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**The Argument Against Tragedy in Feminist Dramatic
Re-Vision of the Plays of Euripides and Shakespeare**

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November 1998**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**



Linda Avril Burnett 1998



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**For my four beautiful nephews, Jay, Connor, Alexander,
and Liam, and my bold little niece, Meghan**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the arguments against tragedy offered by feminist playwrights in their "re-visions" of the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare.

In the first part, I maintain that feminist dramatic re-vision is one manifestation of an unrecognized tradition of women's writing in which criticism is expressed through fiction. I also argue that the project of feminist dramatic re-vision embodies a feminist "new poetics."

In the second part, I examine the aesthetics and politics of tragedy from a feminist perspective. Feminist arguments against tragedy are, in effect, arguments against patriarchy. But it is the theorists and critics of tragedy—not the playwrights—who are unequivocally aligned with patriarchy. Playwrights like Euripides and Shakespeare can be seen to destabilize tragedy in their plays.

In the third part, I show how recent feminist playwrights (Jackie Crossland, Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Deborah Porter, Caryl Churchill and David Lan, Maureen Duffy, Alison Lyssa, The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, Joan Ure, Margaret Clarke, and Ann-Marie MacDonald) counter tragedy by extrapolating from the arguments presented by Euripides and Shakespeare in *The Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*, and by allocating voice and agency to their female protagonists.

RESUMÉ

Cette dissertation examine les arguments contre la tragédie présentés par les écrivains féministes dans leurs "re-visions" des pièces d'Euripide et de Shakespeare.

Dans la première partie, je maintiens que la "re-vision" féministe de la dramatique est une manifestation d'une tradition non reconnue de l'écriture des femmes dans laquelle la critique est exprimée à travers la fiction. Je soutiens aussi que le projet de "re-vision" féministe de la dramatique comporte une "nouvelle poétique" féministe.

Dans la seconde partie, j'examine l'esthétique et la politique de la tragédie d'un point de vue féministe. Les arguments féministes contre la tragédie sont en effet des arguments contre le patriarcat. Mais ce sont les théoriciens et les critiques de la tragédie—non les auteurs—qui sont sans équivoque alignés avec le patriarcat. Des auteurs comme Euripide et Shakespeare peuvent être vus comme déstabilisant la tragédie dans leurs pièces.

Dans la troisième partie, je montre comment les récents auteurs féministes (Jackie Crossland, Dario Fo et Franca Rame, Deborah Porter, Caryl Churchill et David Lan, Maureen Duffy, Alison Lyssa, The Women's Theatre Group et Elaine Feinstein, Joan Ure, Margaret Clarke, et Ann-Marie MacDonald) opposent la tragédie en extrapolant à partir des arguments présentés par Euripide et Shakespeare dans *The Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *King*

Lear, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, et Othello, et en accordant la voix et l'action à leurs protagonistes féminins.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my pleasure to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Leanore Lieblein, my supervisor, for her patience, guidance, and wisdom during the writing of this dissertation. I am also indebted to Professor Michael Bristol for taking the time to sit on two of my project committees, as well as on my thesis examination committee, and for his encouraging response to my work over the past few years; to Professor Myrna Selkirk for her more recent generous response; to Professor Susan Bennett, my external examiner, for her perceptive and helpful response to both my thesis and my postdoctoral project proposal; and to the writers—playwrights, essayists, poets, and novelists—who have inspired me in my work. In being able, as John Donne puts it, "to goe all the way with company, and to take light from others," I have profited enormously.

I also extend my thanks to the colleagues who have provided valuable support in one way or another during the writing of this dissertation: Helen Buss (alias Margaret Clarke) for sending me some years back a copy of her, then unpublished, *Gertude & Ophelia* script and for, more recently, allowing me to interview her; Eugenia Sojka for sending me her unpublished paper on fiction theory; John Baxter for reading and commenting on an early version of some of the material included in this thesis; Ric Knowles for telling me about Elizabeth Burns' "Ophelia" and Joan Ure's *Something in it for Ophelia* and *Something in it for Cordelia*; Rick White for his recommendations with respect to Euripides scholars; Douglas Vaisey, the reference librarian at Saint Mary's University, for his bibliographic research with respect to theatre reviews and interviews with

playwrights; Thomas Trappenberg for his Brecht translation, and Margaret Hastings-James and Loik Jagot for their work on the translation of my Abstract.

Finally, I proffer my thanks and love to my family and friends. The following friends deserve special mention: Jim Olchow, Siobhan McRae, and Bill McRae for their on-going encouragement and willingness to read what I write; Margaret Hastings-James, Shirley Fuchs, Thomas Trappenberg, Adriana McCrea, and Dorota Glowacka for insisting that I really did have to finish this dissertation; Sarah Hubbards for dragging me off to her sunny porch or the market when I needed a break from writing; and Bill Martin for listening to me quite a lot over the past few years.

Every member of my remarkable family deserves my appreciation: my father, Norman Burnett; my mother, Valerie Burnett; my sisters and brothers, Sheree Burnett, Christine Burnett, Diane Nieuwenhuysen, Bob Nieuwenhuysen, Karen Tousignant, Mike Tousignant, Michaela Burnett, Brian Burnett, and Trish Burnett; and my nephews and niece, Jay Gualtieri, Connor Burnett, Alexander Tousignant, Liam Nieuwenhuysen, and Meghan Tousignant. My mother and father, however, merit an extra-special thank-you, my father for those early trips to the public library which fostered my passion for reading, my mother for making it possible for me to take time off from teaching to write this dissertation. It would not have been written otherwise.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Feminist Dramatic Re-Vision and the Call for a Feminist "New Poetics"

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.

—Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," 90

What would become of logocentrism, of the great philosophical systems, of world order in general if the rock upon which they founded their church were to crumble?

If it were to come out in a new day that the logocentric project had always been, undeniably, to found (fund) phallogentrism, to insure for masculine order a rational equal to history itself?

Then all the stories would have to be told differently, the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change hands, bodies, another thinking as yet not thinkable, will transform the functioning of all society.

—Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," 92-93

the problem is in the space women sitting at a table drinking wine from bottles with painted flowers on them saying we must examine the theoretical gains of the decade we must write about our thin layer of culture in order to move it forward the essay is the form the essay is the way to write our new awareness into transformed ideology laying out the argument from start to finish but one says: I can't think in a straight line another: in fiction my imagination lacks; in theory my autobiographical notes destroy the facts

the problem is in the space if the mind works best without those distinctions between reality / theory / fiction, then the space has slipped from which the essay can spring you're repeating yourself says the voice the essay needs logic to be clear to avoid barbarism certain forms must be borrowed from the dominating culture at any rate there's no danger of self-betrayal for you women are excellent at translation women are skilled at stepping into spaces (forms) created by the patriarchal superego and cleverly subverting them

—Gail Scott, *Spaces Like Stairs*, 109-10

The Call for a Feminist "New Poetics"

In *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case calls for a feminist "new poetics."

She views such a poetics as "the basic theoretical project for feminism" in theatre. "New feminist theory," says Case,

would abandon the traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response in order to construct new critical models and methodologies for the drama that would accommodate the presence of women in the art, support their liberation from the cultural fictions of the female gender and deconstruct the valorisation of the male gender. ... This "new poetics" would deconstruct the traditional systems of representation and perception of women and posit women in the position of the subject. (114–115)

In other words, recognizing that traditional literary theory does not, as Andrea Lebowitz asserts, "represent the values and experience of all people, but rather the vested interests of a masculine tradition ... the 'malestream' as opposed to the mainstream" (14), Case outlines a new interpretive model with a twofold purpose: to deconstruct patriarchal paradigms and practices, and to allot voice and agency to women.¹

Although Case's call for a "new poetics" is the most explicit delineation of this project, other feminist dramatic theorists outline similar projects for feminist theatre. Consider, for instance, the work of Carol Thomas Neely, who stresses that "[f]eminist critics must find new ways to talk about gender roles" ("Feminist Modes," 10), and that of Gayle Austin, who urges feminists "to transform dramatic criticism" (20).

In "Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism," Neely identifies three modes of feminist Shakespearean criticism: compensatory, which "focuses on [restoring to] powerful, prominent women ... their virtues, their complexity, and their power, compensating for traditional criticism" (6); justificatory, which acknowledges "the limitations of some women characters ... in the male-defined and male-dominated world of the plays," and then attempts to justify these limitations by "showing how their roles are circumscribed by political, economic, familial, and psychological structures" (7–8); and transformational, which "interrogate[s] the relations between male idealization of and degradation of women, between women as heroines and women as victims, between the patriarchal text and the matriarchal subtext" (9).²

And, in *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*, Austin identifies three stages in the development of a feminist theatre:

1. working within the canon: examining images of women;
2. expanding the canon: focusing on women writers; and
3. exploding the canon: questioning underlying assumptions of an entire field of study, including canon formation. (17)

Neither the criticism of the first stage, with its focus on the male tradition, on examining images of women in plays from the canon (compare Neely's compensatory and justificatory criticism), nor that of the second, with its attempts to re-claim lost plays and uncanonized playwrights, and to encourage new works by women, relies on an innovative approach. Thus, to borrow Deborah Pope's words, despite the insights these critics offer "about the cultural

and ideological bases of literary criteria, they do not challenge the canon—they merely provide another means of interpreting it" (31).

Clearly Austin's third stage and Neely's third mode, however, represent attempts to stake out new interpretive models. Both return to the canon to ask gender-related questions, to "criticize the existing structures and counter them" (Austin, 95). Both recognize that, as Lillian Robinson writes, "while not abandoning our new-found female tradition, we have to return to confrontation with 'the' canon, examining it as a source of ideas, themes, motifs, and myths about the two sexes" ("Treason," 96). Both, though, offer only a suggestion of what this third level of criticism might involve and only hint at the idea of a feminist aesthetics.

Although Neely writes of transforming "traditional criticism," her brief analysis of *Hamlet* "employing the strategies of a third-mode critic" (9, 10) does seem, as Brian Vickers suggests, to depend for its authority on "the mental world of Freudianism" (329). Neely comes closer to depicting what an analysis dependent on a "new poetics" might entail with her remark that, as "a feminist critic of *Hamlet*," she "must 'tell' Ophelia's 'story' and retell Hamlet's in relation to it" ("Feminist Modes," 11).

As for Austin, in a consideration early on in her book of the "shape radical and liberal third-stage criticism might take," she does not point to a feminist poetics. Instead, she suggests that one approach third-stage theorists could take is "to modify some man-made tools, such as semiotics and

deconstruction" (18). And while Austin does propose another approach in her concluding chapter, she does not go too far in her discussion there. After commenting that simply because "most of dramatic history has constructed inaccurate and damaging representations of women does not mean that the trend should continue," she states that she has adopted "a performative stance toward feminist theory and criticism," and intends "to create ... feminist 'theory plays.'" She then offers a one-paragraph summary of one of her theory plays, *Resisting the Birth Mark*, a play that "juxtaposed narrative and dialogue" from Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" with "brief segments of feminist theory and sections that disrupted the narrative" (95-96).

Therefore, while Neely and Austin appear to agree with Case's contention that a new feminist dramatic criticism should "deconstruct the traditional systems ... and posit women in the position of the subject," it is difficult to tell how their third levels of criticism would manage in practice to accomplish this twofold objective. From Neely's brief commentary, it is clear that her proposed re-telling of *Hamlet* should place Ophelia in the subject position. What is not clear is how her re-telling of Shakespeare's play from Ophelia's point of view would function to "deconstruct ... traditional systems."³

And from Austin's summary of her approach, it is easy to see that her theory play should function to deconstruct the patriarchal narrative. It is difficult to see, though, how this play would function to situate women in the subject position. In fact, I am not sure that there is any place in her theory play, despite

what Austin says about countering "existing structures," for, in Gail Scott's words, "reconstructing the historically absent female subject" (75). After all, Austin endorses without reservation Judith Fetterley's concept of the resisting reader, which declares that women "cannot rewrite literary works so that they become [theirs] by virtue of reflecting [their] reality," that all women can do is "accurately name the reality they do reflect" (xxiii). In other words, women can confront and criticize past works, but they cannot counter them.

Both Neely's and Austin's work, however, points to a recent major shift "within feminist theories of theatre," one which Patti P. Gillespie sums up as a move "from women in theatre to theatre in feminism."⁴ This is a shift that corresponds to a move from the study of women in a single discipline to the study of women across disciplines that has occurred in the feminist intellectual community. Thus, Neely's model of feminist Shakespearean criticism borrows from the three-stage models of feminist history propounded by Joan Kelly and Gerda Lerner.⁵ And Austin's study of feminist theatre relies on feminist theory drawn from literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and film.⁶ Clearly, an "important sign" of this shift to an interdisciplinary approach is, as Gillespie notes, that "contemporary theories of feminism, rather than traditional theories of theatre, now dominate feminists' discussions of theatre" (115-16).⁷

With her call for a new aesthetics for feminist theatre, Case joins a conversation about feminist aesthetics that has been going on among feminist theorists in disciplines such as literary criticism and film studies for some time.⁸

In her 1976 essay "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?" Silvia Bovenschen comments on the production of art as follows:

Art has been primarily produced by men. Men have neatly separated and dominated the public sector that controls it, and men have defined the normative standards for evaluation. Moreover, in so far as they come into contact with this sector at all, women have for the most part acquiesced to its value system. (30)

Later in her essay, Bovenschen raises the question of a feminine aesthetic:

"How can the specifically feminine modes of perception be communicated?" (37).⁹

And, in a paper published in 1983, Lawrence Lipking contends that it is time for feminist theorists to undertake the project of formulating a new literary theory. In "Aristotle's Sister: A Poetics of Abandonment," Lipking compares Shakespeare's sister to Aristotle's sister and concludes that "compared with Arimneste, Judith Shakespeare and her kind seem quite talkative" (61).¹⁰ He continues by suggesting that

the exclusion of women from literary theory has been still more extreme than it appears. Most great literature has taken at least occasional notice, after all, of women and their concerns ... But no one speaks for Aristotle's sister. The classic line of literary theory has hardly acknowledged the existence of the two sexes, let alone the possibility that women might read and interpret literature in some way of their own.

Still, despite this lack of acknowledgment, Lipking believes that women have always "thought hard about literature." The problem is that no formal theory "has yet been devised that builds from the ground up on women's own experience of literature, on women's own ways of thinking" (63).

What is lacking yet is a "classic woman's poetics" (63, 62). "Even the most revolutionary feminist thought," argues Lipking, "has tended to ground its theory of revolution on masculine modes." The work of the "best female literary theorists" is not the result of women reading and interpreting literature "in some way of their own." Rather, Lipking claims, their work relies on theories that are modelled on the various established schools: even though there are "excellent female neo-Marxists, female semiologists, female Lacanians, female deconstructionists ... [they] tend to define themselves by giving the lie to daddy, reacting against his power" (63). In short, Lipking agrees with Vickers' claim that when it comes to "reinterpreting well-known literature ... feminist criticism has not developed any fresh interpretative models" (371).

That women have always "thought hard about literature," and that men have set "the normative standards for evaluation" do not seem to me to be contentious issues. Potentially troublesome, though, are Bovenschen's reference to a "feminine" aesthetic and Lipking's to a "woman's poetics." (62).¹¹ Terms such as "feminine," "female," and "woman's" have the ring of essentialism. Their use could suggest that what is meant by "feminist aesthetics" is a "theoretical position which," in Rita Felski's words, "argues a necessary or privileged relationship between female gender and a particular kind of literary structure, style, or form" (19). And to talk about a feminist aesthetics in this way is hugely problematic. For one thing, it ignores the effect of social and economic conditions on artistic production. For another, as

Dympna Callaghan notes, "there is little evidence of any straightforward correspondence between biological sex and artistic production" ("Aesthetics," 259).

Furthermore, even if women's writing could be classified as a "self-contained aesthetic body" (Felski, 19), the "whole issue of a distinctly female form or language, a feminine aesthetic" would remain, as Patricia R. Schroeder claims, a "vexed one":

It is in principle separatist, which may be counterproductive if the ideology of feminism demands social change and, therefore, should insist on attracting audiences for feminist playwrights. Moreover, the demand for a female dramatic form ... enshrines the idea of female superiority. As a result, the quest for a feminist form based on female biology and history suffers from ... the actual replication of a hegemonic model within a feminist context. (72)

Expressed another way, a feminine aesthetic has the potential to be as hegemonic as traditional aesthetic models, for, as Jill Dolan observes, there remain "normativizing implications of aesthetic criteria, feminist or not. Aesthetic criteria ... are the basis of canon formation, and canons are by definition exclusionary" (*Feminist Spectator*, 83-84). To ask "whether there is a feminine or female aesthetic," then, is, as Teresa de Lauretis says, "to remain caught in the master's house and there, as Audre Lorde's suggestive metaphor warns us, to legitimate the hidden agendas of a culture we badly need to change" (*Technologies*, 131).¹²

If to subscribe to the idea of a feminine, female, or woman's aesthetic is "to remain caught in the master's house," does this mean that the notion of a

feminist aesthetics should be discarded? This is Felski's view. Since there are "no legitimate grounds for classifying any particular style of writing as uniquely or specifically feminine," Felski feels that "the question of feminist aesthetics ... reveals itself to be something of a nonissue, a chimera which feminist critics have needlessly pursued" (19, 181).

It is not, however, the view of de Lauretis. In "The Left Hand of History" (1978), she argues that it might be possible to develop

a feminist theory of textual production which is neither a *theory of women's writing* nor a theory of textuality. In other words, it is not a matter of finding common elements among the texts written or produced by women and defining them in terms of a presumed femaleness or femininity. (*Technologies*, 92).

And, in "Rethinking Women's Cinema" (1985), de Lauretis anticipates Case's call for a feminist "new poetics" with her call for a redefinition—rather than a rejection—of the notion of a feminist aesthetics: "feminist theory should now engage precisely in the redefinition of aesthetic and formal knowledges, much as women's cinema has been engaged in the transformation of vision" (*Technologies*, 131).

Moreover, it is not my view. The notion of a feminist aesthetics *is* fraught with difficulties. It remains, as Callaghan observes, "permeated with essentialist cultural feminist notions of a tradition of art to which one can ascribe immanent femininity" ("Aesthetics," 259-60). Any "valorization of the 'feminine' as a site of resistance" does fail, as Felski claims, "to acknowledge that women's assignment to a distinctive 'feminine' sphere has throughout history been a

major cause of their marginalization and disempowerment" (11). Nevertheless, as Bovenschen says, "Art has been primarily produced by men ... and men have defined the normative standards for evaluation." It is important at this juncture, therefore, that, as de Lauretis states, "a feminist theory of the process of textual production and consumption, which is of course inseparable from a theory of culture," be articulated. What we need, de Lauretis goes on to say, is a theory of

how women produce (as makers) and reproduce (as receivers) the aesthetic object, the text; in other words, we need a theory of culture with women as subjects—not commodities but social beings producing and reproducing cultural products, transmitting and transforming social values. (92-93)¹³

It is time, in short, that Arimneste add her voice to Judith Shakespeare's.

The "project of redefinition" outlined by de Lauretis is what a recent collection of essays "understands as 'feminist aesthetics,'" according to Karen Laughlin in her "Introduction" to *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics* (11). Like Case and de Lauretis, whose terminology she borrows, Laughlin sees feminist aesthetics as having both a deconstructive and a constructive "pull": on the one hand, a pull to expose and critique the "ideologies which underpin traditional aesthetic judgments and modes of representation," and, on the other, a pull to propose "feminist alternatives" (19).¹⁴ Feminist theorists should not allow the constructive or "positive 'pull'" to lead them

toward the establishment of a new female canon, tradition, or style. Nor should it lead to an uncritical embrace of the aesthetic as traditionally conceived. Rather, feminist aesthetics means denying the notion of the aesthetic as a uniquely privileged, autonomous realm.

It means affirming "the aesthetic as political and feminist aesthetics as a political 'way of seeing,' and as a vision that is necessarily as diverse and contradictory as feminism itself" (19).

In advocating a feminist "new poetics" or a "redefinition" of feminist aesthetics, Case and de Lauretis call for the construction of "alternative philosophies of art" (Laughlin, "Introduction," 11), in Case's words, "new critical models and methodologies." The suggestion is that a feminist poetics would be pluralistic, employing a range of approaches to achieve its ends. Feminism is a self-conscious political position that, as Felski expresses it, "defines as feminist all those forms of theory and practice that seek ... to end the subordination of women" (13). What matters to feminist theorists, therefore, is, as Toril Moi puts it, "not so much whether a particular theory was formulated by a man or a woman, but whether its effects can be characterised as sexist or feminist in a given situation" ("Feminist, Female," 118). And what matters to feminist theatre is that a particular theory or practice work to accomplish the twofold agenda of this theatre's "basic theoretical project," which is to deconstruct traditional theories and modes of representation—and then, as Janelle Reinelt explains, to move beyond this "deconstructive moment of saying, 'no,' that's not it," to "a second reconstructive moment," one which represents women as subjects.¹⁵

To call for a feminist poetics, then, is not to call for an essentially female or feminine aesthetics.¹⁶ In fact, to pursue such an aesthetics would be, as

Felski has suggested, to follow a chimera. Lipking is being unrealistic when he chides

feminist thought for grounding "its theory ... on masculine modes." To Lipking's remark that there are "excellent female neo-Marxists, female semiologists, female Lacanians, female deconstructionists," I would add that there are also "excellent *feminist* neo-Marxists, *feminist* semiologists," and so on. Feminist criticism has had to make use of various theoretical paradigms. There is, as Moi argues, "no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak. All ideas, including feminist ones, are in this sense 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology" ("Feminist, Female" 118).

And "contaminated" is the pivotal word here. For if there is a lesson to be gleaned by feminism from the postcolonial enterprise in literature, it is, as Anthony Appiah suggests, that "we are all already contaminated by each other" (Mongia, 67). As Salman Rushdie puts it in *Midnight's Children*, "Things—even people—have a way of leaking into each other ... like flavours when you cook" (40). More importantly for feminism, since patriarchal ideology does leak into feminist ideology—since, to use Moi's examples, "the male-dominated ideas of the French Revolution" contaminate Mary Wollstonecraft's writing and "Sartre's phallogocentric categories" contaminate the work of Simone de Beauvoir—patriarchal ideology is never really absent ("Feminist, Female" 118). Therefore, this ideology cannot be ignored. There *is* a definite need for the deconstructive arm of a feminist poetics.¹⁷

From a Woman's Poetics to a Feminist "New Poetics"

It should be apparent by now that Case and Lipking, although they both appeal for a "new poetics," are not appealing for quite the same thing. While Case calls for a feminist "new poetics," Lipking urges that a "well-grounded woman's poetics ... be written" (64). He recommends that Arimneste's poetics be sketched by tracing "poems and novels and plays ... essays and pamphlets and letters and diaries ... where women's ideas about literature are already inscribed" in order to discover "some consistent patterns in literary criticism by women, as well as some significant differences from the theories of men" (63-64). Such a charting of a woman's tradition in literary criticism, I would argue, is a "feminine," not a "feminist," project. It is an investigation of "feminine" modes of criticism, of the ways women have expressed literary criticism in a culture in which such expression has been, as Moi phrases it, "marginalised (repressed, silenced) by the ruling social/linguistic order" ("Feminist, Female," 132).

Nonetheless, since, as de Lauretis says, it is not possible "to clean the slate of history and start anew ... [to] conceive of a totally new world rising out of, and in no way connected with, the past or the present" (*Technologies*, 84), the feminist project of developing a new poetics must start somewhere—and Lipking's call for the documentation of "a woman's poetics" points to a credible starting place. Why, in other words, start from scratch or from "masculine" modes if it is possible to recover a "feminine" mode of literary criticism. Women's resistance to conventional notions of critical practice, after all, goes

back a long way, and there has been a woman's critical tradition in Western culture.¹⁸ It has simply not been formalized or recognized as such.¹⁹

In "[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics?" Susan Sniader Lanser and Evelyn Torton Beck argue, like Lipking, that the problem is not that there have not been great women critics, but that traditional literary history has refused to acknowledge them. Such history does not share "Bovenschen's insight" that "women's aesthetic needs and impulses" might well have been expressed "in letters and other private forms of writing" (de Lauretis, *Technologies*, 129), or in personal essays and novels. It is more willing to accept women as creative writers, as novelists, than as critics and theorists.²⁰ For instance, Clara Reeves' "narrative theory is surely as important as the gothic novels for which she is far better known," and yet Reeves and "[d]ozens of women who practiced both modes seemed to have been selectively perceived" (84).²¹

I would argue that part of the reason women's criticism has not been acknowledged is that, although there has long been a such a criticism, it is one that is based on a woman's poetics, one that does *not* conform to the traditional classifications of criticism.²² It is now a given that women's writing does not always fit the categories of traditional genres. If "our generic postulates were based," as Lanser and Beck comment, "on a truly integrated canon ... our idea of what constitutes 'literature' would be considerably altered, since letters and diaries, two of the literary forms most frequently used by women (especially

before 1800), are rarely included in the definition of literature as an art form" (87). The point I want to make here is that if we were to include in the critical canon the modes of criticism practised by women, our idea of what constitutes literary criticism would be considerably altered as well.²³

Consider Gerda Lerner's response to Simone de Beauvoir's observation that women "have no past, no history, no religion of their own" (xxv): "De Beauvoir was right in her observation that woman has not 'transcended,' if by transcendence one means the definition and interpretation of human knowledge. But she was wrong in thinking that therefore woman has no history" (*Creation*, 221). The same, I believe, can be said with respect to poetics. There is and has always been a woman's poetics; the task, thus, is not to construct a "new poetics," but to "find it and to name it and to claim it as our own" (Marcus, "Daughters," 293).

This dissertation is an exercise in such naming and claiming. Specifically, I want to claim that women's theorizing has long resisted the rigid assumptions and precepts of traditional literary criticism, including generic classification. Further, I want to claim that women's theorizing customarily appears in their fictional writing, or, in the words of A.H. Kritzer, that the work of many woman theorists "stands at a point of intersection between the practice of [their] chosen art and theory concerned both with art and with society" (2).²⁴ Finally, I want to place the feminist project of dramatic re-vision in theatre in this woman's

tradition, and to name such re-vision one manifestation of a feminist "new poetics."²⁵

Women's fictions regularly, as Barbara Godard remarks, "raise theoretical issues: women's theorizing appears as / in fiction" ("Becoming," 119). Consider Charlotte Barnes' re-vision of *The Tempest*, *The Forest Princess* (1844), which "represents and renegotiates issues of gender in *The Tempest* along with those of race, colonialism, and nationality" (Loeffelholz, 59)²⁶; H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, a re-vision of ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology; Anne Sexton's *Transformations*, a re-vision of sixteen tales from the Brothers Grimm, which "involves reevaluations of social, political, and philosophical values" (Ostriker, 87); and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, which "takes aim at Shakespeare's presentation of women in love" (Novy, *Women's Re-Visions*, 9).

Consider also Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf, who have, like Clara Reeves, been "selectively perceived" as creative writers. Browning is rarely acknowledged as a theorist, and Woolf's criticism is often disparaged. Yet both wrote criticism and theory grounded in a distinct woman's poetics, as the critic who referred to Woolf's "approach" as "invincibly, almost defiantly, feminine" acknowledges with respect to Woolf.²⁷ Browning's *Aurora Leigh* is a novel-in-verse, an epic, and a female bildungsroman. It is equally a philosophy of art, a work into which, to use Browning's own words, her "highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered" (37). And Woolf's fictional *The Waves* takes on

both the canon and imperialism. As Jane Marcus astutely remarks, "*The Waves* quotes (and misquotes) Shelley, not to praise him but to bury him. Woolf is infusing her discourse about Orientalism in England at the beginning of the postcolonial period with Shelley's Orientalism" ("Britannia Rules," 137). In short, both Browning and Woolf regularly offer in a single volume two texts: one creative, the other critical or theoretical.

Now look at "fiction theory," a "new genre" created in the 70s by feminists writing in Québec (G. Scott, 47). Keeping with the woman's critical/theoretical tradition I have just been sketching, this "blend of critical analysis and creative writing, narrative poetry, personal essay, diary" (Godard, "Critical Discourse," 289) challenges the "opposition of artistic practice and theory" (Sojka, 6).²⁸ Or, as Godard expresses it, in fiction theory the "law of genre (of textual/sexual propriety) is violated ... when theory scrambles over the slash to become fiction. Truths of telling, not Truth of (f)act" ("Becoming," 119).

Breaking with—or progressing from—this woman's tradition, this genre names itself: fiction theory—"the text as both fiction and theory" (Mezei, 7). Further, it stresses fiction *and* theory equally, as Gail Scott's discussion suggests:

Again theory (root: the Greek word for look on, contemplate) is required for our work to move forward from the fragments and other forms of writing surfacing behind history's veil of silence. ...

Yet, still I'm saying "story." "Story," because while deconstructing the myths about us, the silence, in our writing, we're also involved in reconstructing the historically absent female subject. "Story," because in the telling, a line of narrative is woven intertextually, encompassing elements of a community, past and present (The story, they say, is

40,000 years old.) "Story," especially (for me) because the form implies a certain magic leading to any possibility. "Story": it doesn't matter if it's long or short.

"Story"—a woman's form. (75)

In short, the intertextuality of fiction theory is self-conscious and related to its twofold objective: to deconstruct "the myths" about women and to reconstruct "the historically absent female subject."

And fiction theory's self-consciousness and explicit political purpose means that with fiction theory women's criticism has crossed the line that separates the domain of a criticism grounded in a feminine poetics from that of a criticism grounded in a feminist poetics, as Daphne Marlatt's definition makes clear:

fiction theory: a corrective lens which helps us see *through* the fiction we've been conditioned to take for the real, fictions which have not only constructed woman's "place" in patriarchal society but have constructed the very "nature" of woman ... fiction *theory* deconstructs these fictions while *fiction* theory ... offers a new angle on the "real," one that looks from inside out rather than outside in. (9)

Marlatt's fiction theory is basically one model of Case's "new feminist theory."

Like the theory Case describes, fiction theory points to both a re-evaluation and a re-writing of the old stories. It articulates both a deconstructive and a constructive agenda, or what Sandra Gilbert refers to as "the revisionary imperative" (32).

This "revisionary imperative" to "review, reimagine, rethink, rewrite, revise, and reinterpret the events and documents that constitute" our cultural history (Gilbert, 32) is not a new phenomenon. Woolf suggested in 1928 that

history should be rewritten "so that women might figure there without impropriety" (47).²⁹ In 1971, Adrienne Rich defined re-vision in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision":

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. ... A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see—and therefore live—afresh. ... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (90–91)³⁰

And in 1973, Joanna Russ made it clear in "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" just how strong a "hold over us" past writing possesses.³¹

Since then feminist theorists in various fields have embraced re-vision as a way for women to "know the writing of the past ... differently": Joan Kelly maintains that we must "restore women to history" ("Social Relations," 1); Annette Kolodny suggests that a "revisionary rereading" of our literary canon would not only "open new avenues for comprehending male texts," but would "allow us to appreciate the variety of women's literary expression" ("A Map," 59); Alicia Ostriker defines "revisionist mythmaking" as using "a figure or a story previously accepted and defined by a culture ... for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine" and remarks that such revisionist use makes possible "a redefining of ourselves and consequently our culture" (71); and Gayle Greene,

in her discussion of feminist metafiction, claims that "[f]eminist writers, like feminist critics, engage in 're-visions' of the tradition" (*Changing*, 8).

Clearly, the project of feminist re-vision—dramatic or otherwise—involves, to use the words of de Lauretis, the re-writing of "cultural narratives ... to define the terms of another perspective—a view from elsewhere" (*Technologies*, 25).³² Put more directly, it involves, according to Michelene Wandor, nothing less than the re-presentation of "virtually the whole of history ... from [woman's] point of view" (*Carry On*, 193). Such a project cannot help but entail acts of appropriation and subversion.

Moreover, the feminist playwrights who are engaged in dramatic re-vision are only too aware of the "creative vandalism" (cit. Bennett, 1), to borrow Jonathan Dollimore's term, inherent in this approach. They realize that not everyone accepts that "it is right to 'use' a Shakespeare play as a text for ... 'applied politics,' an attempt to change not only the academy ... but society itself" (Vickers, 329).³³ For example, when asked during an interview if she was worried about "getting into trouble" for "re-writing" Shakespeare, Margaret Clarke replied that "of course [she was] worried about that sort of thing because [she was] tampering with people's cultural ideals in a sense and *Hamlet* is at the top of the heap ... but that's a risk you have to take when you're writing revisionist culture" (Gabereau). And Maureen Duffy acknowledges that many people view re-vision of the sort she engages in with *Rites*, her re-working of

Euripides' *The Bacchae*, as feeding "artistically ... on the past," as a "sort of cannibalism," which they find disturbing (Barber, 10).

Ann-Marie MacDonald raises the issue of tampering with a work of art in the text of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* itself. Thus Constance, upon saving Desdemona by exposing Iago's ruse to Othello, moans to herself, "I've wrecked a masterpiece. I've ruined the play./ I've turned Shakespeare's 'Othello' to a farce" (30). Later she re-states the issue:

—You're floundering in the waters of a flood;
the Mona Lisa and a babe float by.
Which one of these two treasures do you save?
I've saved the baby, and let the Mona drown—
Or did the Author know that I'd be coming here,
and leave a part for me to play? (37)

So even though Constance is able to debate both sides of the issue—after the fact—her immediate response to the situation is Rich's "act of survival" (90).

Moreover, MacDonald makes it clear that she believes that Shakespeare would have approved of her decision, might well have known "that [she'd] be coming here." Shakespeare, after all, re-works old stories from "historical chronicles, prose and poetic romances, classical, medieval and Tudor drama" (M. Scott, 1).³⁴ Or, as MacDonald expresses it,

Shakespeare's spirit is all about plundering existing sources and works
and not being ashamed of using anything, not being ashamed of
imagining anything or of subverting anything ... So ... I wasn't intimidated.
(Rogers)

And *Goodnight Desdemona* reflects this spirit. For MacDonald shows no compunction about imagining or subverting anything. Thus Shakespeare's

Desdemona and Juliet are as real as Constance, her modern protagonist. Constance is able to enter the world of Desdemona's Cyprus and, afterwards, Juliet's Verona (where she is joined by Desdemona). Finally, Constance transforms, not only *Othello*, but *Romeo and Juliet* to a farce.

However, despite MacDonald's subversion of Shakespeare, despite the critique of Euripides and Shakespeare offered by other feminist playwrights (in their dramatic re-visions and in interviews), it is apparent that the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare are admired by those who re-write them. Clarke, for instance, comments about Gertrude and Ophelia that "[w]hen they do appear on stage, they're fascinating women" (Gabereau). Caryl Churchill and David Lans are clearly drawn to Euripides because he foregrounds issues that they find relevant yet: "possession and women being violent—two things that come together in *The Bacchae*" ("Authors' Notes," 5). And MacDonald pays homage to Shakespeare with her remark that she "felt like [she] was apprenticing [her]self to someone [she] could really trust," and with her mastery of the measure of her teacher, the iambic pentameter, a form she calls "beautiful and so tried and true" (Rogers).

While re-vision is disparaging of its source text and/or author, then, it is also respectful, displaying an ambivalence that Ntozake Shange's remarks as to why she decided to revise Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* help to explain:

doing *Mother Courage* wd permit me to pay homage and to defeat the prophecies of Bertolt Brecht/ who i admired immensely at the same time

that i cd never trust cuz/ he waz after all still/ white: my admiration for Brecht is in the text of my adaptation and the care i took not to betray him. but if a work is truly classic it must function for other people in other times. i believe Brecht's work does this. his love of the complexity of ordinary people/ his commitment to a better life for all of us/ his use of politics & passion/ music & monologues/ were not so different from my own approaches to the theater. (36-37)³⁵

Here what is most pivotal is Shange's suggestion that there is something special about the vision of a "truly classic" work such as Brecht's that makes it responsive to re-vision, that allows her to admire it "at the same time that [she] cd never trust" Brecht.

Stephen Greenblatt, in a discussion of *The Tempest*, makes a similar suggestion. Greenblatt does not believe that the "salvage and deformed slave" Caliban triumphs with his claim "this island's mine, by Sycorax my mother." For this to happen, writes Greenblatt, "it would take different artists from different cultures ... to rewrite Shakespeare's play." What is significant about *The Tempest*, though, is that "even within the powerful constraints of Shakespeare's Jacobean culture, the artist's imaginative mobility enables him to ... record a voice, the voice of the displaced and oppressed, that is heard scarcely anywhere else in his own time" (231-32).

Like Clarke, Churchill, Lans, and MacDonald, Shange and Greenblatt point to the double-voiced nature of re-vision: as both tribute to and critique of the work of an earlier artist. And re-vision's double voice marks its resemblance to parody, which also asks searching questions of even as it pays tribute to

earlier works, or, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, is characterized by a "combination of respectful homage and ironically thumbed nose" (*Parody*, 33).³⁶

In fact, I would argue that re-vision is the postmodern manifestation of the parodic strategy.³⁷ This is a claim that is supported by the comments of a number of contemporary theorists who recognize, as David Roberts does, that the "affinity of parody and postmodernism lies in their common strategy of revision, a rereading of the authorised texts which turns all texts into pretexts" (183).³⁸ Note, for instance, Martin Kuester's definition of what he terms "progressive parody":

Progressive parody ... is a mechanism of literary reception and adaptation of traditional texts used by writers who feel themselves to be in a situation in which the old text cannot or should not be seen—at least not exclusively—in the generally accepted way any longer. (22)

Now think about Hutcheon's remark that parody is "acknowledged borrowing" or "critical revision" (*Parody*, 11, 15). Finally, consider Margaret Rose's description of parody as "a form of 'metaliterary' criticism which is distinguished from other types of literary criticism by its presentation of an argument within the confines of fictional reference" (19).

Rose's definition of parody as "a form of 'metaliterary' criticism" is essentially my definition of re-vision, which brings me back to the main subject of this chapter: the relation between the call for a feminist "new poetics" and feminist dramatic re-vision.

I believe, as Case argues, that the formulation of a new interpretive model is "the basic theoretical project for feminism" in theatre. And it is clear

that Austin's third-stage and Neely's transformational criticism represent attempts to stake out such a model. Case's call for a feminist "new poetics" is better answered, however, by the project of feminist dramatic re-vision. In its creative guise, dramatic re-vision does function, after all, to retell the stories of women from the woman's point of view, often at the same time retelling men's stories from another perspective. In its critical guise, it does act to challenge traditional notions of critical practice.

Put differently, dramatic re-vision functions as both criticism and fiction, re-reading traditional narratives to "deconstruct traditional systems of representation and perception of women," *and* re-writing them to "posit women in the position of the subject." And, in so doing, it functions as an expression of a feminist aesthetics, as de Lauretis's discussion in the following passage makes clear:

the feminist critical text, the rereading against the grain of the "master works" of Western culture and the textual construction (written, filmic, etc.) of discursive spaces in which not Woman but women are represented and addressed as subjects ... more, perhaps, than a new genre of (critical/fictional) creative expression ... *can be thought of as a new aesthetic*, a rewriting of culture. ("Feminist Studies," 10; my emphasis)

Dramatic re-vision, in short, is one manifestation of the "feminist critical text" which, by deconstructing the "master works" of our culture and constructing new works in which, to re-phrase Hélène Cixous, "all the stories [are told] differently," makes cultural change possible. And, as such, it answers Case's call for a feminist "new poetics."

Notes

1. I want to make clear here what I mean by the terms "criticism," "theory," "poetics," and "aesthetics."

Following Gillespie's lead, I shall distinguish theory from criticism "by theory's emphasis on developing explanations for groups of plays" or works of literature rather than for individual plays or works of literature. Thus, "a scholar examining the nature of tragedy ... is a theorist whereas one explaining the nature of *Hamlet* is a critic" (102).

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the nature of art, as well as with the establishment of criteria with which to categorise and judge art. Poetics is, in effect, a sub-category of aesthetics which concerns itself with the nature and function of imaginative literature, as well as with literature's types, forms, and techniques.

2. Neely recognizes that her model is "oversimplified, and makes overly sharp distinctions among three modes that are not incompatible in theory or practice" ("Feminist Modes," 5-6).

3. Neely's scheme to re-tell *Hamlet* from Ophelia's perspective might well balance reconstruction of the female subject with deconstruction of traditional structures. The problem is, of course, that Neely neither completes the transformational project she proposes nor offers much by way of commentary on it.

4. This phrase is set in upper and lower case letters in the original, as it is one of Gillespie's section titles. The shift in question is, says Gillespie, one that was "dimly visible by the late 1980s in books by Case and Dolan," and "made clear and explicit" in 1990 when Austin's book appeared (115).

In *Feminism and Theatre*, Case endorses an interdisciplinary approach: "feminist dramatic theory would borrow freely: new discoveries about gender and culture from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and political science; feminist strategies for reading texts from the new work in English studies; psychosemiotic analyses of performance and representation from recent film theory; new theories of the 'subject' from psychosemiotics, post-modern criticism and post-structuralism; and certain strategies from the project called 'deconstruction'" (115).

5. Neely acknowledges that her model is "indebted" to the models of feminist history propounded by Kelly and Lerner: "In their analyses, feminist history moves from 'compensatory' history (the study of 'women worthies,' achievers, by male standards, in a male world) to 'contribution' history (the

study of women's contribution to and oppression by patriarchal society) to the history of the 'social relations of the sexes' (the study of the relative position of men and women in historical periods)" ("Feminist Modes," 5-6).

6. Austin relies in each chapter on a different discipline. She uses feminist literary criticism (Judith Fetterley's "resisting reader") in chapter 2, feminist anthropology (Gayle Rubin's "exchange of women") in chapter 3, feminist psychology (Nancy Chodorow's "mother-daughter bond") in chapter 4, and feminist film theory (Laura Mulvey's "male gaze") in chapter 5.

7. Gillespie goes so far as to make the following claim: "if the admittedly small sample offered by recent books (Case, Dolan, Hart, and Austin) and articles (Diamond, Davy, Stephens) is representative, we can expect feminist theories in theatre to ignore or repudiate the long tradition of theatrical theory (excepting Brecht) in favor of contemporary theories derived from other fields and adapted for theatre" (116-17).

8. As Savona and Wilson note in their "Introduction" to a special issue of *Modern Drama* (1989), feminist research "in the field of theatre is relatively new and ... it has been very much influenced by previous feminist works on semiotics, narratology, and the cinema originating in England (around the journal *Screen*) and expanded in North America by Teresa de Lauretis" (2).

9. Bovenschen concludes that there is no such thing as a "female nature" outside of historical development, and that "no formal criteria for 'feminist art' can be definitively laid down" (48).

10. Lipking notes that *Critical Theory Since Plato*, edited by Hazard Adams (New York, 1971) "does not find room for a single woman in its 1,249 double-columned, small printed pages" (61). (The revised edition of this text [1992] includes 8 women—but 109 men.) Other researchers have made similar observations. For example, Lanser and Beck, in a survey of 24 popular anthologies of literary criticism, discovered that out of 653 essays, only 16 represent the work of women" (79). And Showalter points out that Geoffrey Hartman's *Criticism in the Wilderness* (1980) discusses no women critics ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," 207, n. 2).

11. These and similar terms have been employed by other theorists. Donovan uses the term "women's poetics," in "Toward a Women's Poetics"; Dolan uses the term "feminine aesthetic," in *The Feminine Spectator*; and Blau DuPlessis uses the term "female aesthetic," in "For the Etruscans."

12. Case also discusses this issue: "The concept of a feminine morphology retains the traditional inscription of gender onto cultural forms, merely inverting the value system. ... Some theatre practitioners have also responded negatively to the notion of a feminine form. They feel it means that, if they work in traditional forms, they are not feminists (or feminine), and that their work is discounted because of their preference for those forms" (*Feminism*, 130).

13. In her essay, de Lauretis acknowledges Bovenschen's "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?"

Callaghan discusses this issue also. She summarizes Judith Kegan Gardiner, who calls for a feminist criticism of aesthetics: Gardiner "suggests that the aesthetic has very different meanings for women who are socialized to regard themselves as the objects of male desire and continually enjoined to make themselves beautiful." Callaghan continues: "In male aesthetic theory, Elisabeth Lenk observes, 'the so-called enigma of beauty has been inextricably linked with the enigma of woman.' It is indeed a feminist perspective—one that shifts woman from the locus of aestheticized object, existing primarily as male representation, to that of the self-determining figure of woman as artistic producer—that throws traditional aesthetic criteria into utter disarray." Such a shift demands, according to Michelene Wandor, "nothing less than reinterpreting 'virtually the whole of history ... from our point of view'" ("Aesthetics," 260 [cit. Gardiner's "Gender, Values, and Lessing's Cats," 111, in Benstock; Lenk's "The Self-Reflecting Woman," 52, in Ecker; and Wandor's *Carry On Understudies*, 193]).

14. Laughlin borrows from de Lauretis the notion of feminism's "twofold pull": "a simultaneous pull in opposite directions, a tension toward the positivity of politics, or affirmative action on behalf of women as social subjects, on one front, and the negativity inherent in the radical critique of patriarchal, bourgeois culture, on the other" (*Technologies*, 127; see also 26).

15. Like Case and de Lauretis, Reinelt views "the basic theoretical project for feminism" in theatre as one that is both deconstructive and constructive. Reinelt continues, quoting Julia Kristeva: "It follows that [such] a feminist practice can only be negative ... so that we say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it.' ... The refusal to be constructed as women within a phallocratic economy of representation requires a second reconstructive moment to follow the nay-saying—if the concrete political struggle of the women's movement is to survive in artistic practice" ("Feminist Theory" 49, 50).

16. I think it would be helpful to consider explicitly the meaning of the following terms: "female," "feminine," and "feminist." Here Moi's "Feminist, Female, Feminine" is invaluable. "Among many feminists," as Moi points out, it has long been established usage to make "feminine" (and "masculine") represent *social constructs* ... and to reserve 'female' and 'male' for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus "feminine" represents nurture, and "female" "nature" in this usage. "Femininity" is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. (122)

Both terms, however, must be distinguished from "feminist," which is "a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (117). In terms of aesthetics, then, a *feminist* aesthetic, as Donovan suggests, would derive "judgments from ideological assumptions," whereas a *feminine* aesthetic would derive them "from a sense of female epistemology as rooted in authentic female culture" ("Afterword," 81, n.9).

17. It is important to note that "contamination" is a two-way process. So it is not just a case of the feminist being contaminated by the patriarchal; it is also a case of the feminist contaminating the patriarchal, of de Beauvoir contaminating Sartre.

18. In arguing that there has long been a woman's (or a feminine) critical tradition in Western culture, I am using "woman's" and "feminine" as Moi does, to "represent *social constructs* (patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural norms)" ("Feminist, Female," 122).

19. Although Lipking calls for a "new poetics," he recognizes that the task is one of discovery, not creation (63-64). And Gayle Greene argues that the women writers she considers in *Changing the Story* "comprise a tradition of their own; traditions have been based on less." She follows this with a cautionary note: "But if we view them as a 'tradition,' we should view 'tradition' not in the Leavisite sense of a timeless, universal entity, but as 'tradition making' and unmaking, as a process wherein fiction performs complex negotiations with the works of the past, negotiations which are both appropriations and subversions" (7). (Greene cites Frank Lentricchia's notion of "tradition making" as expressed in *Criticism and Social Change* [1983] here.)

20. This point has been made by other critics. Currier Bell and Ohmann, for example, suggest that Virginia Woolf's criticism has been "neglected," and that it is reasonable to assume that "it has been easier for professional academics to

praise, or even only to notice, a woman novelist, than it has been to accept a woman critic" (49).

21. Clara Reeves "formulated the crucial distinctions between novel and romance, which, as [Robert] Scholes and [Robert] Kellogg note [in *The Nature of Narrative* (1966)], have not basically been altered since she set them forth nearly two hundred years ago" (Lanser and Beck, 84).

22. Since completing this chapter, I have discovered that Thompson and Roberts support my view, at least with respect to Shakespeare criticism: "In part the neglect of women's Shakespeare criticism has been a question of the hierarchy of recognised genres of criticism within the academy. The scholarly edition, monograph, essay, and article in a learned journal have long been established as the legitimate forums for critical debate. Because few women published in these genres before 1900, the enormous output of women's writing on Shakespeare ... has been overlooked in histories of Shakespeare criticism" (7).

23. Lanser and Beck make the same point: "We believe that not only the conception of criticism, but the critical theories themselves, have been seriously distorted by the elimination of women's thought" (87). And Lipking argues that a "new poetics" will "repair the balance of theory itself" (78).

Novy's *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (1990) and *Cross-Cultural Performances* (1993) are recent attempts to repair the balance, at least with respect to criticism of Shakespeare. *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1600-1900*, edited by Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, and *Women Critics 1660-1820*, edited by the Folger Collective on Early Women Critics, represent other attempts to "make visible" the "neglected work" of a range of women's critical writings (Folger, xiii).

24. Kritzer's comment was that this is a trait that Caryl Churchill's work shares "with that of other feminist artists."

Other critics who share my view include Novy, who comments that the essays in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, which span the period 1664-1988, are "enterprises of creativity and criticism" (2); G. Greene, who in *Changing the Story* calls feminist metafiction "a fictional expression of critical positions and statements" (7-8); and Diamond, who remarks that Simone Benmussa's re-working of "'the literary material of others'... functions as a critique of that material" ("Benmussa's Adaptations," 64).

