing exit from another, might be imagined as a derivative inversion of that same obsession” (Boose 204). The bridle usually consisted of a cage-like contraption that went over the woman's head, a bit that was placed in the mouth to prevent speech, and often, a lead with which her husband could “drive” her through town. Lear's misstep is that he seeks to mend that which is not broken; while the bridle is meant to silence, he uses it in the hopes of bringing forth more words. For this misstep, for the misjudgment of all three of his daughters, it is Lear who eventually parades around like a scold, bellowing at his daughter's injustices and cucking himself into his own river of tears.

In *King Lear*, as in *Hamlet*, there is a sense throughout the play of a great deal of dis-ease about women in general—not just as a result of Cordelia's perceived transgression. As Boose

22 “Do you smell a fault?” (I.i.15)

reminds us, “[t]his particular collocation of female transgressions [verbal and sexual effluency] constructs women as creatures whose bodily margins and penetrable orifices provide culture with a locus for displaced anxieties about the vulnerability of the social community, the body politic” (195). As in the other plays, the body politic in *Lear* is in a state of flux and of transformation, due not only to natural and inevitable ordeals of succession, but also because, within the succession, there is some deal of misjudgment or misdoing which sets in motion the tragic hero's loss of fortune. Lear's fortune takes several nosedives over the course of the play, and each time it does, the misogyny and disgust become more and more palpable. When Lear realizes that Cordelia's transgression pales in comparison to the treatment he receives at the hands of Goneril and Regan—who mean to strip him even more than he has already foolishly stripped himself—he refers to them as birds of prey (I.iv.254, II.ii.324), he wishes upon them either sterility or ungrateful children (I.iv.266-281), and he calls them serpents (I.iv.280, II.ii.350).

As in *Hamlet*, this correlation between misogyny and tragic loss of fortune stems at least partly from the idea of Fortune as a feminine entity, or more specifically, as a strumpet²³. This feminization facilitates an occasional cart-before-horse scenario, obscuring causality, in the mind of the hero, between a woman's actions or state of being and the hero's own fall from grace. When the woman does not cause the loss, the loss is retroactively applied to an imagined fault in the woman. Bamber reminds us that

[f]ortune is a strumpet and when the downward cycle of the wheel sends men out from the manageable old world, they turn on the women in their pain and accuse them of being

23 In II.ii both Hamlet and the First Player call fortune a strumpet, and Rozenkrantz and Guildenstern claim to live in her private parts.

whores...Lear's misogynist outburst is one of the clearest examples of the connection between misfortune and misogyny. The speech beginning 'Down from the waist they are Centaurs' comes after Lear's misfortunes but before there is reason to suspect his daughters of sexual infidelity. It is an expression of what is within him, not a response to events. (15)

For Lear, wandering, mad, and stripped of all but poor Tom and a blinded Gloucester, the anxiety over having prematurely given up his power (which he re-imagines, oddly enough for Gloucester, as his ability to pardon an adulterer) has set him upon the very rim of hell, which he figures as a vagina: "...beneath [the waist] is all the fiend's: there's hell,/ there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning,/ scalding, stench, consumption!" (IV.vi.123-125). For Lear, women in general, but both Regan and Goneril specifically, have become, like Tamora, likerish, devouring wombs.

Although I've asserted that tragic pity, not tragic terror, is the realm of the daughter, Goneril and Regan are certainly the exception to this rule. Like Tamora, they are serpentine and predatory; like Lady Macbeth, they are "breed[ers of]...occasion[s]" for their own empowerment, and abusers of the male ear (*Lear* I.iii.25, II.ii.496-497)—but it is Lear who allows them to be so. Woven throughout his untimely abdication is language which suggests a handing-over not only of throne but also of parenthood. In an effort to facilitate his "[u]n burdened crawl toward death" Lear makes of himself a crawling, powerless child (I.i.40). Although he claims to "disclaim...paternal care" only of Cordelia, in the moment that he hands the coronet to Albany and Cornwall, Lear becomes utterly dependent on the goodwill and hospitality of others, and, bearing his "ass on [his] back o'er the dirt" Lear makes a useless fool of himself (I.iv.154).