25. The term "re-vision" is Adrienne Rich's. See her "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," 90.

While I am only discussing re-visions of Euripides and Shakespeare in this dissertation, many other sorts of dramatic re-vision make up this project. Some examples of such are

Simone Benmussa's *Appearances* and *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs* (Henry James' "The Private Life" and George Moore's "Albert Nobbs"); Pam Gems' *Piaf*, *Queen Christina* and *Camille* (Edith Piaf, the Garbo movie and Dumas fils, *La dame aux camélias*); Sally Clark's *Jehanne of the Witches* and *The Trial of Judith K.* (Tournier's *Gilles et Jeanne* and Kafka's *The Trial*); Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* (the myth of Philomele); Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Cut Off* and *Blood and Ice* (Queen Mary's life and romanticism); Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (seventeenth-century witchcraft).

26. There are significant parallels between feminist and post-colonial theorists. Both groups have reread the canon; both have offered re-visions of canonical texts. For example, Wole Soyinka brings Macheath and Polly to Nigeria in *Opera Wanyosi* (1981) and revises Euripides in *The Bacchae* (1973). And many Irish writers have revised classical texts. Brendan Kennelly and Desmond Egan have both revised Euripides' *The Medea*; Derek Mahon has revised *The Bacchae*. (See Teevan's "Northern Ireland" for a more complete listing of such re-visions.)

27. The same critic provides an example of how Woolf's criticism has been received generally: "She [Woolf] will survive, not as a critic, but as a literary essayist recording the adventures of a soul among congenial masterpieces. ... The writers who are most downright, and masculine, and central in their approach to life ... she for the most part left untouched. ... Her own approach was at once more subterranean and aerial" (Kronenberger, 249; cit. Currier Bell and Ohmann, 49).

28. Sojka's remark was that fiction theory challenges "modernism's opposition of artistic practice and theory" (my emphasis). But I would argue that there were modernist feminist critics like Woolf who challenged this opposition, and that, in this respect, fiction theory is not a new feminist genre.

The brief sketch that Austin provides of "theory plays"—plays in which Austin juxtaposes "narrative and dialogue from the story with brief segments of feminist theory" (96)—suggests that these plays are closely related to fiction theory.

29. The following is one revisionary project that Woolf outlines: "Towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully, and think of greater importance than the Crusades or Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write" (64).

30. In another essay, Rich added to this definition, writing that "in order to change what is, we need to give speech to what *has been*, to imagine together what *might be*" ("Motherhood," 260).

Cristine Froula's comments with respect to how the canon, if read critically, can be used as an "instrument for change" are of interest here: "Few of us can free ourselves completely from the power ideologies inscribed in the idea of a canon and in many of its texts merely by not reading 'canonical' texts, because we have been reading the patriarchal 'archetext' all our lives. But we can, through strategies of rereading that expose the deeper structures of authority and through interplay with texts of a different stamp, pursue a kind of collective psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogey' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable. In doing so, we approach traditional texts not as the mystifying (and self-limiting) [Arnoldian] 'best' that has been thought and said in the world but as a *visible* past against which we can ... imagine a different future. Because its skeptical regard of the past is informed by a responsibility to that future, feminist theory is a powerful tool with which to replace Arnold's outworn dictum" ("When Eve," 171-2).

31. Russ sees, like Woolf, how women writers have been severely handicapped in a culture where literature "is by and about men" (5), how, as Woolf writes, "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common. ... For we think back through our mothers if we are women" (76).

32. De Lauretis puts this another way in *Alice Doesn't*. There she refers to the "spaces of contradiction" where the woman writer can "turn back the question upon itself and re-make stories ... destabili[zing] and finally alter[ing] the meaning of representations" (7). Gabereau, interviewing Margaret Clarke, referred to *Gertrude and Ophelia* as the "rewriting [of] history, so to speak, even if it's fictional history."

33. The controversy over whether or not Shakespeare's plays should be appropriated for political purposes is a big issue. Critics such as Artaud and Brecht believe that theatre's past masterpieces belong to the past, that in Artaud's words, they "are fit for the past, they are no good to us. We have the right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way that belongs to us" (60). Believing that today's theatre requires something suited to the needs of this century and its people, both Artaud and Brecht would applaud the appropriation of old theatre for new purposes.

Hutcheon provides another perspective: "What is clear from these sorts of attacks [on appropriation] is the continuing strength of a Romantic aesthetic that values

genius, originality, and individuality ... The more positive method of dealing with the past recalls ... the classical and Renaissance attitude to the cultural patrimony. For writers like Ben Jonson, it is clear that imitation of previous works was considered part of the labor of writing poetry ... the Romantic rejection of parodic forms as parasitic reflected a growing capitalist ethic that made literature into a commodity to be owned by an individual" (*Parody*, 4).

See also Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), who takes as his theme in "What is an Author" Beckett's line, "What does it matter who is speaking?"

34. As M. Scott puts it, Shakespeare "'stole' his stories" and "recreated [them] for private and public stages during a particular historical period" (1). And, as MacDonald explains, she "was being mischievous by using Shakespeare as the source in the same way he used everyone else as a source" (Rudakoff, 141). As well, both M. Scott and Cohn remind us that feminist dramatists are not the first to revise Shakespeare. Earlier adaptations include Brecht's *Coriolanus*, Edward Bond's *Lear*, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant*, Eugene Ionesco's *Macbett*, and Charles Marowitz' various adaptations.

35. It seems to me that, after the plays of Shakespeare and Euripides, Brecht's plays are likely the most popular with feminist playwrights. Pam Gems has adapted Brecht's *The Mother*, according to Laughlin ("Brecht," 148), as has Red Ladder, according to Wandor ("The Personal," 49). Perhaps, then, Shakespeare's and Euripides' tragedies were as radical in their own times as Brecht's plays are in this century?

36. Both Rose and Hutcheon attempt to account for this double voiced or ambivalent feature of parody. According to Rose, "an ambiguity exists in the word 'parodia'--in that 'para' can be translated to mean both nearness and opposition ... Both by definition and structurally parody is ambivalently critical and sympathetic towards its target" (8). Hutcheon says something similar: the Greek noun *parodia* means "counter-song" or "against." Thus parody "becomes an opposition or contrast between texts." But *para* can also mean "beside" so there "is a suggestion of an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast" (*Parody*, 32).

It is interesting to note here Lamy's comment that "feminist critics write with rather than about the text" (22). And G. Greene writes that writers of feminist metafiction "have a complex relation to [the] tradition, writing against it but also writing within it, finding it both constraining and enabling" (*Changing*, 3).

37. As Robert Wilson points out, postmodernism has "two distinct archives." The first "constructs post-modern as a period, the second is a highly flexible analytic-descriptive term capable of isolating conventions, devices and techniques across the range of all the cultural products ... that can be caught in a widely-flung transnational net" (113). I use "postmodern" here to refer to a period.

38. An example of classical parody is provided by Euripides. Euripides parodies Aeschylus and Sophocles when, in his *Medea*, "he replaced the traditional male protagonist with a woman, and a woman who was an outsider rather than a member of a Greek family of renown" (Hutcheon, *Parody*, 6).

The Renaissance manifestation of the parodic strategy is, of course, imitation: "Every creative imitation mingles filial rejection with respect, just as every parody pays its own oblique homage" (T. Greene, 46).

It is also of interest here that Much refers to *Goodnight Desdemona* as parody, an appellation MacDonald accepts (Much, "Ann-Marie MacDonald," 142).

CHAPTER TWO

In the Service of Patriarchy: The Aesthetics and Politics of Tragedy

I knew a very wise man who believed that ... if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation. And we find that most of the ancient legislators thought they could not well reform the manners of any city without the help of a lyric, and sometimes of a dramatic poet.

—Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, Letter, 1704; cit. *Collins Concise Dictionary of Quotations*, 1983

Silence is the adornment of women. Sophocles said so, and Aristotle repeated it.

—Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, 21

Arbitrarily, I choose this setting for my heroine. She's a writer who wants to explore the uncanny, maybe even delve into women's *tragic* potential. Except the word *tragic*, when traced (indirectly, on her computer screen) glitters with irony. Perhaps because classical tragedy's cause-and-effect narrative underscored patriarchal values. Or because it aspired to unary, all-powerful heroes, who wouldn't reflect her sense of self. Although, *elle a envie de vivre grande*, to cast shadows like Ozymandias on the sand. But ... a female-sexed Oedipus? Grotesque. A feminine Hamlet? Closer, maybe. Still, there's something unsuitable (for her) about his relationship with his mother ...

—Gail Scott, *Spaces Like Stairs*, 117

Introduction

In "Shakespeare's Riddle," Jan Kott offers a brief description of the second World Shakespeare Congress, which took place in Washington in April of 1976. Throughout the conference, says Kott, Shakespeare scholars lectured about Shakespeare, offering "traditional text analysis to the latest hermeneutic news.

There were seminars on the existentialist interpretation of Shakespeare and on the Marxist Shakespeare." Scholars went "[b]ack and forth" about Shakespeare until finally, during the last seminar, Kott heard in his head the same voice he had heard five years earlier at the first World Shakespeare Congress "repeating over and over again: 'Shakespeare was progressive and was not progressive'" (8).

The "high point of the congress," continues Kott, "was a lecture by Jorge Luis Borges," which was called "The Riddle of Shakespeare." For an hour "the old blind writer" spoke, but, due to technical difficulties with the microphone, only one word could be heard above a "monotonous humming noise." That word was "Shakespeare." "Like the Orator in Eugène Ionesco's *The Chairs*," comments Kott, Borges "was called upon to solve the riddle." And like this Orator, "who could produce only incomprehensible sounds from his throat, Borges solved the riddle: 'Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Shakespeare....'" (8-9).

The riddle of Shakespeare intrigues me. It does so especially because the riddle of tragedy is at least as resistant to interpretation as the riddle of Shakespeare. Many of the questions posed by tragedy are perplexing. For instance, why does tragedy make such rare and brief appearances? Why, in short, to borrow the words of Albert Camus, "in the thirty centuries of Western history, from the Dorians to the atomic bomb," have there only been two, relatively short, periods of tragic drama in Western history, the first the tragedy of classical Greece, from Aeschylus to Euripides, the second the tragedy of the

Renaissance of Western Europe, from Shakespeare to Lope de Vega, Calderón, Corneille, and Racine ("Lecture," 192)? Why does tragic drama burst so suddenly upon the Greek stage in the fifth century B.C. and upon the Elizabethan stage about the end of the sixteenth century? Why does this same drama abruptly disappear in the fourth century B.C. in Greece and early in the eighteenth century in Europe?¹

Such questions are hard to answer. But surely, given that tragic drama only flourishes during two of the thirty centuries of Western history, they are significant questions. Surely, as Camus argues, these two "tragic moments," twenty centuries apart, must be "very exceptional times," which "should by their very peculiarity tell us something about the conditions for tragic expression" ("Lecture," 193). Surely, in other words, something could be learned about the riddle of tragedy by studying what it is that is pivotal about these two periods.

The main focus of most of the commentators I have read, however, is not on such questions. Rather, it is on the question of the definition of tragedy. "The search for a definition of tragedy has been," as Stephen Booth notes, "the most persistent and widespread of all nonreligious quests for definition" (81). For 2,500 years tragedy has been central to our cultural experience—and for 2,500 years tragedy has resisted definition. During that period, tragedy, as George Steiner observes, has received an "excess of literary, scholarly, philosophical attention," a "prodigality of magisterial treatments—from Aristotle to Dr. Johnson, from Johnson to Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin," and, at the

same time, comedy a "paucity of first-order theoretical examinations"?² Why has tragedy been privileged over comedy? More importantly, why has the basic meaning of tragedy been so difficult to pin down?

Many of the arguments for privileging tragedy over comedy beg the question. Tragedy is viewed, in Joanna Baillie's words, as "the first child of the Drama" (307) because tragedy is, in Steiner's words, "more elevated, more fascinating" than comedy. Put differently, tragedy is elevated because it is elevated. Tragedy is the morally superior genre because it an "imitation of a noble and complete action," according to Aristotle, and its hero a "good" man, a man of "the nobler sort," who, while "neither perfect in virtue and justice," possesses good intentions and "falls into misfortune [not] through vice and depravity: but rather ... through some miscalculation" (VI, XV, XIII; 1449b-1450a, 1454a-1454b, 1453a).³ Tragedy's hero, insists Aristotle, is a man of "the nobler sort." But only a privileged man can be a man of this sort, as women are "inferior" to men and slaves are "completely ignoble" (XV; 1454a). In short, tragedy is privileged because it represents the privileged; tragedy is the noble genre because it represents the noble gender.

Significantly, during the Renaissance, theorists of the neoclassic tradition came to interpret Aristotle's "good" man as noble in more of a social than a moral sense.⁴ Thus class became a basis for distinguishing the genres, and tragedy came to be regarded as the blue-blooded genre because it was identified with princes and kings, comedy with ordinary people. In 1570, in "the

first of the 'great commentaries' on Aristotle to be published in Italian (or indeed in any modern European language)" (Carlson, 47), Lodovico Castelvetro makes such a distinction: "The characters of tragedy are not the same as those of comedy. Those of tragedy are royal and ... dynamic and proud. ... [Those] of comedy are meek and accustomed to obey the courts" (Dukore, 146-47). And Sir Philip Sidney, whose "Defense of Poesy" reflects prevailing Renaissance attitudes, follows Castelvetro. Thus, tragedy is the "high and excellent" genre because it represents high and excellent characters (Dukore, 171).⁵

And that Renaissance theorists offer a shift in focus with respect to the nobility of the tragic protagonist is significant, because it points to the fact that, although Aristotle's *Poetics* has always been privileged in the Western critical tradition, most of the key concepts of Aristotle's definition of tragedy have been given different interpretations at one time or another. As I attempt to show in the second section of this chapter, there is really no such thing as "Aristotelian" tragedy in an unchanging universal sense. Tragedy, as Madelon Sprengnether puts it so well, is "culturally mediated" (18). As constructed by theorists from Aristotle's period to our own, tragedy—no matter how emphatically theorists invoke the authority of Aristotle—has as much to do with the dominant ideology of a particular culture as it has to do with Aristotle. This is why the basic meaning of tragedy been so difficult to pin down.

The riddle of tragedy's resistance to definition, in other words, is not really a riddle. And neither is the riddle of tragedy's elevation over other genres.

Tragedy is privileged for political, not aesthetic, reasons. In the third section of this chapter, therefore, I focus on the following question: If there is no such thing as Aristotelian tragedy, what is it that feminists who argue against "tragedy defined as a genre in the Aristotelian tradition" (Sprengnether, 1) or "Greek tragedy" or the "tragic view" (Kintz, 1, 7) are arguing against?

The answer to this question, I believe, is fairly straightforward. Yes, definitions of tragedy do shift from one culture to another. Conceptions of tragedy do change as generations of thinkers adapt Aristotle to the governing ideology of their periods. And, yes, feminist critics do argue against specific refinements that still colour our understanding of tragedy. By way of illustration, consider the trouble some feminist writers have with the romantic notion of a tragic vision of life, or what Ann-Marie MacDonald refers to as tragedy's "addiction to the dark, hopeless side of things," its "obsession with suffering and death" (Much, "Ann-Marie MacDonald," 134–35). But feminist critics argue most forcefully against the one aspect of tragedy that has been a constant from Aeschylus's time to our own: tragedy's political agenda, which is, as spokes-genre for patriarchy, to promote male hegemony. Feminist arguments against tragedy are, in effect, arguments against patriarchy.

They are not for the most part, however, arguments against Euripides or Shakespeare. In fact, both Euripides and Shakespeare destabilize tragedy and the patriarchal ideology for which it speaks with arguments of their own, arguments which are co-opted by feminist playwrights in their re-visions. Just

because tragic theory and criticism are reactionary, then, it does not follow that tragic drama is not transgressive. Just because the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare at one level support the dominant institutions and ideologies of their patriarchal cultures, it does not follow that at another level they do not subvert these institutions and ideologies. The paradox of tragedy, to hark back to the voice Kott heard at the first world Shakespeare convention, is quite simply that tragedy is progressive and is not progressive.

Tragedy as Culturally Mediated

Part of the reason for the plethora of interpretations of Aristotle's definition of tragedy is that the original Greek text of the *Poetics* is not extant, and, as O.B. Hardison, Jr., comments, the *Poetics* is a "complex, difficult document" (55). Modern editions of this work rely on three later manuscripts, and, as Marvin Carlson explains, there have been various problems with each of these manuscripts:

Passages are unclear in all three versions, and the style in general is so elliptical that scholars have come to assume that the original manuscript was a series of lecture notes or a work meant to be circulated privately among students already familiar with Aristotle's teachings. (16)⁶

And, if the original manuscript was a series of lecture notes or a work intended only for Aristotle's students, "who could be expected to be familiar with his system and terminology," this would explain, suggests Hardison, why "the

Poetics is occasionally brief to the point of being enigmatic, but at other times relatively detailed and well developed" (59).

Still, that tragedy has resisted definition for 2,500 years has to do with more than the form and content of Aristotle's original manuscript or the obstacles presented by later versions. Tragic drama only takes centre stage in ancient Greece and Renaissance Europe. From the fifth century B.C. on, however, the notion of tragedy is at the centre of Western culture. And Aristotle is at the centre of theoretical discussion of tragedy.⁷ As John Drakakis claims in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, "All discussion of tragedy, whether it be Shakespearean or any other, sooner or later, returns to Aristotle" (1). Moreover, many commentators view the terms "Aristotelian tragedy" and "tragedy" as synonymous. Richard Levin, for instance, never says what he means when he uses the term "tragedy" or "tragic genre" in his attack on feminist criticism of Shakespearean tragedy. He takes it as a given that tragedy is Aristotelian tragedy, and that the "nature of the genre (its conventions, expectations, and appropriate pleasure)" is fixed (133).⁸

Despite Aristotle's firm hold on tragedy, however, as Sprengnether claims, tragedy is not a matter of "timeless universals":

Gary Taylor's encyclopedic survey of critical and dramatic interpretations of Shakespeare from the Restoration to the present demonstrates just how culturally mediated our images of Shakespeare are (*Reinventing Shakespeare*). This might also be said of tragedy, which reflects not a universal essence but rather a historically specific encoding of practices and values. (18)

What commentators on tragedy, from Aristotle's century to our own, mean when they use the term "tragedy" is neither a constant nor is it necessarily what Aristotle meant when he used the term. Rather, it reflects the values and priorities of each succeeding age.

During the Roman and late classical period, and during most of the medieval period, scholars lacked direct knowledge of Aristotle's theory. Horace, whose *Ars poetica* (65-8 B.C.) is "the Roman equivalent of the *Poetics*," had no first-hand knowledge of Aristotle (Carlson, 23-24).⁹ And Averroës' commentary on Aristotle, which was translated by Hermannus Alemannus into Latin in 1256, was a "distorted version" of the *Poetics*, which "harmonized ... with already prevailing critical attitudes," according to Carlson, to produce "the misreadings that characterize much subsequent criticism" (37, 34).¹⁰ In short, as Steiner sums up, it is "largely misread tags out of Aristotle's *Poetics*" and "propositions from Horace" that with "distant rumours concerning Ovid's lost *Medea*, and ... the rediscovery of Seneca ... inspire what we have of medieval beliefs about tragedy" (539).

Medieval beliefs about tragedy are fairly straightforward. During the Middle Ages, tragedy simply meant the story of a person of high degree who, deservedly or not, suffers a fall due to a turn of the wheel of fortune. Chaucer defines tragedy as such in his "Monk's Tale":

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree

Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.
(*Complete Poetry*, 282)

And in the "Letter to the Lord Can Grande della Scala," Dante, citing both Seneca and Horace, makes it clear that his *Divine Comedy* is a comedy because it begins in Hell and ends in Paradise. Tragedy, he explains, is just the opposite: "in its beginning [it] is admirable and quiet, in its ending or catastrophe foul and horrible" (Dukore, 102-103).¹¹

During the Italian Renaissance, Aristotle was rediscovered when Giorgio Valla's Latin translation of the *Poetics* (1498) and a Greek text (1508) "put moderately accurate versions" of Aristotle's work "at the disposal of Renaissance scholars." These scholars came to the *Poetics*, as Bernard Weinberg explains,

with habits of textual interpretation ... which made it impossible for them to understand this closely constructed and tightly argued document. ... [T]hey read the *Poetics* in the light of a rhetorical tradition which reduced all aspects of literary documents to considerations stemming from the audience. [And], they could not dissociate from their thinking about poetic matters the numerous details of Horace's *Ars poetica*. (200)

In other words, the "pseudo-Aristotelians," as Weinberg refers to them, expected to find—and hence found—Horace's concern with decorum and form, and a focus on the moral edification of the audience in Aristotle. In effect, they found in the *Poetics* the rhetorical and pragmatic concerns that are at the centre of their conception of Aristotelian tragedy.

This rediscovery of the *Poetics*, therefore, did not result in a re-thinking of late classical theory to bring it into line with Aristotle. Instead, it resulted in,

as Carlson suggests, a reinterpretation of the *Poetics* so as to "accommodate Aristotle to prevailing literary theory," in particular to Horace:

The universal opinion of early-sixteenth-century Italian critics was that the classical tradition was essentially a monolithic one, and that apparent contradictions or inconsistencies were the result of misreadings, mistranslations, or corruptions in the extant texts. Thus the sixteenth-century critics undertook the formidable task of decoding Aristotle, using, naturally enough, the concepts of the already established Latin tradition with its emphasis on moral instruction. (37-39)¹²

Francesco Filippi Pedemonte, for instance, who is the first commentator of this period to quote Aristotle at length, does so as part of a study of Horace (1546). And Francesco Robortello, who published the first major commentary on Aristotle (1548), manages, as Weinberg remarks, to explicate "passages from the *Poetics* as if they came from the *Ars poetica*" (19).¹³

But perhaps the main misconception that emerged from this insistence on "reading Aristotle as if he were a kind of Ur-Horace" (Weinberg, 200) was the notion that Aristotle's analysis of tragedy was intended to be prescriptive, that Aristotle's objective was to draft a set of regulations for would-be writers of tragedy.¹⁴ For example, the laws of the three unities, which were formulated as "rules" by Lodovico Castelvetro in 1570, were, as Michael J. Sidnell phrases it, "foisted on Aristotle by the theorists of the sixteenth century" (10).¹⁵ Aristotle was also credited for the precept, introduced by Bernardino Daniello in 1536, which prohibits "the mixing of tragedy and comedy" (Palmer, 26). This and precepts such as the rule of verisimilitude, the five-act rule and the rule that tragedy be written in an elevated style can be traced to Horace's principle of

decorum, a "doctrine of ... literary propriety" that, as T.S. Dorsch explains, is "fundamental to Horace's literary theory" (23).¹⁶

Later neoclassic critics brought with them the assumption that the exemplary spiritual life can be obtained by means of reason and virtue. Not surprisingly, they discovered rational rules for tragedy in Aristotle. Thus the misconception that Aristotle's goal was to offer a set of regulations, along with the belief that art must contain moral edification in order to please, persisted with the neoclassic critics who followed the sixteenth-century pseudo-Aristotelians.¹⁷ As Stephen Halliwell notes, "the impetus behind the interpretation of the *Poetics* ... passed from Italy to France" in the early years of the seventeenth century. In Paris, a "stringent neo-classicism" arose and "the canons of the Unities, of *la bienséance* (Horatian and rhetorical decorum), and of *vraisemblance*—codified for dramatic poets as *les règles*—rapidly established themselves as definitive principles of the French theatre" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 302).

In England, a somewhat less rigid neoclassicism emerged.¹⁸ Sidney's *Defense of Poetry* (1595), for example, adopts the Horatian standard of instruction and delight: "Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation ... with this end—to teach and delight" (Dukore, 169). Ben Jonson claims in *Timber* that "the end" of a comedy and a tragedy "is partly the same, for they both delight and teach" (Dukore, 193). Both John Webster and Jonson show that they are familiar with the precepts of the pseudo-Aristotelians (as well as with the

practice of Seneca).¹⁹ Even Milton, who, as Halliwell reminds us, "could and did read ancient texts" ("Epilogue," 416) looks equally to "the Ancients and Italians" (Dukore, 338) in his discussion of tragedy in the preface to *Samson Agonistes*.²⁰

Throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the yardstick of neoclassic theory was used to measure Shakespearean practice. As D.F. Bratchell writes, critics

either went to considerable lengths to demonstrate how Shakespeare violated Aristotelian rules, or recognized the force of his accomplishment and sought ways of explaining his success in spite of his lack of conformity with a classical system. (7-8)

Thomas Rymer, who insists on the absolute authority of the neoclassic principles, finds that Shakespeare wrote bad tragedies because he did not follow these rules (Dukore, 351). Voltaire, for his part, suggests that it is only Shakespeare's "genius" that lets him get away with his violation of the rules. Shakespeare is "uncivilized": "he has neither regularity, decorum, nor art ... his chaotic tragedies are a hundred flashes of light" (Dukore, 286). And Johnson, determined to acknowledge both the authority of neoclassicism *and* Shakespeare's accomplishment, insists that "Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies." Rather, Shakespeare, in his drama, "opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in unexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner materials" (Dukore, 407, 416).²¹

In the late eighteenth century, the romantics brought with them to the *Poetics* a world view that celebrates the innovation of individual genius, *la belle nature*, and poetic intuition as a way to bridge the chasm between the sensible and the supersensible in a dualistic universe. Such theorists, therefore, replaced the unities of neoclassicism with nature's organic unity and embraced the tragedy of Nature's "chosen poet," Shakespeare. Further, they developed a neo-platonic conception of tragedy as a link between the natural and the spiritual. And, not unexpectedly, some romantic theorists, as Halliwell explains, found "one kind of literary Romanticism within Aristotle himself." Herder, for instance, finds in the *Poetics* "the concept of organic unity which he invokes in his account of Shakespeare's genius." And a later romantic scholar, S.H. Butcher, in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1895), offers a platonized reading of the *Poetics* (Halliwell, "Epilogue," 420-21) that foregrounds the metaphysical concerns that are central to romanticism's conception of tragedy.

Romantic theorists, led by the playwrights of the German romantic movement, the *Sturm und Drang*, challenged neoclassicism's rules, which Goethe terms "the stupidest of laws," as well as, in Hegel words, the "false position ... that art has to serve as a means for moral ends" (Dukore, 484, 525).²² "I do not object," comments Goethe, "to a dramatic poet having a moral influence in view; but when the point is to bring his subject clearly and effectively before his audience, his moral purpose proves of little use" (Dukore, 489). "Let us take the hammer," proclaims Hugo to the "theories and systems

and treatises," of neoclassicism, to the "paltry quibbles which genius has to put up with for two centuries at the hands of mediocrity" (691, 690).²³

In the place of what they saw as, in Lessing's words, "mechanical rules" (Dukore, 431), romantic theorists substituted the notion of the freedom of genius and *la belle nature* with her organic laws. The essential elements in the composition of poetry, according to these theorists, are the imagination and inspiration of the poet, for, as Wordsworth declares in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Richter, 295). And artificial rules fetter this outpouring of genius. The "unity of place," claims Goethe, is as "oppressive as a prison, the unities of action and time burdensome chains on the imagination" (cit. Carlson, 172). Our great poets, announces Hugo, have had "their wings ... clipped" by "the scissors of the unities" (Dukore, 690).

This rejection of mechanical rules, however, does not mean that the poet is subject to no laws, simply that the dramatic poet is not subject to laws that are "set down in the treatises." "True genius," in Hugo's words, "deduces, for each work, its general laws from the general order of things, its special laws from the special nature of the subject it treats" (Dukore, 691). Or, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning suggests in *Aurora Leigh*, the only rules that the poet is subject to are those of "sovrn nature" (202). The externally imposed form of the "far-famed Three Unities," as Schlegel refers to them, is replaced by romantic theorists with an organic unifying principle that is unique to each work:

"Organical form ... is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination contemporaneously with the perfect development of the germ" (Dukore, 505, 510).

The yardstick of neoclassic theory, thus, is switched for the yardstick of "soveran nature," the notion of "mechanical regularity" for that of "organic form." And one consequence of this switch is that the idea of Shakespeare, in Coleridge's words, as "a sort of beautiful *lusus naturae*, a delightful monster" is replaced by that of Shakespeare as Nature's "chosen poet" (Richter, 304-05). Once the exception to the rule, Shakespeare becomes the epitome of the rule, the universal model that many of the romantic theorists cite to support their resolutions to renounce neoclassicism. Goethe, for instance, in a speech for Shakespeare's birthday, *Zum Schakespears Tag* (1771), declares that, once he had read Shakespeare, he "did not hesitate for a second to renounce the theatre of rules" (cit. Carlson, 172). As for Coleridge, he finds that "unity of feeling and character pervades every drama of Shakespeare." Moreover, "that all opposites tend to attract and temper each other" is "the great law of nature." Therefore, that Shakespeare ignores the unities, fuses genres, mixes patrician and plebeian, employs both lofty and natural style—in short, unites "the heterogeneous ... as it is in nature"—shows Shakespeare's true genius (Dukore, 592, 595).

And where tragedy, in particular, is concerned, there are other consequences of this switch. The romantic notion that mankind is basically in

conflict with a largely incomprehensible universe leads to the notion of the tragic vision of life, according to which tragedy is not "just an art form but also a certain sensibility, a way of looking at life" (Palmer, 73).²⁴ Such a vision follows our realization that what Wordsworth calls "infinitude" in *The Prelude* is unattainable. In Schlegel's words, the "tragic tone of mind" ensues when "that longing for the infinite which is inherent in our being is baffled by the limits of our finite existence." And the sense of "inevitable doom" and "inexpressible melancholy" that results from the tragic vision is, argues Schlegel, the foundation of "Tragic Poetry" (Dukore, 500). Or, as Schopenhauer puts it, tragedy functions to represent the "terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent" (Dukore, 516).

One ramification of this tragic vision is that in "Tragic Poetry" ends such as *catharsis*, moral enlightenment, and aesthetic pleasure give way to a metaphysical end, the satisfaction of our desire to know the infinite: the "highest aim of art," claims Schiller, "is to represent the supersensuous," an aim which "is effected in particular by tragic art" (Dukore, 458). And tragedy's representation of "the terrible side of life" is the means to this end. For the suffering and "strong feeling" that, according to Schlegel, are "inseparable" from the "tragic tone of mind" are a prerequisite of "tragic sublimation," the process by which the "moral freedom of man," the infinite, is revealed through its "conflict with his sensuous impulses" (Dukore, 501, 504).²⁵ We gain from

tragedy "complete knowledge," says Schopenhauer, "of the nature of the world and of existence." And such knowledge, for Schlegel, results in an "heroic endurance" and an appreciation of "the dignity of human nature" (Dukore, 500, 504). For the more cynical Schopenhauer, however, it results in "a *quieting* effect on the will, produces resignation, the surrender not merely of life, but of the very will to live" (Dukore, 516).

Another ramification of this tragic vision of a dualistic universe in which the individual strives for metaphysical knowledge is a shift in focus from plot to character, as Hegel details in the following passage:

That which is of valid force in ancient drama, therefore ... is the universal and essential content of the end, which individuals seek to achieve. In tragedy this is the ethical claim of human consciousness in view of the particular action in question, the vindication of the act on its own account.

In *modern* romantic tragedy, on the contrary, it is the individual passion, the satisfaction of which can only be relative to a wholly personal end, generally speaking the destiny of some particular person or character placed under exceptional circumstances, which forms the subject-matter of all importance. (Dukore, 538)

This shift corresponds to the move from external to internal conflict in tragedy, from conflict that is the result of a hero's struggle with an outside force, such as Antigone's, to that which is the result of a hero's struggle with himself, such as Hamlet's.

It should be clear by now that the claim that Aristotle is at the centre of theoretical discussion of tragedy requires some qualification. Aristotle is certainly at the centre of such discussion in the sense that both neoclassic and

romantic theorists invoke his authority.²⁶ The neoclassicists of the Italian Renaissance did think, as Weinberg explains,

of themselves as Aristotelians and of their theories as going back to the authority of Aristotle. Rarely, did they openly dissent ... never did they realize that their ideas would be completely unacceptable to a sound Aristotelian. (199)

Later neoclassicists like Natham Tate and Johnson adapted Shakespeare's tragedies, as Bratchell reminds us, "to bring them into line with classical decorum" (9).²⁷ And, where there was any question, classical practice was viewed as authoritative. Joseph Addison, for instance, writes that he does not know who first established the rule of "poetical justice," but he is sure that it "has no foundation ... in the practice of the ancients" (Dukore, 388).

As for the romantics, some managed to preserve Aristotle's authority by reclaiming the *Poetics* from neoclassicism.²⁸ Such theorists emphasize the difference between Aristotle, whose ideas they find complementary to their own, and neoclassic misrepresentations of his ideas. Thus, Coleridge, is able to reject neoclassicism, while embracing "the principle of Aristotle, that poetry is essentially *ideal*" (Richter, 312).²⁹ And Lessing is free to abhor "the little mechanical rules" of neoclassicism, while revering Aristotle, his "major critical touchstone," and the *Poetics*, "a work as infallible as the Elements of Euclid" (cit. Carlson, 168).³⁰

Others put forth a view of cultural relativism that acknowledges the excellence of the *Poetics*, but argues that the tragedy of the modern age should not be governed by the theory of antiquity. "The idea of each epoch always

finds its appropriate and adequate form" (Dukore, 26), asserts Hegel, and, according to the romantics, the appropriate form that the modern idea finds is Shakespearean tragedy. A romantic such as Herder, therefore, could be "confident," suggests Halliwell, "that if Aristotle were alive today, he would produce a very different work of poetics to accommodate the distinctive nature of 'northern,' i.e. Shakespearean, drama" ("Epilogue," 419). Romanticism, in other words, is Aristotelian in spirit.

Neither neoclassic nor romantic theories of tragedy are Aristotelian in form, however. Neoclassic theorists misinterpret many of Aristotle's ideas, and romantic theorists tend to downplay them, lending credence to the view that what theorists mean by tragedy has as much or more to do with the needs and expectations that they bring to their reading of the *Poetics* as it has to do with what Aristotle says about tragedy in his treatise.

Clearly, Sprengnether's claim that tragedy "reflects ... a historically specific encoding of practices and values" is a valid one. Theorists do display a penchant for adapting Aristotle's "authoritative" conception of tragedy to the concerns of their own times and their own conceptions of tragedy. And the consequence of this inclination to rework Aristotle is that—at least since the revisioning of Aristotle by the pseudo-Aristotelians—Aristotle's ideas on tragedy rarely have been received in an unadulterated form. Twentieth-century conceptions of Aristotelian tragedy are contaminated by romantic notions, which are contaminated by neoclassic, which are contaminated by the precepts of

Horace, Seneca, and others. Twentieth-century theorists may well approach tragedy as "Aristotelian" tragedy, as a genre defined and authorized by Aristotle. The genre they encounter, however, is actually a creation of the last four centuries.

That neoclassicism still colours our understanding of Aristotelian tragedy can be seen in the way that we customarily understand *hamartia*. The emphasis on the moral function of tragedy by the pseudo-Aristotelians has led, as Naomi Conn Liebler argues, to *hamartia* being "generally read as an error or a moral failing" (42). Aristotle's notion of *hamartia*, however, has nothing to do with the moral nature of the tragic hero.³¹ Rather, as Gerald Else claims, its "missing of the mark" is an action and, like recognition, "part of the plot" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 385). In Liebler's words, *hamartia* "is something protagonists do, not what they *are* intrinsically. ... For Aristotle, the basic 'goodness' of the hero is a given; tragedy arises when 'good' is problematized by plot or circumstance" (43). *Hamartia*, then, is not about virtue or vice, but about a deed committed by a protagonist. Despite the neoclassic focus on morality (and the romantic focus on the nature of the hero), there is, as Liebler notes, "no such thing as a 'tragic flaw'" in Aristotle (44).

Neoclassicism's lingering influence can also be seen in the way that many twentieth-century critics view a play's adherence to the unities as a measure of its success. T.S. Eliot, for instance, has the following to say about

the "laws" of the unities in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1937):

The laws (*not* rules) of unity of place and time remain valid in that every play which observes them *in so far as its material allows* is in that respect and degree superior to plays which observe them less. (cit. Leech, 75)

And, more recently, Robert Brustein, the artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre and, according to Jill Dolan, "generally considered the 'dean' of American theatre critics" ("Bending Gender," 321) has promoted Marsha Norman's *'night Mother* as "chastely classical in its observance of the unities" of time, space, and action.

Even Bertolt Brecht, who repudiates the unities, associates them with Aristotelian drama. Brecht does not distinguish the theory of Aristotle from that of the pseudo-Aristotelians. His antithesis, as Halliwell notes, is between "Dramatic Theatre," which is "supposedly Aristotelian through and through," and "Epic Theatre," "often characterised negatively as 'nicht-aristotelisch' and marked by an 'alienation effect' which is conceived as the contrary of *katharsis*" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 316). And while Epic Theatre is marked, explains Brecht, by its attempt to "master the rules governing the great social processes of our age," Dramatic Theatre, which Brecht spurns, is marked by its attempt to conform to the "eternal laws of the theatre" (*Brecht*, 161).

Romanticism, too, has left its imprint on our understanding of tragedy. The romantic concept of cultural relativism, which recognizes that the "idea of each epoch" requires its own "appropriate and adequate form," is reflected in

Brecht's and Antonin Artaud's notion that theatre's past masterpieces, past theories, belong to the past. In Artaud's words, they "are no good to us. We have a right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way that belongs to us" (60). In Brecht's words, contemporary theatre "constructed according to the old recipes," represents "crudely and carelessly men's life together." New theatre requires new "recipes," a new aesthetics, to accommodate its distinctive nature (*Brecht*, 183).

Further, the emphasis on character by romantic critics has resulted in what Palmer refers to as "the cult of the tragic hero" and the notion that heroism possesses "its own intrinsic value" (85, 87).³² If in ancient tragedy, as Kierkegaard argues, the disaster is brought on for the most part by external determinants such as "state, family, and destiny," in modern tragedy, the "hero stands and falls entirely on his own acts" (Dukore, 552-53). Shakespearean tragedy is, according to A.C. Bradley, "primarily the story of one person, the hero," whose "greatness of soul" is manifest through the "exceptional suffering and calamity" he endures. And such a view has led to a notion of the hero as an "exceptional being" who is ennobled by his heroic perseverance in the face of adversity. His engagement with "the forces destructive of life," as Jonathan Dollimore explains, "paradoxically pressure it into its finest expression in the events which lead to, and especially those that immediately precede, the protagonist's death. ... [I]n defeat and death 'man' finds his apotheosis" (49-50). Tragedy has indeed become, as Palmer puts it, "a form of hero worship" (75).

Finally, the romantic foregrounding of a tragic vision of life is still with us. Bradley, for instance, sums up the "tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare," as "the impression of waste":

Everywhere ... we see power, intelligence, life and glory ... And everywhere we see them perishing, devouring one another and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain, as though they came into being for no other end. (16)

Clifford Leech also emphasizes a bleak "tragic sense of life," which suggests "that our situation is necessarily tragic, that all men live in an evil situation and, if they are aware, are anguished because they are aware" (22-23). And Schopenhauer's cynical summary of the tragic insight—"For the greatest crime of man/Is that he was born" (from Calderon)—is central to the definitions of tragedy of a number of other theorists, such as Richard Sewall, Murray Krieger, Cyrus Hoy, and George Steiner, whom Palmer refers to as the "existential pessimists" (72).³³

In "Tragedy, Pure and Simple," for example, Steiner argues that authentic tragedy is essentially life denying. It is a dramatic representation of a "world-view" that sees "human life *per se*, both ontologically and existentially, [as] an affliction ... We are unwelcome guests, old enough at the moment of birth (as Montaigne says) to be a corpse and blessed only if this potentiality is realized as swiftly as can be." And from this, it follows that giving birth to children is "folly or deliberate cruelty," that suicide is "logical," and that "language must cease" (536, 544).

It also follows that genuine tragedy is a paradox. The absolute negation that characterizes the tragic attitude and is the basis of tragedy occurs only sporadically: the "intellectual convictions ... which would dictate self-annihilation tend ... to be brief and intermittent," like "black holes" (537). And when a dramatist embraces the tragic view, the logical outcome is death, not the writing of a play. Tragedy says "no" to life; the writing of tragic drama says "yes." Or, as Steiner comments,

the absolute tragic statement implies positive values of survivance, of formal beauty or innovation, of repeatability. In some ways it cheats. No one wrote tragedies in the extermination camps. (Music was composed, but this is another, and exceedingly difficult, question.) (544)

Genuine tragedy by this view, therefore, is either fraudulent or a contradiction in terms. "Why should a man or woman bent on death ... bother to write a play," asks Steiner, bother to "indulge life" (537, 536).

Despite the huge influence that romantic notions of a tragic sense of life and tragic heroism have exerted on our conception of tragedy, not all twentieth-century theorists are neo-romantics. Consider, for instance, what Camus has to say about tragedy. After examining the two "tragic moments" in Western history, Camus concludes that tragedy thrives during times of critical change and turmoil. Both Shakespeare and Aeschylus "stand at a kind of dangerous turning in the history of their civilization," a turning "that marks a transition between forms of cosmic thought, each impregnated with the notion of divinity and holiness, and the other forms which, on the contrary, are inspired by individualistic and rationalistic concepts."³⁴ At such moments, when "the

pendulum of civilization is halfway between a sacred society and a society built around man" tragedy appears.³⁶ It disappears each time the balance is upset. For if "all is mystery, there is no tragedy. If all is reason the same thing happens. Tragedy is born between light and shade, and from the struggle between them" ("Lecture," 192, 193, 199, 198).³⁶

There are romantic influences here. Camus' claim that "the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified" ("Lecture," 196) echoes Hegel's claim that the major form of conflict in Greek tragedy is between opposing goods, as in *Antigone*, where the demands of both Antigone and Creon can be justified (Dukore, 538-39). And Camus does, like the romantic idealists, juxtapose a human and a cosmic realm. In particular, his "tragic dualism," as Carlson asserts, "recall[s] Hebbel" (399), who claims that drama's role is to represent "the existing state of the world and man in their relationship to the Idea" (cit. Carlson, 252).³⁷

"Unlike the Romantics, however," as Palmer points out, Camus elevates "human value in the face of the universal" (69).³⁸ If "Romantic drama ... represents ... the struggle between good and evil," the "ideal tragedy," according to Camus represents "the conflict ... between two powers, each of which wears the double mask of good and evil." Moreover, the hero that Camus refers to is not the cult hero of romanticism. Romanticism, argues Camus,

proclaims the rights of the individual and empties the stage. ... Romanticism will thus write no tragedies but simply dramas ... Man is alone, and he is thus confronted with nothing but himself. He ceases to be a tragic character and becomes an adventurer.

Tragedy, declares Camus, is not about the solitary hero: Euripides upsets "the tragic balance by concentrating on the individual and on psychology." It is about the struggle between the divine order, "personified by a god or incarnated in society," and "men ... armed with the power to question" ("Lecture," 196-97, 200, 198-99).

Liebler, who claims that it "is time to reassess some of what Aristotle had to say about the nature of tragedy" (40), argues that theories of tragedy that "focus obsessively" on the tragic hero, "tend to occlude the fact that Aristotelian tragedy is at least equally interested in the *agon* of the community" (13). In fact, the function of what Booth calls "the emergency measure that the word *tragedy* is itself" is, as Tom o' Bedlam phrases it in *King Lear*, "to prevent the fiend and to kill vermin," that is, "prophylaxis and purgation" (9). The subject of Aristotelian tragedy, in short, is the community, specifically, its social and political health. It is not the tragic hero, "who is less the subject than the agency or surrogate" through whom the order of his imperiled community is restored (34). In tragedy, explains Liebler, "when the ordered relations of a community are disrupted, the hero draws to herself or himself all of the ambiguity and crisis present in the community." The hero, in other words, becomes the locus of all that threatens his community, "and ... must be destroyed" if his community is to regain "some semblance of order" (9, 16, 17).³⁹

Moreover, it is Aristotle, with his focus on the preservation of the *polis*, who has had the most significant effect on the understanding of tragedy of

Augusto Boal, Artaud, and Brecht, according to Liebler. Boal's claim that tragedy acts to purge an "impurity ... that threatens the individual's equilibrium, and consequently that of society," for example, owes a debt to Aristotle (Boal, 31-32; Liebler, 38-39). As for Artaud and Brecht, their understanding of tragedy, claims Liebler, "unexpectedly recalls the heart of the Aristotelian position" (45). Aristotle's theory of catharsis, which sees the crisis of a community localized in the tragic hero, "just as an organism fighting a disease localizes antibodies at the site of infection," is, suggests Liebler, "the operation of Artaud's analogy of theater and plague" (9). And there is a "classical core" to Brecht's argument against "'romantic' identification with the hero," his "effort to erase the habitual focus on character and actor in favor of the larger view of 'things'" (45-46). Finally, Brecht's and Artaud's call "for a theatre that shook people up and disturbed their complacencies" is the theatre that Aristotle describes (46-47).

While I would not label "Aristotelian" the theory of Camus, Boal, Brecht, or Artaud, I do think that what these theorists have to say about tragedy "recalls the heart of the Aristotelian position" in the sense that they, like Aristotle, recognize that the subject of tragedy is the community.⁴⁰ They recognize that tragedy is a political genre. It is not about the solitary hero of romanticism, for, as Camus maintains, when an individual is "confronted with nothing but himself," he "ceases to be a tragic character." And this recognition that aesthetics and politics are linked in tragedy is a crucial one for feminist playwrights who argue against tragedy and its preservation of patriarchal order

in their re-visions of Euripides and Shakespeare. For if some years ago, to rephrase W.G. Forrest's comment, most theorists "did not believe that tragedy had much to do with politics," feminist theorists have never believed "that it had to do with much else" (229).

Arguments Against Tragedy as Arguments Against Patriarchy

"Is there something about the nature of tragedy," asks Carol W. Gelderman, "which is essentially male?" (221). And, in the sense that aesthetics and sexual politics have always been linked in tragedy, that tragedy has always privileged patriarchal culture—and patriarchal culture has always privileged tragedy—there is.⁴¹

Camus speculates that the two "tragic moments" in western history must be "very exceptional times," which "should by their very peculiarity tell us something about the conditions for tragic expression." And about the fifth-century Athens that gave birth to tragedy two things stand out. The first is that the *polis* is a society organized on patriarchal principles which is not far removed from the tribal culture of the Homeric poems. The second is that during "the great golden age of drama, some say of civilization, the status of women was lower," as Gelderman claims, than at "any other time in Western civilized history." And, significantly, during the Renaissance, the second great age of tragic drama and of civilization, women's status was analogous to that of the women of fifth-century Athens. As Joan Kelly argues in "Did Women Have a

Renaissance?" this period "was no renaissance for women." During it, "women as a group ... experienced a contraction of social and personal options ... as the family and political life were restructured in the great transition from medieval feudal society to the early modern state" (19-21). Moreover, Renaissance women, like their classical predecessors, were excluded from the public realm. Writings "on education, domestic life, and society," claims Kelly, "distinguish an inferior domestic realm of women from the superior public realm of men, achieving a veritable 'renaissance' of the outlook and practices of classical Athens, with its domestic imprisonment of citizen wives" (21-22).⁴² Clearly, Gelderman's remark that the development of Greek tragedy—"the great public art"—has "complex and important relationships with the development of Athenian male identity" (226, 222) applies to both Greek and Renaissance tragedy and male identity.⁴³

The *polis* was founded "in poetry and philosophy," to borrow Nancy Hartsock's phrase. In a general sense, what this means is that from the middle of the sixth century B.C., as Albrecht Dihle explains, the dances and songs that were part of the rites of rural community cults

were fostered, expanded and adopted as the official cult in a number of Greek states, by tyrants seeking to establish broad-based support among the population, and to turn their states from aristocratic, noble associations into genuine polities. Accounts from several Greek states thus report how ruling tyrants called on poet-composers to provide songs for an obscure local cult and its legends.

For the development of tragedy, of course, the most significant example of such policy, is that of Athens, "where the tyrant Peisistratus incorporated into its

festival calendar the cult of Dionysus" and introduced "a programme for its artistic development," which led in the fifth century to the performance of the first tragedies (91-92). In a more specific sense, the "transition from the tribal or clan-based world portrayed in the Homeric poems to the world of the *polis* is marked in poetic and mythological terms by *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus in the fifth century B.C." (Hartsock, 189-90).

It has been claimed by most commentators that the transition from tribal culture to the *polis* is distinguished by the establishment of private property, the family unit, and patriarchal marriage as the basis of social and political organization. And this, as Sue-Ellen Case explains, "radically altered the role of women," whose "important role ... within the family unit" led to them being "banished from public life," and to their economic rights and legal powers being severely restricted (*Feminism*, 7-9).⁴⁴

It has further been claimed by some that the transition from tribal culture to the *polis* corresponds to a transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal culture. In the 1830s, for example, J.J. Bachofen relied on classical sources in his book *Das Mutterrecht*, where he argued for "the primacy of matriarchy ... in the early stages of a universal cultural development."⁴⁵ And Gelderman, using the term "'matriarchy' very loosely," claims that "Athenian law points to a time when all property descended through women," and that in tribal society

men and women formed and broke unions as they pleased, so that most women did not know who the fathers of their children were. The father did not count in the reckoning of the relationship. This is why gods and

heroes were commonly referred to in Greek genealogies by the names of their mothers. (221-222)⁴⁶

This shift to patriarchal culture, Gelderman continues, is reflected in Greek literature. Whereas "the killing of the mother is rare ... in Greek mythology" and in Homer, in Greek tragedy, Orestes, "the mother-killer," is "the central figure." After all, "if the male must establish his unquestioned preeminence, what better way than by killing off his mother?" (222-223). Even Froma I. Zeitlin, who acknowledges that "matriarchy in the literal meaning of the term is not provable as a historical reality," allows that "the Greek mythic imagination is rich in projections of female autonomy, and Greek religion is amply populated with powerful female deities who seem to antedate their male counterparts in the pantheon" (*Playing*, 89, 88).⁴⁷

Whether or not they believe that matriarchy was ever a historical fact, many feminist critics, as Case remarks, "have analysed *The Oresteia* as a text central to the formalisation of misogyny" (*Feminism*, 12). Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millet both view this trilogy as the mythic rendering of the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy. De Beauvoir suggests that what Aeschylus depicts is the replacement of "matrilineal" with "patrilineal descent" (79). Millet finds the final scenes of *The Oresteia* to be nothing more than "five pages of local chamber of commerce rhapsody" that chart the triumph of patriarchy (115). And Hartsock sees *The Oresteia* as the portrayal of the founding of the *polis* "through a process of domesticating and subordinating the dangerous and

threatening female forces that surround what is to become the political community" (190).⁴⁸

One of the most perceptive interpretations, however, of what Case sums up as the dramatization by Aeschylus in *The Oresteia* of "the 'battle of the sexes,' using Athenian cultural and political codes to prescribe that women must lose the battle" (*Feminism*, 13) is the one Zeitlin offers in a chapter of *Playing the Other* that is entitled "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*." Here Zeitlin argues that in *The Oresteia* Aeschylus "draws upon his mythopoetic powers in the service of world building," and that "the cornerstone of his architecture is the control of women, the social and cultural prerequisite for the construction of civilization." In other words, the central problem in *The Oresteia* is the subjugation of women in the name of "higher social goals." And the solution to the problem is "the establishment, in the face of female resistance, of the binding nature of patriarchal marriage" (87-88).⁴⁹

The Oresteia, according to Zeitlin, "looks both ways." In its treatment of "a dynastic myth known ... from the beginning of Greek literature," it "stands as the fullest realization" of the misogyny "that from its first literary expression in the *Odyssey* is already associated with Clytemnestra." And in its mythmaking it integrates this misogyny "into a coherent system of new values," providing "the decisive model for the future legitimation of this attitude in Western thought" (87-88).

The Oresteia does more than simply tell the story of men's triumph over women. It offers a justification of patriarchy. To do so, argues Zeitlin, it re-works "a widely distributed myth of matriarchy, the so-called Rule of Women." And here Zeitlin cites as "[f]ar more compelling" than theories of a literal matriarchy Joan Bamberger's

theory of the myth of matriarchy as myth, not "a memory of history, but a social charter," which "may be part of social history in providing justification for a present and perhaps permanent reality by giving an invented 'historical' explanation of how this reality was created." (90)

This explanation can be summed up as follows: "Women once had power, but they abused it through 'trickery and unbridled sexuality,' thus fostering 'chaos and misrule.' The men, therefore, rebelled. They assumed control and took steps to institutionalize the subordination of women" (*Playing*, 90).

"The progression of events in *The Oresteia* is straightforward," explains Zeitlin:

Woman rises up against male authority in a patriarchal society. By slaying her husband and by choosing her own sexual partner, she shatters the social norms and brings social functioning to a standstill. Portrayed as a monstrous androgyne, she demands and usurps male power and prerogatives. Son then slays mother in open alliance with the cause of the father and husband, and mother's Erinyes, in turn, pursue him in retribution. (89)

Once the trilogy is closely examined, however, matters are not quite as simple as they first appear:

Clytemnestra, the female principle, in the first play is a shrewd, intelligent rebel against the masculine regime. By the last play, through her representatives, the Erinyes, the female principle is now allied with the archaic, primitive, and regressive, while the male, in the person of the young god Apollo, champions conjugality, society, and progress. His

interests are ratified by the androgynous goddess Athena, who sides with the male and confirms his primacy. Through gradual and subtle transformations, social evolution is posed as a movement from female dominance to male dominance. (89)

On one level, then, *The Oresteia* is the story of the rebellion—and subsequent defeat—of Clytemnestra, an atypical woman, "a monstrous androgyne." On another, more complex level, *The Oresteia* exploits the myth of matriarchy to couple the "female principle" with "the archaic, primitive, and regressive."⁵⁰ And, in so doing, the trilogy demonstrates that women are "basically unruly," "not fit to rule, only to be ruled," thus, justifying "male dominance" as "social evolution" (90).⁵¹

Further, Aeschylus's "intricate and fascinating variant" of the myth of matriarchy differs from simpler versions of the myth, according to Zeitlin, in that where these present the defeat of matriarchy "as a definitive masculine triumph that establishes the pattern for all time," Aeschylus's variation attests

to the continuing renewability of the battle between the sexes in many areas and circumstances. ... The vigorous denial of power to woman overtly asserts her inferiority while at the same time expressing anxiety about her persistent but normally dormant power that may always erupt into open violence. (90)

For Orestes' defeat of Clytemnestra is far from a conclusive victory over the female principle. "The murder of the mother," Zeitlin claims, "evokes a renewed and redoubled power, exemplified now in a proliferation of negative female imagoes of supernatural origin." The mother, in other words, is killed, but the Erinyes, "the vengeful incarnations of Clytemnestra," are far from vanquished (96-97).

Another perceptive interpretation of *The Oresteia's* staging of "the 'battle of the sexes'" is Gail Holst-Warhaft's examination of "mourning and lament as a central preoccupation of the trilogy." Holst-Warhaft applauds Zeitlin's "provocative" reading of the trilogy. Her own reading, she continues, agrees with critics who, like Zeitlin, see *The Oresteia* as "a fundamental examination of the institutions of the *polis*" (136).⁵² It also supports the claims of Zeitlin and others who contend that Aeschylus undermines patriarchy by undermining "women's control over birth" (159). Holst-Warhaft's study is of particular interest, however, because of the way it extends Zeitlin's argument to show how women's control over death as well as birth is undermined by *The Oresteia* and tragedy.

"What is common to laments for the dead in most 'traditional' cultures," explains Holst-Warhaft, "is that they are part of more elaborate rituals for the dead, and that they are usually performed by women" (2). Through the art of lament, women are able to speak to the dead, and, through "a sort of possession on the lamenter's part," the dead are also able to speak to the living. "Such a dialogue with the dead places a certain power in the hands of women," a power, argues Holst-Warhaft, that poses a threat to a patriarchal society.⁵³ Thus, in classical Greece, "from the sixth century BC onwards, legislation was introduced in Athens and a number of the more advanced city-states aimed at the restriction of what is viewed as extravagant mourning of the dead" (3).

State opposition to women's mourning, however, was not wholly effective.⁵⁴ Legislation alone was not able to offset the "power of the lament," and allow men to "take at least partial control over death." It took "two literary genres," maintains Holst-Warhaft, "that are, in Nicole Loraux's phrase, 'the invention of Athens'" to subvert the power of the lament and "its great antiphonal dialogue with death": the "*Epitaphios Logos*, or encomium, delivered at the tomb, and the tragedy" (4-5).

Tragedy, insists Holst-Warhaft, is an appropriation of women's lament, "and we sense in its language, its inscrutable echoes of music and dance, an older body of ritual, a sub-stratum which informs and at times intrudes itself into an urban, male art" (11). In *The Oresteia*, tragedy "is usurping a female art form" by making it its own.⁵⁵ The song that the Furies sing in the *Choephoroi* while dancing in a ring around Orestes is "a *moirólói*, a song of fate, one that belongs to the female world and should not be witnessed by men. Tragedy ... is staging a ritual song, mimicking the forbidden." In so doing, tragedy is both "unleash[ing] and contain[ing] the dark witchy power of women." It may also be functioning as a "form of ... voyeurism" (157).

The arguments for the formalisation of misogyny that are presented by *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus in poetic and mythological terms are developed more fully by Aristotle in philosophical terms.⁵⁶ From "The Teacher," as Maryanne Cline Horowitz writes, "have come many of the standard Western arguments for the inferiority of womankind and the political subordination of

women to men in home and society" (183). For Aristotle did not accept the radical views of Plato—whom Horowitz terms "a feminist for his time" (184)—concerning women. "He instead," as Rosemary Agonito writes, "represented the orthodox Greek position, which he sought to justify by various means" (41). In Boal's words, Aristotle accepted "*already existing inequalities*" as "just" (23).⁵⁷

In *The Eumenides*, Apollo argues that the father is the true parent; the mother is merely a sort of incubator:

The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere. ... There can be a father without any mother. (ll. 657-63)

Aristotle not only accepts Apollo's argument, he goes on to provide philosophical and scientific validation for it with a theory of reproduction, which, as Horowitz asserts, while "recognizing the necessary role the female plays in bearing the young, [goes] about as far as one can in attributing fertility exclusively to the male sex" (193).

According to Aristotle, man is the norm and woman is an incomplete or "mutilated male."⁵⁸ The male is "active and motive," the female is "passive and moved." And, although women have souls, they are less spiritual than men: "femaleness" is material, "maleness" is spiritual.⁵⁹ From this Aristotle concludes that woman is passive when it comes to reproduction, and that, of the four causes for the genesis of the embryo, only the material cause, the one that is of the least importance, can be attributed to the female. Only the male can initiate conception, can supply the "principle of movement."⁶⁰ Only the

male, whose semen "both has soul, and is soul, potentially," has the capacity to generate a rational soul. Through his semen the male contributes form or spirit, while the female contributes "material for the semen to work upon" ("De Generatione," I, 20; 729a, 28-35).

Extrapolating from his theory of reproduction, Aristotle argues that woman is naturally inferior to man in an intellectual and moral, as well as a physical, sense. Since she has less rational soul than man, woman's "deliberative faculty" is "without authority." Whereas man's is the "virtue of the rational," hers is that "of the irrational part." And the same applies to the moral virtues. Man, "the ruler," requires "moral virtue in perfection," but woman, "the subject," requires "only that measure of virtue" necessary for her to fulfill her duty, which is to obey man (*Politics*, I, 13; 1260a). In short, woman's deficiency of male principle means that she relies on man to give her children, to make her decisions for her, and to preserve her from moral weakness by governing her behaviour.⁶¹

Aristotle's ideas about politics reflect his ideas about biology and ethics. Therefore, woman's function is to be passive, not only in reproductive affairs, but in public and civic affairs. Man is suited for rational and public activity, woman for physical and private activity. Her role is, as Horowitz puts it, to spend her days "far from the assembly, the marketplace, the gymnasia, and the schools, dutifully occupied in the women's quarter of [her] household" (212).⁶² "If all classes must be deemed to have their special attributes," says Aristotle,

"Silence is a woman's glory,' but this is not equally the glory of man" (*Politics*, I, 13; 1260a, 28-31).

More significantly, Aristotle's political theory is linked to his aesthetic theory, specifically to his theory of tragedy. For Aristotle, as Stephen G. Salkever shows, "art in general and tragedy in particular are no more proper objects of theory than is politics; one may theorize ... about tragedy and about politics, but there can be no separate aesthetic or political theory" (276). The *Poetics*, thus, "should be read as part of Aristotle's political philosophy" (276, n.5).

Once this is done, argues Salkever, it becomes "apparent that Aristotle's preference for tragedy does not represent a universal aesthetic judgment in abstraction from social context, but indicates his judgment that the tragic art is crucial to the successful actualization of a good democracy" (302-303). It also becomes apparent, I would argue, why tragedy is by nature a male genre. After all, if tragedy's purpose is to promote "the way of life or order" (301) that distinguishes a good democracy, and in such a regime the household is woman's proper domain and silence her proper virtue, it makes sense that tragedy cater exclusively to the male. The ideal tragic character, claims Aristotle in the *Poetics*, "should be good." And both a woman and a slave may be good, "even though the former of these is inferior to a man, and the latter is completely ignoble." Propriety is also important. Thus, manliness or bravery, as well as "the intellectual cleverness that is associated with men" is inappropriate

in a woman" (XV; 1454a). Not surprisingly, woman, who is in Aristotle's biological theory "an impotent male" ("De Generatione," I, 20; 728a, 19-20), is in Aristotle's aesthetic theory an inferior tragic hero.

Since Aristotle, tragedy continues to regard woman as a second-rate tragic hero. Tragedy continues to function to elevate the male hero and his story, and to marginalize woman and her story. And this is the case, argues Linda Kintz, because, according to Aristotle's theory of tragedy, "Oedipus' drama *is* the species called tragedy, just as Oedipus *is* the species called human being" (28). Moreover,

the specific *generic* requirements of Greek [or Aristotelian] tragedy continue to function as the hidden structural model for theories of subjectivity as well as for theories of drama in general ... The generic features of tragedy produce a dramatic and theoretical discourse that in many ways requires that there be no female agency as it guarantees the masculinity of both the protagonist and theorist. (1)

In other words, the continuing influence of Greek tragedy means that, as Zeitlin notes, "theoretical critics from Aristotle on never consider anyone but the male hero as the critical feature of the genre; they devote their attention to outlining *his* traits, configurations, and dilemmas" (*Playing*, 346-47).

To rephrase Kintz's rhetorical question, then, since Aristotle, "every theory of the subject that is *tragic* [is] masculine" (14). As Patti P. Gillespie shows in an insightful discussion of this subject, "the tradition of dramatic theories fully grounded in male culture and male presuppositions" that began with the Greeks did not end with the Greeks.⁶³ Instead, "such presuppositions hardened in the Renaissance, when developing nations centralized political

power and courts took an interest in governing art along with everything else."⁶⁴ Later, neoclassical theorists formulated the principle of decorum, which "meant, among other things, that men should behave like men and women like women, in a culture ruled by men."⁶⁵ In such a culture, women's place was not to write tragedy, the composition of which, states Voltaire, "requires *testicles*."⁶⁶ Even romantic theorists who, with Goethe, challenged neoclassical precepts as "the stupidest of laws," did not "question (or even see) male hegemony. Their theories, like preceeding ones kept woman in her place."⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century, "a changing sense of history" and the influence of thinkers such as Darwin, Mendel, Freud, and Marx resulted in a re-thinking of theatre by some theorists. And Marxism and psychoanalysis, as well as the theories "of the neo-Aristotelians and new critics" became influential in the twentieth century. Further, Marxism, in particular, had much to say about the politics of literature and criticism that later would prove useful to feminists.⁶⁸ The problem was, as Gillespie points out, that none of these theories "questioned (or even saw) the male domination within theory" (104-107).

The history of tragic theory from Aristotle's day to our own, then, is "transparently a history of intellectual and political fashion."⁶⁹ Moreover, what can be said of theory can also be said of criticism and literature. Both the critic and the artist, as Marxist theory has taught us, are products of the historic moment. Traditional criticism, as Fraya Katz-Stoker writes, "was never judicially dispassionate but only used its self-proclaimed autonomy to discourage

questioning of its (male) value system," to, as it were, preserve the status quo (326). And, as Millet shows in *Sexual Politics*, literature often embodies the dominant ideology of its culture, often engages in counter-revolutionary politics.

Still, not all literature reflects the reactionary political attitudes of the patriarchal powers that be. "One cannot," as Adrienne Munich points out, "neatly equate a text with the sex of its author; the identity of an individual writer may not be coterminous with her or his sexual organs." In fact, "to subject literary texts to the absolute polarities of sex ... identifies with dominant (patriarchal) thinking." A masculinist text may well possess a radical subtext. In *Don Quixote*, for example, Pan's discourse on male desire constitutes the canonical text. But the novel "allows a different discourse in the fissures of its telling; it presents a feminist critique of male love" (244, 248). And even "the misogynist aspects of literature" tell us something about woman's existence "as a colonized element of patriarchy." The Marcela story in *Don Quixote*, for instance, "imagines the problems of female subjectivity in a way that few Renaissance women could express ... That Cervantes was a male writer is a fact of *women's* history" (250).

Consequently, continues Munich, while the canon inevitably reflects the sexist politics of the colonizer in one way or another, it may not be "as masculinist as some feminist criticism has assumed." The problem is that traditional criticism "has created a narrowly patriarchal discourse that limits reading" (251), a discourse that, as Katz-Stoker explains, obscures "any

undesirable content" by directing the reader's attention "away from the undesirable subversive message" (323). In Carolyn Heilbrun's words, criticism grants only a patriarchal point of view: "We, men, women and Ph.D.s have always read ... [literature] as men" (cit. Robinson and Vogel, 286). In short, as Munich argues, critical discourse "has tended to be more misogynist than the texts it examines. Tagged with patriarchal interpretation, canonical texts pass into the culture validated by what the Institution of Reading has understood" (251).

Where tragedy is concerned, therefore, I would argue that it is the theorists and critics—not the playwrights—who are unequivocally aligned with patriarchy. As Munich claims, in order to "privilege certain forms as great, certain themes as important and certain genres as major," traditional criticism has had to "disregard or elide those very aspects in the 'great' texts that are incongruent with patriarchal gender definitions" (251-52). To borrow, Munich's example here, how many of us

were taught that the *Oresteia* is about the establishment of justice for western civilization, rather than that it is [as Zeitlin shows] a great act of mythopoeia in which politics are sexualized and where the idea of justice becomes defined as "masculine"? (251)

For that matter, how many of us were taught that Aeschylus is even more subtle than Zeitlin allows for in her reading. Traditional criticism, according to Holst-Warhaft, has bypassed an entire subtext in *The Oresteia*: the "obvious failure of the final scene of *The Eumenides* to silence the ancient deities of revenge" suggests that "Aeschylus himself is only half ready to believe" that the

"aged mythical powers can be so swiftly contained and redirected for the good of the state" (136-37).

Traditional criticism also seems to have overlooked that "female characters," as Helene P. Foley notes, "in tragedy often ... violate Aristotle's assumptions about what they should be like." They also violate the assumptions of popular culture, which in fifth-century Greece "viewed women as either incapable of, or not permitted to make autonomous moral decisions, and restricted them "largely to their households and to participation in religious events" ("Antigone," 50, 49). By way of an example, Foley offers the case of the "heroism and ... moral audacity" of Sophocles' Antigone, whose challenge to the "legitimate, male, civic authority" of Creon functions to "expose contradictions in Creon's mode of morality, and hence to indirectly problematize Athenian civic values and discourse" ("Antigone," 58, 66).

Most of the recent feminist dramatic re-visions that re-work canonical plays that I have discovered in my research re-work the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare, in particular, the latter's tragedies.⁷⁰ It seems to me, therefore, that the following questions need to be asked: Why are feminist playwrights drawn to revise canonical drama? Why are they drawn to tragedy? Why are they drawn specifically to the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare?

Feminist dramatic re-vision implicitly acknowledges Munich's claim that canonical texts have too often received an inadequate reading by the dominant (patriarchal) critics. One reason for re-vision of canonical drama, thus, is to

"question received interpretation" and to "expose women's presence in plays by men" (252), even if this presence is only to be found in a between-the-lines-of-the-main-text subtext. For, as Martha Tuck Rozett explains, when "writers transform Shakespeare's plays, they challenge ... the cultural and critical baggage the text has acquired over time." They "talk back" to "a critical tradition that privileges Hamlet as a tragic character," in an attempt to "stretch the texts in new directions" (5-7).

With respect to the question of why feminist playwrights are drawn to tragedy, the answer, I believe, is fairly straightforward. Ever since the founding of the *polis* in ancient Greece, tragedy has been employed in the service of patriarchy to justify the subordination of women. To subvert tragedy, as these playwrights do in their re-visions, therefore, is to subvert the reactionary political ideology of patriarchy.

Moreover, tragedy's focus on the male hero and his story and its marginalization of woman—deemed an "inferior" being by Aristotle—and her story means that, as Enoch Brater writes in his introduction to *Feminine Focus*, "Theater history seems to have canonized only part of the story, the much-maligned *history*" (x). Women in western literature have been depicted almost exclusively, as Virginia Woolf writes, as "seen by the other sex," and as "seen only in relation to the other sex" (82). The result is, as Gail Scott comments, that tragedy's "all powerful heroes" do not reflect a woman's "sense of self"

(117).⁷¹ Dramatic re-vision, with its focus on *herstory*, offers a way to deal with the problem of female subjectivity in male-authored texts.⁷²

With respect to the question of why feminist playwrights are drawn to re-write the tragedies of Shakespeare and Euripides specifically, however, the answer is somewhat more complicated. Certainly one part of the answer is the cultural authority of these two playwrights, an authority that can be tapped by feminist playwrights to legitimate or gain attention for what they have to say.⁷³ Euripides, after all, has been called "the forefather of European theatre" (Dihle, 132), Shakespeare the greatest playwright in the history of western theatre. Moreover, Shakespeare, in particular, "enters into the consciousness of everyone in the culture," as Michael Bristol writes, "whether or not they have read any of his plays" (5). In short, as Rozett comments, Shakespeare is "the writer everyone has heard of." Shakespeare is an institution that "has created an extraordinarily rich idiom of exchange, a common parlance of phrases, images, characters, and plots that ... [link] writers and audiences around the world" (13).

Another part of the answer is that these feminist playwrights admire Euripides and Shakespeare and their plays. Re-vision is, after all, as I explained in my first chapter, a close cousin to parody, which operates both to critique and to pay homage to an earlier work. In one respect, then, these playwrights are, as Carol Thomas Neely says, "defending" Shakespeare in their dramatic re-visions by directing their anger "against the male culture which has misread

him on behalf of its own values" ("Epilogue," 243-44). Even if they have some reservations about Euripides and Shakespeare, there is much about these two playwrights that feminist dramatists find to esteem.

A bigger part of the answer is that there *is* something special about the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare that invites re-vision. Both of these playwrights show so well the way that patriarchal culture has subordinated women. They show, as Minrose Gwin says in reference to Faulkner, "the *process* of women's silencing, the appropriative gesture of white male dominance" (cit. Sensibar, 283). More importantly, both of these playwrights in their tragedies offer their own arguments against tragedy—albeit sometimes subtle ones—which provide for the feminist playwright a foundation on which to build.

If "Oedipus' drama *is* the species called tragedy, if, as Coleridge remarks, "the tragedies of Sophocles are in the strict sense of the word tragedies," we must "find a new word for the plays of Shakespeare"—and, I would add, for the plays of Euripides (Dukore, 586).⁷⁴ For the women in Euripides' tragedies nearly all "violate Aristotle's assumptions about what they should be like." Medea, for instance, makes an autonomous moral decision to kill her children. And Melanippi is, as Foley notes, "manly and clever," possessing a "knowledge of science and philosophy unsuitable for a woman," by Aristotle's standards. In fact, argues Foley, "to eliminate manly or clever heroines would be to purge much of Euripides" ("Antigone," 50).

Further, Euripides is writing a different kind of tragedy than that of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Whereas most classical tragedy takes place in the public sphere, in "the palace of a king," according to Erich Segal, the tragedies of Euripides take place in the private sphere, the "living room replaces the throne room" (250).⁷⁵ And this move to the domestic realm, to the world of women, parallels a move, as Zeitlin comments, to

portraying the psychology of female characters and [a] general emphasis on interior states of mind as well as on the private emotional life of the individual, most often located in the feminine situation. (*Playing*, 364-65)

"In this new kind of play-world," claims Zeitlin, Euripides discloses the premises of tragedy—"he also revises them and subverts the genre that was so firmly bound up with the context of the masculine civic world." In short, Euripides "may be said to have 'feminized tragedy,'" a claim that is supported by Aristophanes' staging in the *Frogs* of a contest between Aeschylus, "espousing a manly virile art," and Euripides, "representing a feminine slender Muse" (*Playing*, 365-66).⁷⁶ "It is small wonder," as Erich Segal remarks, "that when scholars tire of calling Euripides 'the Greek Ibsen,' they dub him 'the Greek Pirandello'" (248).

If to "feminize" tragedy means to empathize with women's situation and to portray "the psychology of female characters," then Shakespeare too represents "a feminine slender Muse." As Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts write in their introduction to *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660-1900*, most of their authors "agree that Shakespeare had a special insight into female

psychology" (4).⁷⁷ His understanding of women is such, according to Margaret Cavendish, that "one would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe *Cleopatra* Better than he hath done, and many other Females of his own Creating" (13).⁷⁸

Shakespeare's women, claims George Eliot, "almost always *make love*, in opposition to the conventional notion of what is fitting for woman" (cit. Dusi, 72). This is an argument that Evelyn Gajowski develops in her study of Shakespeare's love tragedies. Shakespeare disrupts Petrarchan and Ovidian conventions, Gajowski demonstrates, "representing a radically new construction of romantic love and marriage" (20). Thus, Juliet proposes marriage to Romeo—and, once they are married, as Jill Levenson points out, "unknowingly inverts tradition" by speaking the epithalamium (30)—and Desdemona, as Gajowski comments, woos Othello (39, 55). Shakespeare's women "poke fun at male discursive practices," commenting on "men's idolatry from the margins in the same way that his rustics and artisans comment on the court" (21). Thus, Juliet "tutors Romeo in love," Gajowski remarks, "allowing him to surpass the roles of chivalric lover and chivalric avenger and making possible his metamorphosis from stereotypical Petrarchan lover to true lover." And both Juliet's and Desdemona's language is "more direct and less rhetorical" than that of their husbands (23). In short, claims Gajowski, in "the love tragedies," Shakespeare's female protagonists "are profounder in feeling, more realistic, and more mature in love than are the male protagonists" (25).

Shakespeare also disrupts genre. In "Vengeance in *Hamlet*," René Girard argues convincingly that Shakespeare subverts revenge tragedy in *Hamlet*. Girard admits that in this play Shakespeare is silent on the ethics of revenge. Since, "a revenge tragedy is not an appropriate vehicle for tirades against revenge," Shakespeare had to "[o]utwardly, at least ... respect the literary conventions of the time" (283). "Shakespeare's genius," however, turns "this constraint into an asset," explains Girard. He transforms the silence "at the heart of *Hamlet*" into a subtext, which allows him to provide "the crowd with the spectacle they demand while simultaneously writing between the lines, for all those who can read, a devastating critique of that same spectacle" (283, 287).

More significantly, what Girard says about revenge tragedy applies equally to tragedy generally. Rephrasing Girard, I would argue that, just because Shakespeare is "playing according to the rules of [tragedy] at one level," this does not mean that he does not "undermine these same rules at another" (287). If at one level, then, Shakespeare's tragic drama reflects tragedy's sexist political agenda, reflects the gender politics of patriarchy, at another, this same drama offers an argument against tragedy and what tragedy represents in Shakespeare's culture.

In the "suggestive gaps and silences," to borrow a phrase Margaret Clarke uses, of the patriarchal text of his tragedies, Shakespeare offers a matriarchal subtext. Put differently, the "reality" of women is, says Clarke, "something Shakespeare could only suggest by the absences" in *Hamlet*

(Burnett). Certainly, Ophelia's voice in *Hamlet* is muted. Nevertheless, to apply what Stephen Greenblatt says about Caliban to Ophelia, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare records "a voice, the voice of the displaced and oppressed that is heard scarcely anywhere else in his own time" (231-32). The Ophelia story, to adapt Munich's point about Cervantes, "imagines the problems" of female voice "in a way that few Renaissance ... women could express." That Shakespeare "was a male writer is a fact of *women's* history" (250).

Further, there are places in Shakespeare's tragedies where Shakespeare might well be "writing between the lines" to destabilize the tragic genre. MacDonald, for example, foregrounds sides of Desdemona and Juliet in *Goodnight Desdemona* that have often been ignored by critics to show that these women are in fact sisters of the strong, unconventional women of Shakespeare's comedies, whom Shakespeare was forced to water down to suit a genre that cannot accommodate independent women. She also foregrounds places in Shakespeare's plays where Shakespeare appears to challenge, at least implicitly, the idealism of a genre in which certain notions of romantic love, of honour and reputation are privileged. Other feminist critics have made similar suggestions. Gajowski, for example, argues that in the tragedies it is the female characters, Cordelia and Desdemona,

"in whom we feel the greatest moral strength," not the heroes, "although they are both good men." If the female protagonists are silenced and victimized by the tragic action, it is to raise questions about the destructive forces that bring about that silencing and victimizing. (78)⁷⁹

Accordingly, as Gajowski says elsewhere in her study, "to regard the deaths of these women "as victimizations—and no more than that—is to ignore the commentary that Shakespeare's texts make upon masculine impulses of possession, politics, and power" (22).

My contention, however, is that the feminist playwrights who re-write the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare ignore neither Shakespeare's commentary, nor Euripides' manly and clever heroines. Instead, these feminist playwrights in their dramatic re-visions pay close attention to Euripides' and Shakespeare's arguments against tragedy and against patriarchal culture—and then enlist these arguments in the service of their own. And, by helping to undermine tragedy, they are performing a necessary service. For if "Oedipus' drama *is* the species called tragedy," and if tragedy's limited options *do* allow only for a theory of the subject that is masculine, then it *is* time, as Teresa de Lauretis expresses it, for "a new aesthetic, a rewriting of culture" to displace tragedy from its hegemonic position.

Notes

1. While most commentators agree with Camus that there have been only two periods of tragic drama in Western history, the first from Aeschylus to Euripides, the second from Shakespeare to Racine, there are some who do not. Nietzsche, for instance, views as tragedy only the drama of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the operas of Wagner. Steiner, on the other hand, would add "Büchner's *Wozzeck*; some moments in Ibsen and, perhaps, Strindberg; [and] the metaphysical *guignol* of Beckett" to the list. (542). Still others would add John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* to the list. (During my defense, Sarah Westphal made the point that nineteenth-century opera is both parodic and possesses a tragic figure. I am not sure, however, that this makes it tragedy.)

2. As T.S. Dorsch comments, by "laying down and defining a critical terminology," Aristotle "rendered a valuable service to critics of later periods" (17). Perhaps, then, part of the reason so much attention has been paid to tragedy is that the disappearance of Aristotle's treatise on comedy deprived later critics of such a critical foundation.

3. Unless otherwise noted, references to Aristotle are to the *Poetics*, specifically to Leon Golden's translation. Both chapter and line numbers are offered.

4. I do not mean to suggest that Aristotle ignores the issue of class. The tragic hero, says Aristotle, is one who "enjoys great reputation and good fortune, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and other illustrious men from similar families" (XIII; Golden, 22). Aristotle's "good" man, then, may well come from a prominent family. This, however, is not what makes him one of "the nobler sort." In the *Poetics*, the emphasis is on character and reputation.

5. Tragedy, says Sidney, is that "that maketh kings fear to be tyrants," and comedy is an "imitation of the common errors of our life" which it represents "in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be" (Dukore, 171). George Puttenham, in *The Art of English Poesie* (1589) also makes this distinction: "Besides those Poets Comick there were other who served also the stage, but medled not with so base matters: For they set forth the dolefull falls of infortunate & afflicted Princes, & were called Poets *Tragicall*" (cit. Leech, 3). Compare this view to that of Diomedes (4th century A.D.), who comments that

tragedy is "a narrative of the fortunes of heroic (or semi-divine) characters in adversity" (Atkins, 31).

6. These three later manuscripts are an eleventh-century manuscript, which is the "most authoritative"; a manuscript from the thirteenth or fourteenth century; and a tenth-century Arabic translation, "which is extremely unreliable" (Hardison, 55-58).

There are other factors that make interpretation of the *Poetics* problematic, as Hardison notes. Interpretation is affected, for instance, by translation, for "a translation is always a disguised commentary." Interpretation is also affected by context. For instance, it makes a difference if the *Poetics* is—or is not—viewed as a reply to Plato's attacks on poetry. It also makes a difference if the *Poetics* is "interpreted as continuous with Aristotle's other work" or if it is interpreted as "an independent self-contained work." As well, whether the *Poetics* is considered "an empirical work, the result of Aristotle's observation of the practice of the Greek dramatists, or a deductive work in which the generalizations come first" will make a difference to interpretation. Finally, the position taken with respect to the question of the authenticity of certain sections of the *Poetics* will affect interpretation (55-56).

7. Aristotle's approach to tragedy dominates critical discussion from his own time until the advent of medieval Christianity, and again from the Renaissance and the rise of humanism to the present time. Throughout the period of medieval Christianity, commentators take a largely Platonic approach to tragedy.

8. Feminist critics also tend to generalize when writing about tragedy. Madelon Sprengnether and Linda Kintz, for example, refer to "tragedy defined as a genre in the Aristotelian tradition" (1) and "Greek tragedy" (1), respectively. And, while these are less general references than "tragedy," they are still very general.

9. Horace clearly had indirect knowledge of the *Poetics*, because he reworks material from Aristotle's treatise. According to Carlson, although the evidence is inconclusive, Horace might have been working with the writing of Neoptolemus, "a Hellenistic critic who was ... working under the influence of the Aristotelian tradition" (24). However, the work of Neoptolemus and a great deal of other Hellenistic criticism has been lost. Therefore, "we are left," according to Halliwell, "with the impossibility of defining the transmission of Aristotelian ideas to Horace with any precision" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 288).

10. According to Carlson, "in 1278, William of Moerbeke, Bishop of Corinth, and friend of Aquinas, did produce a reasonably accurate translation [of Aristotle's *Poetics*] from the Greek, but this was not the Aristotle the thirteenth century wanted to hear." Thus, the translation of the great Arabic scholar by Hermannus "was widely read and quoted and was printed in 1481, while that of William of Moerbeke created no stir whatever and was not printed until the twentieth century" (34).

Halliwell notes that Hermannus' translation, "incorporating the many basic misunderstandings which arose from the study of the alien work at several removes from the original," was printed "with further garbling in 1481, and again during the sixteenth century" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 291).

11. During this period, the scope of tragedy was a broad one. Literature was divided into two genres, and "tragedy" referred to any story that was not a comedy.

Dante also distinguishes the language of comedy, which was written in the vernacular, from that of tragedy. Although tragedy is "a goatish song; that is, foul like a goat," it is composed in language that is "lofty and sublime" (Dukore, 102-103).

12. Horace's view is that the poet "who has managed to blend profit with delight wins everyone's approbation, for he gives the reader pleasure at the same time as he instructs him" (91).

These sixteenth-century critics, in addition to Horace's treatise, drew on the ideas of the Latin grammarians, such as Diomedes, Donatus, and Evanthius, as well as the practice of Seneca in their decoding.

13. For instance, while Aristotle views the very act of mimesis as a possible end, as inherently pleasurable, Robortello focuses less on poetry as an imitative art than on poetry as an instrument, the ends of which are the pleasure and instruction of the audience.

According to Halliwell, the difference between Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians "can be broadly characterised as one between a primary Aristotelian concern with the internal or formal organisation of the poem (though without any formalist implication of a purely autotelic status for the work of art) and a rhetorical-Horatian tendency to locate the chief attributes of the poem in its effect on a reader or audience" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 296-97).

14. "Aristotle's main intention," according to Dorsch, "was to describe and define what appeared to have been most effective in the practice of the best poets and playwrights, and to make suggestions about what he regarded as the best procedure. The

misconception, still to some extent current, that he was laying down a set of rules for composition arose with Renaissance critics" (18).

15. These are the laws that limit a play to a single plot, a single day, and a single place. As Dorsch comments, the only unity Aristotle insists on is the unity of action. He does not formulate any rules about unity of place, and, with respect to unity of time, he only mentions time once, when he says that "tragedy attempts, as far as possible, to remain within one circuit of the sun or, at least, not depart from this by much" (V; Golden, 10).

16. As Dorsch notes, the principle of decorum is addressed by Aristotle, and "Cicero made much of it in his rhetorical theory, especially in the *De Oratore*; but for Horace it constitutes, in the words of J.W.H. Atkins, 'a guiding and dominating principle'" (23).

17. Naomi Conn Liebler's comments on the sixteenth-century pseudo-Aristotelians are astute: "The focus on moral conflict in tragedy has been urged upon us, perhaps, by translations of Aristotle's citation of the 'good' man as the hero of tragedy." To a great extent, the sixteenth century was responsible for this skewed emphasis on the didactic moral function of tragedy, but it is important to realize that it was not the dramatists of that century but the theorists ... who created, as Booth expresses it, 'a tradition of debasement-phrased in Aristotelian echoes—not of Aristotle but of the Horatian doctrine of sweetened instruction'" (Liebler, 40; Booth, 82).

18. Insofar as the Elizabethans concerned themselves with the formulation of theories of tragedy, they were as Smidt comments, "more likely to derive their ideas from the literature originating in Boccaccio's *De casibus illustrium* and represented in England chiefly by *A Mirror for Magistrates* [1559] than from the study of the classics (1-2).

19. Webster writes in his preface to *The White Devil* (1612) that he is well aware of "the critical laws [of tragedy], as height of style, and gravity of person ... [and] sententious Chorus" (37). And Jonson remarks in his preface to *Sejanus* (1605) that "truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fulness and frequency of sentence" (Dukore, 189) are among the characteristics of tragedy.

Both Webster's and Jonson's remarks about tragedy reflect the influence of late classic theory as interpreted by the scholars of the Italian Renaissance and Senecan practice more than the influence of Aristotle. Seneca was the main classical influence during the sixteenth century on tragedy in England, France, and Italy.

According to Carlson, during the early Tudor period in England, "no systematic discussion of the drama was produced. ... Aristotle (at least in fragmentary form) and Horace were studied" at Oxford and Cambridge, "and classic plays were read and occasionally performed during the first part of the sixteenth century." Seneca was translated by, among others, Jasper Heywood, and the "first complete translation of Horace's *Ars poetica* into English was completed by Thomas Drant in 1567" (76-78).

20. The influence of the pseudo-Aristotelians is clear in Milton's privileging of "verisimilitude and decorum" over plot, and in his acknowledgement of the unity of time (Dukore, 339).

21. In his *Dictionary*, Johnson offers the following definition of tragedy: "A dramatic representation of a serious action." He then quotes from Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* (1650): "All our tragedies are of kings and princes, but you never see a poor man have a part, unless it be as a chorus or to fill up the scenes, to dance, or to be derided" (Dukore, 404).

22. The *Sturm und Drang* movement, which included the young Goethe and Schiller, was founded, according to Carlson, by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and it involved "a great outpouring in the 1770s and 1780s of literary works stressing inspiration and individualism, [and] provided major critical concepts for the subsequent romantic movement" (171).

23. In his *Dramatic Poetry* (1818-1829), Hegel also questions the "prescription of the so-called unities of place, time, and action ... those rigid rules which the French in particular have deduced from classic tragedy" (Dukore, 533).

24. As Leech argues, the "'tragic sense of life'—in Hegel, in Kierkegaard, in Nietzsche—goes quite beyond the idea of didacticism, which was the official Renaissance view, quite beyond the idea of 'poetical justice', which remained (despite Addison's objection) in the eighteenth century, quite beyond Goethe's or Coleridge's view of Hamlet (the plant in the fragile vase, the man too thoughtful for the world)" (22-23). To Leech's examples, however, Schlegel and Schopenhauer must be added.

25. "Tragic sublimation" is Palmer's term to describe Schlegel's description of the way tragedy functions to reveal the ideal. And, as Palmer notes, it is a term that applies equally to Schiller, as Schlegel "virtually restate[s] Schiller's position" (Palmer, 58; see Schiller [Dukore, 458 ff.]).

26. Most theorists, whether or not they call themselves Aristotelians, accept that Aristotle's conception of tragedy holds a position of authority in Western culture, and, therefore, must be taken into account by any ensuing theory of tragedy. That this is so is made clear by the way that theorists, no matter how cursory their connection is to Aristotle's theory of tragedy, insist on referring to tragedy as Aristotelian tragedy.

27. Nahum Tate revised *King Lear* to produce a version (performed 1681) in which Cordelia lives on at the end and marries Edgar.

28. Halliwell offers a summary of this reclaiming in which he emphasizes that it was "hardly ... the major preoccupation of Romantic and nineteenth century critics." Both Schiller and Herder seem to have been involved, however. For example, according to Halliwell, Schiller claims, that "despite some particular discrepancies, [Shakespeare] has more in common with the spirit of the *Poetics* than does French classical tragedy." As well, Schiller "shrewdly judged that the *Poetics* was on the side neither of those who value merely 'external' form in poetry, nor of those who ignore form altogether" (420).

29. Halliwell stresses that Aristotle can only be viewed as a romantic "by ignoring salient emphases and large tracts of [his] work, or at least by heavily selective elaboration of a small number of [his] ideas." Such a reading of the *Poetics* is anticipated "by an occasional literary tendency in cinquecento Italy to offer platonized (or neoplatonic) accounts of mimesis and 'universals,'" accounts that were "echoed in England" by Sir Philip Sidney (420).

30. Lessing returns to the *Poetics*, comments Carlson, for ammunition with which to fight neoclassicism, for he "recognized that it would be difficult if not impossible to remove the strictures of French neoclassicism from German letters except by challenging the original authority for those strictures" (168).

31. According to Else, "the issue has been beclouded by the almost habitual use of the terms 'intellectual error' or 'error of judgment' on the one side and 'moral flaw' on the other. All these phrases ... are misleading and beside the point" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 378-79). And, according to Carlson, the "various interpretations of *hamartia* may be generally divided into two groups, those that emphasize the moral aspect of the flaw and those ... that emphasize the intellectual, making *hamartia* an error of judgment or a mistaken assumption. The former is the traditional

interpretation, and for some critics the 'flaw' is almost cognate with the Christian idea of sin" (19).

32. It is only a small step, claims Palmer, from a romantic conception of tragedy in which the tragic vision, taking precedence over the individual, "becomes a value unto itself" to a conception of tragedy that views the hero and his assertion of the human will as central (75).

As Liebler puts this, "critical discussions that focus obsessively on individual protagonists have led to a notion that tragedy is about discrete personae with important personal histories and complex psychologies (or psychological complexes)" (13).

33. Schopenhauer quotes from Calderon's *Life is a Dream*, Act I, to sum up the "true sense of tragedy" (Dukore, 517).

The existential pessimists, according to Palmer, "build definitions of tragedy around what Jaspers condemned as 'universal negativity' ... [and highlight] the importance of the Existential assertion of human will in a fundamentally hostile universe." Theorists such as Lucien Goldman, Una Ellis-Fermer, and Karl Jaspers, who "derive a definition of tragedy from a positive view of metaphysics" are categorised by Palmer as "existential optimists" (72).

34. The "dangerous turning" Camus describes sounds like Brecht's notion of *wertvolle Bruchstellen* in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, which Heinemann translates as "valuable fracture points," and sums up as places "where the old in a period collides directly with the new" (231).

35. Consider, for instance, the Renaissance, when the pendulum was balanced halfway between a traditional Christian society and a scientific society. The result of this state of affairs was the intellectual crisis of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries known as the crisis of reason or the *crisis pyrrhonienne* during which there existed at the same time the triumph of rationality and humanism and its denial in scepticism and fideism. This is the crisis that is responsible for Michel de Montaigne's famous question, "Que sais-je?" It is also responsible for Montaigne's answer, the most significant single influence on Jacobean drama. In "An Apologie of Raymond Sebond," after ruthlessly examining all authoritarian truths, Montaigne concludes, with the Pyrrhonic Sceptics, that nothing of what we think we know has a firm foundation: "Thus can nothing be certainly established, nor of the one, nor of the other" (II, 323).

This crisis, in other words, is responsible for what Shakespeare refers to in *Timon of Athens* as the "confounding contraries" (IV.i.20) of the period, the tension between which, in turn, is particularly responsible for the intensity of Renaissance tragedy. With the vindication of the human

intellect to be found in the tragedies of this period, for instance, goes a sceptical mistrust of reason's powers. Thus, individuals such as Faustus and Hamlet are tormented, as Shakespeare expresses it in *Hamlet*, by "thoughts beyond the reaches of [their] souls" (I.iv.56) as they search for answers to life's metaphysical and moral questions. Eventually, however, they are forced to accept that the sorts of absolute truths mankind seeks cannot "be certainly established," that, as Flamineo comments in *The White Devil*, "While we look up to Heaven we confound/ Knowledge with knowledge" (V.vi.257-58).

36. It follows, of course, that for Camus there can be no such thing as either religious or atheistic tragedy: "In both religious and atheistic drama the problem has in fact already been solved. In the ideal tragedy, on the contrary, it has not been solved" (198). And since this is the case, the tragic moment passes with "the final triumph of individual reason, in the fourth century in Greece and in the eighteenth century in Europe" (194).

37. Carlson sums up Hebbel's argument as follows: "great drama can occur only when some significant change is occurring in this relationship [between the world and man, and the Idea], a situation that has appeared only three times in the history of the drama. The first was during the period of Greek tragedy, when the old naive conception of the gods was challenged by the new concept of fate. The second was at the time of Shakespeare, when the rising Protestant consciousness shifted attention to the individual, and the conflict between man and fate changed to a tragic dualism within the single individual. In his own age, a new source of tragic dualism had appeared ... a dualism within the Idea itself ... 'The existing institutions of human society, political, religious, and moral' have become problematic, he says, and tragedy can be developed on the basis of perceived contradictions in these manifestations of the Idea" (252-53).

38. Palmer claims that the "link between the Romantics and Existentialists emerge[s] clearly in the 'tragic hypothesis' of Albert Camus" (Palmer, 68). This does not, I would argue, make the view of tragedy that Camus presents neo-romantic.

39. According to Liebler, the deaths of tragic heroes "represent a kind of self-surgery by the community (as Coriolanus is called 'a disease that must be cut away' [III.i.293], which accompanies a ritualized effort to restore some semblance of order and to clarify and reclaim the culture's primary values. This order cannot be exactly the *status quo ante*—too many characters are swept away with the hero—but it is potentially order of a new kind, or at the very least a clearing for such order, out of which the community can attempt to heal itself" (17).

40. Liebler argues that the differences between Brecht's and Artaud's theatre and that of Aristotle simply reflect "differences in their respective contemporary theaters and producing cultures, rather than fundamentally different approaches to the genre of tragedy." Brecht and Artaud, she claims, "understood tragedy in ways remarkably close to Aristotle's," and Brecht "opposed Aristotle mainly because he opposed the political priorities of Aristotle's Athenian culture" (45-46).

Clearly, I have problems with Liebler's attempt to make Aristotelians of Brecht, Artaud, and Boal. It is one thing to say that these theorists repudiate romantic notions of tragedy and the tragic hero or that they view the community as the subject of tragedy, quite another to suggest that their approaches to tragedy are fundamentally Aristotelian. Brecht and Artaud, after all, say very little about Aristotle in their writings. Brecht does not even distinguish Aristotle's precepts from those of neoclassicism or romanticism. Theatre is either Aristotelian or, in the case of his own Epic Theatre, "nicht-aristotelisch." Of the three, only Boal offers a detailed analysis of Aristotelian drama, which he completely rejects. I would argue, then, that Brecht, Artaud, and Boal share Aristotle's understanding of tragedy as a political genre. However, where Aristotle would employ tragedy to preserve the *polis* and its patriarchal values, Brecht, Artaud, and Boal would use their theatre to challenge the dominant ideology of patriarchal society.

41. When I agree with Gelderman that there is something about the nature of tragedy "which is essentially male," I do not mean, to borrow Wandor's remark about "drama," that tragedy "is per se some kind of 'male form,' and that when women write, they write in a totally different form which has never been invented before and which is common to women." I agree with Wandor's claim that "[e]motional, aesthetic, and structural styles are very varied among women writers," and that it is "the combination of the content and the writer's approach to it which produces the form which she thinks or feels is most appropriate" (*Carry On*, 184). What I mean is that the politics of tragedy cannot be separated from the aesthetics of tragedy—and that tragedy has been employed since the time of Aeschylus in the service of patriarchy.

42. According to Kelly, the "major Renaissance statement of the bourgeois domestication of women was made by Leon Battista Alberti in Book 3 of *Della Famiglia* (c. 1435), which is a free adaptation of the Athenian situation described by Xenophon in the *Oeconomicus*."

The notion of the equality of Renaissance women with men stems from Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). And, while this notion has been adopted by most general histories of women, Ruth Kelso's

Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Paris: Hachette, 1922) is a "notable exception," with its discovery of "no such parity" (47, n. 2, 1).

Dusinberre, it should be noted disagrees with Kelly. In *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, she argues that the drama of Shakespeare (and his fellow dramatists) "is feminist in sympathy" and, further, that this drama reflects "attitudes to women current in [Shakespeare's] society" (5, 8).

43. Callaghan also argues that tragedy "places gender issues" at "center stage." She goes on to comment that "[g]reat men have long been regarded as the subject of tragedy by literary critics, much as 'man' in Renaissance England was regarded as the center of the physical universe" (*Women and Gender*, 1, 3).

44. Case here cites Margarete Bieber, who in *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre* (Princeton UP, 1939, 9) notes that "Attic morality banished women from public life." This, argues Case, "implies that the reason for the exclusion of women must be sought in the emerging cultural codes of Athens" (*Feminism and Theatre*, 7). On women's status in fifth-century Athens, see also Seidensticker (151 ff.) and Foley ("Conception," 127 ff.).