Although this point is lost on Lear, it is not lost on his fool: "...thou mad'st thy/ daughters thy mothers...when thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches²⁴" (I.iv.163-165). Through his untimely transference of unchecked power onto Albany and Cornwall—and by extension, onto their wives—Lear creates his own unbridled mothers who, like Lady Macbeth and Tamora, destroy and consume until there is nothing, including their own lives, left. In the end, Albany surveys the bodies of Goneril and Regan and declares, "This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble/ Touches us not with pity..." (V.iii.230-231). As noted earlier, that which terrifies causes deathly horror and is often associated with shaking and shivering. Like the mothers and wives, Goneril and Regan are insatiable consumers, and for that reason, they represent the ever-present threat of death to those around them. Cordelia, pitiful in that she is undeserving of either her banishment or her murder, represents a perversion of order. Upon seeing her body—the unvalued and now-emptied gift—Kent despairs, "Is this the promised end?" (III.v.261).

"FAULT[S] TO NATURE": Shakespeare's Leaky Men

"...the unrepresentable nature of death is linked with that other unrepresentable—original abode but also last resting place for dead souls in the beyond—which, for mythical though, is constituted by the female body."

--Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror

"Death, at least" notes Walter Foreman, "is common to the endings of Shakespeare's tragedies. However different the particular forms disaster takes in these plays, there is always

24 Coppelia Kahn's "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*" provides further insight into Lear's relationship with his daughters for those interested in a psychoanalytic approach.

death—death of the central figures, the tragic individuals, and often others whose lives were closely bound up with the lives of the central figures” (2). Whether Shakespeare's tragic characters take their own lives, are killed in combat or duel, are heinously murdered, or are simply surprised by nature, and whether they wish for death, run from it, or approach it with ambivalence, in the end, they all die.²⁵ In his book *The Music of the Close*, Foreman performs a teleological study of Shakespearean tragedy, examining the forces that drive Shakespeare's characters to their pitiful and terrifying deaths, paying close attention to disorder as a tragic trope. Whereas comedy²⁶ is concerned with preservation, possibility, and proliferation, tragedy shows us the stark opposite; it is concerned with disorder, a disorder that “tests the limits of human experience” and leaves us with “a sense of the human possibilities we have lost in losing the tragic hero” (6).

As I have stressed earlier, loss of life in tragedy is not as simple as the death of one man or woman—with one character dies a world of potential and of possibility, both for family and for state. In the end, the hero is left without a legacy—his disorder will be replaced by a new order, and he will be forgotten. Foreman highlights the anxiety of utter self-negation in an examination of what he calls “dramatic self-assertion” (47). Because Hamlet is fruitless, and because he will never rule Denmark, he admonishes Horatio to “draw [his] breath in pain/ To tell [Hamlet's] story” (V.ii.337-338), and because Coriolanus fears his great deeds will be

25 I have not considered *Troilus and Cressida* in the course of this paper, but it should be noted, as it is generally considered a tragedy, that the play does not contain Troilus' death, only his hope for that eventuality.

26 Foreman notes the following of comedy: “At the end of the play structured by comic energy we tend to have a sense of a productive community being established and a sense that what lies ahead for this community is health, growth, fertility, and a free harmony among its members—a harmony that has been achieved by the energy of the best in the community, not a harmony imposed on it by survivors...” (8).

overshadowed by the circumstances surrounding his death, he reminds mockingly that “If [they] have writ their annals true, 'tis there/ That like an eagle in a dovecote, [he]/ Fluttered [their] Volsces in Corioles” (V.vi.112-114). Likewise Othello, when confronted with his crime, pleads, “I pray you, in your letters...Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,/ Nor set down aught in malice”; Othello fears that he will be painted a villain for his trespass against Desdemona, and he knows that his saga will be penned solely by the words of others (V.ii.340-343). For each of these heroes, the only part of them that will live on is the story that is told about them by those who have survived (Foreman 47-49). In the face of death, these heroes grapple for the assurance of a fruitful, though intangible, legacy.