45. I am relying here on Zeitlin's summary of Bachofen's argument in *Das Mutterrecht* (*Playing*, 89). See the 3-volume *Das Mutterrecht* Ed. K. Meuli (Basel, 1948, 1861), or *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings*. Tr. R. Manheim (Princeton: 1967, 1954).

46. In tribal society, claims Gelderman, "marriage was not completely patrilocal. The Athenian wife ... remained, for all legal purposes, a member of her parental household and family. ... Moreover, a wife had no claim on her husband's property, yet she had the right, whenever she left her husband or he died, to take her dowry and return to her family's house." As well, according to Athenian law, "a man was at liberty to marry his half-sister on his father's side but not on his mother's side, for such a union was considered incestuous. This law contradicts Apollo's physiological argument [in the *Oresteia*] and again points to a time when inheritance was through the mother" (222, 224).

47. Literally, says Zeitlin, by "'matriarchy' is meant the actual political and economic supremacy of women in a given culture, not matriliney or matrifocality" (90, n. 7).

48. These "female forces of disorder" are forces "whose symbolic sources are the earth and the night, forces seen as deeply connected with fertility, sexuality, and reproduction" (192)

49. George Thomson, a Marxist critic holds a similar view. He sees the *Oresteia* as a mythic version of the founding of Greek democracy, which, because it is based on a system of private property, demanded the subjection of women: "Just as Aristophanes and Plato perceived that the abolition of private property would involve the emancipation of women, so Aeschylus perceived that the subjection of women was a necessary consequence of the development of private property." The significance of Athena casting her vote for Orestes is, argues Thomson, "not primarily moral at all but social" (288, 289).

50. As Zeitlin sums this up, "Mother has been turned into vindictive and archetypal female. In the new genealogy invented by Aeschylus for the Erinyes, they are now daughters of Night—that is to say, they are wholly identified with the primordial negative female principle. And they champion a justice that is judged blind, archaic, barbaric, and regressive, a justice that is to be superseded by the new institution of the law court in which they will in the future play a supporting rather than a starring role" (100-101).

51. Clytemnestra's daughter Electra is on the side of her father in both Aeschylus's version of the story, *The Libation Bearers* (second play of the trilogy), and Sophocles' *Electra*. In Aeschylus's play, her criticism of her mother is vituperative; however, she is not the prominent figure she is in Sophocles' and Euripides' plays. In Sophocles' play, Electra is closely aligned with "the patriarchal imperative," as Powers comments. She "denies and undermines the validity of the concept of tribal justice ... unrecognized by man-centered civilization" (105, 106). Euripides' *Electra* offers a much more complex treatment of Electra, one which some critics have suggested parodies both Aeschylus's and Sophocles' plays and, in so doing, acts to subvert tragedy.

52. Holst-Warhaft also cites here George Thomson's *Aeschylus and Athens*.

53. This power poses a threat to the order of the *polis* in "at least three ways." First, it can be used to incite "reciprocal violence" or revenge. Second, "by focussing as it does on mourning and loss rather than praise of the dead, it denies the value of death for the community or state, making it difficult for the authorities to recruit an obedient army." Third, "it leaves in the hands of women, who, as child-bearers and midwives already have a certain control over birth, potential authority over the rites of death," which is not tolerable in a patriarchal society (3).

54. Margaret Alexiou's *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974) is cited with respect to state

regulation of mourning, specifically, pages 3-23 and chapter 3.

55. As Holst-Warhaft stresses, lament is a female art form: "Women lamenters were, and still are in places where lament survives, folk poets, composers, actors. Not every woman can sing laments—it is always recognized as an art demanding musical and verbal skills in combination with an ability to transform one's own or another's pain into a work of art." Therefore, with "the disappearance of the lament, women have lost more than their traditional control over the rites of mourning the dead" (6).

56. Gillespie comments that "the tradition of dramatic theories fully grounded in male culture and male presuppositions" begins with the Greeks (104). Specifically, western theatrical theory begins with Aristotle. For, as Carlson notes, "[a]side from some scattered remarks in Isocrates (436-338 B.C.), the only extant significant comments on the drama before Aristotle are found in Aristophanes (c. 448-380 B.C.) and Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.)" (15).

57. According to Boal there are "many forms of repression: politics, bureaucracy, habits, customs—and Greek tragedy." The "tragic hero," he argues, "appears when the State begins to utilize the theater for political purposes" (37, 40).

58. Horowitz cites the Oxford edition of "De Generatione Animalium" (II, 3; 737a, 27) here. "Aristotle's definition of a female as a 'mutilated male,'" Horowitz comments, was transmitted into biological, obstetrical, and theological tracts and continues to have authoritative influence through St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. "This influence can be seen in Freud's 'theory of the female castration complex' (184-85, n. 7).

59. See "De Generatione Animalium" II, 5 (741a, 5-10); I, 21 (729b, 12-21); I, 20 (729a, 24-32); II, 1 (732a, 2-10).

According to Horowitz, Aristotle "stated quite clearly that females have souls." It is "femaleness" or the "female principle" (Aristotle's word for the "femaleness" can sometimes be translated as "female principle") that is lacking in spirituality (194, 187, n. 11).

60. The male, according to Aristotle is "the first efficient or moving cause." The "principle of movement" comes from him. See "De Generatione Animalium" II, 1 (732a, 3-10); I, 21 (792b, 12-15).

61. According to Aristotle, "the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind"

(*Politics*, I,5; 1254b). Aristotle's influence has been significant. From Aristotle, explains Horowitz, "medieval thinkers learned to dismiss Plato's radical theory of the common education of women and men for military, intellectual, and political leadership by scoffing at the accompanying 'community of women and children.'" Further, "while upholders of many sides of the woman question have used the Bible to support their cause, it was a rare defender of woman who managed to use Aristotle to bring credit to the female branch of the human race" (187-88).

62. Horowitz cites here Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken P, 1975), 57-92.

63. I have relied on Gillespie's discussion of male hegemony in theory from Aristotle to the twentieth century in this paragraph, as hers is the best succinct discussion of this subject I have come across.

That dramatic theorists and critics (like playwrights) have been for the most part men, that the critical establishment has been dominated by men, is supported by anthologies of dramatic critical writing. Barrett Clark's *European Theories of the Drama, with a Supplement on the American Drama*, revised by Henry Popkin (New York: Crown, revised 1965) and Bernard Dukore's *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (1974), for example, include no theoretical writings by women. Even Marvin Carlson's *Theories of the Theatre* (1984) "cited fewer than twenty women, among whom were mostly playwrights (e.g., Hroswitha), actors (e.g., Fanny Kemble), and directors (e.g., Judith Malina)" (Gillespie, 108). Further, Carlson's first edition does not mention feminist theatrical theory. His second edition (1993) "expanded edition" offers sixteen pages on feminist theory.

64. Gillespie cites Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975), and Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel, eds., *Patronage in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979) on the question of "the connection between art and power in the Renaissance" (123, n. 12).

65. Gillespie quotes from from Franciscus Robertellus, *On Comedy*, here: "To weave nicely, to embroider, to spin are commendable in a woman; these things ought not to be esteemed in a man. ... If [strength of body] be attributed to a woman [or] if some poet or other portrays a woman in the same way Homer portrays Achilles, he would be severely censured" (Dukore, 128).

66. Here are Gillespie's words: "Voltaire ... (at least according to Lord Byron) explained that women had not yet written a 'tolerable tragedy' because 'the composition of tragedy requires testicles' [emphasis in the original]" (105). Gillespie cites *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 3rd. ed., s.v. "Voltaire."

67. "In the late eighteenth century, romantic theorists offered the first major assault on the authority of the text," claims Gillespie. "This change from the authority of a text to the power of individual judgments paralleled those political sentiments that led to the revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the United States and Western Europe" (105). Romantic theory, in short, may have led to a questioning of class inequality; it did not lead to a questioning of sexual inequality.

Gillespie quotes Hegel here: "It is especially in female characters that love rises to its highest beauty; for it is in woman that this devotion, this self-sacrifice, is the supreme point; for she concentrates and develops her whole spiritual and actual life in this sentiment, finds in it alone a context of existence" (Dukore, 529).

68. "Marxist theory did offer two insights useful to later feminists [and to African American theorists]," writes Gillespie: "first, that the historic moment accounted not only for the art and the artist but also for the critic, and second, that spectators were supremely important to the art of theatre. ... Observing, and insistently pointing out, that both playwrights and critics were overwhelmingly upper- or middle-class and educated, Marxists asked repeatedly, 'Who profits?' from the work of art or from the opinions expressed in a piece of criticism" (106).

69. These are the words of Frederick Crews. Crews is quoted by Katz-Stoker, who comments that, although his purpose is "limited to an advocacy of psychoanalytic criticism," he makes an important "political" point (319-20).

70. In addition to the plays discussed in this dissertation, Euripides has been revised by Timberlake Wertenbaker in *The Love of the Nightingale* (Woodstock, IL: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1990), by Gwendolyn MacEwen in *The Trojan Women* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1979), and by Adrienne Kennedy in *Electra* and *Orestes* (*Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988). As well, Shakespeare has been revised by Melissa Murray in *Ophelia* and by Paula Vogel in *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*, according to Rozett (11).

71. Moreover, as Joanna Russ explains, women writers have been severely handicapped by the lack of stories in which women are the protagonists. Authors "do not make their plots up out of thin air" and the "very familiar plots" of our culture "are tales for heroes, not heroines" (4). For, as Russ demonstrates, if the sex of the protagonist is changed from male to female in these plots, the plots no longer work--tragedy becomes farce. These so-called universal plots, in other words, are plots for men, not for people.

72. Through re-vision, feminist playwrights are able to situate women in the subject position, let women tell their own stories. As well, these playwrights are able, as Radstone suggests, to "weave a 'new' feminist mythology" around characters such as Medea, "a powerful feminine figure" (57).

73. Strong and Swift say that if they stopped teaching "the playwright who, with good reason, is esteemed the greatest in English," they "would then be leaving a powerful academic field to colleagues, who, even with the best of intentions, may not satisfy the needs of female students any more than earlier professors did" (212).

Bennett suggests in her discussion of nostalgia in *Performing Nostalgia* that not all returns to the past (and re-vision is certainly such a return) are transgressive. Some serve to legitimate the status quo.

Showalter, for her part, argues that the revision of Shakespeare by women writers could be seen as a "self-defeating and obsolete" strategy of self-legitimation (*Sister's Choice*, 41). If by "self-legitimation" Showalter means something like Sir Walter Scott's characterization of himself "as the Shakespeare of novelists" (12, cit. Marsden), it seems to me that this is not the primary reason that most feminist playwrights re-write Shakespeare.

74. Coleridge's full comment is as follows: "If the tragedies of Sophocles are in the strict sense of the word tragedies, and the comedies of Aristophanes comedies, we must emancipate ourselves from a false association arising from misapplied names, and find a new word for the plays of Shakespeare. For they are, in the ancient sense, neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one, but a different genus, diverse in kind, and not merely different in degree" (Dukore, 586).

75. "In place of the classical *reges et proelia* ("kings and battles"), Euripides brought to the stage what Aristophanes derides as *oikeia pragmata* (*Frogs* 959), 'familiar affairs,' or still more literally, 'household things.' The living room replaces the throne room" (E. Segal, 250).

76. In E. Segal's words, Aristophanes argues in the *Frogs* that Euripides, in feminizing tragedy, "'killed tragedy'" (244). In Silk's, for "Aristophanes at the end of *Frogs*, tragedy is what Aeschylus once epitomized and what Euripides has now corrupted" (Silk, 6). Nietzsche says something similar: "Euripides fought and conquered Aeschylean tragedy." Nietzsche, however, sees Socrates, with whom Euripides formed a close alliance, as the real enemy of tragedy (*Birth of Tragedy*, 77).

77. Thompson and Roberts also remark that these authors "sometimes comment on how remarkable this is, given the absence of female performers on his stage: 'how mistaken,' writes Helen Faucit, 'is the opinion of those who maintain that Shakespeare was governed, in drawing his heroines, by the fact that they were acted by boys ... As if Imogen, Viola, and Rosalind were not "pure women" to the very core'" (4).

78. As the editors point out, Cavendish's Letter CXXIII, from which this excerpt is taken, "was the first critical essay ever to be published on Shakespeare" (Thompson and Roberts, 12).

79. Gajowski cites here M. Doran's "The Idea of Excellence in Shakespeare" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 27 (1976): 133-49, 146).

CHAPTER THREE

"Legends Shall Now Change Direction": Euripides' *Medea*, Jackie Crossland's *Collateral Damage: The Tragedy of Medea*, Dario Fo and Franca Rame's *Medea*, and Deborah Porter's *No More Medea*

The waters of the sacred rivers run upstream;
the right order of all things is reversed.
Now it is *men* who deal in treachery:
now covenants sealed in heaven's name are worthless.

Legends shall now change direction,
Woman's life have glory.
Honor comes to the female sex.
Woman shall be a theme for slanderous tales no more.

The songs of poets from bygone times shall cease
to harp on our faithlessness.
It was not to our minds that Phoebus, lord of melody,
granted the power to draw heavenly song from the lyre:
for if so, we would have chanted
our own hymns of praise
to answer the race of man.

Time in its long passage has much to tell
of our destiny as of theirs.

—Euripides' *Medea*, 410-430¹

The Medea is a revolutionary play. In it Euripides manipulates myth to raise questions about the limitations of a society in which, as Jackie Crossland's *Medea* remarks, "a woman can't expect much" (31). Cast as the tragic hero of a play that observes the conventions of Sophoclean tragedy, *Medea* storms the *polis* in order to comment on the condition of women in a society which treats them as second-class citizens and to defend her honour in heroic terms. In so

doing, this intelligent and proud woman "comes closest" of all of the female protagonists of Greek tragedy, as Froma I. Zeitlin argues, to meeting "the demand for an equivalence of [the] feminine self to the male" (*Playing*, 348). And while Euripides does not kill tragedy, as Aristophanes has Aeschylus claim in the *Frogs*, his *Medea* does function to deconstruct tragedy and the heroic values it champions.² For in this play, as Albrecht Dihle claims, Euripides is "not merely involving himself in a topical discussion of social and moral problems." He is "subjecting both the form and content of tragedy, the greatest and proudest symbol of the art and piety of the people of Athens, to a thorough revision" (124).

The most remarkable aspect of *The Medea* for Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Jackie Crossland, and Deborah Porter, however—based on the evidence of their plays—is the speech in which the Chorus suggests that a new genre of poetry is required, if women are to sing an "answer" to the tales of the male poets, which too often denigrate women.³ This passage foregrounds the issue of representation in a culture that has denied women access to "the lyre's divine/ Power" (425-26), and intimates that, since women have been denied a poetic voice, all the stories male poets have told about women are open to question. And in their *Medea*, *Collateral Damage*, and *No More Medea*, Fo and Rame, Crossland, and Porter extrapolate from what Euripides has to say about representation to offer their own commentary on the way men have exploited

myth to justify their subordination of women and to turn women such as Medea who refuse the role of victim into witches and monsters.

Joanna Russ begins her "What Can a Heroine Do?" by summarizing the plots of eight stories that are "familiar to all of us." The problem is that there is something a bit odd, a bit preposterous about each of the plots Russ presents. This is because "in each case the sex of the protagonist has been changed (and correspondingly the sex of the other characters)" by Russ, as the following three examples from her list demonstrate:

A handsome young man, quite virginal, is seduced by an older woman who has made a pact with the Devil to give her back her youth. When the woman becomes pregnant, she proudly announces the paternity of her child; this revelation so shames the young man that he goes quite insane, steals into the house where the baby is kept, murders it, and is taken to prison where—repentant and surrounded by angel voices—he dies.

Alexandra the Great.

A young man who unwisely puts success in business before his personal fulfillment loses his masculinity and ends up a neurotic, lonely eunuch.
(3)

The point of this exercise, as Russ explains, is to show that most of the plots "that are 'in the air'—'plot' being what Aristotle called *mythos*; and in fact it is probably most accurate to call these plot-patterns *myths*"—in our patriarchal culture will not work for a woman protagonist: "They are tales for heroes, not heroines" (4).

In *The Medea*, Euripides performs a similar exercise when he casts Medea as the hero, and Jason, the traditional hero, as her decidedly unheroic

husband. In his play he, like Russ, shows that the myths of Western culture do not work for a female hero. He shows that "[c]hanging the sex of the protagonist completely alters the meaning of the tale," that "success in male terms is failure for a woman" (Russ, 6, 7). For men kill their children too in Greek mythology, but, unlike Medea, they are not "identifiable" afterwards, as Porter's Medea puts it, by that "act alone," but, rather, by the "lots of other, wonderful things mixed in there too" (S7, S).⁴ Tony Harrison's *Medea: A Sex War Opera* makes this point well by contrasting Euripides' Medea with Herakles, who "in mythology was also a monster," comments Marianne McDonald, but whose reputation was, nevertheless, "one of a hero" (*Ancient*, 119). Each slew his or her own children, but Medea's reputation is that of an unnatural mother, Herakles' that of a mighty hero renowned for his feats of strength such as the Twelve Labours.⁵

"The structure and language" of Euripides's *Medea*, as Bernard M.W. Knox points out, "is that of the Sophoclean heroic play":

This is the only extant Euripidean tragedy constructed according to the model which Sophocles was to perfect in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* and which, through the influence of that supreme dramatic achievement and its exploitation by Aristotle as a paradigm, became the model for Renaissance and modern classical tragedy: the play dominated by a central figure who holds the stage throughout, who initiates and completes—against obstacles, advice and threats—the action, whether it be discovery or revenge. ("The *Medea*," 274)

And the central figure who dominates *The Medea* is Medea herself, a woman who possesses the proud spirit and the uncompromising determination of the Homeric or Sophoclean hero. Medea's self-arranged marriage, her heroic

actions on Jason's behalf, her language and that used by others to describe her, her movement from the private to the public sphere, and her concern for vengeance and glory all point to Medea's heroic nature, all point, as Elizabeth Bongie suggests, to a woman whose closest affinity is "not with Alcestis and women of her kind, but rather with the great male heroes of Greek literature such as the Homeric Achilles and the Sophoclean Ajax" (27).

In fifth-century Athens, marriage contracts were customarily negotiated between the bride-to-be's father and the would-be husband. Euripides' Medea, however, contracts her own marriage. Jason's oath is given to her.⁶ As Anne Burnett puts it, the "alliance of Jason and Medea was not an ordinary marriage ... for it existed outside society as a thing sanctioned only by the gods the two had named" (13) as Jason touched Medea's "right hand" (496). And the significance of Medea's self-contracted marriage, as Margaret Williamson remarks, is that with it Medea translates "herself into the role of a male citizen, operating in the public sphere as Jason's equal" (18). Like Clytemnestra, who in *The Agamemnon*, as Helene P. Foley reminds us, "chooses her own mate and acts to secure political power for herself" ("Conception" 151), Medea functions as an autonomous individual.

In earlier legend, Jason was the stouthearted and adventurous leader of the Argonauts in the quest for the Golden Fleece. In *The Medea* he is, as Jennifer March sums him up, "an ordinary middle-aged man, with ambitions for respectability and a concern for civilized values" (38). Nowhere in Euripides'

play can Jason's speech or behaviour be described as heroic. Rather, as Foley phrases it, "Jason surrenders his heroism to Medea" ("Conception," 153), an abdication that Euripides underscores when Medea reminds Jason of her "knees which [he] often clasped/ in supplication" (496-97) in the early days of their union.

According to the myth of the Argonauts, which "hangs like a great painted scene behind this play," Jason had never been a real hero, comments Anne Burnett, because he had not "conquered his monsters" by himself or with the "aid of an Olympian divinity," but in the company of the argonauts and with "the borrowed sorcery of a local witch" (16).⁷ In Euripides' play, Medea tells of how she "betrayed [her] father and [her] home" (483) to protect Jason and enable him to win the Golden Fleece, and makes it clear that Jason's heroic deeds on the Argo expedition were actually her acts:

I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it,
Who was a shipmate of yours aboard the Argo,
When you were sent to control the bulls that breathed fire
And yoke them, and when you would sow that deadly field.
Also that snake, who encircled with his many folds
The Golden Fleece and guarded it and never slept,
I killed, and so gave you the safety of the light. (476-82)

Then, in her final exchange with her husband after she has murdered the children, just as she is to make her triumphant escape to Athens in the chariot sent by Helios, Medea predicts an unheroic death for Jason: "you, as is right, will die without distinction,/ Struck on the head by a piece of the Argo's timber" (1386-87).

"The Euripidean revolution," remarks Erich Segal, "changed the decor and the *dramatis personae*" of the tragic stage: "In place of the classical *reges et proelia* ('kings and battles'), Euripides brought to the stage what Aristophanes derides as *oikeia pragmata* (*Frogs* 99), 'familiar affairs,' or still more literally, 'household things'" (250). In short, Euripides is distinguished for shifting the focus of tragedy from the public and male world of the *polis* to the private world of the *oikos*, the sphere that is usually associated with women.

The Medea opens with Medea, having been abandoned by Jason, "in her room," suicidal and refusing to eat, "lost in [her] sufferings" (142, 96). Before too long, however, Medea emerges from the private world of the household to speak to the Chorus, with the announcement "Women of Corinth, I have come outside to you" (214), words which Williamson translates as "I have come out of the house" (17). These words, both symbolically and literally, mark Medea's movement from the private world of the *oikos* to the public world of the *polis*. They—and the words that follow—also mark her transition from Jason's wife to hero of her own play. For, as Williamson observes, an "important corollary" of Medea's transition to the public sphere

is the corresponding change in the language she uses. From within the house we hear her expressing extremes of rage, misery, and hatred in lyrical anapests; as soon as she steps outside it her language becomes controlled, abstract, intellectualizing and indistinguishable from that of any of the male characters she confronts in the early scenes of the play—including Jason. (17)

And from this point on, Medea shows she has mastered, in Williamson's words, "the discourse of male citizens" (19).⁸ She also shows that she has mastered

the "language of the Sophoclean hero," as Knox details, displaying the "determined resolve" of the hero in her use of "uncompromising terms" such as "the deed must be done," "I must dare," and "I shall kill" ("The *Medea*," 275).

Medea not only speaks like a Sophoclean hero, she is described—by herself and others—in the sort of language conventionally used to characterize such heroes. A "familiar set of similes and metaphors" are applied to Medea, says Deborah Boedeker, to "suggest her intractable, violent, 'heroic,' nature" (146). In the Prologue, for example, the Nurse says that Medea in her suffering is as unrelenting as "a rock or surging spring water" (28). The Nurse compares Medea in her fury to a bull who "blaz[es] her eyes" at her children and will not "stop raging until she has struck at someone" (92, 94).⁹ "This metaphor, as Boedeker notes, "interacts with the Argo myth, as do her comparisons to rocks and sea" (131).¹⁰ A bit later, the Nurse uses a thunderstorm image to suggest that Medea's wrath will not just blow over: "It is clear that soon she will put lightning/ In that cloud of her cries that is rising" (106-107). Much later, her mind made up to kill her sons, Medea speaks of herself as a warrior taking up the sword for battle (1244).

And, as a warrior, Medea is much more concerned with honour of the sort men most esteem than with the virtue women are expected to covet. Women in classical Athens, as Foley comments, were not expected to possess, let alone worry about, a public reputation:

As Pericles stressed in his Funeral Oration, respectable women should have no public reputation, whether for good or for bad (Thuc.2.46).

Orators praise the modesty of female relatives who were embarrassed even to dine with male kinsmen. ("Conception," 130)

Medea, however, is anxious about her public reputation, and quite determined that "no one think [her] a weak one, feeble-spirited,/ A stay at home," but rather "one who can hurt [her] enemies and help [her] friends/ For the lives of such persons are most remembered" (807-10). By his actions, Jason has dishonoured Medea and become her "worst enemy" (467). Therefore, the simple code "by which Homeric and Sophoclean heroes live—and die" (Knox, "The *Medea*," 277)—demands that Medea seek revenge at any cost, that Medea "kill [her] own children" as "the best way to wound [her] husband" (792, 817).¹¹ Better that than have Jason "live [his] life through, laughing at [her]" (1355).¹²

But above all else, what marks Medea as a heroic figure is that "passion of hers," which, as the Chorus warns, "moves her to something great" (184).¹³ Medea's "passionate intensity," her *thumos*, "is so marked a feature of her make-up that in her famous monologue [1021-80]," as Knox notes, "she argues with it, pleads with it for mercy, as if it were something outside of herself" ("The *Medea*," 275). Medea's *thumos*, though, is not something outside of herself. It is the essential part of her nature. "Even in the *Iliad*," Eilhard Schlesinger reminds us, the "old poetic device" of a hero addressing "his proud spirit" is employed. To say Medea's *thumos* dictates her revenge, in other words, is to say, as Schlesinger points out, that "the revenge is imposed upon her by her own

nature." For there is a sense, as Schlesinger continues, in which Medea must will her revenge "of necessity":

Even before the great monologue begins, the revenge is already a closed matter, and so is the murder of her children, for *this* is the essence of her revenge. ... The force within Medea that reacts to this necessity is not an opposing will, but rather a simple longing for happiness struggling against a destiny that has forced her to perform deeds of superhuman proportion, "heroic" deeds in the Greek sense of the word. What is said here in the language of the latter half of the fifth century differs very little from the sentiments expressed in Hector's monologue in *Iliad* XXII and in the great speech of Achilles in *Iliad* IX. (295)

To the extent that Medea is a traditional hero, then, her nature is such that she shall be, as Knox comments, "moved by the typical heroic passions": wrath, rashness, daring, determined resolve, and concern for honour and glory. To the extent that Medea is a traditional hero, she "shall kill [her] own children. ... No compromise is possible" ("The *Medea*," 792, 819).

Moreover, insofar as she is presented in terms of male heroism, it is not overly problematic that Medea "carries out her destructive plans rationally and efficiently," as McDonald puts it, "then escapes without punishment" (*Ancient*, 117). Medea is presented by Euripides, however, not only as a heroic figure, but as "the sad wife" (150) and "mother of little children" (996), as one of those "most unfortunate creatures" (231) whose fate, like the women of Corinth to whom she speaks outside the house, is to exist in a world dominated by men. Medea is, as Emily McDermott astutely remarks, "a purposely paradoxical blend" (43-44) of male/female, hero/victim, self/other. Or, as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz phrases it, Medea's "role as a woman is in direct conflict with her

desire for a warrior's glory." In Euripides' play, "Medea is not just comfortably the other but is rhetorically made to occupy both positions" (*Anxiety*, 148, 126).¹⁴ And, insofar as she is presented as a woman, Medea's revenge, especially the killing of her sons, is hugely problematic. Medea is "particularly horrible for a male-dominated society," as McDonald says, because "she represents a woman, wife, and mother who consciously chooses to put her own needs and passions above those of the men in her life" (*Ancient*, 117).

Medea the typical woman, the helpless and passive wronged wife with a broken heart who only wants "to die" (226-27), does not pose much of a threat to a patriarchal society. And certainly the Medea who pretends that she will go along with Jason's marriage plans for the sake of her children (866-975) poses no threat. For this is the Medea who (in order to further her plan for revenge) acquiesces to what Fo and Rame's Medea refers to as "the law" created by man "for his own good" that ordains that a woman should think only of her children, not of herself (36-37). Medea the powerful and proud woman who accepts heroic values, and is determined to destroy the man who dishonoured her, however, is another question. This Medea, who thinks it "better to be remembered," in the words of Fo and Rame's Medea, "as a wild beast than a goat" (38) is, as McDonald puts it, "every wandering husband's nightmare" (*Ancient*, 115).

In fact, the Medea who is "fearful, terrible ... and wild, like a beast" (275), who possesses intelligence and valour of the sort that are, according to

Aristotle, "inappropriate in a woman" (XV; 1454a), is so problematic a figure in a patriarchal culture whose mythology, as Rabinowitz says, has been "handed down not by the Medeas of the past but by the Jasons" (*Anxiety*, 126) that, to a great extent, Euripides' characterization of Medea as a heroic woman has been refused. A woman such as Medea who, as Meredith A. Powers phrases it, rejects "the Athenian ideal of the feminine, an ideal which served men and the state" (114), cannot be a hero, because the role of a hero is to serve the state.¹⁵ She can only be an abnormal woman. From a patriarchal perspective, if the Medea who is wild, like the beast to which "sooner or later ... all Sophoclean heroes" are compared, cannot be a hero "like Ajax, Odysseus, Achilles, Heracles" (Knox, "The *Medea*," 286), she must be, in Jason's words, a "monster, not a woman, having a nature/ Wilder than that of Scylla in the Tuscan sea" (1342-43).¹⁶

Such a Medea is not even acceptable as a female form of hero, the goddess whom Euripides suggests she is when he picks up on the legend that says Medea is the granddaughter of Helios, because a male-dominated culture finds such a powerful female figure profoundly disturbing.¹⁷ Euripides could have, to borrow a phrase from McDonald, "blackened" Medea as the "male mythmakers interested in maintaining the status quo" had done and made this former goddess a witch (*Ancient*, 118).¹⁸ Euripides, though, did not invert Medea "to suit the Attic schema, as Sophocles had inverted the chthonic Deianeira." Instead, as Powers explains, he left her "a figure of the ancient

mode ... the goddesss who exercises her chthonic rage, opting for anarchy ... because there is no redress for her wrongs" (114, 116).¹⁹ Despite Euripides' depiction of Medea as a woman with no magical powers, except for her powers of intelligence and her drugs or poisons (until she is rescued by Helios), despite that, as Knox says, "supernatural winged chariots are hardly the identifying mark of witches," but are "the properties, in Greek mythology, of gods, of Apollo, of the Attic divinity Triptolemos, above all of Helios, the sun" ("The *Medea*," 283), traditional literary critics regularly refer to Medea as a witch, a sorceress, a "bloody Fury raised by the fiends of Hell" (1260).²⁰

In the language of tragedy, this "wicked mother" (1363), who refuses to be controlled by a man and who kills her own sons to get back at the husband who has humiliated her, represents an outbreak of the negative female principle that Orestes the mother-killer had succeeded in containing in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. This powerful princess who "called down wicked curses on the king's family" (607) and on Jason's house (114) is a "bloody Fury," one of those "vengeful incarnations of Clytemnestra" (Zeitlin, *Playing*, 97) whose terrifying power Orestes had failed to obliterate.²¹ And, as an Erinys, Medea represents, as Anne Burnett explains, not "the religion of the proud Olympians [but] the very magic of the older gods that Jason thought to use and cast away" (17).²² In effect, with Medea's triumph over Jason, tragedy comes full circle. The primitive and violent female forces, dormant since they were suppressed in Aeschylus's trilogy, erupt once again to imperil the *polis*. But the language of tragedy can

offer only a misogynist reading of Euripides' *The Medea*. Patriarchal interpretation, as Powers asserts, is predisposed to view women like Medea as bad mothers, as monsters, as "figures of the Gorgon mode, degenerate forces who threaten the social order, disintegrative forces who threaten psychic order." If "the world's great order [were] reversed" (410), as the Chorus says, then women such as Medea might indeed be viewed as "rebels of Promethian stature." By the terms of the tragic theatre, a "moral theatre which has itself been conceptualized to keep civilization a man-centered entity," however, Medea can only be, as Powers astutely notes, "judged heinous" (126).

Moreover, while it is possible to read Euripides' play as a warning that women pose a threat to civilization, there is another way to read *The Medea*. For in his play, this "poet of paradox," as Erich Segal calls him, this master of irony, offers parallel texts.²³ One text plays by the rules of tragedy and supports a patriarchal interpretation. This is *The Medea* in which, as Zeitlin phrases it, "the uses to which [Euripides] puts the feminine and the theater may be seen as the logical result of the premises of tragedy." The other—and competing—text raises questions about a culture which subordinates women and a genre which denies women a voice, and supports a feminist interpretation. This is *The Medea* that explicitly offers a commentary on the situation of women, and, implicitly, "by disclosing" the premises of tragedy "too well," as Zeitlin argues, "revises them and subverts the genre that was so firmly bound up with the context of the masculine civic world" (365).

Much has been made recently of Medea's role as a "foreigner," a "barbarian" whom Jason took "from [her] foreign home" (222, 536, 1330). As "the exploited barbarian," Medea, as McDonald explains, "can become the symbol of the freedom fighter, ... the oppressed turned oppressor," the abused "other' who fights back" (*Ancient*, 130). For example, Guy Butler's *Medea* foregrounds Euripides's presentation of Medea as, in Albert Wertheim's words, "the very embodiment of difference, a foreign and allegedly barbarian woman, in contrast to a Greek and allegedly civilized hegemonic Establishment" (336).²⁴ And Brendan Kennelly's *Medea* deals with both the fate of women in a patriarchal culture and "the Irish question" in the context of British imperialism.²⁵

Further, while "[h]ardly anyone today would insist," as Margaret Visser writes, "that we should explain the actions of Euripides' Medea as entirely those of a barbarian witch," it is "important to the plot" that Medea is a barbarian (151). For Euripides' presentation of Medea as culturally "the Other" functions to draw attention to the plight of women in a society where all women are "the Other," in particular, where brides, in the words of the Chorus, sail away from their fathers' homes, and pass the "double [clashing] rocks" to arrive in the "foreign country" of their husbands' homes (431-33).²⁶ As Medea says to the Women of Corinth, a woman, when she marries, "arrives among new modes of behavior and manners," and "needs prophetic power" if she is to adapt to both

the new customs and her new husband. A woman, when she marries, finds herself a stranger in a strange land.

Women are "the most unfortunate creatures," Medea continues, for not only do women have to "buy a husband and take for [their] bodies/ A master," but "not to take one is even worse" (231-34).²⁷ Further, a woman can never know whether her "master" will turn out to be a "good or bad one," and, if the former, then life is "enviable." If the latter, then a woman would "rather die," because a woman's husband is her only company, as Medea reminds the Women of Corinth:

A man, when he's tired of the company in his home,
Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom
And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.
But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone. (236-47)

Men can say all they want, says Medea, about women having it easy and staying "at home, while they do the fighting in war," but she "would very much rather stand/ Three times in the front of battle than bear one child" (248-51).

Faced with a husband like Jason, most women would share Medea's feelings. As Porter's Medea tells us, Medea "forsook [her] father, [her] home, all that [she] knew" (S3) to help Jason win the Golden Fleece. In return, Jason broke his oath to her in order to form "an alliance with a king" (700), in order to, as Crossland's Medea puts it, "marry the boss's daughter" (69). One woman or another, it is all the same to Jason, who thinks men would have been better off to "have got their children in some other way, and women/ Not to have existed" (573-75). And that Creon shares Jason's disrespect for women and for "the

authority of oaths" is made clear in the scene between Medea and Aegeus when, as Anne Burnett comments, the "king of Themis-loving Athens is astonished at the thought that anyone could have offered a new alignment, as Creon had, to a man already solemnly bound" (15).²⁸ Clearly, Euripides depicts a society in which, as Philip Vellacott comments, "male cruelty and contempt" are "a constant factor in the fate of women," a society which "assumes without question that the life of woman is always at man's disposal" (17).

The Medea obviously functions to raise questions about a society in which women are so poorly treated. Euripides' play also functions, albeit less obviously, to throw open to question tragedy and the heroic values it supports. With his *Medea* and its critique of a certain code of male honour, Euripides, to borrow a phrase from Dihle, "throws the entire heroic world open to question" (124). He does this by characterizing Jason, in Anne Burnett's words, as a "hustling, puny man" (16), and both Jason and Creon as unprincipled men who break oaths—and casting Medea as a woman who with what Rabinowitz calls her "warrior sensibility" (150) values honour above all else. In Euripides' play, Medea is "the true representative of the virtue (*arete*) that used to be found in the Homeric hero," while men like Jason and Creon, as McDonald writes, "show their corruption in the elaborate language learned from the sophists, language used to deceive rather than as a sacred repository of truth" (*Ancient*, 148-49).

Euripides takes matters further yet. After Jason shames her by breaking his marriage oath, Medea, the play's paradigm of *arete*, is faced with a no-win situation: either she forfeits her children or she forfeits her honour. There is no action available to Medea that will not destroy something of her self. If she kills her children she loses her life, for, as Fo and Rame's Medea remarks, her children "are [her] own flesh, [her] own blood ... [her] life" (38-39).²⁹ If she does not kill her children, she loses her *thumos*, her proud spirit, which is the basic part of her nature.³⁰ So the Medea who values honour above all else heeds the heroic code that says enemies must not be allowed to laugh at her and murders her children. In so doing, she shows the futility of vengeance, and the emptiness of the heroic ideal. Rush Rehm puts this well:

The horrifying precision with which Medea converts marriage into death—and maternity into child murder—shatters the validity of the heroic ideal she uses to justify her action. When doing harm to enemies so as not to be laughed at becomes the reason for killing one's loved ones, when an abused woman inverts her traditional roles at weddings and funerals and so converts her home into a battlefield, then the play challenges the ideological roots of the culture. (*Marriage*, 107-109).

Or, as Sarah Iles Johnston says, "a mother's deliberate slaughter of her children undermines one of the basic assumptions upon which society—indeed humanity—is constructed: mothers nurture their children. Once this assumption breaks down, all others are open to reconsideration" (44).

It is possible, moreover, to push the implications of Medea's slaughter of her sons even further, to suggest, in short, that *The Medea* deliberately exploits and subverts the commonplace in Euripides' society that biologically only the

father is the parent of a child. This creed, a wonderful example of man making, as Fo and Rame's Medea puts it, "whatever *he* wants become the law" (37), which holds that the father supplies the seed, the mother simply the environment in which this seed develops, throws a different light on Jason's remark that he wishes men did not need women to get children. As well, it renders heavily ironic the question that the Corinthian Women ask Medea after she has informed them of her plans: "How can you bear to kill your own seed, woman?" (816).³¹ More importantly, this creed supports the claim that the children Medea killed were those of the husband who dishonoured her, but not her own. Her body, as McDonald submits, "was not her own just as the colonized land does not belong to the colonized but to the colonizer. Medea's heroism is then a protest against her own self-alienation" ("Medea," 301). In terms of tragedy, Medea's decision to kill her children "might be regarded," as Peter L. Rudnytsky says, as "a perverse working out of the misogynous logic expressed by Aeschylus through the mouth of Apollo in the *Eumenides*, where Orestes is acquitted of the murder of Clytaemestra in large part because of the argument that only the father is a genuine parent" (38).

But Euripides' *Medea* challenges, in addition to the sexism of the dogma about fathers, the sexism of some of his society's most basic assumptions about sex roles. Specifically, this play challenges his society's distinction between the virtue of woman and the honour of man, a distinction which denied women a public voice and confined them to the domestic sphere, insisting, in

Andromache's words in *The Trojan Women*, that if a woman does not stay in her own house, this very fact brings ill fame upon her, whether she is at fault or not" (646-50; cit. Vellacott, 90). Euripides' play suggests that the virtue of men and women are the same.³² Not all women are as capable of heroic virtue as Medea is, but some are. As Euripides writes elsewhere, "among a large number of women you will find this one bad, that one endowed with a noble spirit" (Fragment 658; cit. Vellacott, 94).³³ Not all men are scoundrels as Jason is, but some are. As Medea complains, it is just too bad that "there is no mark engraved upon men's bodies," so that women "could know the true ones from the false ones" (518-19). Or, as Porter's Medea expresses the same sentiment, "When going to the market, it's easy to tell/ The good fruit from the soft and overripe;/ But men are different things" (S4).

Moreover, by presenting Medea in heroic terms, Euripides places side-by-side and centre stage two of his society's cultural texts: the text that rationalizes the "legal minority" of women by alleging that women are, in Foley's words, "naturally lacking in the self control, emotional stability, rationality and personal authority required for exercising virtue in a manner appropriate to a free citizen," and the text that declares that mythical "warriors are often indistinguishable from beasts, and they are subject, like Ajax, Heracles, or Pentheus, to bouts of madness, erotic seizures and other anti-cultural outbursts." And such a positioning of these two texts, as Foley's excellent discussion of the "nature/culture dicotomy" helped me to see, functions to

suggest that his culture's "instabilities are located in the roles, actions, and psyches of both genders" ("Conception," 132, 143).³⁴

The most revolutionary aspect of Euripides's *Medea*, however, is its focus on what Rehm refers to as "the problem of representation—who composes the song and sings it, and in whose interest is it sung?"—in a culture that denies women not only a public but a poetic voice (*Greek*, 143). If all the stories depict women as unfaithful wives, insists the Chorus, this is because all the stories were composed by men and do not offer the complete picture. If women had possessed a voice, "Men [would] figure no less famous/ Or infamous than women"³⁵ in legend:

Flow backward to your sources, sacred rivers,
And let the world's great order be reversed.
It is the thoughts of *men* that are deceitful,
Their pledges that are loose.
Story shall now turn my condition to a fair one,
Women are paid their due.
No more shall evil-sounding fame be theirs.

Cease now, you muses of the ancient singers,
To tell the tale of my unfaithfulness;
For not on us did Phoebus, lord of music,
Bestow the lyre's divine
Power, for otherwise I should have sung an answer
To the other sex. Long time
Has much to tell of us, and much of them. (410-28)

As Knox remarks, this is "an extraordinary passage. All the songs, the stories, the whole literary and artistic tradition of Greece, which had created the lurid figures of the great sinners, Clytemnestra, Helen, and also the desirable figures

(from the male point of view) of faithful Penelope and Andromache, ... is dismissed; it was all written by men" ("The *Medea*," 291).³⁶

And it is this scepticism regarding the stories of male mythmakers, this suggestion by Euripides that we, as Rudnytsky puts it, "look upon myth as *myth*" (35-36), that is picked up by Fo and Rame, Crossland, and Porter in their re-visions of Euripides' *Medea*.³⁷

According to Fo, his and Rame's *Medea* is based on a "popular Italian version" of the play, which is "related to the popular culture of the 1500s, and linked to the social and class problems of the peasants who used to perform it on the first of May."³⁸ In this version, Medea attempts to "regain the dignity of woman ... in a society of males who dominate women through their children" (Grant and Mitchell, 44). In the language of Fo and Rame's play, Medea refuses to "sacrifice" herself for her children, to "think like a good mother." Instead, she gets angry like "a proud woman" and murders her "little children ... so that [man's] shameful laws can be shattered into pieces" and "a new woman [can] be born" (36, 40).

And the "shameful laws" to which Medea refers, the play makes clear, are the myths that men invent to justify their abuse of women, myths that most women accept without question as "the way the world goes." One of these myths is that men "ripen with age" and women "wither." Women "bloom" and then "fade," whereas men grow "more mature and wise" as they get older. This is "just the law of life," according to the Chorus, the rule that explains why men

always cast off their wives for younger women, "always go searching for new flesh, new breasts and a fresh young mouth" (36-37).

The most insidious of the laws created by the male mythmakers, though, is the one that dictates that once a woman has children she is no longer a woman, she is a mother. Or, as Maggie Günsberg puts it, a "different female subject position echoes the traditional womanhood-as-motherhood tenet" (226).³⁹ This law means, as Fo and Rame's Medea says, that a husband "can't be a traitor just because he exchanges his woman. The woman should be happy and contented with being a mother ... that is her great reward" (39).⁴⁰ It means that a "reasonable" woman will not make a fuss when her husband disowns her, will not think about herself, but will think only of her children (36).

Following in the footsteps of Euripides' Medea, Fo and Rame's Medea, however, refuses to be a reasonable woman who respects man's "rules ... his creed." She refuses to "learn the lesson and repeat it and submit to it." She refuses to "keep silent ... for the good of [her] children" (37, 38). Instead, Medea rebels. She calls the law that allows men to exchange their wives "shameful blackmail," and points out that the "the worst infamy" is that it makes a "cage" of motherhood, and therein tethers women, hanging children around their necks to keep them quiet, "the way you hang a wooden collar on a cow" (39). Then, she vows that she is going to break out of this cage, that she will kill her sons in order "to demolish ... this infamous yoke and this infamous blackmail" with which patriarchy has imprisoned her (40).

Jackie Crossland's *Collateral Damage* also recognizes that motherhood, as the Chorus/Zelda remarks, "Is the place where women get trapped" (47). Its main concern, however, is the problem of representation. Since Medea speaks only through the poets, we have only their version of her story, only what "they say" about her motives and actions. To apply here a remark Karen Laughlin makes in her discussion of *Electra Speaks*, we only have "the patriarchal voice's canonical version of [Medea's] experience" ("Brecht," 155).⁴¹

Crossland's play acts to sing "an answer/ To the other sex," to offer a woman's take on the tales men have circulated about Medea. Since a "story is the sum of all its versions," writes Crossland in her "Playwright's Note," her goal was to augment traditional versions of Medea's story with her version: "a woman's story, with men presented as a woman sees them" (9). And, from a woman's perspective, Medea is a typical woman whose story is "an old story," one that "happens every day" in a world where guys like Jason are just "regular guys" and "rape and pillage" are just "part of the picture" during war (19, 74, 25).

Crossland's version of the Medea story focusses on motives—those of both Medea and the male storytellers. The play suggests that much of what "they say" about Medea is coloured by "their" ulterior motives. For instance, they say that Medea is "a witch," comments Cleo. But it is just as likely that "[s]omeone, her father or her brother," who wanted "to get rid of her at some point" started the "grisly stories" in order "to justify some accident later on" (22). *Collateral Damage* offers a perfect example of this sort of thing when Medea

takes the cabin boy who was left guarding her on the ship by surprise, "bonks him on the head," and gets away. Later, since he cannot stand to admit that a "mere woman" got away from him, the cabin boy tells everyone that Medea "bewitched him by growing larger than normal size and hypnotizing him with a supernatural stare." By the time she reaches town, "there is a crowd of curious onlookers who want to see the Greek hero's barbarian witch" (45-46). Myths, it seems, are created by men, not only to justify their abuse of women, but to cover up their own failings.

And if a cabin boy can fabricate such a tall tale, the play suggests, so can others. Euripides and other poets insist that Medea killed her brother.⁴² Perhaps what really happened, says Cleo, was that Jason killed Apsyrtos, but, when he discovered the body of his son, Medea's father made up a story "that goes like this":

Medea cast Jason under a spell, because she is a witch. She killed her own brother and dismembered the body and threw the pieces out of the back of a chariot to confuse pursuers. ... Ever since her mother died, she hasn't been right. (36)

It's not that people wanted to "believe the old man," Cleo continues, but "they had seen Medea with dead rats on her head, and everyone agreed that it was scary" (36). Medea's crime, in other words, was that she was not a sensible, conventional woman.

What nobody talks much about, though, are Medea's motives. Why did she run away with Jason in the first place? Surely, Medea's behaviour was motivated by other than Aphrodite's spells. And, as the Chorus/Sonia asks,

even "if she did kill [her brother] and cut him into thirty pieces—why? Murderers aren't born like that. What [had] been done to her to make her so full of rage that she could do such a thing? And another thing—what really happened to her mother?" As Cleo adds, "this is the kind of question that isn't usually asked" (36).

The play goes on to speculate that Medea ran off with Jason partly because he is "brave" and "handsome," but mostly because she wanted to "get the hell out of the temple and Colchis" (31). Jason was her escape from an abusive father and brother, from a father who "hated" and "murdered" Medea's mother—and "turn[ed] his attentions" to Medea before her mother was "cold in [her] grave"—and a brother who had learned "his moves from his dad" (32). Medea had no choice but to flee with Jason. As she says later to her maid, she "couldn't have stayed at home" (56). Moreover, if she did kill her brother, Medea's act might well have been in retaliation for his mistreatment of her.

Crossland's play also challenges Euripides' version of the story of the Princess, Creon's daughter. For the Princess in *Collateral Damage* is an intelligent and bold woman, who "hate[s] the whole business" of marriage and is "a great disappointment to her old dad" in that she refuses to wed Jason "and start making babies to consolidate [her father's] position" (65, 70, 64). Creon throws her in the dungeon and leaves her there until she agrees to become Jason's wife. But the Princess triumphs in the end. She sets fire to "the

marriage bed" and, with the help of the women of the Women's Temple, escapes to lead her own life (72-73).

Most importantly, Crossland's play contests the ending of Euripides' *Medea* with her version, in which this "woman more or less like any other who depended on a man and got no thanks for it" (74) does not murder her children, does not murder Creon or the Princess, and certainly does not escape into the clouds on a magic chariot sent by a god. Creon "died eventually, when a knife wound turned septic." Jason died quite unheroically, as Euripides' Medea had predicted, "when the prow of his rotting ship fell on him, as he slept through a hangover." The Nurse, it turns out, "took the children and left the country." As for Medea, well, Medea got safely away from Corinth and lived "to be an old woman" (73).