To die is to expire, literally “to breathe one's last breath”; it to exhaust one's own body, “to draw out or forth a humour” (OED). This both morbid and sexual²⁷ drawing-out of humor, of soul, of life-force, highlights one last quality of tragedy that must be explored: the leakiness of the hero. So far I have made the argument that, by virtue of their social construction as leaky vessels, women embody the spillage and loss experienced by the heroes, but it is the men, not the women, who are meant to be the fools of fortune in Shakespearean tragedy. We feel terror because of, or pity for, the women who harm or are harmed in the course of the action, but, as intimated in my earlier Aristotelian definition of tragedy, the representation is of men's actions—the loss, in the end, is theirs. At the close of the play, our catharsis of emotion will have (ostensibly) been brought about by the terror and pity that we have experienced as witnesses to the plight of the hero, and only to a lesser degree by that which we have felt for the secondary characters.

27 In 16th and 17th Century writing, to die is also “to experience a sexual orgasm” (OED).

In *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies*, Phillipa Berry touches on two of my earlier points, that women are leaky and “open-ended” and that, for drama, this relegation of incontinence to women is complicated because, on the Elizabethan and the Jacobean stage, there were no biological females present. Berry notes,

Shakespearean tragedy converts this physical insubstantiality of its female characters into an immense figurative resource, in its recurring focus upon a sexuality whose definition in terms of lack or negation—producing punning speculations upon a woman's devouring (genital) 'eye,' and her equivalence with 'nothing'--often appears to call its gendered specificity into question. (10)

Although leakiness is highly feminized due to its fundamental association with the female body, it, unlike Lear's misdiagnosed case of “the mother²⁸” can be (and for tragedy, must be) exhibited in the bodies of men as well. In this final chapter, I would like both to examine a few representations of the incontinent male body and to consider the ramifications of this association for the fate of the hero. I will explore what a breach of container means for those who, unlike women, are not “built” to leak and who do not have a surplus of bodily humor to lose.

* * *

“To break,” writes Gail Kern Paster, “is to bleed shamefully, to be shamefully open, to be revealed as bearing other than patriarchal blood. Patriarchal blood in such a formation is the blood one cannot bleed, the blood that cannot be spilled without changing its nature” (103-104). Perhaps the most prevalent of container breaches in Shakespearean tragedy is the wound—the unnatural opening of the body by force, the “separation of the tissues of the body” which makes

28 See footnote 21.

vulnerable the soft and damp insides (OED). While a certain amount of blood loss is important to the cultivation of oneself as a man of action and of courage, it is only the voluntary wound—and by extension, the scar, the *reminder* of these hurts—that is privileged as powerful. The “unrecuring wound,” as detailed by Marcus in *Titus Andronicus*, on the other hand, is the kind that a deer (like Lavinia) receives before it hides itself in the woods to die (III.i.91). It is the passive, involuntary wounding that feminizes in that it causes the body to pour forth all of its precious humors. When Coriolanus assures Titus Lartius that “the blood [he] drop[s] is rather physical [from footnote: “therapeutic”]/ Than dangerous to [him]” and when Volumnia hopes, almost greedily, that her son has received many wounds, they are both speaking specifically about the type of wound which “become[s]” a man (I.v.18-19, II.i.122). These non-fatal wounds leave scars, and these scars speak of great deeds. Lamenting what he considers to be a gross and unnecessary custom, Coriolanus details the duties of the scar:

To brag unto them, thus I did, and thus,
Show them th'unaching scars which I should hide,
As if I had receiv'd them for the hire
Of their breath only!” (II.ii.147-150).

While a gash, open and free-flowing, represents feminized penetration and a loss of “the blood one cannot bleed,” a scar speaks to the penetration and the draining of *other* bodies, of the preservation of one's own life through the effeminizing extinction of the enemy's. Scars are mementos of death overcome. In a disturbingly gleeful count of Coriolanus' scars, Menenius notes, “Now it's twenty-seven: every gash was an enemy's/ grave,” evoking a grotesque image of Coriolanus' fallen foes sealed in by his healing skin, much as dead bodies are sealed in by

earthen graves (II.i.154-155). Although “gash” is not documented as slang for “vagina” until 1893, its nature as a “cleft” “made in the flesh” suggests that the correlation might not have been lost on Early Modern viewers; no cognitive leap is required for an audience who so closely associated the womb with the tomb (OED).