The first part of Deborah Porter's *No More Medea* (S3-S4) is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek re-telling of Euripides' account of Medea's story. Medea, we are told, is "a woman of great power" who, having been struck in the heart by Cupid's "shaft of love," falls for Jason with "a passion most unseemly." She helps Jason obtain the Golden Fleece and flees from her father with him, casting "the shredded corpse" of her brother "behind." Jason vows "marriage and a happy home," and "all is well—til Jason, tiring of his 'foreign' mate/ Forsakes her to marry the daughter of the Corinthian king." At this point, Medea and Jason engage in a name-calling match, during which Jason, parroting the misogynist lines of Euripides' Jason, bemoans the fact that "man

alone cannot bestow the gift of life" and reminds Medea of her "fading charms," and Medea harps on about her honour, which she insists is "not for sale," and about how she will not allow Jason to "make a fool of [her]." After Jason leaves, Medea tells us that she has "the loveliest idea for revenge," and goes on to re-stage the internal battle fought by Euripides' Medea over whether or not to "use the kids as chattel" in her fight with Jason. This part of Porter's play wraps up with Medea determined to murder her sons so as not to be "scorned or mocked as a spurned thing," choosing to take on the role of "the monster for [History's] books and plays," rather than to "take this kind of treatment."

The scene then shifts to The Place of Battered Legends, where women who have become myths, an "exclusive collection of saints and sinners," as Medea explains, "while away the eons" (S4). Here Medea, man's vilest creation, the bad mother of legend, has "to spend the rest of eternity" with Mary, man's "perfect creation," the "Virgin Mother" (S5, S6, S4). Medea had been alone for centuries before being joined by Mary, because "they couldn't find [her] match." Neither she nor Mary can understand why they were paired, why Medea did not get "some sort of monster; maybe a Hydra or all the Harpies" (S4). As it turns out, they have more in common than they expected.

For both women have suffered at the hands of the male mythmakers, whose fictions have reduced two multi-faceted personalities to simple paradigms of good and evil: "Handmaid of the Lord" and "Harpie, harridan ... witch, virago, she-wolf" (S6). Mary, the "meek and mild Queen of Heaven" has,

as Medea comments, "a particularly sanguine legacy, Immaculate conception. Virgin birth" (S7). Medea, on the other hand, has been given a quite different sort of history: "most cruel and unnatural mother" who "slays the kids in a fit of pique" (S6). Each, in short, is "trapped" by the "lies of legend," which distinguish each woman by one act alone: Mary "will always give birth," and Medea "will always kill the baby" (S7).

What has happened, as Medea says, is that "They" have used Mary's and Medea's stories "to suit their own ends" (S4). Medea, who "dared take action" (S6) in a world where women are supposed to be submissive victims, has become the "monster" for their stories, her story a cautionary tale admonishing women not to break society's rules. Mary and her "impossible meekness," Mary, "who had not dared to declare," has become another sort of example.⁴³ Her "icon" was carried on "the standards of the Crusaders ... burned into mortified flesh at the Inquisition." Her "immaculate javexed birth process," as Medea refers to it, has become "the shackles that bind a thousand, million, countless women." In short, like Fo and Rame's *Medea*, Porter's play insists that the "reality" of these two women has been "swallowed into myth, myth into canonical law, law into subjugation" (S6, S7).

No More Medea also insists that there is more to these two women than the stories about them would have us believe. Lending credence to Virginia Woolf's claim that "if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various;

heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme" (44-45), the poets have presented us with two archetypes, the good mother and the bad mother. But, as Woolf continues, "this is woman in fiction. In fact ... she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room." Or, as Porter's *No More Medea* (echoing Crossland's *Collateral Damage*) suggests, Mary and Medea were women more or less like other women. Medea was not "a butcher, not a beast." She was simply a woman "trying to get by like everyone else." She did not "choose to draw the knife. [She] had to." She had about as much leeway in her situation as Sophie had in *Sophie's Choice* when the Nazi told her to choose "[z]e boy or ze girl" (S6), or he would send both of her children to their death. Women do not kill their babies for no reason. If the Australian woman who claimed that the "dingo et me bubby!" (S5) murdered her child, something must have gone wrong. "Perhaps," as Mary says about another young woman who murdered her baby, "her lover left and she was stranded. Crazy with grief and nowhere to turn. Poor woman. White trash. Forced to kill her child." The point is, says Medea, who sees herself in that other poor woman, that "Medea is around us everywhere. The monster walks the street—and in the end, is just a woman. A survivor" (S7).⁴⁴

According to Zeitlin, even though Euripides casts her as the hero of his tragedy, "the self that is really at stake" in *The Medea* is not Medea's. In Euripides' play, Medea's demand for "identity and self-esteem" takes a back seat to her "formal function in the plot," which is "to punish Jason for breaking

his sacred oath to her" (346-48). And Zeitlin has a point. For Euripides' play does offer a misogynous text. This is the text that reduces Medea to merely the personification of those dark female forces that pose such a threat to a patriarchal culture, that makes of her a monster, a witch, a Fury, "the bad mother who haunts the nightmares of the Athenian youth" (Powers, 126). In this text, Medea as a woman does not really exist at all.

Euripides's play also offers a competing text, however. This is the text that, by casting Medea as the tragic hero, parodies the male hero and, in so doing, challenges both tragedy and the patriarchal values it upholds. Erich Segal says that we can describe what Euripides "'did' to classical tragedy" with the image "he destroyed the palace" (250). What Erich Segal fails to say is that in *The Medea* Euripides not only destroys the palace, he destroys the house. Medea curses, "Let the whole house crash" (114)—and both Creon's palace and Jason's house fall. This is the text that, by showing that Woman-as-Hero "is not one of our success myths," to borrow Russ's terminology, that "hero" myths are "tales for heroes, not heroines," makes it clear that "Culture is male" (8, 4). This is the text that warns us to view myth as *myth* and to regard with suspicion the tales of the male mythmakers.

Most importantly, this is the text that Fo and Rame, Crossland, and Porter turn to in their re-tellings of the Medea story. Each of their plays, as Crossland says about *Collateral Damage* in her "Playwright's Note," "could be any woman's story" (9). Each of their plays thinks of Medea as "a woman more

or less like any other" (Crossland, 74), a woman "just trying to get by ... Medea at the supermarket, Medea at the drugstore. Just trying to survive. Like you, and you, and you" (Porter, S7). Each of their plays insists that the Medea who is the embodiment of what a patriarchal culture fears most, the Medea who is Clytemnestra incarnate, so to speak, must perish. Thus, to the people's shouts of "Monster! Bitch! Murderess! Unnatural mother! Whore!" Fo and Rame's Medea replies, "Die ... die and let a new woman be born" (40). Thus, to the legend of Medea, Porter's Medea says, "That was the legend. It wasn't me," and her Mary insists, "No more Medea" (S6). The Chorus of Euripides' *Medea* sings, "Legends shall now change direction."⁴⁵ Since a story such as Medea's is, as Crossland says, "the sum of all its versions," perhaps where Medea is concerned legends finally shall change direction.

Notes

1. This is the translation of these lines offered by Bernard Knox in "The Medea of Euripides" (291).

2. The notion that Euripides killed tragedy was "surely inspired," says E. Segal, by Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1085 ff., where the "progress of Greek tragedy [is] likened to the famous fire-relay held at the Panathenaic festival," and it is implied that Euripides "was not only too weak to carry the torch" that both Aeschylus and Sophocles had heroically carried a great distance, "but he could not even keep the flame alive" (244, 436, n.1).

3. See lines 410-30 for the Chorus' famous speech. All quotations from *The Medea* are taken from the Rex Warner translation unless otherwise specified. Future line references will be provided parenthetically in the text of my chapter.

4. Medea's story was told before Euripides dramatized it. However, the evidence suggests "that the murder of the children by Medea herself is Euripidean invention" (Knox, "The Medea," 272-73), and, after Euripides, as M. McDonald comments, "Medea is synonymous with child murderer" ("Medea," 300).

According to Visser, mothers in Greek mythology rarely kill their children. "*Patria potestas* gave fathers, on the other hand, the power of life and death over their children." In Greek mythology Cronus tries to kill his children, Herakles and Alcathous succeed in doing so in a fit of madness or rage, and Theseus and Oedipus bring about their children's deaths by a curse. "When Medea kills her children," therefore, "she is treating them in a manner conceivable in fathers, but far more shocking in mothers" (158, 164, n. 49).

5. McDonald cites Bachofen, who sees Herakles as "the irreconcilable foe of matriarchy, the indefatigable battler of Amazons, the misogynist, in whose sacrifice no woman takes part, by whose name no woman swears, and who finally meets his death from a woman's poisoned garment" (Bachofen, 176). She then offers the following commentary: In Sophocles his "wife slew him ('inadvertently,' in trying to win his love back) when he attempted to import a princess to share their marriage bed, thus making an interesting contrast with Medea. He was a man who slew monsters, thus contributing to civilization, but, as Harrison claims, these monsters were all forms of women, maiden, crone, and goddess, and in slaying them he resembled the final monster" (*Ancient*, 119-20).

6. Medea's marriage transaction with Jason, which took place before the action of the play, is mirrored in the play by her arrangement with Aegeus for his protection once she gets to Athens, another contract between equals, sealed by oaths.

7. According to Visser, "Jason was given a magic charm and Persuasion by Aphrodite to take away Medea's 'reverence for her parents'; from now on Medea is to follow Jason, who is made to stand for his country, Hellas (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.214-9). Jason stole Medea, Pindar says, 'with her own help' (250), a phrase which covers what Pindar knows but is not telling" (156).

8. See Williamson's "A Woman's Place" for a detailed analysis of Medea's exchanges with Creon, Aegeus, and Jason, to whom she speaks as one equal to another, except, of course, when she has need to play the suppliant woman in order to get her way. This she does, for example, with Creon, who distrusts clever women, in order to persuade him to allow her to stay.

9. Boedeker translates "blazing her eyes at them" (92) as "bulling her eye" at her sons. This is, she says, Euripides' adaptation of "a memorable Aeschylean metaphor": "Orestes recalls Apollo's frightening catalogue of what he will suffer if he does not avenge his father, attacking Agamemnon's killers in their own fashion, like a bull" (131).

10. As Boedeker says, this bull metaphor "recalls the fire-breathing bulls Jason had to harness to the plough in Colchis (cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.224-29)—which Medea herself mentions in the next episode (478). The same Medea who once helped Jason survive her father's murderous bulls now glares bull-like at the products of her union with Jason" (131).

11. Knox remarks that "[h]eroes, it was well known, were violent beings and since they lived and died by the simple code 'help your friends and hurt your enemies' it was only to be expected that their revenges, when they felt themselves unjustly treated, dishonored, scorned, would be huge and deadly" ("The Medea," 277).

Foley comments that Medea "takes revenge in an explicitly male heroic style (with the exception of her weapon), makes political alliances for herself with Athens, and destroys her husband's *oikos* by killing her sons" ("Conception" 151-52).

12. According to McDonald, this heroic code—"helping friends and harming enemies"—is one that "can be traced to Homer" (*Odyssey*, 6.182-85). It also "appears frequently in later Greek literature, e.g., Plato *Meno* 71e" ("Medea," 302, n. 13).

13. McDonald views Medea as "a woman of consuming passion." She might even "personify" *thumos*, which Euripides "will externalize in Dionysus in his *Bacchae*" ("Medea," 301).

As for Medea's heroic wrath, it is such that, as McDonald notes, it "earns her immortality in a union with Achilles as her husband in Elysium" ("Medea," 299; cit. Ibycus fr. 289, Simonides, fr. 558, Apollonius Rhodius 4.805 ff.). Achilles is the most renowned Greek warrior of the Trojan War, and he killed the greatest Trojan hero, Hector. (See Homer's *Iliad*.)

14. Rabinowitz suggests that Euripides "represents an ambiguous Medea, both goddess and woman, foreigner and native; she is liminal and trans-gressive, crossing over the boundaries, with the result that the threat she poses seems a general contamination" (126).

Boedeker suggests that the heroic metaphors used to describe Medea are at odds with the image of deserted wife: "In the prologue and parados the Nurse ... describes Medea in a series of vivid images as a dangerous beast or a natural force. These metaphors call into question the pathetic descriptions of a homeless woman, abandoned by her husband, about to be exiled, which the Nurse or Pedagogue develops in the same scenes" (129).

15. Euripides characterizes Medea as both a woman and a hero. That such a characterization is a paradoxical one is made clear by the fact that the Greek word *aner* means both "hero" and "husband" (Castellani, 11).

16. Scylla is a sea-monster, one of the dangers Jason faced on the Argo expedition (see *Odyssey*, 12.5-100). As Boedeker comments, Jason is here suggesting that Medea is "more savage than that most famous threat to Greek sailors, the devouring, bestial Scylla ... more dreadful than the kinds of dangers he faced on his great adventure" (132).

17. Medea is also connected to Hecate, whom she repeatedly calls on, in Euripides' play. Hecate is Medea's mother, according to one version of her legend. Powers comments that "Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, the authority on classical philology, considered Medea an Underworld goddess herself, possessing chthonic powers," and that "Apollodorus connects her to Circe, supposedly her aunt, who helped to purify her and Jason after they had killed her brother" (113).

18. In her discussion of Tony Harrison's re-vision of Euripides' *Medea*, McDonald suggests that Harrison develops a theme found in Euripides to show that Medea was "blackened by male mythmakers." Here are the lines from Harrison's *Medea: A Sex War Opera* that McDonald cites: "Men's hatred had to undermine/ MEDEA's status as divine/ and to reduce her/ to a

half-crazed children-slayer/ making a monster of MEDEA/ like the Medusa (cit. McDonald, *Ancient*, 116; Harrison, 432).

19. According to Powers, Euripides reached back beyond Homeric legend to the remnants that remained of the matriarchal mythology of the tribal groups of mainland Greece and surrounding islands, a mythology that held sway until "the Age of Pericles permanently altered the mythology that has come down to us as the heritage of Western civilization." Then, instead of "inverting" the stories he found to suit the bias of a patriarchal culture, "particularly the notion of its righteous ascent to dominion," Euripides used these stories to challenge Athenian culture.

This is something he did, not only with Medea, but with Helen, who was once "a powerful earth goddess of Sparta. ... Helen's name is pre-Greek and there were stories," says Powers, "which insisted she was blameless, had been abducted against her will, had never even arrived in Troy." It is such stories that Euripides works with in his *Helen* (54, 64).

20. Powers discussion of the way patriarchal mythmakers altered earlier matriarchal myth so that goddesses became witches and furies is a fascinating one: "The Indo-Europeans did not understand the Minoan religion and were surely threatened by the ubiquity of powerful goddesses and heroines, yet they could not obliterate the goddesses. Some were silenced, other deprecated and dismissed. A combination of ignorance and fear led also to the characterization of women as "ogresses: Gorgons, Harpies, Sirens, Graiae, Eryinyes. These were the misunderstood, misinterpreted remnants of the goddess trinity. The conquerors saw only debasement and horror in the religion of the conquered and the chthonic side of the great goddess allowed such emphasis to take hold. So the goddess became the female monsters to be killed by Indo-European heroes" (54).

21. Visser, who also sees Medea as an Erinyes, notes that the chariot Helios sends for her "is drawn by serpents, the symbol of the chthonic, female Erinyes." Further, it is because Medea is "under the protection of the Sun (god of oaths)" and she is an Erinyes, "a dark and bloody curse on the house of Jason," that she "will get away with her dreadful deed" (159).

Knox accepts that by the end of the play Medea has become some sort of a *theos* (god), and admits that in the play Medea is "identified as an Erinyes" (723). But he has trouble accepting that Medea is an Erinyes, because "as a spiller of kindred blood, she should be their allotted victim, as Jason vainly hopes she will be (1389)" ("The Medea," 282).

It seems to me, though, that Medea might well represent an Erinyes sent to avenge Jason's broken oath. After all, in his defense of Orestes in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, Apollo claims that the father is a child's true parent, the mother is only

an incubator for the male seed, a claim supported by Aristotle. According to this logic, Medea does not spill kindred blood, as the children she kills are Jason's sons, not her own.

22. Jason, it is important to keep in mind, is condemned by Medea as "a breaker of oaths, a deceiver" (1392)—not as an adulterer. And to the pre-Olympian divinities, "oath-breaking was twin to kin-murder," according to A. Burnett: "The broken oath, like the drop of kin blood, brought an erinyes into being ... and the demon was not to be appeased until the wrongdoer had been made to suffer" (13).

23. "Much of Euripides' conviction, especially in the matter of women, was for most of his fellow-citizens too radical to be comprehensible," according to Vellacott, "and to the rest he presented it in a fabric of irony which in his day was penetrated by few." (6).

24. Butler's re-vision of *The Medea* is set in South Africa and deals with the issue of the apartheid system, particularly with the effect this system has had on South Africa's coloured population (those of mixed racial background). In the "Author's Note" to *Medea*, Butler writes that he was "particularly struck by the *Medea* of Euripides," because it "dealt with an issue much on [his] mind: racial and cultural prejudice" (v).

25. In the preface to his play, Kennelly offers the following comment on Euripides' *Medea*: "Many people say the play is about jealousy. It's not, it's about rage" (6). According to McDonald, Kennelly "has written a paean to rage, and specifically woman's rage. He not only deals with specific contemporary issues, such as 'the Irish question,' but also such universal themes as those that surround love between man and woman" ("Bomb," 131).

26. As Visser notes, Medea's "initiation into the married state was a passage between the Clashing Rocks" (151; cit. *Medea*, 2, 431-33, 1262-64).

27. As Williamson notes, Medea's account here "of the giving of dowries contains a subtle distortion: she ... represents the woman as an active partner in the transaction" when "it would be a woman's father who engaged in the transaction, not the woman herself" (18-19).

28. See lines 700-708 in Euripides' *Medea*. A. Burnett also comments here that Creon's offering of this "new alignment" to Jason is "at very least a form of cheating, which is why Creon and his daughter are twice called 'descendants of Sisyphus' in the play" (405, 1381).

29. Fo and Rame's Medea argues that "everyone disowns the woman who's been betrayed" by her husband. Jason has not only banished her from Corinth, he has banished her from society generally. "It will be," she says, "as if Medea had never been born." In other words, Medea cannot kill herself, because Jason has already done that. The "only life" that remains to her is that of her children. Therefore, the "only life [she] can take is theirs" (38).

30. As Schlesinger remarks, after she kills her sons, the "granddaughter of Helios may stand in triumph on her dragon chariot, but Medea the woman is dead" (89). In his *Medea* (1946), Jean Anouilh "has Medea commit suicide in the flames of her children's funeral pyre after she has murdered them," says March. Perhaps, she continues, Euripides' ending "with Medea transformed into something other than human" and Anouilh's ending with Medea killing herself are in effect "one and the same" (43).

That Medea both loses and gains with her retaliation against Jason is emphasized, according to Rudnytsky, by the comment that the Chorus makes to her: "And you might become at least the most wretched woman" (817-18). For, in "the antithetical meanings of the superlative form of *athlios*—which originally signifies both 'wretched' and 'winning the prize'—are compressed the extremes of gain and loss inseparable in Medea's action" (38).

31. This is Rabinowitz's translation of this line, which is translated by Rex Warner in my copy of the play as "But can you have the heart to kill your flesh and blood?" Translation certainly is interpretation.

32. That this is a radical notion for Euripides' time is suggested by Foley's remark that "Socrates seems to have been virtually alone in arguing that the virtue of men and women was the same (*Meno* 72d-73b)" ("Conception," 132).

33. As well, in their fifth stasimon, the Chorus of Euripides' *Medea* suggests that some women are capable of greatness: "Often I have passed through subtler tellings and have confronted greater strivings than it is 'destined' for the female sex to search into; yet there is a Muse for us, too, who comes to us to impart wisdom—not to all of us, indeed, but you can find a handful among many, and the woman's sex is not without music" (1081-89; tr. Castellani, 11).

Elsewhere, Euripides' Melanippe comments that "nothing is worse than the base woman, and nothing far surpasses the good one. Only their natures differ" (cit. Foley, "Conception," 156).

34. In *The Medea*, it can be argued that Euripides blurs the boundaries between the sexes. Initially Jason's victim, Medea swaps roles with her husband to become the victimizer. By play's end, Medea is in the dominant position and Jason offers a "lament" (1409) for his murdered sons. In short, Euripides shows that in a culture such as theirs both man and woman lose in the end, that the tragedy of Medea is also the tragedy of Jason.

And, certainly, both Porter and Crossland humanize Jason, enabling us to sympathize to some extent with him. Porter emphasizes the similarities between husband and wife by having them engage in a childish name-calling match in which they sound a bit like Ann-Marie MacDonald's immature and petulant Romeo and Juliet. And Crossland's Cleo comments that Jason is "not a bad guy. He's just doing what he knows (33).

35. This is Vellacott's translation of lines 428-30 of the Chorus' great speech, a translation that is not, he acknowledges, the most "literal" (112, 250, n. 16).

36. Knox continues by commenting that the Chorus "has suddenly realized the truth contained in the Aesopian story of the man and the lion who argued about which species was superior. Shown as proof of man's dominance a gravestone on which was carved a picture of a man downing a lion, the lion replied: 'If lions could carve sculptures, you would see the lion downing the man'" (291-92).

37. Rudnytsky's full comment is as follows: "Unlike his two great predecessors, who despite their differences both remain within the inherited tradition of Greek mythic thought, Euripides is distinctively modern (as Nietzsche recognized) in the way he calls into doubt the assumptions of the stories he dramatizes, that is, is able to look upon myth as *myth*."

Dihle says something similar: Sophocles "invariably upheld the authority of religious and mythical tradition," but Euripides took the step "of seeking to evaluate myth" (118).

38. In the English translation of Fo and Rame's play, the prologue has been left out. In interview, Fo deplores this omission, because it is the prologue that "establishes that the text is popular." It is the prologue that "gives a synopsis of the story, and tells what had happened previously" (Grant, 44).

39. This position, Günsberg adds, "reiterates the Father's view of the Mother: 'She's not a woman, she's a mother,' in Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, Act I)" (226).

40. The notion of "exchanging" one woman for another is also suggested by the Jason of Crossland's play, when he says to the king that he could just return Medea to Colchis: "I could

just send her back—she has family there—and let her take the kids. ... We don't have to kill her" (64).

41. *Electra Speaks* is the third part of the trilogy *The Daughter's Cycle* by Women's Experimental Theatre. The first two parts of the trilogy, according to Laughlin, "situate daughters, mothers, wives in the present day." The third part, *Electra Speaks*, "turns to the ancient world and picks up the figures of Electra, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Cassandra, and Athena from ancient Greek myth" ("Brecht," 154).

42. According to Visser, not "all accounts agree with Euripides in making Medea kill her brother Apsyrtos: Appollonius, for instance, and Pherecydes make Jason or the Argonauts do it. Medea was nevertheless polluted by her brother's blood. Pindar makes no mention of Medea's brother, but he does say that she married 'against her father' and 'for herself' (Ol.13.54)" (Visser, 155).

43. Interestingly, Mary is, in Porter's play, given some of Ophelia's lines: "and I of ladies most deject and wretched: Oh woe is me, to have seen what I have seen, and see what I see!" (S6).

44. That Medea and her suffering is still "around us everywhere," is made clear by a story that Rame related in a recent interview. "One particular night," as Anderlini re-tells the story, Rame "sensed the theater freeze as she played Medea. Curious about the reaction, she learned of a woman in that town who had jumped out of a window with her two children, just a few days before Franca came to play" (38).

45. This is Knox's translation of this line. Knox claims that Euripides' use of the future tense here "is unnecessary," as "Euripides play itself is the change of direction" ("The Medea," 292). It seems to me that Euripides' use of the future tense is both necessary and deliberate. Euripides astutely perceived that it would take more than one play to bring about such a change in direction.

CHAPTER 4

***The Bacchae* Re-Visited: Caryl Churchill and David Lan's A Mouthful of Birds and Maureen Duffy's Rites**

In the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche brilliantly analyzed the dichotomy between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the principle of emotional fusion and the principle of differentiation and individuation. The point was epoch-making for the understanding of Greek tragedy and Greek culture. But what is missing from Nietzsche's discussion, otherwise fruitful for the study of the *Bacchae*, is a consideration of the feminine in relation to both Dionysus and Apollo. The vehemence of Pentheus' resistance to Dionysus and the close association of Dionysus with women in the play together constitute a remarkable insight into the weaknesses of the Apollonian view of self and world that has come to dominate Western consciousness. "This structure of consciousness," to quote James Hillman, "has never known what to do with the dark, material, and passionate part of itself, except to cast it off and call it Eve. What we have come to mean by the word 'conscious' is 'light'; this light is inconceivable for this consciousness without a distaff side of something else opposed to it that is inferior and which has been called—in Greek, Jewish, and Christian contexts—female."

—Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, 158

The Bacchae is a complex and slippery play, which demands interpretation on more than one level. Most critics agree that at a basic level Euripides' play, which depicts a clash between Pentheus, the new ruler of the city, and Dionysus, a god from the east who jeopardizes the social and political order of the city, makes a statement about religion and its place in the *polis*. They do not agree, though, about the nature of that statement. *The Bacchae* has been understood as an exaltation of Dionysus. It has been viewed as evidence, according to E.R. Dodds in his "Introduction" to the play, of Euripides' "deathbed conversion," as a "palinode," a recantation of the 'atheism' of which

Aristophanes had accused its author (xxxvii). It has also been understood as a condemnation of Dionysus.¹ Commentators in the first camp focus on "the power of Dionysus and the dreadful fate of those who resist him" (Dodds, "Introduction," xxxvii), and defend Dionysus's actions as justified divine retribution. Those in the second point out that Cadmus and Teiresias, who support Dionysus, are completely ludicrous figures, and focus on the cruelty of the god, casting Dionysus, in William Arrowsmith's words, "as a devil and Pentheus as a noble martyr to human enlightenment" (143).²

While the play "undeniably," as Helene P. Foley remarks, "raises questions about the nature of divinity" (*Ritual*, 206), both the "palinode" theory and its rival are, as Dodds suggests, inadequate, "too crude" to fit all of the facts. With respect to the first theory, there is no real evidence of any sudden conversion on the part of Euripides. There is more evidence, according to Dodds, that Euripides' "interest in, and sympathetic understanding of, orgiastic religion" predates "his Macedonian period."³ With respect to the second theory, it is all but impossible to find evidence in the play to support the claim that Pentheus is some sort of "noble martyr." For, like Jason in *The Medea*, Pentheus is depicted as an unheroic character by Euripides, as, in Dodds' words, a "typical tragedy-tyrant." Dionysus, on the other hand, behaves in a "serene and dignified" manner, "as a Greek god should behave." ("Introduction," xxxviii-xli).

Moreover, to ask whether Euripides praises or condemns Dionysus is to ask a meaningless question. Dionysus, the "god incognito,/ disguised as man" (4-5), is simply the finite manifestation of a force immanent in both human beings and the natural world. Dionysus, as Plutarch says, is the god "of all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature." He is not only the passionate side of the human psyche, but the "Power in the tree," the "blossom-bringer," the "fruit-bringer," the "liquid fire in the grape," the "blood pounding in the veins of a young animal" (cit. Dodds, "Introduction," x). In short, Dionysus is an amoral force of nature that is beyond good and evil. Like life itself, he requires only acknowledgement, not approval.

It does not matter, then, what Euripides thinks of Dionysus. What matters is that in *The Bacchae* Dionysus, the stranger from the east who "brings the strange," as Froma I. Zeitlin remarks, "compels acceptance, under tragic pressure, of altered states of perception and modes of cognition that challenge a limited, often male-centered view of the world" ("Staging," 152) and threatens Pentheus, the new ruler of Thebes, and the order of the *polis*. What matters is that, in the ensuing confrontation between the smiling god who demands recognition and the human ruler who denies the stranger's divinity, the mortal is destroyed. What is important is that Euripides recognizes Dionysus in *The Bacchae* and uses the clash between the god and the ruler "to explore simultaneously," as Foley comments, "god, man, society, and his own tragic art" (*Ritual*, 207).

Euripides offers both poetry and critical commentary about his culture and his art in his play. Friedrich Nietzsche's observation that Euripides possesses "incisive critical gifts" (79) is certainly substantiated by *The Bacchae*. His allegation that Euripides' intention in his plays is to "eliminate from tragedy the primitive and persuasive Dionysiac element, and to rebuild the drama on a foundation of non-Dionysiac art, custom, and philosophy" (76), however, is not. Euripides suggests in *The Bacchae* that it is his own Greek culture that has elevated Apollonian rationality, form, unity, and light over Dionysiac irrationality, formlessness, plurality, and darkness.⁴ He also suggests that the consequences of failing to recognize the Dionysiac element can only be dire, in the words of Heraclitus, the "sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the handmaids of justice, will find him out" (cit. Camus, "Helen's," 135).⁵

The conflict in Euripides' *Bacchae* is not between men and women, but between Pentheus, the representative of a supremely Apollonian patriarchal order, and Dionysus, the god who denies such order. As Colin Teevan puts it, Euripides' play is

not a debate between excluded women and authority but between authority and a vengeful God of liberality. Pentheus has repressed not only celebration and the carnivalesque inversion of social order for which all stable societies provide a periodic outlet, he has repressed the feminine, and through his attempts to see what he has banished ... he is torn apart. (81)

In a real sense, then, the women in *The Bacchae*, as Teevan continues, "are no longer the excluded victims of a male patriarchy—they are agents of

destruction of a male patriarchy that by its own intransigence has brought itself to such a point" (81).

The lesson of Euripides' play is that if a culture carries the Apollonian repression of the Dionysian to extremes, Dionysus *will* strike back. It is also that the denial of Dionysus is the denial of life, no less, and that such a denial cannot but hurt the person who denies, man or woman, Pentheus or Agave. As Albert Camus puts it, "Nemesis, the goddess of measure and not of revenge, keeps watch. All those who overstep the limit are pitilessly punished by her" ("Helen's," 134).

From the evidence of their re-visions of Euripides' *Bacchae*, this is a lesson that Maureen Duffy and Caryl Churchill and David Lan have taken to heart. Both *Rites* and *A Mouthful of Birds* recognize the importance—and the power—of the Dionysiac element in life. In both plays, the rigid Apollonian distinctions that polarize the sexes are subverted. In their play, Churchill and Lan suggest that both men and women can be violent, that both men and women, in other words, can be possessed by Dionysus. In her play, Duffy suggests that women, like men, can come too much under the spell of Apollo and that when this happens women can be just as guilty of bigoted sexual stereotyping as the worst Pentheus. Both re-visions—like *The Bacchae*—show the madness of Western patriarchal culture's elevation of an Apollonian ideal that, as Camus phrases it, "glorifies but one thing, which is the future rule of reason," and "negates" whatever it "does not glorify" ("Helen's," 134). *The*

Bacchae, *Rites*, and *A Mouthful of Birds*, as Elizabeth Hale Winkler says of the latter, in their "profound questioning of power, gender roles and gender identity [are] intended to be subversive of patriarchy" (226).⁶

Tragedy appeared rather suddenly on the scene in fifth-century Athens as a fully formed genre. In Gail Holst-Warhaft's words, like "Aphrodite, the foam-born goddess, it seem[ed] to emerge fully grown out of the raw stuff of life" (127). This seemingly spontaneous appearance has given rise to some debate on the subject of tragedy's origin. Most modern theorists, however, agree with Aristotle's account, and view tragedy, in Bernard Knox's words, as "an organic growth from Dionysiac ritual to perfection of form," stressing its evolution from some kind of religious "ritual performance—dithyrambic, satyric, phallic—to fully dramatic presentation" (*Word*, 4).⁷ And, if tragedy was spawned in Dionysiac ritual, it follows that originally tragedy was closely connected to women's rites, for Dionysus, as Holst-Warhaft remarks, is himself linked to the underworld and to women's ritual behaviour." Women took the leading roles in the Eleusinian mystery rites, over which Dionysus reigned with Demeter, and in the greater Dionysia, an annual mid-winter festival held in Athens, which celebrated Dionysus (165, 101). Tragedy, in short, was conceived in the cult of Dionysus, a cult clearly identified with women.

This conception is, as Camille Paglia notes, one of the ironies of literary history (6). For the genre that was conceived in the cult of Dionysus came of age in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, a trilogy which celebrates the defeat of the

chthonian power that Dionysus represents and the triumph of the male power that Athena and Apollo represent. In terms of what Zeitlin calls "the dynamics of misogyny," Aeschylus establishes a "hierarchization of values" in his *Oresteia*, in which Olympian is placed over chthonic on the divine level, Greek is placed over barbarian on the cultural level, and male is placed over female on the social level (*Playing*, 87).⁸ In short, by the time tragedy, "a Dionysian mode," has reached its full expression in *The Oresteia*, has completed "the passage from ritual to mimesis, that is, from action to representation," it has, as Paglia puts it, "turned against Dionysus" (6).

Holst-Warhaft argues that the "macabre song" of the Furies as they dance in a ring around Orestes in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is "a song of fate, one that belongs to the female world and should not be witnessed by men." Tragedy mimics "the forbidden" when it stages this ritual song, which makes it a form of "voyeurism." Such an interpretation is supported by *The Bacchae*, in which the ritual performance is repeated, Pentheus' voyeurism is severely punished, "and the Athenian audience, the symbolic doubles of Pentheus," is brought face to face with "the terror of bearing witness to mysteries not meant for male eyes" (157). "The salacious voyeurism into which Dionysus lures Pentheus," may well be, as Paglia remarks, "Euripides' comment on the moral evasions of [a] theater" (103) that, as Holst-Warhaft suggests, appropriates a female form and uses it to turn "women's laments against themselves" (161).

With *The Bacchae*, Euripides takes tragic theatre back to its pre-Aeschylean origins, to what Foley refers to as "a form of embryonic theater" (*Ritual*, 103), suggesting, according to Holst-Warhaft, that "tragedy can no longer hold its material," that "it is, after all, female."⁹ By returning tragedy to Dionysus, Euripides suggests that Aeschylus got it wrong. He makes his point on one level by parodying *The Oresteia* and subverting traditional heroic values in *The Bacchae*. On another, he makes his point by using Dionysus, in particular the clash between the god and Pentheus, to challenge Aeschylus's "hierarchization of values" and, in so doing, raise questions about the so-called universality of Athenian tragedy and the values of the *polis*.¹⁰ As Charles Segal writes, the "vehemence of Pentheus' resistance to Dionysus and the close association of Dionysus with women in the play together constitute a remarkable insight into the weaknesses of [the] Apollonian view of self and world" (*Dionysiac*, 158).¹¹

The Bacchae, as Paglia submits, "satirically reverses" *The Oresteia*, rewriting its "central statements" (102).¹² Chthonian nature, for instance, which is defeated in *The Oresteia*, is victorious in *The Bacchae*. The son kills the mother in Aeschylus's trilogy; the mother kills the son in Euripides' play. Orestes acts to destroy a mother's honour in the earlier tragedy; Dionysus acts to rehabilitate a mother's honour in the latter. Aeschylus's play presents a boyish female god, Euripides' a girlish male god. Most significantly, Euripides reverses the fate of Orestes with Pentheus who is, as Charles Segal declares,

"virtually the mirror-image" of Orestes. Both are chased by maenads. Pentheus is "the 'hare' torn by the maddened women or maenads," Orestes the prey of "the Furies, who are themselves called maenads (*Eum.* 500)." Orestes escapes from the Furies "to the patriarchal realm of the city." In Euripides' play, however, the young man who is hunted "by devouring, blood-drinking female avengers emanating from the power of the mother" does not escape the vengeance of the women, but is torn to pieces (*Dionysiac*, 167). In the battle of the sexes, female power is defeated in *The Oresteia*, but triumphs in *The Bacchae*.

A different kind of reversal is offered by Euripides' subversion of traditional heroic values in *The Bacchae*. Pentheus, the young king, is a member of the male warrior class. However, instead of leading his army off to fight the maenads after his call to arms (780-86), Pentheus is convinced by Dionysus to dress as a woman and sneak up the mountain to spy voyeuristically on the women and their revels. And this robing or toilet scene (913-44) is, as Charles Segal comments, "a fantastic inversion of the arming scene that precedes the epic warrior's entrance into battle." In it, Pentheus "acts out the opposite of the values of his male peer group: effeminacy instead of masculinity; emotionality instead of rationality; illusion, magic, and trickery instead of realistic clarity, forthrightness, and martial discipline" (*Dionysiac*, 169, 171). He goes from male armor to female dress, from martial ruler to maenad, from, in Paglia's words, "strutting young buck to drag queen" (102).

The battle scene (678-775) presents another inversion of traditional values. According to the account of the Messenger, during the skirmish the maenads behaved as an organized corps, the men as a wild horde. The women were organized into three companies, each with a captain, and ready to follow orders (680-81). Given the "signal," they "whirled their wands" and with "one voice" uttered their battle cry, "*O Iacchus! Son of Zeus!*" "*O Bromius!*" (722-25). The men, on the other hand, had no leaders and no battle plan. They were simply "cowherds and shepherds/ gathered in small groups, wondering and arguing/ among [them]selves," who had decided to hide in the bushes and ambush the women (714-30) or "villagers, furious at what the women did," who had taken to arms (758-59). And during the battle that ensued, the men's spears proved useless, drawing "no blood," while the women, displaying the power of the warrior, "inflicted wounds" with their wands and "routed" the men, who fled (760-64).

The humiliating death Dionysus brings to Pentheus also turns traditional heroic values inside-out. The heroic code of Pentheus' society insists that it is a disgraceful thing for a heroic warrior to be laughed at. Pentheus tells Dionysus that for him to dress in "a *woman's* dress" would be "to die of shame" (828), and that any route through the city is fine, as long as "those women of Bacchus don't jeer at [him]" (841). Shortly thereafter, Dionysus tells the women that he wants Pentheus "made the laughingstock of Thebes,/ paraded through the streets, a woman" (853-54). In the next scene, Pentheus enters dressed as a

woman, ready for glory and the "great ordeal" that Dionysus says awaits him on the mountain (973-75). But instead of glory Dionysus brings Pentheus humiliation. Instead of the glorious death appropriate to the warrior, Dionysus brings Pentheus an ignoble death, in "wig and snood" rather than warrior's helmet, "sobbing and screaming" as his own mother falls "upon him" with the "whole horde/ of Bacchae" (1112-31).

In addition to parodying *The Oresteia* and subverting traditional heroic values, Euripides' *Bacchae* uses Dionysus to challenge Aeschylus's "hierarchization of values." A "recurrent social tendency," according to Helene Keyssar, has been to use Western theatre "to confirm the victory of a new set of beliefs over the old." Some playwrights, however, among them contemporary feminist playwrights and the author of *The Bacchae*, use theatre in a transformational way "to explore unresolved tensions between dominant and emergent values" ("Doing," 144). Keyssar's distinction is a useful one for thinking about the difference between what Aeschylus is doing in *The Oresteia* and what Euripides is doing in *The Bacchae*. Aeschylus's trilogy confirms the victory of the male-defined *polis* and the defeat of female power. It celebrates the transition, in Paglia's words, "from nature to society, from chaos to order, from emotion to reason, from revenge to justice, from female to male" (100). *The Oresteia*, in short, confirms the victory of Apollo over Dionysus. Euripides' play, on the other hand, suggests that Dionysus is not so easily vanquished, that the conflict between Apollonian and Dionysiac elements in Greek culture

remains unresolved. *The Bacchae* insists that Apollonian constructions such as male and female, reason and emotion, and order and chaos are not distinct entities, but, in Paglia's words, like the Chinese yang and yin, "balanced and interpenetrating powers in man and nature" (8).

In *The Bacchae*, the battle between Dionysus and his demand to be recognized and Pentheus and his determination "to maintain social order" is, as Simon Goldhill writes, "played out" in the clashes between many of the play's oppositions (266). As Goldhill continues, in these clashes *The Bacchae* "develops the threat to the institution of the city in terms of the discourse of the city." In his attempt to gain recognition, Dionysus inverts "the oppositions by which the city defines itself" (266).¹³ Through "his capacity to turn things upside down," as Zeitlin remarks, the god "subverts the ostensibly rational order" ("Staging," 152). Dionysus, in other words, functions in Euripides' play to blur the distinctions between rigidly antithetical constructions such as male and female and, therefore, to undermine difference. In so doing, he challenges the social norms of the *polis*, forcing the city, as Zeitlin puts it, "to include and incorporate the 'other' (including himself) into a wider network of alliances and relations" ("Staging," 152).

The distinction between male and female, for example, is blurred in the play by the influence of Dionysus on the behaviour of the women and Pentheus. Gender roles are challenged when the "white and delicate hands" of Agave are used, not to work "the loom," but to fight and hunt (1205-06, 1236-

38) and the women, triumphant as hunters and as warriors, are shown to possess masculine courage, while the warrior-king Pentheus is shown sneaking around the women's camp in the guise of a drag queen. This distinction is also blurred by Dionysus himself, an androgynous god "with long yellow curls smelling of perfumes,/ with flushed cheeks and the spells of Aphrodite/ in his eyes," an "attractive" god who, Pentheus surmises, does "not wrestle" (235-37, 453-55).

Certainly, as Charles Segal points out, "the boundaries between normality and neurosis, between individual psychology and pathology, are unclear" in the play (*Dionysiac*, 161). Pentheus views the desire of Cadmus and Teiresias to worship Dionysus as "madness" (344). He finds the women's maenadic revels particularly threatening, and sends his men off to "scour the city" for Dionysus, "the effeminate stranger ... who infects [the] women with this strange disease" (352-54). However, it is not the women who are mad. Actually, from "a nonpatriarchal perspective," as Arthur Evans suggests, their behaviour has "a certain logic." For, when possessed by the madness of the god, women find "themselves free of patriarchally imposed definitions of self, womanhood, and sanity" (18). The locus of the real madness in the play is Pentheus, whose disintegration of personality—"graphically represented" by Euripides, as Charles Segal observes, in his "physical dismemberment" (*Dionysiac*, 162)—is caused, not by the revels of the women, but by his misogyny. As Claire Nancy states, the truly destructive madness in Euripides' play is that of Pentheus: "The lesson

is unequivocal: it is Dionysos in person who descends on the scene to unmask the character of and expose the celebrated *moria* [folly] in the camp where one hardly expects it, that of order and power" (cit. Evans, 19).

Most significantly, the play suggests that Dionysus and Pentheus have a fair amount in common, that, in fact, Dionysus is his cousin's "darker self or 'bestial double'" (C. Segal, *Dionysiac*, 166).¹⁴ These two first cousins are, after all, both grandsons of Cadmus and about the same age. Moreover, both are identified with beasts, specifically with snakes, lions, and bulls. The reptilean connection is outlined by Geoffrey S. Kirk:

[Pentheus] genealogical descent from Echion is emphasized, and thus his monstrous, chthonic, and snake-like character. This connects him with Dionysus, who is also, through Semele, descended from the Sown Men, and is seen as a snake by his snake-handling worshipers. (15)

The women of the chorus call Pentheus "a "beast of blood/ whose violence abuses man and god" (555-56). They see him as a monster, "born of no woman," but of "[s]ome lioness" or of "one of the Libyan gorgons" (994-95). His own mother in her madness sees him as a lion. Dionysus is described with similar imagery. The women of the chorus refer to him as "the bull-horned god" in their first choral ode (101), and in their fourth ode call upon him to "reveal [him]self a bull ... a snake with darting heads, a lion breathing fire" (1016-17). Most importantly, during the course of the play, Pentheus and Dionysus switch roles—and personalities. Initially, Pentheus is the hunter, Dionysus the "quarry" that the ruler has sent his attendants "out to catch" (435). Subsequently, Pentheus becomes the "prey" who "thrashes in the net" Dionysus has cast for

him (846-47).¹⁵ The hunted has become the hunter. "The effeminate, languid prophet," as Charles Segal comments, "suddenly becomes the vigorous, energetic, controlling master of the situation. The threatening, vociferous, fear-inspiring king ... suddenly becomes pliant, confused, vulnerable" (*Dionysiac*, 168).¹⁶

The suggestion that the young god and the young ruler who symbolize the oppositions of *The Bacchae* are essentially the same, each incorporating self and other, hunter and hunted, presents the play's most serious challenge to these oppositions. This blurring of distinctions works to subvert patriarchal society's privileging of, for example, order over chaos, society over nature, male over female, citizen over outsider, reason over emotion, sanity over madness. It also works to subvert the *polis*'s privileging of tragedy over comedy. For the god who blurs "all the antithetical distinctions by which Greek culture define[s] itself ... also blurs," as Foley argues, "the distinction between tragic and comic genres" (*Ritual*, 218).

In fact, as Foley shows in her fascinating discussion of the subject, in his revenge, the smiling god employs the subversive power of comedy to undermine Pentheus' status as tragic hero. The toilet scene in which Dionysus convinces Pentheus to dress as a woman in order to spy on the maenads is parody worthy of Aristophanes. But "Pentheus' consent to a change of role" here, as Foley explains, "brings him a 'comic' exposure inappropriate for a tragic hero." And his obscene death is not the death of a hero, but "a divine

joke and a cause for the kind of triumphant celebration that traditionally closed Old Comedy." Further, the death of Pentheus is, as Foley suggests, "an abortive tragic action" (*Ritual*, 227, 217, 231). In a remarkable inversion, Agave, not Pentheus, "reaches and survives the full tragic *anagnorisis* [recognition] of her *peripeteia* [reversal of fortune] and her error in failing to recognize the god" (231). In a very real sense, then, Euripides supplants Pentheus with Agave in the role of tragic hero, undermining not only tragedy's privileging of the male hero, but tragedy's role as the public art form that represents the *polis*.

Maureen Duffy, in her "Introduction" to *Rites*, one of the two feminist revisions of Euripides' *Bacchae* that I want to look at here, makes the remark that "'The Bacchae' is Pentheus' story; 'Rites' is Agave's" (6). And she is correct. For even though *The Bacchae* brings Agave to the full tragic recognition denied Pentheus, it is her son's story, not hers. Until her recognition scene, it is only through Dionysus or the Messenger that we learn about Agave. Dionysus tells us that Agave slandered her sister Semele by saying that some mortal man, not Zeus, had fathered Dionysus (25-28), and that Dionysus punished Agave by sending her and the other women of Thebes "up to the mountains" in a mad frenzy in the "livery" of maenads (25-38). Agave and the others were then left sitting "beneath the silver firs" (38) on the mountain until Dionysus brought Pentheus to them in women's attire and, according to the Messenger, called on them to "take vengeance" on the king (1081). The Messenger continues with the story of how Agave, while possessed by the god, murdered and

dismembered her son. Finally, near the play's end, we actually see Agave on stage experiencing what Arrowsmith calls in his "Introduction" to *The Bacchae* "one of the cruelest (and finest) recognition scenes in tragedy." Truly, Agave has been put in the play "almost entirely to suffer" (150).

In *The Bacchae*, then, Agave does not speak for herself until after she comes down the mountain with her son's head impaled upon her thyrsus. We are denied a view of the secret "rites" of the women and what Allison Hersh refers to as the "orgiastic female violence" on the mountain. We never know what Pentheus sees on the mountain except, as Duffy notes, "through the words of the messenger." In Duffy's play, however, we are allowed to satisfy the "Peeping Tom in all of us," as we are granted the inside view of "the shocking goings-on in a ladies' loo" ("Introduction," 5-7). Or, as Hersh comments, "the transgressive voyeur who 'spies' upon the private action which occurs in a woman's space is the audience" (413).

What we view in this women's public lavatory are the daily rituals of Ada, the matron of the facility and the play's Agave character; Meg, Ada's assistant; and the various women who come into the washroom, most of whom appear to be regulars. As the play opens, Ada begins "an elaborate coiffure and make-up session" (9), obviously a morning ritual, while Meg does all the work of cleaning toilets. Before long an old woman enters to eat her breakfast in a cubicle, something she has done every day for two weeks. A little later a chorus of office girls arrives, giggling as usual about their boyfriends, followed by Nellie

and Dot, two sixty-something widows, who seem to be obsessed with their memories of the demanding husbands with whom they shared rather dispiriting marriages.

But the rituals of these women are nothing like the elated all-night whirling dances of the maenads on the mountains. Instead of the sounds of laughter and song, "the strict beat of the taut hide/ and the squeal of the wailing flute" (126-27), we hear the sound of toilets flushing intermittently. Instead of witnessing ecstatic possession, we witness complete emptiness. To borrow something Camus says in a related context, "the world has been amputated of all that constitutes its presence: nature, the sea, hilltops, evening meditation. Consciousness is to be found only in the streets" ("Helen's," 136), only in a "ladies' loo." As Duffy comments, if Agave denies "the life that Dionysus represents," so too does Ada with her reduction of men and women to objects, her translation of "sex and love into money and revenge" ("Introduction," 6). To Ada, men are the "bidders" and women are the "goods," which must be be tarded up a bit in order to be sold "high" (11). Men are "them" with whom women can do without, and love between men and women is romantic drivel (32, 27). And, from their discussion of their relationships with men, it is clear that the other women have been treated as objects by the men in their lives. The office girls feel like "goods," specifically "like cattle in the market" (32). Nellie and Dot have each spent a lifetime, as Ada puts it, "ministering to a stranger" (27). One of the mothers and Meg wonder why little boys ever "have

to grow up" (25, 32). After all, as one of the office girls says, "You can't talk to them. They're all the same" (21).

Clearly, a women's lavatory is an appropriate setting for the humdrum rituals we witness here, putting on make-up, complaining about boyfriends and husbands, chanting snatches of pop songs. After all, a sterile, enclosed space created by workmen "dressed in white overalls" at the play's beginning (9), "an oppressive, quarantined space," in Hersh's words, "which limits rather than liberates" (419), is perfectly symbolic of the mundane, dehumanized, and oppressed lives these women suffer. In this life-denying environment, it seems fitting that the laughing and dancing Dionysus of Euripides' play has become an inanimate and powerless "lifesize toddler boy doll" (24).