Of course not all male bleeding is life-extinguishing—not all of it represents loss or spillage. In addition to therapeutic wounds, such as those received in battle by a triumphant Coriolanus, tragedy also evokes images of sacrificial, or Christlike wounds—wounds, neither pitiful nor terrifying, through which blood is given willingly and by which life is granted, not taken away. Although obviously not a Christian, Decius makes reference to this type of life-sustaining blood in his (mis)interpretation of Calphurnia's dream:

Your statue spouting blood in many pipes
In which so many smiling Romans bathed
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance. (II.ii 85-89)

This is blood that is at once masculine and Christlike, controlled and sacrificial. This notion of control is what, for Paster, separates male and female bleeding: men bleed voluntarily, women bleed uncontrollably. But, as Paster points out, Decius has misspoken; this is not the blood that is drawn from Caesar.

Because Caesar has usurped so much power, a conspiracy is formed to relieve him of it. Cassius complains, “Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish”; patient endurance of the will and command of a fellow Roman has put the conspirators in a subservient position that they do

not appreciate, and the only way to ameliorate the situation is to find some way to reverse the gender dynamic (I.iii.84). Paster notes that “the conspirators can remake themselves, it would seem, only by regendering Caesar, displacing their own sense of gender indeterminacy onto the body of their adversary and renegotiating the differences between themselves and Caesar in the diacritical terms of the bodily canons” (100). Unfortunately for Caesar, this renegotiation involves, not one, but multiple (historically, twenty-three) gashes. The conspirators partake in a “necessary construction of grotesqueness²⁹ in Caesar” in order “to maintain a sense of somatic integrity, primarily by distinguishing between their own physical self control and Caesar's lack of it” (101,102). By constructing Caesar as a leaky vessel, and by making manifest Caesar's lack of self-control, the conspirators simultaneously make a woman of him and rob him of his life.

I have chosen Caesar for the bulk of my examination on wounds for perhaps the same reason as Paster. I find Caesar to embody womanly leakiness more so than any of the other tragic figures, and in a larger variety of ways. Like the devouring mother, Caesar has taken more than his share and represents a force that must be squelched. The conspirators, like Titus, imagine that what they are doing is for the good of society, and that by devouring the devourer, they will usher in a new and better order. Caesar is not only figured as the mother though; he is also figured, in much the same way as Ophelia, as the daughter, as the “gift.” In and of itself, Caesar's dead body has little meaning. Because he is covered with wounds “[w]hich like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips/ To beg the voice and utterance of [Antony's, but also Brutus'] tongue,” and not with scars, he cannot speak for himself (III.i.259-261). The value of Caesar's

29 For further reading on the grotesque body, see Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*.

body depends on the tongue put into it, much like Ophelia and Cordelia, whose value and gift-ability reside in their fathers' words, deeds, and blessings.

Paster notes that “[e]ven to receive Caesar's body from the conspirators as a token of political exchange and denial of hostile intent suggests Antony's acceptance of its use value as female and his own new patriarchal responsibilities to it” (110). Antony, who “shall receive the benefit of [Caesar's] dying, a place in the commonwealth,” becomes husband-figure to the body, deciding how he will voice the wounds and what he will use the body-gift to accomplish (III.ii.42-43). Though he says he comes “not to praise” Caesar, he does so anyway, poking his tongue, as it were, into the gaping wounds and performing a bloody interpretation, much the same as Titus does when he reads the motions of Lavinia's stumps, or like Marcus, whose staff, thrust into his niece's bleeding tongueless mouth/wound, reveals the names of the crime and of the perpetrators (III.ii.75). He claims, “I only speak right on:/I tell you that which you yourselves do know,/ Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor dumb mouths/ And bid them speak for me” (II.ii.216-219). Like Titus, Antony is an interpreter of “martyred signs,” but also like Titus, he gives more of a reading *into* than a reading *of* (Titus III.ii.36). Caesar's body, reduced to a cracked and drained container, is only what men would make of it.

Not all woundings in Shakespearean tragedy involve great bloody gashes stuffed with the tongues of men; some woundings are less literal but just as powerfully destructive. For instance, Lear's wound is a metaphysical crack that divides his head—like his crown—in two, leaving a vacancy in the middle. “Now thou art an O without a/figure...I am a fool, thou/ art nothing” (I.iv.183-184). Because Lear cleaves his kingdom in twain, giving the halves to his older daughters, and because he neglects Cordelia, whose nature as a “balm” has the power to heal and

to restore the severed kingdom, he is left not with a united whole but with severed and scattered parts (I.i.216). The fool enlightens him:

Why, after I have cut the egg i'the middle and eat
up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou
clovest thy crown i'the middle and gav'st away both
parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt.
Thou had'st little wit in thy bald crown when thou
gav'st thy golden one away. (I.iv.151-156)

As I mentioned earlier in my Aristotelian definition of tragedy, characters may “act knowingly,” “be about to act, in full knowledge, but not do it,” or they may “do the dreadful deed in ignorance” (4.1.2 28-31). What the fool is trying so hard to express to Lear is that, in ignorance, he has acted foolishly and has breached his own bodily container, leaving a void where once there was a great king.

Lear's failure to predict or to perceive the consequences of his actions most likely stems, if not from his own senility, then from his self-identification as a sacrificial body. In actuality he *is* a sacrificial body, but not in the way that he thinks. Lear sees himself as a Christ-the-mother, nourishing his daughters with his life-giving blood; the problem is that he, unlike Christ, does not have an unending supply of blood, so Goneril and Regan suck him dry. Lear calls Goneril and Regan “pelican daughters,” implying that he, by extension, is the pelican parent. Lear figures himself as “...the self-sacrificial emblem drawn from natural lore—the mother pelican, which, Christlike, pecks her own breast to feed her young” (Paster 107) [See Appendix E]. According to the writings of 6th century church patriarch Saint Epiphanius of Constantinople, the

mother pelican accidentally smothers her babies with kisses and kills them. After three days, she feels so much remorse that she pecks open her own chest and bathes the babies in blood, reviving them. After they are revived, the chicks feed off of the mother's sacrificial blood (Plantin).

Perhaps Lear sees his gifts of land and title as a sacrifice, but even the fool knows that the pelican daughters have drunk too freely of their father. He has not offered so much as they have taken, and they have taken all. Acting in ignorance, Lear opens himself up to leakage, a leakage more akin to accidental suicide than to a voluntary masculine (or Christlike) shedding of blood.

* * *

In his *Directory for Midwives*, Nicholas Culpeper sets out six rules for post-parturient women. His fifth rule states: “Let her the first three days (and longer if she be weak) avoid light. Her labor weakens her Eyes exceedingly by an Harmony between her womb and them” (121). There is no limit, it seems, to the number of orifices that are connected within the bodies of women, specifically to those directly linked to the womb or vagina. Because of this connection between the womb and the eyes, we can explore another incarnation of leakiness for Shakespeare's tragic characters: their tears. Paster notes that “increased expectations of bodily refinement and of physical and emotional self-control” arose in sixteenth-century Europe and that one of the outward signs of emotional un-control, crying, was considered “passive and feminine” in either sex (14, 9). Shakespeare is well aware of the ability of some to feign crying (Othello's “Oh devil, devil!/ If that the earth could teem with woman's tears/ Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile” (IV.i.244-246)), but the tears of particular interest here, men's tears, are not crocodile tears; they are shameful episodes of emotion-driven incontinence provoked by the witnessing of terrible or pitiable sights.

Shakespeare makes the status of tears quite clear. Volumnia says that Coriolanus leaves them in his wake (II.i.158) and Coriolanus says to his wife that none but “widows in Corioles” and “mothers that lack sons” should shed tears (II.i.177, 178). Tears are for the defeated, not the victorious; they are for those who have been penetrated, effeminized, or compromised bodily. Tears are for the losers and for women, so for men, they are a source of shame (as Coriolanus later learns when, on the eve of his defeat, Aufidius calls him “...thou boy of tears” (V.vi.100)). Lear also learns of this shame when, after cursing his eldest with either sterility or ungrateful children he is reduced to tears:

I'll tell thee.*[To Goneril]*Life and death! I am asham'd
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
Th' untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee!- Old fond eyes,
BewEEP this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
To temper clay. (I.iv.288-296)

Lear talks about crying like it is something violent that “breaks” out from his body, and this leakage causes him great shame. No matter how hard he fights against it, he cannot win. The language of struggle is further emphasized in his admonition to his own eyes. They, not he, are the leaky bits, and he will tear them out if that is what it takes to stop the tears and the shame of

effeminate incontinence. Lear tries to regain control by hurling a curse at Goneril, but unlike his words, his tears are not his to control.