What is going on here? What is Duffy suggesting about Euripides' play with her play? Why has she reduced Dionysus to a toy doll? My hypothesis, with respect to the latter, is that Duffy uses a doll for Dionysus to emphasize the loss of power this god has suffered in the 2,500 years that have passed since Euripides wrote *The Bacchae*. Winkler says that if "madness in *The Bacchae* is connected to the restrictions of patriarchy in its emergent stages, Maureen Duffy's *Rites* shows us a different kind of madness in which patriarchy has landed us more than two thousand years later." Later, she asserts that much of *Rites* "consists of such empty, trivial and disjointed conversation," because Duffy wants to suggest that "this modern sterility is a form of madness, the total perversion of the Maenad's divine possession" (221, 222). Winkler's

comments here are perceptive. Duffy does suggest that the two sorts of madness are different. She also suggests, however, that the modern madness is a more desperate madness, because the entrenched patriarchy to which it is connected is much stronger than the emerging patriarchy represented by Euripides. By making Dionysus a doll in her play, she implies that the Apollonian element in Western culture has all but vanquished the Dionysian. Although Dionysus still had the power to challenge patriarchy and the *polis* in *The Bacchae*, he no longer does. Patriarchy has become so powerful that it has paralysed the force Dionysus personifies. Ominously, Dionysus, the god "of all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides that ebb and flow in the life of nature," has become a rigid plastic doll.¹⁷

There is, of course, another sort of madness in *Rites*, a moment of collective possession which leads to an act of collective violence, as in *The Bacchae*. This time, however, Dionysus is not responsible for the women's violence. Rather, it is, as Winkler comments, "the pent-up anger and frustration" of the women's "everyday lives" that is to blame. "Their action," continues Winkler, "is a violent reaction against their situation as women" (221).

What happens is that the women discover that a young girl in cubicle two has slashed her wrists. They respond to the distraught girl and her cry of "Desmond!" with a rising fury against "Bastard men!" (31). Breaking into what Katharine Worth calls "a maenad dance" (5) as if possessed, they chant, "Don't need them, don't need them." At that moment, the old woman who has been

eating her breakfast in cubicle one unbolts the door and "shambles out," and the chanting women with "an angry hiss" join hands in a circle around her, dancing and singing themselves into "a frenzy of menace." Suddenly, a "suited and coated, short-haired and masculine" figure bolts out of cubicle seven. The women jump to the conclusion it is "a bloody man ... spying on [them]" (33), and, in their frenzy, they "fall upon the figure," the old woman joining in, as the chorus whispers "menacingly," "Bastard men!" (34). Only after they have murdered the intruder do they discover that the victim was a woman in man's clothing.

Rites, then, repeats *The Bacchae's* scene of orgiastic violence. Like the Bacchantes of Euripides' play, the women in the lavatory violently murder the person they believe to be a Pentheus figure, a man who voyeuristically spies upon women in their private space. In *Rites*, however, just as Dionysus turns out to be a perversion of the original, this murder, as Winkler notes, "turns out to be a perversion of the original. When the women in their climactic fury destroy an intruder it is not a male disguised as a woman but a woman disguised as a man" (221). Just when the women think, as Duffy explains, that they "have got their own back on men for their typecasting, in an orgasm of violence they find they have destroyed themselves" ("Introduction," 7).

In *The Bacchae* the women destroy Pentheus. In *Rites*, they destroy another woman. And this makes sense in a culture in which Apollo, who is responsible for division and opposition, reigns supreme. The logic of such a

world is an "us and them" logic. Men are the enemy, the "them" who should stick to their "own side of the fence" (24). By this logic, it is not the women who are to blame for the murder of one of their own. The murder is the fault of the victim herself who, by dressing as a man, crossed the fence. Thus Ada, feeling no remorse, says to the others, "She shouldn't have done it. How could we tell; the mouth, the eyes ...?" (34).

The lesson of the play is that the values of such a world are destructive. Although *Rites* acknowledges that the "absence of opportunity and choice that these interior [female] spaces symbolize can lead to bitterness, anxiety, hysteria, and violence," Duffy's play, as Lynda Hart remarks, "criticizes the women for their separatist desires and their transformation of oppression into violence" (9-10). *Rites* condemns the dehumanization of others and all "[g]endered bigotry" (Wandor, *Look Back*, 100). As Duffy puts it, all "reduction of people to objects, all imposition of labels and patterns to which they must conform, all segregation can lead only to destruction" ("Introduction," 7). Unquestionably, Duffy shares Euripides' reservations about the limitations of the Apollonian view of self and world.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Caryl Churchill and David Lan did not intend, as Churchill explains, "to do a version of *The Bacchae* but to look at the same issues of possession, violence and ecstasy." Euripides' play interested them, says Churchill, because it upends the convention that sees women as passive and men as aggressive: "*The Bacchae* is about a violent murder done by

women; it is about the pleasure of physical power, the exhilaration of destruction, and finally a recognition of its horror." Euripides' play also interested them because of the way it uses the irrational, symbolized by Dionysus, to challenge the order of the state. As Churchill puts it, they became interested "in the way the authoritarian Pentheus, trying to maintain state power by official armed violence, is subverted by the androgenous god" ("Authors' Notes," 5). Like Duffy, in other words, Churchill and Lan were drawn to Euripides' blurring of the Apollonian boundary lines institutionalized by patriarchy between oppositions such as male and female, rational and irrational, lines that, as Paglia phrases it, "lead to convention, constraint, oppression" (96).

The opposition between male and female has resulted in men and women being polarised, according to Churchill, as men being tagged the violent sex, women the peaceful sex. Such a polarisation is dangerous, because if men are thought of as essentially violent, there is no impetus for them to change. "It seems important," she continues, "to recognise women's capacity for violence and men's for peacefulness" ("Authors' Notes," 5). The original plan for *A Mouthful of Birds*, says Churchill, was to start with "passive, weak, peaceful women and rather angry, violent men." The women would then become violent and the men "weakened or sexually more uncertain" in the play's middle section. By the play's end, the women on stage would be strong, "strong in choosing not to be violent," and the men would be "more peaceable, unmacho" (cit. Cousin, 60).

And, although this plan was modified somewhat in the writing of the play, the "stories" of Lena and Derek do more or less follow the original scheme. Lena is an easily frightened woman who is too squeamish to skin a rabbit in the first section of the play. In the middle section, she murders her child. By the final section of the play, though, Lena has gained strength and understanding:

I'm not frightened of anything. ... It's nice to make someone alive and it's nice to make someone dead. Either way. That power is what I like best in the world. The struggle is every day not to use it. (70)

As for Derek, his lack of a job threatens his manhood in the first section of the play. Then, in the middle section, during an encounter with the nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, Derek becomes confused about his sexual definition. By the play's final section, however, Derek, who has become a transsexual, seems at peace with himself and his body: "My skin used to wrap me up, now it lets the world in. Was I this all the time? ... Every day when I wake up, I'm comfortable" (71).

Although I have referred to the "stories" of Lena and Derek, it is important to note that these stories are not presented as coherent narratives. Rather, as Winkler explains, they are presented in an "episodic and disjointed form" that "mirrors the playwrights' exploration of the various disoriented, fragmented, or demented psyches of their characters" (224). Seven brief character sketches make up the first section of the play. In the second section, each of these seven characters experiences what Churchill calls an "undefended" day, during which he or she "is possessed, by a spirit or a

passion" ("Authors' Notes," 5). In the third and final section of the play, in seven brief monologues, each character offers us a glimpse of the way this possession has affected her or him.

Moreover, this play which fractures form disrupts the way meaning is conveyed on stage in another way.¹⁸ The link between pleasure and violence that the play wants to make is communicated primarily without words—through dance. The Fruit Ballet, for instance, communicates the "sensuous pleasures of eating and the terrors of being torn up" (28). And the Death of Pentheus scene, which conveys the same message, is danced: "Pentheus is brought by Dionysos into a dance of the whole company in which moments of Extreme Happiness and of violence from earlier parts of the play are repeated" (66).

The Bacchae functions "as a parallel text" to Churchill and Lan's text, as, in Hersh's words, "a disrupted and disruptive narrative which is interwoven throughout the scenes of contemporary life" (411) which comprise the second part of *A Mouthful of Birds*. As Lan comments, his play, "which began with *The Bacchae*, is itself possessed" by Euripides' play ("Authors' Notes," 6). Dionysus dances in a white petticoat his dances that link ecstasy with death. When he performs for one of the characters, he dances the dance that that man or woman "longs for." The ecstasy that ensues is too much for the character and she or he "dies of pleasure" (37). Significantly, Dionysus expresses himself only through dance. "It is a symptom of patriarchy in its late stages that the androgynous god," as Winkler comments, is "fragmented and without a voice"

(224). Gradually, Derek is possessed by Pentheus, Doreen by Agave, and the other women by bacchants. The violent dismemberment of Pentheus follows. As Churchill describes it, the "horrific murder and possession" of Euripides' play "bursts from the past into these people open to possession, first the unquiet voice telling of a murder, finally the murder itself happening as the climax to all their stories" ("Authors' Notes," 5).

For the most part, Churchill and Lan accomplish what they set out to do in *A Mouthful of Birds*. Their play does foreground issues of possession and blur the oppositions between conventional gender roles and identities. It also makes a strong statement about the pleasure of violent destruction. I am not sure, however, how much of a challenge to the order of the state it poses. According to Lan, he and Churchill envisioned their play as a comment on "the politics of ecstasy." In it, they wanted to stress that possession, as well as being "an abandonment of control," is "an act of resistance": "to become possessed by a god or a spirit may be a means of challenging the state, of bringing about change." ("Authors' Notes," 6). Winkler's observation that, even though Lan insists that possession is "a form of political opposition and subversion," the play "itself singularly fails to show this aspect of the myth" (226) is an astute one.

The change that the play shows appears to be more on the level of personal than social transformation. More significantly, not all of the characters undergo positive personal transformations. Certainly, Derek becomes

"comfortable" as a result of his transformation. And Dan is thrilled with the "beautiful garden" he has made in a desert. Paul, however, finds the days "very empty" without his pig. He has left his wife and his job, and spends his days sitting "in the streets" and drinking "scotch." And Doreen's transformation is extremely pessimistic. Her head is filled with "horrible images" that she feels, rather than sees. She feels that her "mouth is full of birds" which she "crunch[es] between [her] teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking [her]." She "can find no rest" (71).

The ending of *A Mouthful of Birds* is unclear. Doreen, a broken woman, "carries on her work as a secretary," but Dionysus dances on (71). Elin

Diamond reads this ending as a reassertion of social order:

When Doreen finishes her speech, Dionysos dances again, libidinally, ferally, but she, docile, productive, capitalized, does not. The cracks and fissures in the representational surface have been explored in *A Mouthful of Birds*, but the structure of disciplinary control remains. (*Unmaking*, 98)

In other words, despite what Churchill says in her "Authors' Notes," the play does not quite manage to reverse Euripides' ending. Perhaps there is a sense in which Doreen and the other women do not, like Euripides' Agave, return to the patriarchal fold. There is also a sense, though, in which Doreen not only goes back to her previous life, but is punished for her attempt to break out of the fold. Still, there is certainly something heroic about the attempt in itself. As Diamond continues, in the play "[e]cstatic, dying, dancing, screaming, possessed bodies attempt to represent the release from representation, and in the futility of that endeavour a feminist politics is made visible" (*Unmaking*, 98).

In the fifth century B.C., Euripides wrote *The Bacchae*, a play that uses Dionysus to raise questions about Athenian tragedy and the limited, male-defined values of the *polis*. Nearly 2,500 years later *Rites* and *A Mouthful of Birds* raise the same questions. And there is some evidence to suggest, as Hersch does, that

[u]nlike the murder of Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, which ultimately reinforces the social order by punishing the Bacchae and by exiling them from the community, the killing of the androgynous figure in *Rites* and the sacrifice of Pentheus in *A Mouthful of Birds* do not function to "restore harmony to the community," as Girard claims, but rather to disrupt the illusory harmony of the community. (416)¹⁹

But there is much more evidence to suggest that the disruption of social order offered by *Rites* and *A Mouthful of Birds* is no more permanent than that offered by *The Bacchae*. After all, the power of Dionysus, the god responsible for disrupting the harmony of communities, is severely curtailed in Duffy's play and limited in Churchill and Lan's play. Dionysus, the life force strongly associated with women, with multiplicity, with the blurring of boundary lines between oppositions, is reduced to a "lifesize toddler boy doll" in *Rites* and deprived of a voice in *A Mouthful of Birds*. In short, these two feminist re-visions not only raise the same questions as Euripides' *Bacchae*, they offer the same answers.

Notes

1. Gilbert Murray sees *The Bacchae* as "a fullhearted glorification of Dionysos" (cit. Diller, 358). The notion that Euripides underwent some sort of religious conversion in his old age was a popular nineteenth-century interpretation. See Dodds' "Introduction" to *Euripides' Bacchae*, where he summarizes some of the arguments for viewing *The Bacchae* as evidence of Euripides' "eleventh-hour conversion to pagan orthodoxy" (xxxvii), as well as some of the arguments for viewing the "real moral" of the *Bacchae* to be "tantum religio potuit suadere malorum" (xxxviii). Aristophanes' accusation of atheism is made in *Thesmophoriazusae*, 450 ff.

2. Cadmus, the founder of the city, and Teiresias, the sage and seer, dress up as maenads and go off to the mountains to dance with the other worshippers of Dionysus. They are not, however, portrayed by Euripides as true believers. Rather, these two doddering old men dance, as Arrowsmith comments, "in shrewd expedience, Cadmus realistically aware of the value of having a god in the family, Teiresias sensing the future greatness of the new religion and the opportunities for priestly expertise" (150-51). Dressed up as maenads, they are pathetic figures, made more so by their failure as Dihle comments, "to grasp" that Dionysus "is not even remotely interested in them" (131).

3. Euripides wrote *The Bacchae* at the end of his life, after he had left Athens for voluntary exile in Macedonia. See Dodds' "Introduction" for the evidence in earlier plays of the interest Euripides displays in religion in *The Bacchae*.

4. It would make more sense to blame Aeschylus in *The Oresteia* for the attempt to eliminate "the primitive and persuasive Dionysiac element" from Greek culture and tragedy, and Sophocles, whose heroes, according to Nietzsche speak "the language of ... Apollonian determinacy and lucidity" (39).

5. But the sun, associated with Apollo, does, of course, sometimes "overstep his measures." For, as Nietzsche explains, Dionysiac and Apollonian elements do not remain in a state of balance in ancient Greek culture. From the "Iron Age, with its battles of Titans and its austere popular philosophy, there developed under the aegis of Apollo the Homeric world of beauty." This "'naive' splendor was then absorbed by the Dionysiac torrent," then sometime later, "face to face with this new power, the Apollonian code rigidified into the majesty of Doric art and contemplation" (36).

Paglia, as is made clear by her description of one such movement, agrees with Nietzsche: "The movement from Dionysus

to Apollo and back is illustrated in two landmarks of Greek drama, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458 B.C.) and Euripides' *Bacchae* (407 B.C.), which stand at either end of classical Athens. From Aeschylus' generation, exhilarated by its defeat of the Persian invaders, came the formal perfection of classic art and architecture—the beauty and freedom of male sculpture, the grand yet humanistic proportions of the Parthenon. The *Oresteia* proclaims Apollo's triumph over chthonian nature. Fifty years later, after Athen's decline and fall, Euripides answers each of Aeschylus' Apollonian assertions. The *Bacchae* is a point-by-point refutation of the *Oresteia*. The Apollonian house that Athens built is demolished by a wave of chthonian superpower. Dionysus, the invader from the east, succeeds where the Persians failed. Sky-cult topples back into the earth-cult" (99-100).

6. Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* is another recent re-vision of Euripides that is "intended to be subversive of patriarchy." In Wertenbaker's play, Euripides' *Hippolytos* functions as a play within a play that not only retells the story of Philomele, but offers critical comment on the Phaedra story. Wertenbaker's play also offers an allusion to *The Bacchae*, with its Bacchic festival near the play's end, during which Philomele, like Agave, kills a son. This time though it is not her own son, but the son of Tereus, the man who has raped her and cut out her tongue to silence her. Wertenbaker, like Duffy and Churchill and Lan shows that women, like men, can be violent. She makes it clear, however, that such violence is caused by the violence of men. Although certain gods are named in Wertenbaker's play, the conflict that is portrayed in *The Love of the Nightingale* is between men and women, not between two Greek gods.

7. There is still, as Foley notes, "controversy over the relation between the origins of Greek tragedy and the worship of Dionysus." Foley, however, views such controversy "irrelevant" to her argument, "since we know that Euripides' contemporaries thought of Dionysus as a theater god" (*Ritual*, 206, n. 2.).

8. Zeitlin concludes that "the male-female conflict subsumes the other two by providing the central metaphor that 'sexualizes' the other issues and attracts them into its magnetic field ... This schematization is especially marked in the confrontation between Apollo and the Erinyes in the *Eumenides*, where judicial and theological concerns are fully identified with male-female dicotomies" (*Playing*, 87).

9. No wonder Aristophanes suggests that Euripides "feminized" tragedy, as Zeitlin puts it. This suggestion is made in the *Frogs*, where Aristophanes stages a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides which, as Zeitlin remarks, "develops into one

between masculine and feminine sides." It is interesting to note that Aeschylus wins the contest because his "manly virile art" is seen as being more likely to offer a solution to the city's problems than Euripides' feminine art, making the link between the *polis* and the masculine clear (*Playing*, 366).

10. Both C. Segal and Evans read Euripides' play as a criticism of the *polis* and its values. Segal, for instance, sees Dionysus as representing a threat to the *polis* ("Menace," 197-99), and Evans argues that *The Bacchae* is critical of Athens' patriarchal values generally and its entrenched misogyny specifically (19). Some feminist scholars have been more sceptical. Zeitlin, even though she acknowledges that Dionysus and Greek tragedy were identified with women's experience, insists that the most important function of Greek tragedy was the initiation and education of "male citizens in the democratic city" (*Playing*, 346). And Padel sees Bacchic madness as created by a male society for its own purposes: "It is men who create and use the myths depicting women 'out of their mind,'" (8). It seems to me, however, that Zeitlin is wrong to generalize about all of Greek tragedy the way she does here, to allow no exceptions to her rule, and that Padel fails to acknowledge that it is Dionysus, a god who is clearly at odds with the values of the male *polis*, who brings about the madness of the women in *The Bacchae*.

11. Elsewhere C. Segal claims that *The Bacchae* functions implicitly as a radical critique of the "great Athenian experiment" of the *polis* ("Menace," 197-99).

12. Paglia also points out that *The Bacchae* reverses and/or parodies Sophocles. In Euripides' play, "Dionysus makes landfall at Thebes, site of Sophocles greatest play. ... Teiresias, who in Sophocles warns Oedipus to seek Apollonian illumination, now warns Pentheus the other way. ... Oedipus' twenty-four-hour transformation from hypermasculine hero to maimed sufferer is echoed by Pentheus' transformation from strutting young buck to drag queen to shredded corpse" (102).

13. "To understand Dionysus," as Foley comments, "is to understand that the order imposed on the world by human culture is created by that culture, and that the permanent potential exists for a reversal or collapse of that order" (*Ritual*, 242-43).

14. C. Segal goes on to suggest that Pentheus' "rigid but precarious self-image is unable to sustain the surfacing of the submerged sides of himself embodied in Dionysus. His contact with this figure releases the savage aspect of his adolescent personality, that part of the not yet civilized self that belongs to the raw and the wild" (*Dionysiac*, 166).

15. The "violence which rages in and finally destroys Pentheus," as Faas says, "is part of the force which Dionysus embodies." It is, in other words, a force of nature, innate in all human beings. The net Pentheus is caught in, thus, is his own net, or, as Faas puts it, "Pentheus ... destroys himself" (72).

16. Euripides shows us both sides of a Dionysus who, like "nature herself," according to Faas, "is the creator and destroyer in one" (72). In the language of Euripides' play, he is "most terrible, and yet most gentle, to mankind" (861).

17. Hersch offers a different interpretation of why Duffy makes Dionysus a doll. She argues that the women in Euripides' play "initiate their break from patriarchally-determined society not under the influence of an unspecified madness, but rather a possession induced by Dionysus," in other words, not under their own agency. According to Hersch, then, Duffy makes Dionysus a lifeless, powerless doll in order to endow her protagonists with agency (412-13). I disagree. I think that Hersch is forgetting that Dionysus is not a man in Euripides' play, but a god, a life force associated with women that has temporarily taken on the form of a rather feminine man. She is also forgetting that Dionysus represents a force which challenges the patriarchal culture of the polis.

18. It makes sense in a play that investigates the power of the irrational and questions the opposition between the rational and the irrational that meaning be conveyed in other than rational ways. The celebration of Dionysiac formlessness is accentuated by the formlessness of the play's plot, by the attempt to communicate through movement as well as language.

19. Hersch is here referring to the model of sacrificial violence Girard puts forth in *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, 1977).

CHAPTER FIVE

"The Story of Women Growing Up in the Kingdoms of Their Fathers": Deconstructing Shakespeare Deconstructing Patriarchy in Allison Lyssa's *Pinball*, The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughter's*, and Joan Ure's *Something in It for Cordelia*

The sixteenth-century aristocratic family was patrilinear, primogenitural, and patriarchal: patrilinear in that it was the male line whose ancestry was traced so diligently by the genealogists and heralds, and in almost all cases via the male line that titles were inherited; primogenitural in that most of the property went to the eldest son, the younger brothers being dispatched into the world with little more than a modest annuity or life interest in a small estate to keep them afloat; and patriarchal in that the husband and father lorded it over his wife and children with the quasi-absolute authority of a despot.

—Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*, 271

The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture.

—Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 237

The men in my books come from observation ... I'd see other people's fathers, these great, raging, door-slamming power-brokers. Or these amputated men—amputated not by their wives but by the wars and the Depression.

—Timothy Findley, "High Colour, Deep Shadow," C1.

Some commentators find Bertolt Brecht's attitude to Shakespeare contemptuous, others find it respectful. Most, however, point to an ambivalence best summed up by John Fuegi's remark that Brecht's was a "lifelong love-hate relationship with his Elizabethan forerunner" (cit. Rossi, 161). In "How Brecht

Read Shakespeare," Margot Heinemann acknowledges that Brecht's attitude to Shakespeare "is double, contradictory—and, like all his attitudes, changing through time," but insists on the importance of Brecht's ongoing dialogue with Shakespeare, about whom Brecht "once said, 'one has to grapple with [*sich auseinandersetzen*] Shakespeare as one does with life.'" She argues that much of Brecht's critique of Shakespeare is really a "critique of the mode of reading and interpreting him [of] romantic critics, and of modern theatre productions which reinforce that view" (228-29).¹

There is much to be said for Heinemann's position. For it is clear from *The Messingkauf Dialogues* alone that Brecht grapples with Shakespeare—whose theatre he views as powerful and innovative—in the process of creating his own epic theatre.² "The Globe Theatre's experiments and Galileo's experiments in treating the globe itself in a new way," claims Brecht, "both reflected certain global transformations" (*Messingkauf*, 60). Historically, Brecht sees Shakespeare as standing, to borrow Albert Camus' phrase, "at a kind of dangerous turning in the history of [his] civilization" (192) between a world in which the feudal family had "just collapsed" and a world in which the "bourgeoisie was taking its first hesitant footsteps" (*Messingkauf*, 60). And the conflicting demands and values of these two worlds are reflected in Shakespeare's plays, says Brecht, "where the new in his period collide[s] with the old" at "valuable fracture points" (*Messingkauf*, 63).³

In particular, such collisions take place within the tragic heroes of

Shakespeare's plays:

Lear, tied up in his own patriarchal ideas; *Richard III*, the unlikeable man who makes himself terrifying; *Macbeth*, the ambitious man swindled by witches; *Antony*, the hedonist who hazards his mastery of the world; *Othello*, destroyed by jealousy: they are all living in a new world and are smashed by it. (Messingkauf, 59)

Here, of course, I am interested in the notion of Lear being "tied up in his own patriarchal ideas." For Lear is straight-jacketed by the clashing demands of patriarchal politics in Shakespeare's tragedy. And, as such, Lear functions as one of the "valuable fracture points" at which patriarchy starts to come apart in Shakespeare's play.

In a discussion of Jean-Luc Godard's film *King Lear*, Peter S. Donaldson argues that, for Godard,

King Lear is not merely a text to be demystified: for Godard it is the locus, in the Western cultural tradition, of the self-critique of patriarchy and of the totalizing aesthetic and psychological assumptions that support it. The deconstruction of the "father" as source, authority, and hegemonic center is already underway in Shakespeare's *Lear*, as is the unruly interplay of selves and texts. (218)

Therefore, Godard's *King Lear* "burlesques, disperses, interrupts, and disconnects Shakespeare's text," not so much to critique Shakespeare's "vices" as "those of Western patriarchalism, and especially the artistic variant of patriarchy," with its "exclusion, objectification, and commodification of women." In fact, in picking up the critique of patriarchy where Shakespeare left off, Godard "reveals how fully the play of dispersal is already at work" in

Shakespeare's *King Lear*—and "acknowledges Shakespeare as precursor, even ancestor, of his own deconstructive artistic practice" (218-19, 190).

I agree with Godard's reading of *King Lear*. In his play, Shakespeare not only deconstructs patriarchy from within, he deconstructs tragedy, its "artistic variant," from within. Moreover, Godard is not the only refashioner of Shakespeare to offer such comment. Three recent feminist dramatic re-visions of Shakespeare's *King Lear* also suggest that the deconstruction of the "father" is already underway in Shakespeare's play. Alison Lyssa's *Pinball*, The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, and Joan Ure's *Something in it for Cordelia* make use of the implicit criticism of patriarchal ideology and of tragedy itself to be found in Shakespeare's *King Lear* in their own deconstructions of what Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston, in their introductory comments to *Lear's Daughters*, call

the fictions, myths, and structures which are deployed by men to imprison women in patriarchal ideology, to separate them from themselves and their bodies and their desires so that they are only ever daughters, wives, or mothers. (11-12)

At the same time, these feminist re-visions, with their focus on the "women growing up in the kingdoms of their fathers," rather than on the fathers, act to afford Cordelia and her sisters a voice with which to tell their version of events.⁴

In *The Oresteia*, the story of men's triumph over women is linked, as Froma I. Zeitlin remarks, to the "denial of *matriarchy*," which "is accomplished by the denial of *mater*" (*Playing*, 108). What Apollo claims in *The Eumenides* is

that "the mother is no parent of that which is called her child" (II.657-63). The child has only one parent, the father. Tragedy establishes patriarchy, in short, by killing off the mother.

In a literal sense, *King Lear* continues this denial of the mother. While one of Shakespeare's main sources, *King Leir*, opens with the King mourning the death of his "dearest Queen," in Shakespeare's play Lear alludes to his wife only once. There is, as Coppélia Kahn comments in "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," "no literal mother in *King Lear*":

In the crucial cataclysmic first scene of his play, from which all its later action evolves, we are shown only fathers and their godlike capacity to make or mar their children. Through this conspicuous omission the play articulates a patriarchal conception of the family in which children owe their existence to their fathers alone; the mother's role in procreation is eclipsed by the father's, which is used to affirm male prerogative and male power. The aristocratic patriarchal families headed by Lear and Gloucester have, actually and effectively, no mothers. (35-36)

That Lear believes children have only one parent is made clear when Lear responds to Regan's expression of gladness at seeing her father with "If thou shouldst not be glad,/ I would divorce me from thy [mother's] tomb,/ Sepulchring an adult'ress" (II.iv.130-32). These lines suggest, as Kahn points out, "first, that Lear alone as progenitor endowed Regan with her moral nature, and second, that if that nature isn't good, she had some other father" (43).

If, however, the mother's role is literally "eclipsed by the father's" in *King Lear*, there is a sense in which her presence is affirmed. For, figuratively speaking, Shakespeare resurrects the mother in this tragedy. If "patriarchal

structures loom obviously on the surface" of a text such as *King Lear*, "beneath them," argues Kahn,

as in a palimpsest, we can find ... "the maternal subtext," the imprint of of mothering on the male psyche, the psychological presence of the mother whether or not mothers are literally represented as characters. (35)

Lear's search for "a mother or mothering woman" is such a subtext (40).

Confronting the prospect of old age and death, Lear yearns for a mother to provide for his needs. Thus he says of Cordelia, after her seeming rejection of the mother role with her silence, "I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery" (I.i.123-24). Thus, when his other two daughters turn out to be "bad mothers," Lear is seized by what he refers to as "this mother ...

Hysterica passio" (II.iv.56-57?), a type of madness that, as Kahn comments,

assaults him in various ways—in the desire to weep, to mourn the enormous loss, and the equally strong desire to hold back the tears and, instead, accuse, arraign, convict, punish, and humiliate those who have made him realize his vulnerability and dependency. (40)

Clearly, the repressed mother returns in Lear's madness, which he characterizes as feminine by calling it hysteria.⁵ She also returns, as Kahn claims, "in Lear's wrathful projections onto the world about him of a symbiotic relationship with his daughters that recapitulates his pre-oedipal relationship with the mother" (40-41). Just as clearly, the mother who returns is a powerful figure. As madness, she works through Lear, as Robert Weimann suggests, to disrupt "the authority of order, decree, and decorum" (93). As bad mother, she is the agent, as Madelon Gohlke notes, "of power and destruction, allied with

the storm" to render Lear defenceless ("I Wooed Thee," 157). And as good mother, she is the agent of virtue and love who sacrifices herself for Lear.

There is another sense also in which the mother is present in *King Lear*. The final scene of *The Eumenides* suggests that Orestes' defeat of Clytemnestra is far from a conclusive victory over the female principle, that, as Zeitlin puts it, while man has defeated woman for the moment, her "persistent but normally dormant power ... may always erupt into open violence." The mother has been killed, but the Erinyes, "the vengeful incarnations of Clytemnestra," are far from vanquished (*Playing*, 90, 97). And in *King Lear* these "vengeful incarnations" take the form of Goneril and Regan, who, with their show of unbridled lust and violence, represent as does Clytemnestra, what Holst-Warhaft calls "the terrible nightmare of uncontrolled woman" (155).⁶

Where women are concerned, however, Shakespeare's tragedy differs from that of Aeschylus in two important ways. First, Shakespeare's re-working of what Zeitlin refers to as "a widely distributed myth of matriarchy, the so-called Rule of Women" fails to provide the justification of patriarchy that Aeschylus's version offers. For if the text of *King Lear* shows that Regan and Goneril abuse power "through 'trickery and sexuality,' thus fostering 'chaos and misrule'" (*Playing*, 90), the subtext of Shakespeare's tragedy shows a man and a king, rather than taking control, losing control, shows Lear behaving like an unruly child and through his irrational behaviour promoting "disorder and misrule."

Second, Shakespeare counters "uncontrolled woman," not only with irrational man, but with Cordelia, who, as the epitome of controlled, rational woman, violates Aristotle's (and her own society's) assumptions about what a woman should be. A woman of few words, at first glance Cordelia appears to be Aristotle's ideal woman whose glory is to "Love, and be silent" (I.i.62). And many critics have idealized her as a virtuous and loving daughter. Others, however, blame her refusal to submit to the terms of Lear's love test for the ensuing tragedy, and point to her pride as her undoing. Harley Granville-Barker sums up the view of such critics:

it will be a fatal error to present Cordelia as a meek saint. She has more than a touch of her father in her. She is as proud as he is, and as obstinate, for all her sweetness and her youth. And, being young, she answers uncalculating with pride to his pride even as later she answers with pity to his misery. (303)

But it is not primarily with her pride that Cordelia violates Aristotle's assumptions. Rather, it is with her exhibition of "the intellectual cleverness that is associated with men" (*Poetics*, XV; 1454a) in her reply to her father's demand that she prove that her love for him is greater than that of her sisters. When she says to Lear, "I love your Majesty/ According to my bond, no more nor less ... Why have my sisters husbands, if they say/ They love you all?" (I.i.92-100), she shows that she understands exactly how patriarchy works, just how far the authority of the father extends. In having both the intelligence and the audacity to so voice such convictions, Cordelia is reminiscent of Euripides' "manly and clever heroines" (Foley, "Antigone," 50).⁷

With respect to the representation of women, then, at the very least, Shakespeare complicates matters in *King Lear*. He does much the same with genre. For Shakespeare presses "a host of comic devices," as well as elements of fairy tale, pastoral, and romance, into what Constance Ledbelly in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* refers to as "the blood-soaked service of tragic ends" (20).

King Lear boasts a comic infrastructure. According to Susan Snyder, although *King Lear* was a "comedy-romance," Shakespeare "added or expanded most of the comic elements" to be found in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's play has

a double plot and a developed Fool; it is concerned, like many comedies, with the passing of power from old to young; two of its characters are disguised through much of the play, one of them in series of *personae* that allows him to manipulate other characters ... and this process is accompanied by the traditional disorder of comedy—social hierarchies turned upside down, logic and even sanity violated. (*Comic*, 139, 140, 153)

The play's story of the three daughters and the love test to determine the division of the kingdom, for instance, is derived from a fairy tale that can be traced back to antiquity. Its driving of its protagonists away from society into a natural setting to sort out their troubles is a pastoral device. And the movement at the end of the fourth act from madness and alienation to reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia suggests the "redeemed world" of romance. In short, Shakespeare works hard to lead us to expect that *King Lear* will end nontragically.

After setting the stage for comedy, however, Shakespeare undermines much of the play's comic structure. In *King Lear*, therefore, the fairy tale of the three sisters and the love test, which, according to Stephen Booth, "in all tellings previous to Shakespeare's" has a happy ending, "refuses to fulfill the generic promise inherent in the story" (17).⁸ Further, as Maynard Mack claims, "*King Lear* employs the pastoral pattern only in order to turn it 'upside down':

It moves from extrusion not to pastoral but to the greatest anti-pastoral ever penned. Lear's heath is the spiritual antipodes of the lush romance Arcadias. Nature proves to be indifferent or hostile, not friendly. (166)

Finally, the play's "promis'd end" (V.iii.263), its "comic resolution" is, as Carol Thomas Neely phrases it, "aborted" (*Broken Nuptials*, 135), as reconciliation gives way to the horror of the gratuitous murder of Cordelia and the spectacle of a stage on which only men remain.⁹

Tragedy, in short, wins the argument against comedy in *King Lear*. But to what end? The inevitability of Cordelia's death is never quite convincing. As Samuel Johnson comments, "Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause." Her death is, however, "contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of the chronicles." Moreover, Shakespeare's public, as Johnson notes, rejected tragedy's victory over comedy in *King Lear*. Johnson himself never "endured to read again the last scenes of the play" until he had revised them. And for almost 150 years after Shakespeare, Nahum Tate's happy-ending version, in which Cordelia retires "with victory and felicity," dislodged Shakespeare's from

the stage (Dukore, 418). Surely, there is some justification in asking of *King Lear*, as Constance Ledbelly asks of another of Shakespeare's tragedies, "Is this tragedy?! Or is it comedy gone awry ... ?" (MacDonald, 20).

And, surely, the answer to Constance's question is that *King Lear* is both tragedy and "comedy gone awry." For there is a certain kind of comedy that strongly resists tragedy in Shakespeare's play. "Cordelia's death," as Snyder comments, "is the last and greatest example" of the "powerful and insistent presence" of the grotesque in *King Lear*. The grotesque, continues Snyder, is not easy to define:

it depends not on the predictable but on the startling, not on opposite states in sequence but on opposite states perceived all at once. In Philip Thomson's formula, it is not just that life is "now a vale of tears, now a circus"; rather, the grotesque implies that "the vale of tears and the circus are one." It places tragic stature and suffering in uneasy proximity with the laughable, the irrelevant, the reductive. (159-60)¹⁰

The grotesque, in short, places tragedy and comedy in the same frame. And, in so doing, it functions to destabilize tragedy from within. In *King Lear*, Snyder claims, "flashes of grotesquerie last long enough to make us feel the vulnerability of Lear's tragic stature, but not so long as to destroy it" (163).¹¹

Flashes of grotesquerie cause us to perceive Cordelia's death as, in the words of William Empson, "a last trip-up as the clown leaves the stage."¹² This perception, in turn, causes us to question the tragic action, to question, as Evelyn Gajowski says, "the destructive forces that bring about [the] silencing and victimizing" of a woman with "the moral excellence of a Cordelia" (78).

Patriarchy, as Claire McEachern explains, imposes conflicting demands on fathers, because it is composed of "two principal systems of affective loyalties" that are in "radical competition" with each other: "the family, over which the father rules, and a socio/political system founded on male alliance, in which the father is invested." It is in the best interests of the state, therefore, that daughters marry into other families. But, when this happens, fathers lose control of their daughters. They are forced to "sacrifice one authority to uphold another." Patriarchy, McEachern continues, "is founded in a profound contradiction," and "it is this contradiction that Shakespeare explores" in *King Lear*.

Shakespeare explores this contradiction by positing a father who desires to preserve his authority over his family as well as over his kingdom, to fuse, in McEachern's words, "familial and political authorities" (281). To this end, Lear refuses to relinquish control of Cordelia, and, in so refusing, "subverts the conventions of patriarchy in defying its demand for male alliance through marriage" (286). For, if marriage poses an inherent threat to the father's authority, the "greatest menace to patriarchy," as Lynda E. Boose argues, is not women, but "the threat of the fathers rebelling against the archetypes they inherited" (cit. McEachern, 288). In *King Lear*, Shakespeare identifies this potential "threat of the fathers" as what Peter Erickson calls a "stress point" (*Rewriting*, 23) in patriarchal ideology. He then uses it to deconstruct his

culture's deification of fathers and to expose a glaring contradiction in the logic of patriarchy.¹³

There are no god-like fathers in Alison Lyssa's, The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's, and Joan Ure's re-visions of *King Lear*, only self-centred petty tyrants, aging playboys, and spoiled children.

In Alison Lyssa's *Pinball*, a play about a modern family in modern Australia, which is permeated, as Michelene Wandor notes in her "Introduction," by the "subverted motif of Cordelia and her sisters" (9), Archibald is, as Lyssa explains in her "Afterword," a sort of twentieth-century amalgam of the "father/King Solomon/the judge." In his home, which is his castle, his wife, Violet, agrees with everything Archibald says and insists that her children do the same, reminding them on a regular basis not to "upset" their father. His daughter-in-law, Miriam, lets him patronize her, and flatters him (much as Goneril and Regan flatter Lear during the love test) with remarks such as "My charming Mr Havistock senior" (132), performing a service that women, as Marianne Novy comments, "are traditionally expected to do for men" (*Love's Argument*, 152). Moreover, "the forms and meanings" of Archibald's world, a world he imposes on his family, "can only be," as Lyssa says with respect to *King Lear*, what he "has constructed them to be." If he insists that "the proletariat" threatens both the English language and the "freedom" decent people such as himself "have worked for," then this is the case. If he decides that it would be in his grandson's best interests for his daughter, Theenie, to

leave her lesbian lover and move back home, and she says "No, thank you," then Archibald "wipes [his] hands" of his "sometime daughter" and joins her ex-husband's camp in the custody battle over her son (145-46). For, in Lyssa's words, "[t]o agree with him, is to agree with right; to disagree with him, is to be wrong" ("Afterward," 158).

The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, a prequel to Shakespeare's play, which Lizbeth Goodman calls "a landmark in feminist 'reinventing' of Shakespeare" (220) focusses on Lear's daughters. Their father, even at seventy-five "the most agile horseman and best archer," is always off at one "sporting tournament" or another, or "pawing" one woman or another (33, 58, 44). As Novy comments, "he is neither seen nor heard; he is the embodiment of the 'absent father' image of today's no-longer-nuclear families" (*Cross-Cultural*, 221). Still, we learn much about him from the play's other characters. We learn that he is a man who believes that the function of his wife and daughters is simply to accomodate him. The Queen's job, in addition to trying to produce a son, is to sort out the budget and taxes, leaving Lear time for his hobbies: sports and other women. His daughters' role is to please him, as regular reminders by the Nurse or the Fool (Queen) to the effect that "He won't like that" (28) or "He doesn't like shouting" (38) make clear. And Cordelia, his favourite—"Lear's baby," his "pretty chick," his "peach"—must do the most pleasing, must dance and spin on demand "for daddy" (52-53). The relationship of the daughters with their father in *Lear's Daughters* is indeed, as

Goodman sums it up, "one of fear and awed respect, notably tinged with embarrassment on the part of Cordelia and with jealousy on the part of the other two" (222).

Joan Ure's *Something in it for Cordelia* is a comedy set in modern Waverley Station, Edinburgh, which re-visions the ending of *King Lear*. In a sense it is a sequel to Shakespeare's play, because it suggests what might have happened had Shakespeare's play not ended tragically. Ure's play suggests, as the play's Introducer tells us,

that if King Lear of then had been, instead, King Lear of Scotland now, we might have had not a tragedy which the Scots can't afford but a sort of Steptoe and daughter comedy. (11)

According to Diane Elizabeth Dreher, "[p]sychologist-critics have noted Lear's infantilism. ...They have pointed out that at 'fourscore and upward,' he 'remains a great baby ... a ranting, towering, very dangerous baby'" (72-73). Ure's Lear, "sitting in a wheelchair, wearing his guilty crown," waiting for the train to the Highlands (11), proves, like Shakespeare's Lear, that "Old fools are babes again" (I.iii.19). This King Lear is anything but dangerous, however. As a younger man, he had no time for his wife, whom he insists "died to spite [him]," or children, but "looking like Napoleon ... chatted to his soldiers for hours" (23, 27). Now a retired "ex-King Lear," he is a petulant child on a "mobile throne," at the mercy of a Cordelia who saved him from the death of Shakespeare's tragedy by carrying him off on the handlebar of her bicycle (19, 12, 16-17). He

is a king who wants a dog, because "a man's got to have someone who'd do what they are told" (29-30).

Each of these three feminist re-visions of *King Lear*, then, continues the work of deconstructing the authority of the father that was started by Shakespeare. At the same time, each, in its own way, foregrounds the absence of the mother in the source text.¹⁴ In *Pinball*, Theenie's mother is initially present. However, after a life-time of mothering her children *and* her husband, and trying to keep the peace between various family members, she has a breakdown and, by play's end, she has mentally absented herself from her family. In *Lear's Daughter's*, the mother is, from the play's start, as Goodman comments,

noticeable in her absence, but she is represented in the figure of another character, Nanny, and also in the grotesque image of the mother-figure—to whom the three princesses direct their speeches and actions in mimed sequences—represented by a tea towel hastily draped over a saucepan (metonymically representing the "other" missing crown). Nanny is both mother and servant, in the words of the play, "the mother who is paid." (222)

And, in *Something in it for Cordelia*, the mother is present only as the memory of a woman Cordelia, Regan, and Goneril "might have benefited from having ... around a lot longer" (23). Like the mother of *Lear's Daughter's*, the mother of *Something in it for Cordelia*, the play suggests, died while her daughters were yet young, "worn out" with the effort of "trying to get [Lear] a son" (14, 23).

There is a "traditional tendency in Western literature," as Novy notes, "to split the image of woman into devil and angel" (*Love's Argument*, 153). The feminist re-visions I have been discussing challenge that tendency.

In *Pinball*, Theenie's "sisters," her friend Vandelope and her lover Axis, as Lyssa explains, support her, "instead of fighting with her and with one another, as Cordelia's sisters, Goneril and Regan, do in Shakespeare's play" ("Afterword," 158). In *Lear's Daughters*, if the bonding of the two eldest sisters and the nurse acts to exclude Cordelia, this is because Lear's favouritism keeps Cordelia permanently a daddy's little girl who annoys everyone but Lear with her baby talk. As for *Something in it for Cordelia*, in this play, Goneril and Regan (who die before the play's action) really were their father's daughters. Lear, having no sons, encouraged them, as Cordelia points out, "to play at soldiers." He drilled his "girls on the esplanade," offered them "the perpetua mobile of the power game." He then could not understand it when they grew up and wanted "to supplant" him, something that he would have expected of sons, but found "most unnatural" in daughters (20).

Each of these re-visions has something to say about genre also. The fairy-tale structure that Shakespeare subverts in *King Lear* reappears in *Lear's Daughters*, the story of an "old man called Lear" and his three daughters, "princesses, living in a castle" (21, 24). Here it is employed, as Wandor explains, to investigate the "daughters' status as objects and possessions" so that the play's audience understands "how it is that three women come to be

imprisoned in the role of daughter" ("Introduction," 11). And *Pinball*, for its part, nods at the alliance between tragedy and the status quo with Louise's comment that conservative Lamington Ladies College was an "enriching" experience: "Hockey, front row, Byron, Chapel at eight, Michelangelo, the annual GPs Regatta, and *Oedipus Rex*" (124).

Only *Something in it for Cordelia*, though, explicitly raises questions about tragedy. Only Ure's play, as Christopher Small notes in his "Introduction" to the play, "traverses the authority ... of self-displaying tragedy itself" (6). After Cordelia aborts the tragic ending of *King Lear* by carrying Lear off on her bicycle, her father accuses her of failing to appreciate "the significance, the heights attained in the tragic demise." To this Cordelia snaps that she is through being taken advantage of by male culture:

I wasn't going to let you slip out of the world to tumultuous applause and using my lifeless body as an object of sympathy to be conferred upon you. I wasn't going to let it happen. Without a word. Without a word from me I mean. There's got to be something in it for Cordelia some day, I said. She is not just going to be something her father uses like a medal to proclaim his sores. (16-17)

Clearly, what Lear sees as "quite the most moving moment in all dramatic history, the speech of King Lear before he dies" (17), Cordelia sees as the low point of a genre in which, as Donaldson puts it with reference to Godard's *King Lear*, "women are necessary as subject matter, inspiration, and support for male creation" (Donaldson, 219).

In a very real sense, not only Ure's *Something in it for Cordelia*, but Alison Lyssa's *Pinball* and The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's

Lear's Daughters "can be described as rescue operations," to rephrase what Small says, for one "of the most put upon of Shakespeare's heroines" (5). For if it is the case, as Sprengnether suggests, that we will never know what the Cordelia of Shakespeare's *King Lear* knows, we certainly know what the Cordelias of these feminist re-visions know.¹⁵

These three Cordelias know that marriage too often does not provide the fairy tale "happy ever after" ending they have been taught to believe in. The reality is, as Wandor comments, that marriage "is a way out of the father/tower, and yet it represents another form of patriarchal imprisonment" (12). Thus, in *Lear's Daughters*, Goneril, the lace of her bridal veil "scoring into [her] eyes," is perched on the "window seat, as though to throw herself out" (65) of the tower. In *Pinball*, Theenie, divorced from her husband and living with her lesbian lover, has given up on marriage all together. And, in *Something in it for Cordelia*, Cordelia has left her husband Donald, who with "his merry men" is probably off "playing soldiers on the esplanade of the Castle with the rest of them" (12, 16).

But, more importantly, these Cordelias know that they have to stand up to their fathers. Each knows that she has to, as Lyssa says of Theenie, "make a great effort to separate herself from what her father insists she ought to be" ("Afterword," 158). Thus, Theenie tells her father that even though she loves her "dear old conservative dad," she won't let him turn his grandson into "a dog that you train how to bark" or her into his "dear daughter," who will satisfy him once she has "learnt to sit there, silent, soft, false, and vulnerable, like the tub

of table margarine" (134, 145). Thus, Ure's Cordelia, encouraged by her mother, went away and got herself an education—and now there is nothing Lear can say but that she'll answer him back (14). Thus, The Women's Theatre Group's Cordelia discovers at play's end that she has "two voices": her daddy's-little-girl voice and the voice that has been locked away in her head, *her* voice. Moreover, recognizing the power of her voice, she intends to speak to her father in future with that voice, "as a woman, as one adult to another" (67):

Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different. I hold two in my hands, testing their weight. "Yes," to please, "no," to please myself, "yes," I shall and "no," I will not. "Yes" for you and "no" for me. I love words. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I'm silent I'm trying to get them right. I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I shall chose the right one. (69)

If, as the Introducer in Ure's play says, "young women ... have noticed that there is nothing much for them to do in Shakespeare's plays ... except die, rather beautifully," today, as *Something in it for Cordelia, Pinball, and Lear's Daughter's* suggest, "it might be different" (11).

Notes

1. Rossi makes the same point as Heinemann, but more strongly: "When we consider the many examples of Shakespearean resonance in Brecht's drama, instances of Brecht's defence of his own drama and of his interpretation of older plays by pitting Shakespearean dramaturgy against 'Aristotelian dramaturgy' and 'the orthodox theater apparatus'—and his explanations about how the material content of Shakespearean drama can successfully be brought out in the epic theater—it is difficult to conclude that Brecht held conflicting feelings about Shakespearean drama. On the contrary, it would seem that Brecht consistently used Shakespeare as a model to be emulated in the creation of a dialectical drama and for producing works in an epic theater" (183-84).