Hamlet also experiences the shame associated with tears. In the beginning of the play, he has one mission and one mission only: kill Claudius. His hatred for his uncle-father is honed into homicidal brooding upon his revelation that Claudius actually murdered Old Hamlet, his father. Though intent upon drawing forth Claudius' blood, Hamlet seems, at every turn, overcome with tears, compromised in bodily integrity by his inability to cease mourning for his father. Near the opening of the play, Claudius reprimands Hamlet's lack of decorum:

...'tis *unmanly* grief;

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,

A heart *unfortified*, a mind impatient,

An understanding simple and unschool'd;

For what we know must be, and is as common

As any the most vulgar thing to sense,

Why should we in our peevish opposition

Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a *fault* to heaven,

A *fault* against the dead, a *fault to nature*,

To reason most absurd... (I.ii.94-103, emphasis mine)

In this passage, Claudius spells out Hamlet's breach of decorum quite clearly; he is not carrying himself like a man. The repetition of the word "fault" and the use of the word "unfortified" give us a better idea of the particular accusation made against Hamlet. His heart has not been "provided with a means of defense," meaning that *he* is at fault for the faults, for the "unsound or

damaged place[s],” for the “deficiency,” the “lack” and the “error” (OED). This sad disposition, claims Claudius, could be remedied if only Hamlet would man-up and restore the defenses, the natural manly fortifications, to his heart. Hamlet seems doomed to a life of tears, however, because in his mind, he's mourning for two (“Within a month/ Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears,/ Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,/ She married” (I.ii.153)). Although the tears seem to dry up before the end of the play, Hamlet's preoccupation with his own leaking, in place of his ability to inflict swift and timely leakage on Claudius, results in his death in an unnecessary duel.

Tears are, according to *Romeo and Juliet's* Friar Lawrence, “womanish,” “wild,” “unreasonable,” and evocative of the “unseemly woman” (III.iii.109, 110, 111). An unseemly woman is an “unbecoming, unfitting, indecent” woman (OED). She represents a breach of decorum either within her category as woman or because of it. Also, because these lines are meant to be spoken, not read, we may also consider women to be un-seam-ly, or possessing the qualities of an unclosed wound. Friar Lawrence juxtaposes the unseemly/un-seam-ly woman with the “seeming man,” a being who at once appears to be male and, because of his seam-ing, should not suffer humoral incontinence (111). One such “un-seam-ing” occurs in the final scene of *Othello* when, caught off guard by the revelation of Iago's ruse, the Moor is reduced to tears, though his eyes are “unused to the melting mood” (V.ii.359). The unseaming is then carried to a literal level when, in an effort to avoid the exposure of his “fault” to the public of Venice, Othello unseams his own body with a knife (V.ii.346).

Shakespeare gives us perhaps no better picture of the correlation between unseaming and tears than in *Titus Andronicus*. In the beginning of the play, we are introduced to noble and aged

Titus, who, like Lear, passes the torch without much thought toward the repercussions of his choice. Though he has little pity for Tamora who sheds “a mother's tears in passion for her son” Alarbus, who Titus orders away for sacrifice, Titus soon finds himself in the very same predicament (I.i.108-109). When Quintus and Martius are framed for Bassianus' murder, Titus entreats,

High emperor, upon my feeble knee
I beg this boon, with tears not lightly shed,
That this fell fault of my accursed sons,
Accursed if the fault be proved in them,— (II.ii.288-291)

Although Titus is genuinely distressed, he imagines that his tears, “not lightly shed,” have a higher currency than Tamora's. A woman is naturally leaky, but Titus, prostrate before the young emperor, is opening himself up, un-seam-ing and making himself vulnerable in an attempt give his plea weight. Because Tamora has vowed that Titus will feel her pain, his entreaties to her husband, Saturninus, do not succeed.

Titus' un-seam-ing of himself for the emperor makes way for a much larger emotional effluvium two scenes later when he pleads to the judges and the tribunes to spare the lives of Quintus and Martius. Because simple tears have failed him, Titus completely and utterly un-seams himself, begging and wailing in a manner inappropriate even for a woman and using as currency his own noble reputation which, up until this point, he has humbly ignored.