2. According to Heinemann, after Hitler had seized power, Brecht "grappled with the problem of 'how to represent the present-day world in the theatre' in its most bitter and tragic form. At this point he read and re-read Shakespeare, and found new possibilities in the plays which he thought he could make use of. His writings and diaries in exile are full of Shakespearean notes and illustrations. And finally after the war in the GDR we find him arguing for young playwrights to study the many-sided, dialectical, argumentative style of Shakespeare as an antidote to the flatness, dullness and oversimplification of much contemporary socialist drama, a new and more exciting kind of realism" (235).

3. Brecht uses the expression *wertvolle Bruchstellen* in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*. Willet translates this as "useful junction points" (63) in his translation of the *Dialogues*. Heinemann disagrees with this translation and translates Brecht's expression as "valuable fracture points," which to me makes more sense in the context of what Brecht is saying. Just to be sure, however, I checked with a German friend. He was emphatic in his agreement with Heinemann's translation. Willet's, he said, "makes no sense" to him.

4. According to Goodman, *Lear's Daughters* "is billed as 'the story of women growing up in the kingdoms of their fathers' (220).

5. See Kahn's "The Absent Mother" for a detailed account of a tradition, "stretching back to 1900 B.C.," of characterizing hysteria as feminine (33).

6. Where Goneril and Regan are concerned, little of what they say in the play, as Novy claims, carries "hints of motivations other than cruelty, lust, or ambition, characteristics of the

archetypal fantasy image of woman as enemy" (*Love's Argument*, 153).

7. Interestingly, in Jean-Luc Godard's film *King Lear*, Cordelia is associated with Joan of Arc (Donaldson, 199).

8. As W.H. Auden writes in his introduction to *Tales of Grimm and Andersen*, a "fairy story, as distinct from a merry tale, or an animal story, is a serious tale with a human hero and a happy ending. The progression of its hero is the reverse of the tragic hero's: at the beginning he is either socially obscure or despised as being stupid or untalented, lacking in the heroic virtues, but at the end, he has surprised everyone by demonstrating his heroism and winning fame, riches, and love. ... The tale ends with the establishment of justice; not only are the good rewarded but also the evil are punished" (xv-xvi).

9. It seems to me that Shakespeare has taken tragedy to its logical conclusion in *King Lear*. In Aeschylus's *Oresteia* the mother is killed off, but the female principle, as symbolized by the Erinyes, remains a powerful force. By the end of *King Lear*, however, only men are left on the stage. Tragedy has finally vanquished woman.

10. Snyder quotes here from Thomson's *The Grotesque* (Critical Idiom Series [London, 1972], 63).

11. Snyder describes one way that the grotesque destabilizes tragedy: "Conceptions of the grotesque usually include some notion of a striking departure from the expected order or norm. Individual importance and uniqueness are the norm for a tragic hero. By diverging from these, contradicting them, the grotesque endangers the tragic sense; it hints subversively that the hero is not so different from everyone else, or that his suffering does not really matter much" (160-61).

12. William Empson is cited by Snyder, 151, n. 34. See *The Structure of Complex Words* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1967), 150.

13. According to McEachern, patriarchal culture's "glorification of the father forecloses his potential for threatening exogamy and thus patriarchy." Here she cites Boose, who writes, "To quell the menace of paternal behavior deviating from the authoritarian ideal, the cultural mythmaking apparatus seems to have continually needed to reify patterns of dictatorial, resolutely unsentimental fatherhood modelled into father-Gods and God the Fathers. By insinuation, the model is divinely sanctioned" (288).

14. As Bennett comments in her engrossing "Production and Proliferation: Seventeen Lears," not all re-visions of *King Lear* are "concerned to re-member the Mother." Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* (1989), for example, acknowledges in an introductory note that the "Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*" (cit. Bennett), but then goes on to insist on the Mother's "discipline and punishment." Like "so many Barker plays, " continues Bennett, Barker's is "a violent and uncompromising (and ultimately misogynist) text" (*Performing Nostalgia*, 50).

15. Sprengnether's point is that Goneril's parting line in *King Lear*—"Ask me not what I know"—is fitting, given that it is "the lot of women generally in Shakespeare's tragedies" that "[w]e will never know what they know" (1).

CHAPTER SIX

Re-Reading Shakespeare, Re-Writing Culture: Margaret Clarke's *Gertrude & Ophelia*¹

Silence in a woman is a moving rhetoricke, winning most, when in words
it wooeth least ... More shall wee see fall into sinne by speech then
silence.

—Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman* (1641); cit. Fox-Good,
224

Was it in a dream or a reverie that Gertrude of Denmark came and
begged me to tell her story to the world? ... "Will you tell that story of
mine over again," she implored. "Hamlet wanted Horatio to live on in
order to report him and his 'cause aright.' I had no chance, before I
died, to ask anybody to protect me from the writers, the critics,—and the
actresses!"

—Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, *Gertrude of Denmark* (1924), 1-2

the problem is in the space she's repeating herself again the problem is
in the space between herself and image she used to watch herself in
the surrounding world of mirrors which one was she hamlet had his
words but ophelia slipped silent down the river watching the mirrors she
wondered which one named her new woman amazon abandoned lover
mother daddy's girl french english every image had a different way of
talking every image had a different way of walking she got so dizzy she
had to stop looking

—Gail Scott, *Spaces Like Stairs*, 110-11

As Adrienne Munich suggests, the "Institution of Reading" not only works to
canonize certain works of literature, it works to canonize certain ways of
understanding those works (251), specifically, those ways that validate male
hegemony. Canonical criticism privileges a male point of view and a male
system of values. And this means, according to Gayle Greene and Coppélia
Kahn, that critical tradition

reinforces—even when literature does not—images of character and behaviour that encourage women to accept their subordination, either ignoring or degrading women, or praising them for such virtues as obedience, meekness and humility. (22)

To apply here what Minrose Gwin has said about Faulkner criticism, "the politics of ... criticism is male politics; the discourse of ... criticism is male discourse" (cit. Sensibar, 275).

Critical tradition has typically understood Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as one man's tragedy. Hamlet, the tragic hero and subject with whom everyone must sympathize, occupies centre stage. The story is told from his point of view; other characters come into play only in relation to him. Gertrude is significant insofar as she is Hamlet's mother, Ophelia insofar as she is Hamlet's girlfriend. Gertrude is conventionally viewed as lascivious and as Claudius's accomplice in the murder of his brother, because this is how she appears from Hamlet's perspective. As one of Martha Tuck Rozett's students came to realize, Hamlet's "constant slander of Gertrude definitely affects the way we see her character" (89). As for Ophelia, she is viewed, as Elizabeth Burns observes in her poem, "Ophelia," as "Always the daughter," in part because Hamlet sees her primarily as her father's puppet, and in part because Hamlet treats her as a child. In Burns' words, "He will not talk to her as an adult:/ he confides in Horatio/ ... He will not listen, he will not/ ... hear her."

Inattentive to the potentially subversive silences, "omissions, gaps, partial truths and contradictions" (Greene and Kahn, 22) in canonical literary texts, such criticism is frequently, as Munich claims, "more misogynist" than the texts

it explicates. It fails to note, for example, that in *Hamlet* "the precise nature of Gertrude's faults and the extent of her recognition of them are ambiguous," and that Shakespeare emphasizes "the stereotypical and fantasized aspects of Hamlet's misogyny" (Lentz, 9).² The result of such oversight is that critical tradition has resisted interpretations such as Lillie Wyman's that, paying attention to what Gertrude says and does in the play, view Gertrude as all too human. Hamlet's lecherous monster is privileged over Wyman's "suddenly widowed woman confronted with choices for the first time, with no one to turn to for help or advice," a woman who "agrees to marry a man she has known for her entire adult life, a man whose devotion she has probably recognized and taken for granted" (Rozett, 81-82).

Under the assumption that the only way to experience a play is as a man, such criticism is too often oblivious to the fact that women's experience of a play such as *Hamlet* is not the same as men's. As Joan Ure's play *Something in it for Ophelia* suggests, when women are forced to identify with a male subject "imbued with specifically male psychosexual anxieties" (Case, *Feminism*, 121), the experience is less than satisfying. In her play, thus, Martin comes away from a production of *Hamlet* feeling pleasure, but Hannah leaves feeling puzzled, shocked, distressed, and embarrassed. Hannah simply cannot identify with Ophelia, whom she does not understand and with whom she does not sympathize. Echoing the sentiment of Hélène Cixous' remark that she stopped going to the theatre because "it was like going to [her] own funeral"

("Aller," 546), Hannah tries to express to Martin how she felt in the theatre: "If you saw all the young girls clapping and clapping, could you believe they were clapping and clapping because you were dead?" But Martin is a man who feels "inclined to see [him]self as Hamlet." And, as such, he has never shared Hannah's feeling, never believed that Ophelia was other than "a convenient fiction, a rather fine part for a girl with not too many lines to learn" (34-45). Clearly, as Alicia Ostriker writes, "Prufrock may yearn to be Hamlet, but what woman would want to be Ophelia?" (87).

Cixous stopped going to the theatre. Margaret Clarke stopped teaching *Hamlet*. For many years, unable to separate *Hamlet* from Hamlet, she avoided teaching the play for fear of her "annoyance at the character" showing (Burnett). To apply here what Judith Fetterley says about women's relation to canonical literature in *The Resisting Reader*, Clarke's problem was that Shakespeare's tragedy "is male."³ In order to read *Hamlet*, Clarke had to "identify as male" (xii). Since, however, she could not identify with the male humanist subject position that Hamlet represents, Clarke refrained for some time from reading the play at all.

When she did return to *Hamlet*, it was to confront and counter as "a resisting reader" both the skewed readings of the play offered by canonical criticism and the reality reflected by Shakespeare's play. For Clarke's goal in *Gertrude & Ophelia* is twofold. It is to offer critical commentary on Shakespeare's play that takes "the woman's part," that attends "to female

characters, compensating for the bias in a critical tradition that has tended to emphasize male characters, male themes, and male fantasies" (Lentz, 12, 4). It is also to retrieve the women's voices in the play from silence and marginalization.

Clarke's *Gertrude & Ophelia*, in short, functions both creatively and critically, presenting its argument within the confines of a work of drama. Clarke takes as part of her project the one Carol Thomas Neely outlines in the final paragraph of "Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism": to "tell' Ophelia's 'story' and retell Hamlet's in relation to it" (11), and adds to this the telling of Gertrude's story. In its creative guise, therefore, her play, to use the words of Pam Gems, functions to "retell. [r]elight" (Betsko, 204) the stories of Gertrude and Ophelia, with these two women in the subject position.⁴

And in its critical guise, *Gertrude & Ophelia* challenges traditional notions of genre and critical practice. Recognizing that, as Munich argues, "the canon may not be as masculinist as some feminist criticism has assumed" (251), Clarke's main quarrel, I would argue, is not with Shakespeare, but with tragedy. For Clarke not only admires Shakespeare's "honesty about the typical fates of women in his world," she sees her feminist re-vision as, to borrow a phrase from Rani Drew, a sort of "co-venture with Shakespeare" (123-24), one in which her "scenes became interchapters of his, a discourse happening in the gaps and silences of the male tradition" (Burnett). In other words, Clarke sees her re-vision as an attempt to amplify what is muted in Shakespeare, to write "a reality

that Shakespeare could only suggest by the absences in his play" (Burnett). Moreover, *Gertrude & Ophelia* foregrounds tragedy's focus on the male hero and his story and its marginalization of woman and her story. It also foregrounds, in particular with its re-telling of Ophelia's story, the way in which critical interpretation has tended to align itself with a genre that works to reinforce the privilege of men, the way in which tragedy, as Linda Kintz claims, "guarantees the masculinity of both the protagonist and the theorist" (1).

The goal of Clarke's female Playwright in *Gertrude & Ophelia* (a play within a play) is cultural change, is to subvert patriarchy, the "eternal male script" (2.1). As she puts it, writing "inside Shakespeare's play ... to write [her]self out of the world Shakespeare had to write in" (2.8), a world in which women "are always dying in asides" (2.7), is exactly what she is doing. And like her Playwright, Clarke sees how woman is silenced in *Hamlet*, how much of her is just not there. Thus, in a discussion of the women in *Hamlet*, Clarke speaks of the "bits, the *big* bits" that Shakespeare left out, and remarks that, "as one actress who's played Gertrude in *Hamlet* [said], 'You do a lot of listening when you're Gertrude'" (Gabereau).

Clarke is motivated to tell the women's stories because Shakespeare has done such a sketchy job: although Gertrude and Ophelia are "written very truly," are "fascinating women," and "the scenes that they do appear in in the *Hamlet* play certainly intrigue a woman's imagination," they "are completely unexplained

characters ... [who] arouse in the man that they love ... extremely intense and antagonistic emotions" (Gabereau).

Clarke's comments reflect Enoch Brater's view that "[t]heater history seems to have canonized only part of the story, the much-maligned *history*" (x). They also reflect Virginia Woolf's conviction that Shakespeare's women—like most of the women in western literature—are depicted almost exclusively as "seen by the other sex," and as "seen only in relation to the other sex," which means that "much has been left out, unattempted" (82).⁵ To apply here Christine Froula's summing up of Woolf's position, Clarke recognizes that Shakespeare's "art manifests poetic power at its fullest and freest, but he still leaves half the cultural canvas blank for women's representations" ("Virginia Woolf" 136).

Clarke's goal is to complete the cultural canvas with the woman's perspective: "From a woman's point of view, I want to know what it's like to be the mother of that kind of son, and also I found it very interesting to explore what it must have been like to be the girlfriend of such a man." Clarke revises *Hamlet*, therefore, to "re-write history ... even if it's fictional history" (Gabereau). In *Gertrude & Ophelia*, she re-tells Shakespeare's story from the perspective of Gertrude and Ophelia, focussing on the female subculture of *Hamlet* and its interactions with and status in the dominant male culture.⁶

In her play, Clarke shows how women like Ophelia and Gertrude are controlled by patriarchal dictates. Ophelia is helpless: she is exploited by

Polonius to win favour at court, by Claudius—and Gertrude—to spy on Hamlet, and by Hamlet to express his counterfeit madness and his fury with Gertrude. Gertrude is submissive: she accepts that her only option is to "lie in the bed provided by [her] masters" (1.5). Therefore, although she criticizes both the old King's and the new King's actions and values in front of Ophelia, Gertrude never openly challenges these kings. She knows that only "men may have noble reasons; women obey necessity" (1.5); she knows "what a Queen does to survive" (2.7).

And survival for women in the world of Shakespeare's tragedy means that true female friendship "has to be supplanted by marriage" (Thompson, 78). In the opening scenes of *Gertrude & Ophelia*, the two women appear to be friends: Gertrude advises Ophelia as a mother would, and they share their concern for what is happening to Hamlet since his father's death. This changes, however, after Polonius is killed. Gertrude goes to Ophelia in her secret place by the river and tries to pass off Polonius's murder as an accident, and then to convince Ophelia to return to her rooms, telling Ophelia that she will "care for [her], be as [her] own mother" (1.7). But Ophelia will have none of this, for she is beginning to understand that "this woman is perhaps not on her side" (Gabereau). Later she sees clearly that Gertrude "never saw [her], until the Prince saw [her]. Never. Never. When the Prince smiled, [Gertrude] looked" (1.6). After Ophelia's death, Gertrude acknowledges the truth of Ophelia's realization:

You knew that all I did was for him. It was never for you. I could not play your mother, although we would both wish it so. In being true to him, I wronged you. (2.8)

Gertrude knows that she was wrong to treat Ophelia so; she also knows that she had little choice in the matter.⁷

Clarke's play also shows that Hamlet is caught in patriarchy's web. As Gertrude explains to Ophelia, "having a hero for a father is not always a blessing" (1.5). The old King was a "hard" man who scared the young Hamlet and sent him "too early to be squire." Hating battle, the boy kept running away. Eventually Yoric, "who held first place with the Prince," ran away from battle with him, and the King had Yoric killed, causing Hamlet "to cry so hard that [his mother's] skirt was wet clear through to her skin" (1.5).

The Hamlet we hear about in *Gertrude & Ophelia*, then, is not his father's son. Unlike the ruthless old warrior, the young Hamlet, "was always tender-hearted, and too scrupulous for his own good" (1.3), according to Gertrude. He does display "noble reasons": he is genuinely distressed because his mother's marriage to his uncle "seems soon after his father's death, and priests have been whispering to him of silly rules about brothers marrying brother's wives" (1.3). He does weep in Ophelia's arms. He has, as Ophelia says, "been ill-used so much, he has been driven to distraction" (1.5).

The problem is that Hamlet is unable to direct his frustration at those in positions of power who have abused him. So, as Gertrude realizes, even though she and Ophelia are not the ones "who have misused [Hamlet] ... it is

[they] who will get the blame" (1.5). Clarke's synopsis of Hamlet's situation makes clear why this is so:

He is one of those representatives of a man on the cusp of history between the medieval world and the Renaissance world, a man who's called upon to act and to forget scruples, and a man who has had an education and wishes to live as a moral human being. And what I discovered in writing my script is that such a man when he's frustrated, put down in his public life, takes out that frustration and that anger in his private life. (Gabereau)

And so Clarke's Hamlet, who has so angered his uncle with his staging of a brother killing a brother that there is "no safe place for [him] now, no matter who[m the women] beg" (1.6), takes out his anger on the women: he rapes Ophelia, and verbally abuses his mother.⁸

In Shakespeare's play, not only Hamlet's disgust, but that of the reader, is directed at Gertrude, as Clarke's Playwright explains in her analysis of Gertrude as a scapegoat figure:

[A]s "The Mother," Gertrude is like an ideological sponge. The crap and piss left over from shaping the play is sucked up into the Gertrude character, where we can safely feel all the disgust and contempt we want. Then we're supposed to identify like crazy with Hamlet and his pals, feeling our ever-so-neat fear and pity, because all the nasty bits have been displaced into her. (1.1)

This is the conventional reaction to Gertrude. It is the view of those many critics who, "taking their cue from Hamlet's fantasies of her, instead of from an analysis of her decorous, bewildered lines" (Lentz, 5), explain her marriage to Claudius and Hamlet's loathing of his mother by painting Gertrude as a woman who—dull, shallow, and lascivious—well deserves our contempt.⁹ Even Carolyn Heilbrun, who complains that critics "fail to see Gertrude for the strong-minded,

intelligent, succinct ... sensible woman that she is," sees "lust, the desire for sexual relations, as the passion, in the Elizabethan sense of the word, the flaw, the weakness which drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appalls her son, and keeps him from the throne" (11).

It is not lust, however, that motivates Clarke's Gertrude, but the need to entrench her position at court. In fact, it is suggested in *Gertrude & Ophelia* that Gertrude is equally indifferent to both the old King and Claudius. For Clarke interprets Gertrude in a similar fashion to René Girard, who reads the old Hamlet and Claudius as "brothers in murder and revenge," and suggests that the reason Gertrude "could marry the two ... in rapid succession is that they are so much alike and ... Gertrude moves in a world where prestige and power count more than passion" ("Vengeance," 274, 276).

And, interestingly, it is intimated in *Gertrude & Ophelia* that the man Gertrude was *not* indifferent to was Yoric. She tells Ophelia that after Yoric's death she and Hamlet both cried "for the loss of [their] ... fool," and that it was "the only time [she] defied [her] husband" (1.5). Then, near the play's end, wondering where she went wrong, Gertrude comments to herself that "[p]erhaps, it was Yoric's fault ... for teaching me too much of tenderness to be satisfied with a Queen's life" (2.8).

Clarke, instead of "having us identify like crazy with Hamlet," instead of giving us Gertrude through the eyes of Hamlet, lets Gertrude speak for herself. And the result is an intelligent and prudent woman, one who knows that being

"a Queen means measuring, always measuring. What is the mood at court today? What will please the King? Is he angry at the Prince?" (2.6). In *Gertrude & Ophelia*, as in Shakespeare's play, Gertrude does marry Claudius too hastily after the old King's death. She does not marry out of weakness, however, but to fulfill her part of the bargain she has made with Claudius to guarantee Hamlet's succession. As she tells Ophelia,

If I marry [Claudius], he will name the Prince his heir. It is the best way. For both of us. There are some that would have gone with the Prince after his father's death, but they were the young men, none of the older men would have supported him against Claudius, the rightful brother of the dead King. There would have been blood spilled. I have prevented that and my son and your sons after him will rule. (1.3)

Clarke's Gertrude is an astute politician, pragmatic not lustful, one who marries in haste because she views her union with Claudius as "the best thing for everyone" (1.3). She is a woman who makes the most of the limited choices her society offers her.

In Clarke's play, in short, Gertrude is a coherent character, whose motivations are clear. Gertrude does what "scheming, primping" (as Ophelia names it [2.6]) she does for the same reason that Polonius schemes: to survive in a world where she wields little power.¹⁰ Unlike her "too scrupulous" son, Gertrude allows herself few scruples. When it is necessary, she deceives her husband or uses Ophelia to spy on her son. Moreover, she has every intention of using Ophelia's unborn child as "deliverance from all this trouble" (1.7).

Unlike her Gertrude, however, Clarke's Ophelia is not a coherent character; she is a woman of multiple personalities: there are at least four

possible Ophelia's in *Gertrude & Ophelia*. Further, Ophelia's motivations are not made clear.

The first Ophelia is a "correct and timid virgin of exquisite sensibilities" (West 18) who dies of a broken heart.¹¹ She is "the maid Ophelia" (1.4), a pure young woman with a "sweet nature" (1.2), who, according to Gertrude, holds "too innocent an attitude to men" and "imagines she will marry her beloved, a gentle man, who will never hurt her" (1.4). This is the young woman who, when she finally sees "the world as it is," still naively thinks that she and Gertrude can find a safe haven by moving to the country to live "in nature, away from the court" (1.4). Finally, this is the Ophelia who—after Hamlet rapes her—still loves him, and who assumes the blame for his behaviour: "it was my own fault ... I should not have accepted his love tokens and his gestures ... and then been suddenly so cool, avoiding his company" (1.5), and who, after her father's death and Hamlet's banishment, touches her heart and tells Gertrude that she has "Pain. Always pain" (2.6). This Ophelia truly is, as Gertrude remarks after her death, a woman who "could not have been a Queen ... Too delicate for the strain of it" (2.7).

The second Ophelia is essentially Rebecca West's Ophelia:

one of the few authentic portraits of that army of not virgin martyrs, the poor little girls who were sacrificed to family ambition in the days when a court was a cat's cradle of conspiracies. (21)

This "poor little creature, whom the court had robbed of her honesty ... [and] driven to madness and to death" (22) is not motivated to kill herself for love of

Hamlet. After her father's death, she wants nothing more to do with Gertrude's "devil son" (2.6). She is, to borrow West's phrasing,

in a situation that requires no sexual gloss. Her father had been murdered by a member of the royal house, and she found herself without protection, since her brother Laertes was in France, in the midst of a crisis that might well send her out of her wits with fear. (23)

This Ophelia, as Gertrude notes after Ophelia's suicide, was killed by the court:

"They have killed you child. They ... he ... I ... we. We have all killed you" (2.8).

The third Ophelia is not an innocent young woman. Rather, she has something in common with Girard's Ophelia, about whom he makes the following comments:

We must not be misled by Ophelia's blond hair and pitiable death. Or, rather, we must realize that Shakespeare consciously misleads his less attentive spectators with these gross theatrical signs of what a pure heroine should be. Just like Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia allows herself to become an instrument in the hands of her father and the king. She too is affected by the disease of the time. ("Vengeance," 285)

This is the Ophelia who spies on the man she professes to love, meeting Hamlet "as if it were by accident, so that the King and [her] father could overhear his words" (1.5), and who mixes a brew to "rid [her] body of [Hamlet's] child" and calls her act "but a little destruction" (1.7). This Ophelia has indeed "lost her integrity" (West 22). Further, she is bitterly aware of this loss, and, shortly before she kills herself, calls herself "a very great sinner" (2.5).

The fourth Ophelia is the madwoman of recent feminist criticism, who, as Elaine Showalter says, "is a heroine, a powerful figure who rebels against the family and the social order" ("Representing" 91).¹² Like the third, this Ophelia

has lost both her innocence and her integrity; however, she has, in her madness, gained both insight and strength. She knows she "can never be the maid Ophelia again" (1.4). She sees Gertrude's basest motivations, calling her "the Whore ... of the court. Who sleeps with the King to get a crown," accusing her of sacrificing "a father or two, a daughter, to get a son a crown" (2.6). She realizes that she is only a pawn in the game of chess Gertrude plays. And, having realized what her world is—that she "had a lover once. But he is gone. She had a brother once. But he is gone. She had a father once. But he is gone" (2.3)—she announces that "her senses cannot bear to live in this silly frame" (2.6) and soon thereafter kills herself. Whereas Gertrude acquiesces to the status quo, this Ophelia finally spurns it.

The Ophelia of *Gertrude & Ophelia* is, in short, a problematic mélange of types. Like those of the "Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives [who is] more than the sum of all her parts" (92) with whom Showalter is concerned in "Representing Ophelia," the facets of Clarke's Ophelia are manifold: she is a "study in sexual intimidation"; she is the "'insipid little creature' of criticism"; she is "a strong and intelligent woman destroyed by the heartlessness of men"; she is an "emblem of righteousness"; she is the madwoman "who refuses to speak the language of the patriarchal order" (89, 91).¹³ Thus, while Clarke's reading of Gertrude offers us a woman who is clearly defined, her reading of Ophelia leaves us with a completely enigmatic character.

Why is Clarke's Ophelia such an unintelligible character? Clarke claims in the interview with Vicky Gabereau, after all, that she set out in *Gertrude & Ophelia* to explore the points of view of Gertrude and Ophelia, who are "written very truly" in *Hamlet*. In a recent interview, Clarke objected to my reading of her Ophelia, and she offered her own interpretation of Ophelia's character:

Gertrude is only "coherent" in that she has learned to get along in patriarchy. Ophelia is only a "problematic mélange," says Clarke, "in that she is very young, very unfortunate in her life circumstances, and betrayed by everybody, women and men. ... Her character, as you put it, is never an issue for me, because I see her destroyed before she is old enough to have one. Character, after all, is only the sum of the adaptations we learn to make, and what chance is [Ophelia] given to make any. (Burnett)

In short, it makes no sense to Clarke to talk about Ophelia having multiple personalities when Ophelia, because of her situation, does not even possess a developed character.

I agree with Clarke's comments here. "Women's sense of self," Emi Hamana points out, "derives from a myriad of biological, existential, interpersonal, and social realities such as one's gender, family, and class. Owing to subordination [and, I would add, the lack of a mother], though, Ophelia has never developed a sense of self" (27). In Diane Elizabeth Dreher's words, Ophelia does not

know who she is. ... Retreating behind the false self the patriarchy has created for her, Ophelia represses her feelings and obliterates her own reality, collapsing into a schizoid divided self and morai confusion. As R.D. Laing wrote of her: "there is no one there. She is not a person. There is no integral selfhood expressed through her actions or utterances. Incomprehensible statements are said by nothing. She has already died." (77, 80)

If Ophelia is accepted as a woman who, in Hamana's words, is utterly powerless "under the monstrous constraints of patriarchy" (Hamana, 25), then, as Clarke says, she is "written very truly" by Shakespeare.

Still, I do not think that Clarke's interpretation of Ophelia cancels mine. If anything, her reading of Ophelia as lacking a firm sense of self could be used to explain why it is that Ophelia is such a problematic *mélange*. That there is no *one* there, means that there is the possibility of many *ones* there. That Ophelia's character is not developed, is a blank page, so to speak, is what makes it so easy for writers, critics, directors, and actors—and Clarke's Gertrude—to offer such divergent interpretations of Ophelia. This is what makes the history of her representation such a complex one.

Clarke does not, like Showalter, claim that the story she as a feminist critic can tell is "neither [Ophelia's] life story, nor her love story ... but rather the *history* of her representation." Despite this, her Ophelia's resemblance to the "Cubist Ophelia" cannot be overlooked: unquestionably, Clarke is not so much telling Ophelia's story as she (like Showalter) is retelling the story of how Ophelia has been represented—and adding to this story Gertrude's representation of Ophelia.

For if Gertrude speaks for herself in *Gertrude & Ophelia*, making her motivations clear, Ophelia rarely does. When she does speak about Hamlet or about her father, it is usually when she and Gertrude are in the latter's bedchamber, with Gertrude asking the questions. Gertrude prompts Ophelia

about what to say: "Promise on our friendship that you will speak to no one concerning this" (1.3); about what to do: "When you feel the hands against your flesh, it is absolutely necessary that you ... running away is completely unattractive" (1.2); and about what to think: "You are his wife now, with or without the words of the church" (2.4). Moreover, Gertrude reads Ophelia for us: we are told that Ophelia "shows the lack of a mother's teaching"(1.2); that her "father was ambitious for her" (2.2); that she "is in great need of a friend" (2.2); that she is one of the "innocent ... who need rest from harm" (2.4), and so on. Finally, Gertrude offers Ophelia's eulogy: "It seems madness now, but I thought she would be my Hamlet's wife ..." (2.7). Therefore, if, as Lee Edwards comments, Shakespeare's Ophelia "literally has no story without Hamlet" (36), Clarke's Ophelia literally has no story without Gertrude.

Moreover, Clarke's Ophelia has no ability to wield words—although it is intimated that her Hamlet does. Ophelia's jibes are neither intelligent nor witty. She responds to Horatio's "Lady" at one point with "Who do you call 'lady'? There is no 'lady' here. I am no 'lady' sir! I am only a bag of guts waiting to spill into a hole in the earth" (2.3). Hamlet, however, is the "King of Jibes" (2.3).

Ophelia's rhymes are also poor:

My love is gone, gone ... gone sailing. Oh yes. He is on the sea, and rides the waves, laughing at me, silly me, here on the earth. Silly me, who cannot go to sea. I rhyme. Silly silly girl! To make rhymes. At such a time ... to make rhymes. Do you hear me love? As clever as you with my words. (2.3)

And, not only is Hamlet "clever" with words, but when Ophelia tries to "make words" like Hamlet, she is frustrated: "I shall make words. Words. Words. And be the winner over pain. The fight is not fair! The devil has all the words" (2.3).

Needless to say, Clarke's representation of Ophelia is a perplexing one. Shakespeare's Ophelia has a faint voice indeed: she appears only in five scenes of *Hamlet*. However, despite her stifled voice, Shakespeare's character, unlike Clarke's, is a skilled user of language. Christy Desmet, in her perceptive reading of Ophelia as "rhetorical woman," makes this evident: She points out that Ophelia's soliloquy in the nunnery scene belongs to "a standard rhetorical scheme ... from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*" and that Ophelia "defines Hamlet first by synecdoche, then by metaphor." Further, she identifies this soliloquy, "defining Hamlet's character at the moment when he ceases to be himself," with epideictic rhetoric, the "branch of classical rhetoric that deals with praise and blame and is particularly appropriate for ceremonial occasions." According to Desmet, then, "long before Fortinbras delivers his judgment over Hamlet's dead body," Ophelia "has offered her own eulogy" (12).¹⁴

What is going on here? Why is it that Clarke's Ophelia is so completely foiled when she tries to "make words," Clarke's Hamlet so "clever" with words? And why is it that Gertrude so often speaks for Ophelia, that Ophelia's story is told largely by Gertrude?

An obvious explanation for Ophelia's frustration with language in Clarke's play is that it is a comment on how Ophelia is prevented in Shakespeare's play

from using language to express herself. In *Hamlet*, as Sandra K. Fischer notes, Ophelia "finds herself explained, faulted, and struggled over by rival authorities outside herself" (4). Even when she does speak, she too often is, as Fischer points out, "listened to but still not heard" (7). Another explanation is that Ophelia is making fun of male ways of speaking when she calls Hamlet the "King of Jibes" and spoofs the way he plays on words in her "Who do you call 'lady'? I am no 'lady' sirl" exchange with Horatio.

I am not sure, though, why Ophelia finds herself finds herself "explained, faulted, and struggled over" by Gertrude in Clarke's play. Perhaps it is because Ophelia's story does end tragically with her death and it is only Gertrude who is left to tell her story from a woman's perspective (as only Horatio is left to tell Hamlet's story in Shakespeare's play). Perhaps it is because "inside Shakespeare's play" (2.8)—inside tragedy—it is not possible for an Ophelia to be heard.¹⁵ Perhaps, to paraphrase a comment Joanna Russ makes, this *is* a tale "for heroes, not heroines" (4). Perhaps only a Gertrude, "the Whore ... of the court" who has learned the language of patriarchy, can have a voice inside tragedy.¹⁶

Then again, perhaps Ophelia has such trouble with language in *Gertrude & Ophelia* because Clarke is as guilty as many earlier critics are of failing to listen to Ophelia.¹⁷ For not only would I argue that Shakespeare's Ophelia is, as Desmet claims, a skilled "user of language," I would argue with Fischer that the tragedy of Shakespeare's Ophelia develops "its own, specifically female,

mode of discourse, which is remarkable in the extent to which the loudness of Hamlet's vocal posturing overwhelms the thwarted tongue she eventually finds" (9). To apply what Stephen Greenblatt says about Caliban to Ophelia, what is significant about *Hamlet* is that

even within the powerful constraints of Shakespeare's Jacobean culture, the artist's imaginative mobility enables him to ... record a voice, the voice of the displaced and oppressed, that is heard scarcely anywhere else in his own time (231–32).

And, once Ophelia's "thwarted tongue" is attended to, it becomes clear that the voice Shakespeare has recorded offers, as Fischer claims, "a feminine counterpoint to Hamlet's tragedy as well as a devastating commentary on it" (9).

Ophelia's mad songs not only represent a "specifically female" mode of discourse, they offer a "devastating commentary" on both Hamlet's tragedy and tragedy generally. For what Ophelia enacts with her songs is a ritual of mourning. As Jacquelyn A. Fox-Good observes, she sings a lament for "loss, death, unobserved rites, sexual violation, and betrayal" (224).¹⁸ And, as Gail Holst-Warhaft claims, lament is traditionally a female art form. Moreover, it is a form that has often been viewed by patriarchal society as a threat, in that it "places a certain power in the hands of women," providing them "with the licence to express themselves that is denied them in normal life" (3, 28).¹⁹ In the sixth-century, for example, the state of Athens passed legislation to restrict the practice of lament. Later, tragedy, "an urban male art," subverted the power

of women's lament by staging its "ritual song, mimicking the forbidden" (11, 157).

And Shakespeare, it seems to me, subverts the power of tragedy by returning the ritual song of lament and the power that goes with it to Ophelia. For, given the licence to express herself through lament and the madness with which it is often associated, Ophelia disrupts the dynamics of *Hamlet* in the "mad scene."²⁰ "In her madness her subversive voice, the voice of the other, the voice of the marginalized second sex," as Hamana remarks, "is released at last" (34) to "strew/ [its] Dangerous conjectures" (IV.v.14-15). Liberated from silence, Ophelia lashes out at the injustices of her patriarchal society, challenging its values. Her madness acts, as Neely claims,

to disenchant domestic values: she "marks" the falsehood of love, the emptiness of religious formula, the betrayal of men. She narrates the arbitrariness, instability, and corruption of love and the family as Lear narrates those of justice and the state. Ophelia, like Lear and Hamlet, speaks impertinently, proverbially, bawdily, disturbingly; she too is both actress and character, partly an object of the audience's gaze, partly a spokesperson for their contempt for Claudius and his court. Ophelia, as much as (or perhaps even more than) Lear "disrupts the authority of order, degree, and decorum." ("Documents," 93).²¹

"In an important sense," as Fox-Good claims, "Ophelia's songs constitute her character" (233), as, with them, she acquires the voice that has eluded her through much of the play.

In other words, I would suggest that "Ophelia's madness," which Neely claims receives too little attention traditionally, "remains underread" in Clarke's *Gertrude & Ophelia* ("Documents, 93).²² Hamana, who does pay careful

attention to this madness, sees Ophelia as "challenging patriarchy, [and] acquir[ing] a language of her own, self-assertion, autonomy, and liberation in her peculiar way" with her mad songs (35). And Fox-Good argues convincingly that, although their tendency is "to mask intent or effect, the "conventions" of madness that Ophelia articulates in her songs, retain "a thrust of anticonventionality, a threat of subversive, antisocial behaviour," that "would have been recognized by a seventeenth-century audience" (231). Even Shakespeare offers evidence that "there might be thought" (IV.v.12) in Ophelia's songs. For, as Fox-Good points out, "Shakespeare's songs are sung by his marginal characters, by women (especially tragic women like Ophelia and Desdemona) and by other feminized figures—fools like Lear's, or like Touchstone and Feste, sprites like Puck and Ariel." Moreover, she continues,

[g]iven voice by these characters, musical harmony does not become *metaphorical* harmony or social concord. Rather, it seems to sing against the voices of characters who speak the language composed, as Hamlet says, of "words, words, words." (232)

Perhaps there is indeed a connection between the "prettiness" of music, which Susan McClary claims "is actually the *result* of its subversive power," and that of Ophelia who in the mad scene "turns to favor and to prettiness" (Fox-Good, 232; IV.v.189).²³

If *Gertrude & Ophelia* does not function to pay close enough attention to Ophelia's soliloquy in the nunnery scene or to her mad songs, if *Gertrude and Ophelia* does not raise questions about just what Shakespeare is suggesting by making Ophelia, in effect, "Hamlet's 'dark double,' ... who acts out what is

repressed in Hamlet," there is much, however, that it does do.²⁴ By rejecting Hamlet's point of view where Gertrude is concerned, it goes a long way to, as the Playwright character puts it, "dealing with the bad press she's been getting" (1.1). By showing how a young man such as Hamlet can be caught in patriarchy's web, *Gertrude & Ophelia* shows that it is not just women who suffer under such a system—and suggests that it is this system that brings about Hamlet's tragedy. The Prologue to Rani Drew's *The Ill-Act Hamlet* makes the same suggestion explicitly:

Tonight, the management
Makes yet one more attempt at the riddle.
We bring you a feminist Hamlet ...
Hamlet is ordered to
Line up on the father's side. In fewer
Acts, extended and enlarged by our own
Text, we claim it was this imperative
That made a tragedy of his life. (127)

Finally, by telling the story of the multi-faceted Ophelia of criticism, it reviews the many and divergent ways Ophelia has been represented. At the same time, Clarke's play intimates that these representations have less to do with Shakespeare's play than they have to do with changing attitudes toward women. In other words, as Showalter writes,

[t]he alteration of strong and weak Ophelias on the stage, virginal and seductive Ophelias in art, inadequate or oppressed Ophelias in criticism, tells us how these representations have overflowed the text, and how they have reflected the ideological character of their times. (91)

In short, *Gertrude & Ophelia* foregrounds the ways in which traditional criticism has joined with the genre of tragedy to marginalize Ophelia.

Clarke's play also functions, to use Neely's terminology, as both compensatory and justificatory criticism. As compensatory criticism it restores to Gertrude her "virtues ... complexity, and ...power." And as justificatory criticism, it acknowledges Gertrude and Ophelia's lack of real choice in the patriarchal world of *Hamlet* and tries to justify Gertrude's behaviour by making clear its motivations. Like the justificatory critics whom Neely discusses, Clarke reads Gertrude as "subordinated to and acting in the service of the patriarchal culture which has shaped [her]" ("Feminist Modes," 6, 8) and Ophelia as helpless in the no-win situation in which she finds herself after her father's death.²⁵

And *Gertrude & Ophelia* moves toward transformational criticism. It does attempt, in Neely's words, to "interrogate the relations between male idealization of and degradation of women ... between the patriarchal text and the matriarchal subtext" (9), particularly with the framing scenes involving its Playwright character and Gertrude's talk of Yoric, with his teaching of tenderness and his song, "The Fate of Bold Women," with its "verse about desperate times" (1.5). As well, it does attempt to "define," as Teresa de Lauretis puts it, "the terms of another perspective" (*Technologies*, 25)—mainly Gertrude's and the Playwright's—on the women's stories. It does attempt to focus on the stories of Gertrude and Ophelia, and not on those of Hamlet and the play's other male characters.

The women's stories, however, remain situated in relation to the men's. *Gertrude & Ophelia* is, to borrow Woolf's phrasing, about "women who are the

wives, mothers, daughters, friends, or lovers of men" (82). Gertrude is Hamlet's mother. She cannot imagine what she will be "when [she] stop[s] being his mother ... The girl who was not his mother ... is nothing." Perhaps, she will "be nothing again" (2.8). As for Ophelia, the girl who was not Hamlet's girlfriend was "nothing": "The King, the Queen, the court, [her] father ... [her] brother" only noticed her "because the Prince saw her." Further, when Hamlet is banished, Ophelia becomes "nothing again" until he returns: "[t]hen there will be an Ophelia again" (2.6). In *Gertrude & Ophelia*, the "women come into play only in relation to the male protagonist" (Woolf, 83).

Based on the evidence of *Gertrude & Ophelia*, then, the reply to Clarke's own question—"Well, can a play [such as *Hamlet*] be centred around the lives of women instead of men?" (Gabereau)—is "no." Although neither Hamlet nor Claudius appears on Clarke's stage, *Gertrude & Ophelia* is still the story of "How She [Gertrude] Got Married [and] How She [Ophelia] Did Not Get Married (always tragic)..." (Russ, 9). Further, as is made evident in a discussion between the Actor who plays Horatio and Clarke's Playwright, the women's "obsession" with Hamlet is "present on the stage"; Hamlet "permeates [Clarke's] play" (2.8).

Nonetheless, as Clarke's Playwright replies to the Actor, "it is *their* obsession ... present on the stage, not [Hamlet's]." Further, *Gertrude & Ophelia* does function to permanently change the way we view Shakespeare's tragedy. Once you have experienced Clarke's re-vision, it is not possible to return to

Hamlet and read it "in the same 'naive' way" (Kuester, 18) you read before you knew the re-vision. For a re-vision such as *Gertrude & Ophelia* acts, as Daphne Marlatt says of fiction theory, as a "corrective lens" to help

us see *through* the fiction we've been conditioned to take for the real, fictions which have not only constructed woman's "place" in patriarchal society but have constructed the very "nature" of woman ... fiction *theory* deconstructs these fictions while *fiction theory* ... offers a new angle on the "real," one that looks from inside out rather than outside in. (9)

More importantly, such re-vision, by helping us "see *through*" this fiction, not only changes the way we understand canonical literature, it makes, as Fetterley argues, "the system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion but even to change" (xx). No wonder Clarke refers to the project of feminist dramatic re-vision she is engaged in as "writing revisionist culture."²⁸

Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter appears in *Essays in Theatre* 16.1 (November 1997): 15-32.

2. The editors of *The Woman's Part* also note that "Gertrude in *Hamlet* is more opaque than the parallel characters in the sources, who are explicitly guilty of marriage to the husband's known murderer in *Historiae Danicae*, of adultery during marriage in *Histoires Tragiques*" (Lentz, 9).

3. Fetterley's comments are made about canonical American literature. However, since they are applicable, I would argue, to canonical literature and drama generally, I have decided to make use of them here.

4. *Gertrude and Ophelia* can perhaps be compared to Christa Wolf's *Cassandra*, which, as Hutcheon writes, "retells Homer's historical epic of men and their politics and war in terms of the untold story of women and everyday life" (*Politics* 374).

5. To fully comprehend the effect of a literature that is for the most part both by and about men, Woolf asks us to consider the following scenario: "Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers ... We might perhaps have most of Othello; and a good deal of Antony; but no Caesar, no Brutus, no Hamlet, no Lear, no Jaques—literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women" (83).

6. Clarke's re-vision sees Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as set in a period during which elite women held very little power. This view concurs with that of many feminist historians who focus on elite women of the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Kelly, for instance, concludes that the Renaissance "was no renaissance for women ... women as a group experienced a contraction of social and personal options ... Renaissance ideas on love and manners, more classical than medieval, and almost exclusively a male product expressed this new subordination of women to the interests of husbands and male-dominated kin groups and served to justify the removal of women from an 'unladylike' position of power and erotic independence" ("Did Women Have a Renaissance?" 19-20, 47).

The work of feminist historians has been invaluable for literary critics. For although the "values of a patriarchal society are embedded in [its] texts" (Case, 12), as Landy points out, "a critical examination of the mythology embedded

in the art of the past ... entails an understanding of the social structure which produced these works of art" (18).

7. As Hamana remarks, not all women were "totally powerless under the institutionalized system of male dominance in the Elizabethan age." Therefore, although Ophelia "is so positioned in the hierarchy of sex, gender, and class that she is doomed to dependence and subordination," Gertrude, because she is a queen, has some room in which to manoeuvre (24-25). Her situation is such, however, that one wrong move could cost Gertrude her little bit of power. And the precariousness of her own position means that self-preservation must take precedence over concern for Ophelia. The following lines spoken by Ophelia in Prologue I of Drew's re-vision of *Hamlet* capture Gertrude's situation: "And the Queen, whose despair at my drowning/ Spoke more of the terror hanging over/ Her own womanly condition than/ Compassion for my unrequited heart" (128).

8. According to Drew *The III-Act Hamlet*, "a feminist version" of *Hamlet*, also comments on the way that young men such as Hamlet are misused by "the powers of a hegemonous patriarchy." In Hamlet's defence, Ophelia comments in Prologue I on "the plight of the younger males who face the castration threat from the elderly" (122, 126): "Follow or have your/ Tender genitals sliced off..../ The figure of the father appears in full/ Armour. It's enough to convey the threat" (128). Rani's play goes on to indict Hamlet, as Clarke's does, for his abuse of the women he loved. In Prologue III, Ophelia tells us, that when Hamlet failed in his attempt "to defy the patriarchal father figures," he brutalized and bullied Ophelia and Gertrude. In short, she claims, Hamlet's "revenge drama turned out to/ Be a reform act exercised on the weaker sex" (132-33).

9. The comment that some readers of Gertrude take "their cue from Hamlet's fantasies of her" by the editors of *The Women's Part* is made in reference to the notion that productions of *Hamlet* "may stereotype or minimize women characters even more thoroughly than criticism does. ... Most contemporary films of *Hamlet*, for example, present a lascivious Gertrude," as such films interpret her through Hamlet's eyes (5). It seems to me that this is exactly what the recent "Mel Gibson" *Hamlet* does. Further, in addition to its stereotyping of Gertrude, this film minimizes Ophelia by cutting lines from her pivotal "O, woe is me" soliloquy.

In her Appendix to *Gertrude of Denmark*, Wyman also comments on the way that Gertrude is usually viewed from Hamlet's perspective: "the critics have generally denounced Gertrude's second marriage as sinful in its very nature. It is rather absurd to echo Hamlet so completely as to this" (238).

10. It is clear from Gertrude's remarks in Act 1, Scene 3 of Clarke's play that Polonius expresses few scruples, that Clarke reads Polonius as Rebecca West does, as

the Court Circular version of Pandarus. The girl [Ophelia] ... is a card that can be played to take several sorts of tricks. She might be Hamlet's mistress; but she might be more honored for resistance. And if Hamlet was himself an enemy of the King, and an entanglement with him had ceased to be a means of winning favor, then she can give a spy's report on him to Claudius. (West 20-21)

And Clarke's Gertrude is essentially a female Polonius. Thus Gertrude understands Polonius and his waiting always to act until he "sees which way the wind blows" (1.3) so well, because Gertrude follows the same precept.

11. West calls this conception of Ophelia "a misreading," and suggests that "it would not have lasted so long in England had it not been for the popularity of the pre-Raphaelite picture by Sir John Millais which represents Ophelia as she floated down the glassy stream, the weeping brook; for his model was his friend Rossetti's bride, the correct, timid, sensitive, virginal, and tubercular Miss Siddal [who was] especially wan during the painting of the picture" (18).

12. Showalter writes that it is "since the 1970s [that] we have had a feminist discourse which [offers this] new perspective on Ophelia's madness," reading her madness "as protest and rebellion," viewing her as "the hysteric who refuses to speak the language of the patriarchal order" ("Representing" 91). Elsewhere, she suggests that with regards to Ophelia, "Instead of asking if rebellion was mental pathology, one must ask whether mental pathology was suppressed rebellion" (*The Female Malady* 147).

13. I quote here only a few of the representations of Ophelia that Showalter details in "Representing Ophelia."

Showalter writes that representations of Ophelia as opposed as the "decorous and pious Ophelia of the Augustan age and the postmodern schizophrenic heroine ... can be derived from the same figure; they are ... both contradictory and complementary images of female sexuality in which madness seems to act as the 'switching point, the concept which allows the co-existence of both sides of the representation'" (92; Carl Friedman, the Wesleyan Center for the Humanities, April 1984, cited).

14. Desmet does not suggest that Ophelia is rhetorical woman in the same sense that Hamlet is rhetorical man: "Hamlet is constructed through language and Ophelia excluded by it" (13). But she does claim that both Hamlet and Ophelia "are users of language, not just effects of language" (13). Further, she

suggests that if we regard Ophelia "as a speaking person" this "encourages scrutiny of her own motives in this scene ... We read Ophelia reading Hamlet" (13-14).

15. In Clarke's play (as in Shakespeare's) Ophelia, as Kehler comments, "is doomed by codes of obedience and misogyny" (4). In Drew's *The III-Act Hamlet*, however, Ophelia gains awareness through hindsight and is empowered, as Drew's comments about her play make clear: "The empowerment of Ophelia became the *raison d'être* for the writing and staging of *The III-Act Hamlet* ... newly acquired speech and consciousness [enable Ophelia] to talk about herself, her condition, her oppression, her loss and her death" (124-25).