Hear me, grave fathers! noble tribunes, stay!
For pity of mine age, whose youth was spent
In dangerous wars, whilst you securely slept;

For all my blood in Rome's great quarrel shed;
For all the frosty nights that I have watch'd;
And for these bitter tears, which now you see
Filling the aged wrinkles in my cheeks; (II.iii.1-7)

Titus builds up his status as a warrior, as a protector, as an endurer of much suffering for the good of Rome³⁰ in the hopes that these facts will give his tears more weight and make them seem even less lightly shed. He continues,

For two and twenty sons I never wept,
Because they died in honour's lofty bed.
[Lieth down; the Judges, &c., pass by him, and Exeunt]
For these, these, tribunes, in the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears:
Let my tears stanch the earth's dry appetite;
My sons' sweet blood will make it shame and blush. (10-15)

Titus does not weep because his sons are going to die. He weeps because they are going to die wrongfully and without honor. He offers his tears as proof of injustice and as a sacrifice in place of his sons' blood. In an almost Christlike gesture, he is willing to wring his own body dry as long as his sons will be spared. Titus imagines that, because he has “never wept before,” the tribunes will recognize his sincerity (25). Naturally, they do not, and the only thing that Titus accomplishes is a complete breach of container, one that leaves his mind a void to be filled only

30 Othello expresses similar sentiments in V.ii.349.

with thoughts of revenge, so much so that, after killing Chiron, Demetrius, and Tamora, he has no other reason to keep on living.

Mourning also causes Laertes to weep, but because he is spurred to immediate action, and because that action facilitates the restoration of order, his tears are of a different cast. Returning in a rage to avenge the death of his father, Laertes is confronted with Ophelia, who has recently become “divided from her self and her fair judgement” (IV.v.84-85). Although the king has charged Horatio with keeping a close watch on Ophelia, she manages, after her encounter with her brother, to drown herself. Laertes attempts to fortify his heart against mourning in preparation for his confrontation with Hamlet:

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick—nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will [*Weeps*]. When these are gone,
The woman will be out. Adieu, my lord,
I have a speech o'fire that fain would blaze,
But that this folly drowns it. (IV.vii.183-189)

Like Lear, Laertes imagines that he has the ability to forbid his eyes from crying, and like Lear, he fails at the task. Laertes knows that mourning entails the trick, or “unpleasant habit,” of crying, but he also knows that, with any “woman” in him, he will lack the vital heat necessary for his attack on Hamlet (OED). His crying, then, is involuntary, but he re-figures it as a moment's necessity and does not let it postpone what must be done. The same can be said for Macduff who, upon hearing that his family has been slain, notes that he “could play the woman

with [his] eyes,” but that such un-seaming would be but an “intermission” to what must be done (*Macbeth* IV.iii.230, 232). Both Laertes and Macduff are able to transform the tearful dirge into a “tune [which] goes manly,” eschewing passive lament and tearful complaint in favor of bloody revolution (235). Unlike Titus, Lear, and Othello, in re-seaming themselves, Laertes and Macduff reclaim their masculine continence.

* * *

“By representing pitiable, terrifying events,” asserts Richard Janko, “tragedy arouses pity, terror, and other painful emotions in the audience, for each according to his own emotional capacity, and so stimulates these emotions as to relieve them by giving them moderate and harmless exercise, thereby bringing the audience...nearer to virtue in their characters...” (xix-xx). To Linda Bamber's earlier-mentioned fascination with the fact that comedy and tragedy produce such vastly different flavors of female characters, I would say that, conceiving of tragedy within an Aristotelian construct, there is no more effective way to elicit pity and terror from an audience than by seating in it the characters in whom the tragic heroes have the most material or economic stock. One cannot, oblivious to the conventions of genre, read Shakespeare looking for him to be a feminist or a misogynist; the issue is hardly so cut and dry. Rather, one must look to see how Shakespeare's culturally influenced characterizations of gender work to complement the genre in which he writes. “Good humor toward the feminine in the comedies,” notes Bamber, “is part of a more general good humor to the general conditions of life” (112). Women in comedies can be more carefree because we, the audience, know that everything will work out alright and that even the stickiest of dilemmas will be resolved by the close. Though we don't know precisely what Aristotle would have comedy accomplish, we do know that less of the

hero's fate resides in the hands of a woman in a comedy and that comic women, in general, are free to make their own choices with little lasting consequence. This is not so for tragedy. Because it is concerned with the fall of a great hero, and because suffering is most intense when it stems from close familial relationships, tragedy almost necessitates that women—wives, mothers, daughters—be a source of strife and of conflict. When we examine what a man has to lose, the two most fundamental items are his life and his bloodline. Who better to sabotage a hero's life than his scheming wife—his “dearest chuck” who has both his ear and his admiration (*Macbeth* III.ii.45)? Who better to evoke a man's anxiety over the successful negotiation of kinship bonds than a virgin daughter who, unbeknownst to her father “admit[s]...discourse to [her] beauty” in the form of love notes (*Hamlet* III.i.106-107).

I would like to end with a brief examination of what, for me, is the most complete synthesis of the tragic hero and the leaky female body. I want to look at the dying words of Othello, Lear, Coriolanus, and Hamlet for an examination of the moment when the male body expresses its costliest and most highly feminized incontinence: the “O.” Phillipa Berry notes the following:

Renaissance anxieties about rhetorical excess or *dilatatio* often compare this performative surplus to the 'dilated' body of the whore or harlot. In their persistent implication that the body is the ultimate referent of all language, as not only its origin but also its end, in the final speechlessness of death, the multiple puns that are embedded within Shakespeare's tragic language destabilize that authority which is typically enacted in the rhetorical excesses of his male protagonists. (49)

As I have already noted, in women, rhetorical excess is linked to sexual excess, and openness at one end is indicative of openness at the others, of a general and threatening sense of either incontinence or compromised contents. It seems only fitting then that when a hero has lost everything he had or ever could be, when he's lost both his past and his potential, that he be reduced to a literal embodiment of nothing.

When Hamlet realizes that he has received a mortal wound, he begins a barrage of "O's": "O, I could tell you--/ But let it be"; "O God, Horatio, what a wounded name...shall I leave behind me!"; "O, I die, Horatio" (V.ii.321, 328-329, 336). Though Hamlet's last words are given as "The rest is silence", in and of itself a powerful negation, the Folio includes an additional "O, o, o" as the hero's last verbalizations (V.ii.342). Likewise, just before his death, Lear, overcome with the pile of bodies that has amassed, cries "No, no, no life!...O thou'lt come no more,/ Never, never, never, never, never," and then, just before he re-fixes his gaze on Cordelia's body, he cries, "O, o, o, o" (V.ii.304, 306-307, 308). When Coriolanus realizes that his fate is sealed, he holds Volumnia's hand and cries, "O mother, mother!...O my mother, mother O!..O...O mother, wife! (V.iii.182, 185, 187, 199). For Othello, whose very name is a harbinger of a double-negation, the "O's," or what Maurice Charney aptly calls the "O-groans" simply abound (qtd. in Berry 49). In the last scene of Othello, there are forty O-groans, compared to twenty in the last scene of Lear and twelve in that of Hamlet, and the Moor laments his mistake with two separate ejaculations of "O, o, o!" and with the equally linguistically effective "Oh fool! fool! fool!" (V.ii.199, 285, 328).

The cry of "O," like the utterance of "nothing," shapes the mouth into a vaginal gape, signifying loss, a lack of bodily control and continence. In this dilation, the hero involuntarily

offers up his own helpless soul. These O-groans can also be likened to orgasms; in each instance, in both orgasm and in death, heat and soul leave the body—in one instance the whole soul, in another, just enough to generate new life (Laqueur 46). In this “O” we experience both terror at seeing a hero cry out against approaching orgasm/death and pity at hearing a newborn's helpless wail. It takes us at once to the womb and to the tomb, embodying in an instance, in one utterance, the fleetingness of human existence and the inevitability of death.

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APPENDIX A



Woodcut, *Uterus, cervix, and vagina*, by Jan Stephen van Calcar; commissioned by Andreas Vesalius in 1534 for *De humani corporis fabrica libri septum*.

APPENDIX B



Painting, *Elizabeth I: The Sieve Portrait*, by Quentin Metsys the Younger, c1583.

APPENDIX C



Woodcut, Untitled, by Heinrich Vogtherr II, Germany, c.1540.

APPENDIX D



Illustration, *Scold's Bridle*, by T.N. Brushfield, England, 1858.

APPENDIX E



Copper plate, *The Pelican in Her Piety*, by Pieter van der Borcht, Antwerp, c1564.