16. It is interesting that when Ophelia does start to speak for herself in her agitated state after her father's death and Hamlet's exile, her words are directed to Gertrude and for the most part against Gertrude: "I hate her. She walks through the great halls, her lovely gowns going ... swish swish swish ... She never sees me. Never speaks to me. Only to the King, the Prince..." (2.6).

17. In interview, Clarke says that she realizes that her portrayal of Ophelia is "a kind of silencing." She also comments that my "discomfort here is shared by [her] graduate students who saw the play." It was suggested by one of these students that Clarke does not "give younger women a chance," does not "give relationships between women a chance." To this charge, Clarke replied "that from [her] point of view, patriarchy doesn't give younger women a chance, patriarchy doesn't give relationships between women a chance" (Burnett).

18. Neely also views Ophelia as enacting a ritual of mourning ("Documents," 82). For detailed commentary on Ophelia's mad songs see Seng, 131-62.

19. For more detailed discussion of lament's relation to tragedy, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. For commentary on the ways that this power in the hands of women poses a threat to the order of the polis in "at least three ways" see Holst-Warhaft's "Introduction."

20. According to Holst-Warhaft, lament and madness have often been associated: "The self-mutilation which is a common feature of mourning in numerous cultures, the obvious connection with possession in the mourner's dialogue with the dead, and the inversion of common male/female roles may all contribute to the perception of lamenting women as both mad and dangerous. ... Death provides women with the licence to express themselves that is denied them in normal life, but lest they consolidate their temporary power ... it may be seen in retrospect, as aberration, even as madness" (28).

21. Neely here cites Robert Weimann's "Bifold Authority in Shakespeare's Theatre" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 [1988]: 401-17, 417).

22. I do not mean to suggest that Clarke ignores the mad scene completely. I do think that she captures with her "fourth Ophelia" some of the potentially subversive power of Ophelia's madness, and that this Ophelia has, as Clarke says, "the most telling lines in the play, is the most critical of the patriarchy" (Burnett). I just do not think that Clarke's revision fully exploits the subversive potential of Ophelia's mad songs or pays enough attention to Ophelia's "O, woe is me" speech.

23. Fox-Good discusses in her intriguing essay how the "identification of music with the female has been a persistent, and threatening, one through the centuries." She also suggests that Ophelia's songs are expressions "of a specifically female power ... for through music—which means so much partly because it appears to mean either nothing or an inexpressible everything—Ophelia builds a secret, subversive power beneath a public, conventional appearance of passivity and vulnerability" (232-33).

24. The quotation here is from Neely's "Documents in Madness" (98, n. 15), where she cites Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 360, for the notion of "dark double."

25. Clarke's text (like West's) displays what Landy refers to as "one dimension ... of a feminist critique": "an understanding of the social structure which produced ... works of art" such as Shakespeare's, "an understanding of kinship, the role of property and power, the role of ritual, particularly the role of marriage as a central ritual" (18).

26. The following is the excerpt from the interview of Clarke by Gabereau on CBC radio in which Clarke refers to "writing revisionist culture":

Vicky Gabereau: I would think that re-writing history, so to speak, even if it's fictional history, Shakespeare, runs a risk of getting in trouble—with the critics, for instance. And so were you nervous about that at all?

Margaret Clarke: I was. Of course I'm worried about that sort of thing because you're tampering with people's cultural ideals in a sense and *Hamlet* is at the top of the heap. And so sometimes I feel pretty nervy even taking it on, but that's the risk you have to take when you're writing revisionist culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Comedy's Argument Against Tragedy: Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*

In this brilliant and ingenious play [Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*], the contest between the genders must share the spotlight with the contest between the genres, comedy and tragedy. Along with the parody of other serious forms of discourse within the city (judicial, ritual, political, poetic), *paratragodia*, or the parody of tragedy, is a consistent feature of Aristophanic comedy.

—Froma I. Zeitlin, "Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*," 133

Of all of Shakespeare's tragedies, "Othello" and "Romeo and Juliet" produce the most ambivalent and least Aristotelean responses. In neither play do the supposedly fate-ordained deaths of the flawed heroes and heroines seem quite inevitable. Indeed, it is only because the deaths do occur that they can be called inevitable in hindsight, thus allowing the plays to squeak by under the designation, "tragedy."

—Constance Ledbelly, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, 15

[Parody] is like opening up a trunk that used to be full of instruments of torture and now everything has turned into toys. When you reclaim and transform ideas and methods that have been used against you as a woman, you become empowered. Subversion of this kind is healthy.

—Ann-Marie MacDonald, Rita Much Interview, *Fair Play*, 142

If Margaret Clarke's *Gertrude & Ophelia* is the *untold* story of the women of *Hamlet*, then Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* is the *retold* story of three of Shakespeare's foremost tragic women. Put differently, if Clarke's play remains in Shakespeare's tragic world and gives us, in Rita Much's phrasing, the "women behind the myth," MacDonald's play re-locates to a new world and offers us the "goddess within every woman" (xiv).

For while Clarke in *Gertrude & Ophelia* stays in the margins of Shakespeare, MacDonald in *Goodnight Desdemona* moves without compunction to centre page to meddle with Shakespeare's words, his characters, his conventions, and his genres. And in the course of her meddling, her re-working of Shakespeare, MacDonald manages to stage the triumph of her Ophelia character and the enlightenment of her Desdemona and Juliet. She also manages to subvert "two of Shakespeare's foremost tragedies" (23) and to challenge tragedy and the patriarchal values with which this genre is associated.¹

Constance Ledbelly, the protagonist of *Goodnight Desdemona*, is, at least initially, an Ophelia-like figure.² If Ophelia has been the helpless pawn of Polonius and Claudius, Constance has been a lackey to Claude Night, or, in Desdemona's words, "in thrall;/ ten years an inky slave in paper chains!" (40). Whereas Ophelia has "suck'd the honey of [Hamlet's] [music] vows" (III.i.156), Constance has hung on Night's every word. And when their men forsake them (both to go to England), each woman's world collapses: Ophelia becomes a lady "most deject and wretched" (III.i.155), and Constance, in a state of despair, delivers her own (comic) version of Ophelia's "O, woe is me/ T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" (III.i.160-61) soliloquy, during which she decides to resign her post, give up her doctoral research (symbolized by tossing into the wastebasket her plumed pen and the ancient Gustav manuscript that "could be the Missing link in Shakespeare" [22]), and become a bag lady (26-27).³

Constance's despair comes with the realization that both her love for Professor Claude Night and her unfinished thesis are "lost causes." After ten years of loving Night, ten years of playing his minion and writing brilliant articles for him to publish under his own name, Constance learns that he intends to marry Ramona, a young Rhodes scholar, and follow her to England, taking the "lecturing post" at Oxford for which Constance had assumed he would recommend her. After a decade of dedicated work on her dissertation, "*Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*: The Seeds of Corruption and Comedy," which postulates that the indecipherable Gustav manuscript contains evidence that these two tragedies were originally "comedies that Shakespeare plundered and made over into ersatz tragedies!" she is in danger of "turning into a laughing stock," because "[n]o one takes" the Gustav manuscript "seriously anymore" (21-25).

With this dismissal of Constance's thesis, MacDonald raises the important issue of the way women's academic work has too often been slighted by the male-dominated academy. "Constance's scholarship is dismissed as the work of a crackpot," as Wilson points out, "yet the work which she has written, but which is attributed to Claude Night, brings him great acclaim" (7).

And with Constance's conjecture in her thesis that Shakespeare's tragedies are poor imitations of earlier comedies, MacDonald raises the important critical issue of some "feminists' tendency to view tragedy as failed comedy" (Woodbridge, 285).⁴ In this connection, Carol Thomas Neely claims that *Othello* "shows pervasive and profound resemblances" to "Shakespearean

comedy," and that its ending is "cankered comedy," its "comic resolution ... aborted" (*Broken Nuptials*, 109, 135). And Madelon Gohlke comments that *Romeo and Juliet* fails "to achieve the generic status of comedy" ("I Wooed Thee," 152), and "that it is possible ... to interpret the tragedies, in one sense, as comedies gone wrong" ("All That is Spoke," 175).

Further, there is some justification in asking, as Constance does, "Is this tragedy?!" Or is it comedy gone awry ... ?" (20). For Shakespeare does use what Susan Snyder refers to as a "comedy-into-tragedy formula" in *Romeo and Juliet*, as Constance notes:

Shakespeare sets the stage for comedy with the invocation of those familiar comic themes, love-at-first-sight, and the fickleness of youth. But no sooner has our appetite for comedy been whetted, when Tybalt slays Mercutio, and poor Romeo proceeds to leave a trail of bodies in his wake." (19)

And *Othello*'s first two acts do offer a "short comic movement ... encompassing the successful love of Othello and Desdemona and their safe arrival in Cyprus" (Snyder, 81). Moreover, there is a sense in which these two tragedies are, as Brendan Gill says of *Romeo and Juliet*, "an earthbound recounting of a series of preposterous misadventures" (83). For in *Othello*, as Neely remarks, "Iago's plot, like those of the comedies, rests on coincidence and absurdity" (*Broken Nuptials*, 110), and in *Romeo and Juliet*, as Constance puts it, the

"inevitability" is never quite convincing. Fate seems too generous in both plays ... the tragic characters, particularly Romeo and Othello, have abundant opportunity to save themselves. (15)

Finally, as Constance notes, Shakespeare does exploit his own comic conventions in these tragedies: "a host of comic devices is pressed [by Shakespeare] into the blood-soaked service of tragic ends" (20).⁵

There are critics, however, who are dissatisfied with the notion of Shakespearean tragedy as "failed comedy." Richard Levin is one such critic. Levin thinks that those who would "reduce tragedies to comedies manqués," as Neely and Gohlke do, "do not see Shakespeare deliberately setting out to write a tragedy, where the nature of the genre ... might determine the nature of the gender relations" (133). He sums up his interpretation of the views of such feminist critics as follows:

Since, according to these critics, Shakespeare is always grappling with the problem of gender, the comedies, which end in gender harmony, are often seen as his solution to the problem, the goal he is seeking, and therefore the tragedies come to represent a failure to solve this problem and achieve this goal. Moreover, the difference between the two genres is explained by the role of the women ... when they are able to cure or at least restrain the men's masculinity, the result is a comic resolution, and when the men will not let them do this, the result is tragedy, which makes it, again, a kind of failure. (133)

Therefore, although Levin acknowledges that a play's genre is responsible for the nature of its gender relations, he disagrees with the feminist focus on "the problem of gender" and discounts any view that privileges comedy and sees tragedy as a "kind of failure." As well, he firmly takes exception to the feminist claim that Shakespeare's tragedies "are criticizing the gender assumptions of their worlds" (134).

MacDonald, I would argue, would take exception to most of what Levin has to say. She would, though, agree with his contention that "the nature of the genre ... might determine the nature of the gender relations." She would not read *Othello*, for example, as a *Much Ado About Nothing* gone wrong, a case of a play in which Shakespeare failed to solve the problem of gender. Rather, based on the evidence of her play, she would see *Othello* and *Much Ado* as, to use William E. Gruber's words, "polarized imitations of the same fundamental reality" (261), *because* the first is a tragedy and the second is a comedy.

Constance, MacDonald suggests, is not to be taken seriously with her thesis that *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* are Shakespeare's re-workings of two comedies "by an unknown author" (21). One clue here is MacDonald's portrayal of Constance as an absent-minded academic who has spent ten years trying to "crack ... [the] obscure alchemical hieroglyphs" of the Gustav manuscript because she has "this indefensible thesis that ... it's source material Shakespeare wanted to suppress yet preserve" (23). In short, MacDonald is poking fun at a certain type of single-minded critic, the sort, perhaps, who, as MacDonald phrases it, looks for "generalized oversimplified solutions" (Rudakoff, 135), who believes that Shakespeare's tragedies can be reduced to "comedies gone wrong."⁶

More significantly, with *Goodnight Desdemona* MacDonald suggests that there is an alternative way to view the relationship between tragedy and comedy. Constance does *not* discover, after all, that Shakespeare "plundered"

two earlier comedies by an unknown author to produce *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, in other words that "comedy gives way to tragedy" (Neely, *Broken Nuptials*, 129). Rather, she discovers that, as "the Author," she has the power to make tragedy give way to comedy (86). What Constance discovers is that Shakespeare's tragedies are comedies only insofar as she revises them, only insofar as she enters the worlds of Shakespeare's plays and "subverts the tragedy and turns it to comedy" (Rogers).

And "subverts the tragedy" is the operative phrase here. For, in the tradition of Aristophanes, who subverts two of Euripides' tragedies to parody tragedy in *Thesmophoriazousae*, MacDonald subverts two of Shakespeare's tragedies to parody tragedy, *not* Shakespeare, in *Goodnight Desdemona*.⁷ She refashions another of Shakespeare's genres—comedy—and uses it both to counter and to offer serious criticism of tragedy. And, in the process of so doing, MacDonald, like Aristophanes before her, demonstrates that an important way comedy relates to tragedy is as "an argument against tragedy" (Gruber, 261).⁸

René Girard comments with respect to *Hamlet* that just because Shakespeare is "playing according to the rules of the game at one level" does not mean that he is not "undermin[ing] those same rules at another." In other words, in *Hamlet* (and, I would suggest, in his other tragedies), Shakespeare might well at one level be adhering to the conventions of the genre of tragedy, while, at another, "still providing the crowd with the spectacle they demand [he

is] simultaneously writing between the lines, for all those who can read, a devastating critique of that same spectacle" ("Vengeance," 287).⁹

The point is that Girard thinks that Shakespeare might undermine what he appears to revere, might offer his own argument against tragedy, albeit a subtle one. And I suspect that MacDonald agrees with him. For MacDonald in *Goodnight Desdemona* foregrounds the places in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* where Shakespeare might well be "writing between the lines" to destabilize the tragic genre.¹⁰

Mark Fortier points out that "MacDonald's reappropriation of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* is effected through Shakespearean means: Shakespearean language, Shakespearean comic devices" (50).¹¹ It is also effected through Shakespearean characters: MacDonald "argues that her characterizations of Desdemona and Juliet are extrapolations of possibilities in Shakespeare's texts: Desdemona's fascination with Othello's accounts of his exploits; Juliet's ability to throw herself into love" (Fortier, 50–51). Finally, MacDonald's critique of tragedy relies on other sorts of "possibilities" in these texts, such as Shakespeare's equation of romantic love and death in *Romeo and Juliet* and his equation of a certain code of male honour and destruction in *Othello*.

"Academe" may believe that the "gentle Desdemona" (I.ii.25) is "a doomed and helpless victim," but Constance finds her to be "magnificent!" (41, 42). A veritable warrior queen, Desdemona "sail[s] across a war zone just to live in [an] armed camp" (32), and her notion of a pleasant diversion is to stroll

"to the sea wall and enjoy the fray" (36). Shakespeare's pale Desdemona is, by MacDonald's interpretation, an Amazon with "a violent streak" (32), who advises Constance to "acquire a taste for blood" (37), and who, had she *"the motive and the cue for passion"* that Constance has, "would drown all Queen's with blood,/ and cleave Claude Night's two typing fingers from/ his guilty hands" (49).

As for Juliet, she is immature, graced with the "fickleness of youth" (19), and more interested in sex than in love. She and Romeo bicker over their pet turtle, call each other names, such as "sniv'ling girl" and "stripling boy" (58), and threaten regularly to run to their respective fathers with tales about each other. Juliet, who is, as Fortier comments, "in a lubricious Verona where no one 'sails straight,' ... the most enthusiastic and polymorphously perverse of the bunch" (48), "bed[s] the first doublet to o'erperch [her] orchard walls" (66), and, after only one "hot swift night" (56) of married love, loses interest in Romeo, desiring "fresh gallants" (59). A firm believer in love-at-first-sight, she becomes enamoured with Constantine/Constance at their first encounter and pursues him/her with abandon.

How is it that MacDonald can claim that these two women are "extrapolations of possibilities in Shakespeare's texts"? What possible connection can there be between MacDonald's "tragic lioness" (Fortier, 48) and the "delicate creature" (II.iii.20) of Shakespeare's play? What connection can

there be between MacDonald's wanton lover and Shakespeare's chaste Juliet who pledges to "follow [Romeo] throughout the world" (II.ii.48)?

With respect to Desdemona, MacDonald extrapolates from *Othello* to emphasize a side of Desdemona that has often been disregarded. For as Marta Dvorak points out,

Directors, actors, and spectators ... have tended to ignore the ambivalence in the role of Desdemona, who essentially is to Othello what Portia is to Brutus. What we actually find in Shakespeare's text is a woman of strength who exercises her power and will. ... A military lexicon describing Desdemona does run like a thread throughout [Shakespeare's] text. So we can see that MacDonald's representation of Desdemona as Amazon does not so much serve to undermine a classic text as to challenge our preconceptions of it. (131)

In *Othello*, Desdemona is both a "gentle mistress" (I.iii.178) and an unconventional woman who "exercises her power and will": she is "half the wooer" (I.iii.176) in her courtship; she defies her father (and society) by marrying a Moor; and she makes up her own mind to go to Cyprus. As Neely remarks, "Othello is awed by her power to move man and beast—'She might lie by an emperor's side, and command him tasks. ... O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear' [IV.i.180-81]" (*Broken Nuptials*, 126). And, as Marianne Novy's discussion makes clear, in "pleading for Cassio with Othello ... us[ing] images suggesting that she sees herself in roles predominantly held by men in Renaissance society," Desdemona shows that she has the strength to stand up for her convictions (*Love's Argument*, 139).

With Juliet too, MacDonald extrapolates from material that can be found in Shakespeare's text. Juliet does seem somewhat petulant and childish when

we meet her. In Friar Lawrence's cell, after Romeo, upset about the loss of Juliet, throws himself on the floor in tears, refusing peevishly to get up, the Nurse makes it clear that Juliet too is wont to exhibit such behaviour: "O, he is even in my mistress' case,/ Just in her case. ... Even so lies she,/ Blubb'ring and weeping" (III.iii.84-87). And other critics have commented on this aspect of the play. Coppélia Kahn, for instance, writes that "*Romeo and Juliet* is about a pair of adolescents trying to grow up" ("Coming of Age," 171). Similarly, Nicholas Brooke remarks that it is "a very highly organized play about (among other things) immaturity" (88).

Shakespeare's Juliet is at the same time, however, an unconventional and strong-willed woman. Like Desdemona, she defies her family with her choice of a husband and takes an active role in love: she offers Romeo "love's faithful vow" (II.ii.127) before he offers her his vow; discourages him from stereotyped love vows with comments such as, "You kiss by th' book" (I.v.110); urges him to set a time and a place for their wedding; and, "unknowingly inverts tradition," as Jill Levenson points out, by speaking the wedding epithalamium (30). Further, although she does not share the exuberant predilection for physical love of MacDonald's Juliet, Shakespeare's Juliet does exhibit a healthy respect for love's earthy side. For instance, as Evelyn Gajowski notes, "where the groom usually voices desire, she joyously proclaims hers: 'I have bought the mansion of a love,/ But not possess'd it, and though I am sold,/ Not yet enjoy'd' [3.2.26-28]" (39).

It is clear that MacDonald's claim that her women are extrapolations of possibilities in Shakespeare's plays can be defended. It is also apparent that her extrapolations work to underscore those aspects of Desdemona's and Juliet's characters which mirror—or are mirrored by—the characters of Othello and Romeo. In other words, MacDonald's Desdemona, with Othello, "chooses war over peace, the battlefield over the hearth, action over stasis, the public over the private" (Dvorak, 131). And her Juliet is graced with Romeo's fickleness in love, his idealism, and his immaturity.

What is not as clear is why MacDonald chooses to present "Desdemona as an Othello in skirts" (Dvorak, 131), and Juliet in the "boyish hose" (68) of Romeo. MacDonald does not characterize her women as mirror images of their men because she reads Shakespeare's plays in an essentialist manner as "a dialogue" between a "Self" which in Shakespearean tragedy is masculine and a "feminine Other," an exchange in which the "possibilities for the masculine Self are referenced point for point ... with what is outside that Self," with an Other, as does Linda Bamber (4-9). Moreover, her purpose does not seem to be to invert conventional stereotypes, to represent "female characters as active, powerful, rational, and male characters as passive, weak, unhinged" (Neely, "Feminist Modes," 5).

Rather, MacDonald portrays her women as just like their men because she wants to subvert fixed gender distinctions altogether. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, as Dvorak astutely notes, "Victor and Victim are interchangeable

... Woman is neither better nor worse than man; she is potentially the same" (132).

In short, the problem with Shakespeare's plays, according to MacDonald, is not that their women are weak and passive, their men strong and active. On the contrary, MacDonald finds that Shakespeare's Desdemona and Juliet not only are matches for their men, but are sisters of the attractive, strong, unconventional women of Shakespeare's comedies, are women from whom MacDonald is able to extrapolate to create two heroines who "are always active, always pushing the piece forward, threatening, seducing, giving up, rallying, stabbing, kissing, embracing, thinking" (9).¹² The problem is that Desdemona and Juliet have been, as Constance remarks about Desdemona, "really watered ... down" (49) by Shakespeare to suit a genre that cannot, as Ann Wilson remarks, "accomodate strong, independent women as its function is to reinforce the privilege of men" (2, 11). The problem with these two plays is one of genre not gender.

In an interview with Rita Much, MacDonald, comparing the scope of tragedy to that of comedy, remarks that she "lost interest in tragedy, maybe because comedy seemed larger somehow. Comedy can contain tragedy but tragedy doesn't contain comedy" (Rudakoff, 135). And in *Goodnight Desdemona* Constance, who has had it with "all the tragic tunnel vision" (85) in the world of Shakespeare's plays, lectures the "two heroines ... [who] keep

trying to be tragedies" (Rogers) on the subject of tragedy's inability to do justice to life:

life is a hell of a lot more complicated than you think! Life—real life—is a big mess. Thank goodness. And every answer spawns another question; and every question blossoms with a hundred different answers; and if you're lucky you'll always feel somewhat confused. Life is—I ... Life is ...
 a harmony of polar opposites,
 with gorgeous mixed-up places in between,
 where inspiration steams up from a rich
 Sargasso stew that's odd and flawed and full
 of gems and worn-out boots and sunken ships. (85)

What *Desdemona* and *Juliet* learn in MacDonald's play ultimately is that comedy's vision can better accommodate life. In Gajowski's words, the "multiple possibilities of comedy" come closer to encompassing life than do the "limited options of tragedy" (20).

Tragedy's limited options, therefore, are what MacDonald parodies in *Goodnight Desdemona*. For what MacDonald does not like about tragedy in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* is the same thing she dislikes "in a lot of writing by men": its "undue solemnity ... [its] addiction to the dark, hopeless side of things ... [its] obsession with suffering and death" (Rudakoff, 134–35).

Shakespeare's love tragedies are obsessed with death. The world of *Othello* is one where the men are, as Emilia says of Othello, "murd'rous coxcomb[s]" (V.ii.233): three of them attempt murder. It is a world in which death does seem to be the only answer, where "to live is torment," and "death ... our physician" offers only "a prescription to die" (I.iii.308-10). As for *Romeo and Juliet*, not only are we told in the Prologue that the love of Romeo and

Juliet is "death-mark'd," but the word "death" itself appears more often in this play than in any other work of Shakespeare's (Farrell, 131).

And in *Goodnight Desdemona*, MacDonald foregrounds this obsession. Desdemona and Juliet "are hellbent on dying" (Rogers)—or killing. Thus Desdemona tells Constance to "[l]earn to kill" (37), and to "slay Professor Night" (41). Then, when Iago convinces Desdemona that Constance "know'st" Othello too well, Desdemona threatens to "spit her head upon a pike" (45), "stone her in the square" (47), and, later, borrowing Othello's lines from Shakespeare's play, to "chop her into messes" (51). Juliet, for her part, threatens to "die of tedium" (59) after one night of married life, advises Constance to deal with her unrequited love for Claude Night by "[i]mpal[ing] [her] cleav'ed heart on a sword" (71), and, after having been caught in a lie by Constance, hurries to "die upon [her] dagger" (76) in order to make amends. Eventually, near the play's end, just before Constance convinces them to forswear victimhood, Desdemona's compulsion to kill and Juliet's to die get completely out of hand, with Desdemona beseeching Constance to "come and kill," and Juliet imploring her to "stay and die" (84).

Like MacDonald, Girard notes that *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* are permeated with anxiety about death and destruction. He argues that Shakespeare shows in these two tragedies that "eros and the destructive urge are ... one," that as "desire becomes increasingly obsessed with the obstacles that it keeps generating, it moves inexorably toward self-and-other annihilation,

just as erotic courtship moves toward its sexual fulfilment" ("Desire and Death," 293, 294). With respect to *Othello*, he comments that

Desdemona is so fascinated by Othello's dark and violent world that she takes no measure to save her own life when she detects his murderous intent. On the contrary, she prepares for death as she would for a night of love. ... She is Othello's "fair warrior" (II.i.182), and the tragic outcome fulfills her most secret expectation. ("Desire and Death," 293)

As for *Romeo and Juliet*, Girard claims that the "death of these two young people is really a consequence ... of their own absurd precipitation ... the voluntary rush toward destruction and death. ... Like *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* is a play of the darkest desire, a desire no longer tempted by anything but its own apocalyptic self-destruction" ("Desire and Death," 295).

With respect to *Othello*, MacDonald views Desdemona as "fascinated by Othello's dark and violent world." According to Constance, Desdemona possesses such a "taste for blood" (37) that she eloped with Othello and "sailed across a war zone just to live/ in this armed camp" (32).

Once in Cyprus, however, MacDonald's Desdemona is not satisfied by what Girard terms "spectacles of violence" ("Desire and Death," 293). Despite her delight with the battle raging around her, this Desdemona desires to be more than a spectator. Therefore, although still on her honeymoon, she is quite ready to forsake Othello at a moment's notice for the Amazons, "these ranks of spiked and fighting shes" (35) who "brook no men" and are "[n]othing if not war-like" (34, 35). Although she enjoys the "horror stories" of her husband (32),

Desdemona desires to be Othello's "*fair warrior*" (32) in more than name, yearns to join her "sisters slain on honour's gory field" (35).

Further, the reason Desdemona would leave her "valiant general and most bloody lord" (17) to "fly to [the] beleaguered side" (35) of her Amazon sisters, if given the chance, is that honour—not love for Othello—is Desdemona's all-consuming passion. As she tells Constance, love of honour is what motivated her to marry Othello: since "heaven had not made [her] such a man;/ ... next in honour [was] to be his wife. And I love honour more than life!" (32). And she partakes of Othello's honour vicariously:

Othello's honour is my own.
If you do find me foul in this,
then let thy sentence fall upon my life;
as I am brave Othello's faithful wife. (34)

Moreover, in *Goodnight Desdemona*, what Girard refers to as the "fusion of the libido and violent death" ("Desire and Death," 293) is apparent: to protect her reputation, a woman "must study to be bloody" (37); since Desdemona promised to help Constance find the "fool's cap," she is "honour-bound ... upon [her] life" (45) to do so; if anyone dares to "impugn [Desdemona's] honour" then they must "dare to die" (83). Desdemona truly is her husband's "better self!" (32).

With respect to *Romeo and Juliet*, MacDonald reads Romeo and Juliet as more in love with a certain sort of perilous romantic love than with each other. For instance, once Verona has accepted their union, once their love is no longer dangerous love, it loses its beauty for both Romeo and Juliet: "[both

aside] Th' affections of our love's first-sighted blood,/ have in the cauldron of one hot swift night,/ all cooled to creeping jelly in the pot" (57). Both lovers then fall madly in love with Constance/Constantine, a scenario which, as Dvorak comments, is "an extension of [Romeo's] fickleness in the original text, calling attention to the fact that as Juliet as object of affection supplanted Rosaline, it is only poetic justice that she should be supplanted in turn" (132). As The Dramaturg in Bertolt Brecht's *The Messingkauf Dialogues* says to The Actor about Romeo, "You needn't laugh. In Shakespeare he's already in love before he's seen his Juliet at all. After that he's more in love" (61).

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, moreover, MacDonald explicitly shows desire's increasing preoccupation with "the obstacles that it keeps generating." Where Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* hints that for Romeo the attraction is Juliet's family, because her family is his family's enemy (when Rosaline turns him down, Romeo returns to the Capulet fold in search of another woman), MacDonald in her play makes it plain that "forbidden love" (77) is the attraction.

Thus Juliet, when told of Constance's role in rendering her marriage a socially sanctified one, is not overjoyed: "Oh. Thanks. [aside] The Greek hath taught not just the world to see,/ but also me. Would I were blind again" (64). Afterwards, when she falls in love with "Constantine, the "Hellenic deviant" (63), Juliet makes it obvious that part of the attraction is the challenge of gaining the attention of a man who "savours a two-legg'ed pose" (66): "Thou pretty boy, I will ungreek thee yet" (66). And, when she discovers that Constantine is really

Constance, Juliet's desire increases dramatically: "[u]nsanctified desire, more tragic far/ than any star-crossed love 'twixt boy and girl" (77).

Does Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* suggest that a certain kind of love is in some sense flawed, is by its nature "death-mark'd"? Maynard Mack phrases the question this way: "Does [*Romeo and Juliet*] urge us to conclude that every high romantic passion ... is necessarily allied with death, even perhaps (however unconsciously), seeks death? (81) And, based on the evidence of her text, MacDonald's response to this question is a resounding yes. For according to Juliet, the "readiness to die doth crown true love": when "love goes to its grave before we do,/ then find another love for whom to die,/ and swear to end life first when next we love" (66, 65). Or, as Constance responds to Juliet's comments: "so love is tragic, or it isn't love ... tears, not smiles, its truest measure" (65-66).

MacDonald, in other words, like Girard, interprets *Romeo and Juliet*'s behaviour as a "voluntary rush toward destruction and death," as a reflection of their conviction that the "readiness to die" is love's "richest living ornament" (66). After all, as Juliet tells Constance,

No one may remain forever young.
We change our swaddling clothes for funeral shrouds,
and in between is one brief shining space,
where love may strike by chance, but only death is sure. (65)

The suggestion here is that the quintessence of ideal love is to be fleeting and to "strike by chance." Perhaps, then, to quote Mack, romantic love of the sort *Romeo and Juliet* desire is "a perfection that such lives cannot long sustain?

and therefore tending irresistibly to a 'love-death' because unable or unwilling to absorb the losses imposed by a 'love-life'" (81). Or, to quote Constance, who puts it much more simply, Juliet is "more in love with death [than with Constance], 'cause death is easier to love" (85).

In summary, MacDonald's play is a critique in comedy on the limits of the tragic genre—its "tragic tunnel vision." As such it challenges the "unregimented idealism" (Andrews, 415) of a genre in which certain notions of honour and reputation or romantic love are privileged. As well, it undermines the "love-death embrace" (Brooke, 106) of the tragic world, a world which, as Kenneth Burke expresses it, "makes for a state of resignation, or acceptance" (320).

In Shakespeare's tragic texts, as Constance points out, Desdemona and Juliet are victims "fated to remain tragedies looking for a place to happen" (21). In *Goodnight Desdemona*, however, once they accept that "comedy's got the edge over tragedy" (Rogers), and swear "To live by questions, not by their solution/ To trade [their] certainties, for [Constance's] confusion" (the "confusion" of the "Wise Fool" who turns "tragedy to comedy" [85, 86]), they become masters of their own fates.

In MacDonald's play, which relegates Shakespeare's plays to the sidelines, using them as "the backdrop, the running joke ... the source" of her "Jungian fairy tale" (Rudakoff, 141), and which situates women at its centre and makes feasible the sorts of alliances between women not possible in tragedy, it is possible for an Ophelia to triumph. Constance is offered "a double-edged re-

birthday" (14), the chance, as Fortier suggests, to re-write not only Shakespeare's texts, but herself (48).¹³ And so, "a mousy woman academic who ghostwrites essays for a male professor with whom she is in love," as MacDonald explains, "comes into her own and claims her own power and her own talent, and discovers that she has the violence of Desdemona and the passion of Juliet all within herself" (Rogers).

Notes

1. As Wilson shows, *Goodnight Desdemona* also possesses a postcolonial subtext: "Macdonald's representation of Claude Night as a tweedy Brit is not innocently comic, but serves as a reminder of Canada's history as a colony which Great Britain dominated culturally and exploited economically. The relationship between a Canadian woman and a British man sets into play a complex set of colonial relations which is further complicated by Constance's academic focus on the tragedies of Shakespeare, whose work is represented as the apex of British cultural achievement and consequently is central to humanist studies of English literature" (3).

2. According to Fortier, Constance is a Hamlet figure: "her tombstone is to read, 'Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown'; she is given a long parody of Hamlet's 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!'; she is visited by a ghost who comes to 'whet [her] almost blunted purpose'" (50).

However, in *Hamlet*, Ophelia is Hamlet's muted other, is his "dark double" (Gilbert & Gubar, 360). She is the one whose mind truly is "o'erthrown." To connect Constance to just Hamlet in a play where Desdemona fills in for Othello in scenes with Iago and Juliet utters Romeo's "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? ..." (68), therefore, is to oversimplify matters somewhat. It makes more sense to assume that Hamlet's lines go to the Ophelia figure in MacDonald's play—Constance.

Moreover, Constance is identified during the Dumbshow that opens the play with Desdemona and Juliet. Three vignettes play simultaneously: Desdemona being smothered by Othello; Juliet stabbing herself with Romeo's rapier; and Constance throwing her life (figuratively speaking) into the wastebasket. Constance is, in short, strongly associated with Ophelia, albeit an Ophelia who resists her tragic fate and saves herself and others. (What MacDonald does not do in her play is name Ophelia. Perhaps this is MacDonald's way of commenting on that aspect of Ophelia so many critics have noted: her silence.)

3. It is during this soliloquy that Constance parrots Ophelia's line: "Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" (27). Whereas Ophelia used the line in reference to Hamlet, however, Constance uses it in her own eulogy. For, as Wilson points out, "Constance throwing away the symbols of her academic passion suggests that her abandonment of her quest for the source comedies of Shakespeare's tragedies is a form of death" (3).

4. Woodbridge's comment is made in reference to Levin's discussion (133). While both Levin and Woodbridge raise the issue of "tragedy as failed comedy" specifically in relation to feminist critics, other critics raise this issue more generally. With respect to *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Gill calls it "a nominal" instead of "an authentic tragedy" (363), Mack writes that it "offers ... many of the attractions of high comedy" (69), and, as Snyder notes, H.B. Charlton finds that the feud has "a comic aspect," and that the "play [is] flawed by this failure to plant the seeds of tragedy" (75).

5. Gill also comments on the matter of genre in this play: "*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy that must be played as if it were a comedy, or it won't succeed ... its tone is continually at odds with its content" (363).

6. Another clue here is that, whereas the issue in criticism has been the inclination of some feminist critics to argue that these tragedies are "comedies manqué," that is *comedies that might have been (but were not)*, Constance turns this upside down and argues that they are "ersatz tragedies," or *comedies that once were (but are not)*.

7. As Hutcheon points out, parody can involve criticism, "not necessarily of the parodied text [but] of codifiable forms" (*Parody*, 15-16).

In *Thesmophoriazousae*, Aristophanes situates Euripides as "the playwright-within-the-play," as Zeitlin comments, "to intervene as actor in the parodies of two plays which he has already composed" ("*Travesties*," 137). In *Goodnight Desdemona*, MacDonald situates Constance, "the 'Judith' Shakespeare that never was" (375), as Laurin Porter tags her, as "the playwright-within-the-play."

Aristophanes also uses comedy to parody tragedy in his *Frogs*, where he stages a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides to determine which of them is the better tragic poet. This contest, which is judged by Dionysus and staged as a debate between the two poets, involves a series of rounds, during which, as Sommerstein notes, "comedy takes great pleasure in debunking tragedy as a genre" (16).

8. Gruber is here presenting the ideas of Francisco Adrados (*Festival, Comedy and Tragedy*, tr. Christopher Holme [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975]). According to Gruber, Adrados claims that "the genres of tragedy and comedy matured together as polarized imitations of the same fundamental reality" [and that] "[t]he belief that the primary orientation of comedy is social is false; the primary orientation of the genre is aesthetic, and may be considered an argument against tragedy" (26).

9. Girard's comments here are made with reference to the notion of revenge in *Hamlet*. He writes, "To read *Hamlet* against revenge is anachronistic, some people say, because it goes against the conventions of the revenge genre. No doubt, but could not Shakespeare be playing according to the rules of the game at one level and undermine these same rules at another?" ("Vengeance," 287).

10. Critics have argued as well that Shakespeare argues against tragedy in some of his comedies. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (written either just before or just after *Romeo and Juliet*), for instance, the "mock-play of Pyramus and Thisbe was ... a self-parody of *Romeo and Juliet*" (Brooke, 80), "Pyramus and Thisbe die as the result of the same absurd precipitation as *Romeo and Juliet*. The second time around, [however,] Shakespeare openly derides a young man who hurries to commit suicide without even verifying that his beloved is really dead" (Girard, "Desire and Death" (295). *Romeo and Juliet* has also been compared to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* "with which it could almost be a twin birth, the comic and tragic variations on the same theme" (Brooke, 81). As for *Othello*, the story of "the true woman falsely accused in *Much Ado* anticipates [its] action" (Gajowski, 71). And in *Twelfth Night*, "Viola's reaction to Orsino's threat, her eagerness to die at the hands of a murderous lover, [is] a counterpart of Desdemona's willing acceptance of death" (Girard, "Death and Desire," 294).

11. Fortier details how MacDonald makes use of "Shakespearean means": "The parody in *Goodnight Desdemona* is manifold. Individual lines of Shakespeare recur in twisted versions, as in Juliet's call to suicide, 'past hope, past care, past help, past tense.' Lines, situations, and scenes are replayed with interchanged characters; so it is Desdemona who says to Constance, 'I do love thee! And when I love thee not, / chaos is come again.' Shakespeare's style is pastiched throughout, as in Juliet's account of her wandering libido: 'love's first keen edge grows dull with use and craves / another grinding.' There is much parody of Shakespeare's comic conventions of reversal, cross-dressing, and mistaken identity" (49).

12. Gajowski also sees a connection between Shakespeare's comic and tragic heroines: "In genre after genre, the human impulses of love and power are ... brought into conflict with each other ... [and] in Shakespeare's ... love tragedies ... the empowered female protagonists of the comedies interpenetrate the tragic genre and even destabilize it" (22).

As well, Gajowski reads Shakespeare's tragic women as strong and independent women. She writes that they are "profounder in feeling, more realistic, and more mature in love than are the male protagonists" (25), and that

"Desdemona's language, like Juliet's, is more direct and less rhetorical than her husband's " (23).

13. MacDonald refashions comedy's ending: instead of Shakespeare's ending, which usually involves a marriage between a man and a woman, MacDonald's ending offers communion between women at one level and, at another, a marriage of the "friends and foes [that] exist within" (87) Constance. In short, this "merging of unconscious selves" represents not only a "re-birthday" (14), but a marriage. For as MacDonald comments in an interview, "there is a marriage. It's a marriage of Constance's selves. She marries herself" (cit. Hengen, 102).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Afterword: The Paradox of Tragedy

Tragedy, the great public art, flourished during two periods in Western history when women were confined to the domestic and excluded from the public realm. Woman "in political, legal, and economic contexts, as Bernd Seidensticker claims, "was not a *persona sui iuris*. As part of the *polis*, she existed only through men and for men" (152). The household was her proper domain, silence her proper virtue. With respect to the theatre, "not only was the male the practitioner of theatre and the ideal tragic character," as Sue-Ellen Case comments, but he "may also have been the exclusive recipient of the theatrical experience" (*Feminism*, 17-18). Not surprisingly, "in the Greek theater, as in Shakespearean theater," the self that is doing the imagining, the self that is "at stake," as Froma I. Zeitlin puts it, in tragedy is the male self. The self that travels the "path from ignorance to knowledge, deception to revelation, misunderstanding to recognition" is the male self. The self that lives "through the consequences of having clung to a partial single view of the world" and himself is the male self (*Playing*, 346, 353). It is not then, as Albert Camus says, "the individual" who "increasingly asserts himself" (199) during these two exceptional periods, but the male. Tragedy, as Carol Gelderman comments, is "an outlet, and in a way, a propaganda tool for male self-assertiveness" (225).

Tragedy's origins and the reasons for its rare and brief flowerings remain enigmatic. There is one aspect of tragedy, however, about which there is no mystery. That is the political use that has been made of tragedy by patriarchal culture. In fifth-century Athens, as *The Oresteia* shows, the link between tragedy and the self-definition of the *polis* is clear. Aristotle does not separate aesthetics and politics in the *Poetics*. He privileges tragedy over other genres because he believes that tragedy has an important role to play in the development of a good democracy. And from Aristotle on tragedy continues in the service of patriarchy. The meaning of tragedy may well change as successive theorists reinterpret the *Poetics* in order to adapt Aristotle to the dominant ideology of their periods, but the politics of this spokes-genre for patriarchy remain a constant.

Theoretical constructions of tragedy, then, reflect patriarchal ideology. Moreover, what can be said of tragic theory can also be said of criticism. Traditional criticism limits what a literary work can mean by granting only the patriarchal perspective. Such criticism, never impartial, disregards or dismisses aspects of a work that are incompatible with its patriarchal value system. The result is, as Adrienne Munich so convincingly argues, that critical discourse "has tended to be more misogynist than the texts it examines. Tagged with patriarchal interpretation, canonical texts pass into the culture validated by what the Institution of Reading has understood" (251).

That tragic theory and criticism reflect the reactionary political attitudes of the patriarchal powers that be, however, does not mean that tragic drama does. "One cannot," as Munich points out, "neatly equate a text with the sex of its author." To do so is to identify "with dominant (patriarchal) thinking" (244). A masculinist text may well possess a radical subtext, may well undermine itself. Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for example, functions to critique both patriarchy and the genre that supports it. The "deconstruction of 'the father' as source, authority, and hegemonic center" that feminist playwrights carry out in their revisions of *King Lear*, as Peter S. Donaldson says in reference to Jean-Luc Godard's work, "is already underway in Shakespeare's *Lear*" (218). Where tragedy is concerned, in short, it is the theorists and critics—not the playwrights—who are unequivocally aligned with patriarchy.

It is important, therefore, that feminist playwrights/critics return to the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare to redress the wrongs of traditional criticism. Since such criticism has too often overlooked subtexts in canonical plays that raise questions about patriarchy and tragedy, feminist criticism needs to re-interpret the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare. For once these subtexts are discovered, it is impossible not to notice that Euripides raises important questions about the politics of representation in *The Medea*, or that Euripides challenges patriarchy's limited Apollonian perspective in *The Bacchæ*. It is impossible not to notice that in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* Shakespeare offers serious criticism of tragedy, or that in *Hamlet* Ophelia finds a voice, albeit

a muted one, with which to offer a critique of both Hamlet's tragedy and tragedy generally. The plays of Euripides and Shakespeare, to borrow a phrase from Munich, "convey the working myths of the culture" they represent (244). These plays also convey the limitations of these myths. They show how sexual stereotyping has worked to silence women. They tell us something about the way power and dominance function, something about what it must have been like to be a woman in such a culture.

It is also important that feminist playwrights/critics address the inadequate representation of women on the Western stage. Women must be granted both voice and agency. There must be, as Joan Ure declares in her revisions of Shakespeare's tragedies, something in it for an Ophelia or a Cordelia. There must be, as Joan Plowright has urged, "better roles for actresses" (cit. Winkler, 221). Gertrude's story, as Margaret Clarke maintains, must be told from her point of view. One way to do this, as the feminist re-visions I examine in this dissertation suggest, is to retrieve the women's voices in canonical plays from silence and marginalization, in other words, to foreground the presence of women in the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare. Thus, Ophelia's faint voice is amplified so that it can be heard clearly. The intelligence and audacity of the challenge Cordelia poses to the authority of the father is spotlighted so that it is not missed. Medea's decision to claim the role of tragic hero—and what this decision costs Medea—is staged to raise questions about the limitations of a genre in which the central role simply will not work for a woman

and about a society which insists that women play the role of submissive victim. One way to grant women voice and agency, in short, is to employ Euripides and Shakespeare in the service of feminism.

In a discussion of her reasons for revising Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Ntozake Shange remarks that "if a work is truly classic it must function for other people in other times" (37). According to this definition, Euripides' and Shakespeare's *The Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* are "truly classic" works. For these plays function today to allow the feminist playwrights/critics who re-write them to challenge, as Donaldson puts it, the "vices" of "Western patriarchalism, and especially the artistic variant of patriarchy" (219).

Moreover, by allowing feminist playwrights/critics to challenge patriarchy and tragedy, Euripides' and Shakespeare's plays function indirectly to change the way we view traditional criticism and to make cultural change possible. Once a feminist re-vision of Shakespeare or Euripides has been experienced, it is impossible to look at the original play in the same way. I am still astounded by Euripides' attempt to talk about the politics of representation 2,500 years ago in *The Medea* and by Shakespeare's subtle critique of patriarchy in *King Lear*. Until I encountered feminist re-vision of the latter, what I had been told as an undergraduate about *King Lear* had, quite simply, never made much sense to me. Now, it is clear that the "absence of love," to borrow Stanley Cavell's phrase, in Shakespeare's brilliant tragedy is due to patriarchy's subjugation of

the feminine half of the world, an act that cannot but stifle love and bring misery to both men and women.

More importantly, by positing women in the subject position and by changing our notion of the masculine canon, feminist dramatic re-vision of the sort I have examined in this dissertation acts to re-write our culture. Through strategies of re-reading and re-writing, such re-vision, as Christine Froula remarks in her discussion of how the canon can be used as an "instrument for change," pursues "a kind of collective psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogey's' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable" ("When Eve," 171-2). Or, as Lawrence Lipking says, now that Aristotle's sister "Arimneste is learning to speak" some of the classics

seem less heroic ... Those "irrelevant" scenes of cruelty to women, those obsessions with chastity and purity, those all-male debates about the nature and future of the human race ... have changed their character. ... [The] flames [of a feminist poetics] can scorch and burn, refining some authors and wasting others forever. (79)

And it is important that the canon not be left unchallenged, that Arimneste and other feminist critics not honour what Munich calls the "primitive patriarchal taboo forbidding women to approach sacred objects" (243). It is important that women return to the canon and, as Clarke's Playwright puts it, "make it [their] business to know [their] Shakespeares and [their] Stoppards better than all the Johns do" (2.8). For, as Adrienne Rich so emphatically pointed out over twenty-five years ago, such re-vision "is an act of survival ... [we] need to know the

writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (91).

Final thoughts. This dissertation has left me convinced of the need to know the writing of the past differently. Specifically, it has left me with three projects. In my first chapter, I argue that the project of feminist dramatic revision is part of a critical tradition that resists generic classification. I argue that women's theorizing and criticism customarily appears in their fictional writing. It seems to me now that there is still a lot of work to be done in this area, that an entire history of women's theorizing about art and practice of literary criticism has yet to be written.

Now that I have studied Euripides' and Shakespeare's arguments against tragedy in the company of a group of feminist playwrights, I am anxious to return to Euripides and Shakespeare by myself to study their arguments in more detail. In particular, I want to look closely at the role of lament in the plays of these two playwrights. Gail Holst-Warhaft claims that lament, traditionally a female art form, has often been viewed by patriarchal society as a threat. This is something I touch on in my chapter on Clarke's re-vision of *Hamlet*, where I suggest that what Ophelia enacts with her mad songs is a ritual of mourning, a lament, which acts to "strew ... Dangerous conjectures" (IV.v.14-15). And women in Shakespeare's history plays, in *King Richard III*, for instance, also, I suspect, employ lament in a subversive manner. It seems to me, therefore, that

the use of lament in Euripides' and Shakespeare's plays is bound to be closely connected to the arguments against tragedy offered by those same plays.

Finally, I am eager to examine the tragedies of playwrights other than Euripides and Shakespeare to see if they too subvert tragedy from within. Traditional criticism, after all, seems to have missed much about Euripides and Shakespeare. I assume that it has done the same with other playwrights, for instance, Aeschylus and Sophocles. Some of the feminist critics I read in the course of writing this dissertation appear to share my assumption. Hélène Foley, for example, argues that Sophocles' *Antigone*, in challenging the "legitimate, male, civic authority" of Creon, serves indirectly "to problematize Athenian civic values and discourse" ("*Antigone*," 66). And Holst-Warhaft's reading of *The Oresteia* shows that traditional criticism has bypassed an entire subtext. If the main text of Aeschylus's trilogy undermines lament, as traditional criticism has commented, one of its subtexts subverts the main text by exposing the enormous power of lament.

My hypothesis is that, even though Euripides and Shakespeare are more radical in their criticism of patriarchal culture than are many other playwrights, there is a breach between the theorists and critics of tragedy on the one hand and the writers of tragedy on the other. It may well be that the theorists and critics of tragedy, who tell us how to read playwrights such as Euripides and Shakespeare, are in the service of patriarchy, but that the playwrights themselves are iconoclasts who resist the dominant ideology of patriarchal

culture in the subtexts they write in the fissures of their main texts. It may well be that the paradox of tragedy is that all tragic drama offers its own self-critique, that all tragedy is, in short, anti-tragedy. Aristophanes' allegation in *The Frogs* that Euripides killed tragedy may well be the most profound comment ever made about Euripides—or tragedy.

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