Maps of Woe: Sites and Sights of Female Suffering in Shakespearean Tragedy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the ways in which female characters of Shakespearean tragedies' rights to access the social, creative power of suffering are controlled, exploited, and appropriated by surrounding characters, audience members, and the tragedies themselves in which they exist. The rich history of suffering in art, religion, and politics informs the depictions of suffering which appear across Early Modern tragedy; however, the tragedies of *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* offer a keen survey of the variety of causes of female suffering and its treatment within the drama. By examining Early Modern tragedy as a site of public suffering, this thesis aims to unpack how power structures that enable violence against women also exploit the suffering of women and, in doing so, undermine their license to their own experience.

RÉSUMÉ

La présente thèse traite des façons dont les droits d'accès aux aspects sociaux et le sens créatif de souffrance des personnages féminins dans les tragédies shakespeariennes sont contrôlés, exploités et pris en charge par les autres personnages, par l'auditoire et par les tragédies où ces personnages existent comme tels. Le riche historique de souffrance dans les arts, la religion et la politique établit la démonstration de la souffrance qui est évidente dans les tragédies de l'époque moderne. Néanmoins, les tragédies *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* et *Othello* présentent un aperçu vibrant des diverses causes de souffrance féminine et de leur traitement au sein du drame. En étudiant la tragédie de l'époque moderne comme une démonstration de souffrance publique, la présente thèse vise à présenter la façon dont les structures d'autorité qui permettent la violence contre les femmes exploitent aussi la souffrance des femmes et, ainsi, rongent leur droit à leurs propres expériences.

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Introduction

On August 9th, 2019, the previously anonymous victim of one of the most notorious recent sexual assault cases came forward with her identity. That day, Chanel Miller published her identity and, in doing so, reclaimed her entitlement to a horrific experience already known to the wider world. In January 2015, on the Stanford University campus, she was sexually assaulted while unconscious; the rape took place behind a dumpster; the rapist was a student named Brock Turner. While the crime's coverage rose in the media, the world, like Turner on the night of the assault (Miller 45), did not know Chanel Miller's name. Her identity was reduced to "a blacked-out and raped woman" (Miller 48); her suffering was torn away from her identity to be published, discussed, and examined. Miller's decision to step forward with her identity and her experience was not only an incredibly intentional and thoughtful act of resilience, but a profound moment for contemporary conversations about victims' relationships to their own experiences and their right to their own stories.

By publishing her name and releasing her memoir, Miller took her rightful place in a narrative of suffering that had developed around her, but without her.[1] Despite the trial that followed the assault, the critical coverage in the media, and the teaching about the case in university lecture halls, despite the fact the assault had taken on a life of its own and expanded to incorporate the public's responses, the experience was still hers: and even now, regardless of the time that has passed, she has a right to her own suffering.

This removal of the person who suffers from the scene of suffering is the same fate to which female characters in a Shakespearean tragedy are often subjected by the arc of their

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[1] Miller first released her name on August 9th, 2019 in an interview with *60 Minutes*. Her memoir was subsequently published on September 24th, 2019.

characters' stories, by the audiences that consume them, the critics who review them, and the playwright who created them. Female characters in tragedy are frequently reduced to objects of suffering. Additionally, more often than not, their suffering has to do something, be something, or cause something to serve the male-dominated plots in order for it to garner space in the tragedy. While this circumstance can be seen as a positive force female characters can wield in a male-dominated world, I am interested in how the pressure to make suffering accessible undermines the social, creative power the women can exert through their suffering. That is not to say they do not exert this positive force, but rather that it coincides with an increased pressure on females to render their suffering accessible as well as separate from themselves, and, in doing so, eliminates, or in the very least challenges, their own right to their experiences of suffering. In the face of this complexity, my thesis examines female suffering in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Macbeth* (1606), and *Othello* (1604) with an eye to questions regarding the social force of suffering and the power structures that aim to limit, control, and exploit access to it.[2]

The right to suffer, as I refer to it, is the right to access the social force of suffering. Social force is described as "any global, systemic, and relatively powerful process that influences individuals in interpersonal settings" ("Social Force"). The right to suffer also refers to an individual's right to their own experience of suffering and how the validity of the suffering is unaffected by whether or not they choose to share that experience. Often we aim to refer to the individual and their suffering as mutually exclusive; however, in identifying suffering as an entity on its own, rather than as an experience attached to the person who endured it, we

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[2] All citations of Shakespearean text in this thesis are taken from the Royal Shakespeare Company editions of the plays edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen and published by Modern Library. While conducting this research, I have also consulted *The Riverside Shakespeare*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, and the Oxford World's Classics editions of the plays and their editorial comments.

privilege our own relationship to the suffering and aim to access the social power it holds in order to spark action, evoke change, justify choices, prompt outrage, and threaten order. In doing so, we disregard the personhood of the individual that it primarily affects. That is not to say, like the women of these tragedies, victims of violence should be primarily identified as such, but rather, they should be in control of the prominence of it within their own identity. Of course, the stories of Shakespeare's tragic heroines are already written. Nevertheless, with every new production dawns a new performance and thus a new potential space of intervention where the right to suffer may be reinvented, repositioned, and reclaimed by the actors charged with playing the roles and contributing to the legacies of the suffering of these tragic heroines.

My analysis views each of the tragic heroines as they exist in the text, as they exist in the play, and as they exist in our world. Within each of these tiers exists a distinct version of the named character in question. To explain these tiers, I will use Desdemona. The first Desdemona is the *person* in the world of the play. Her life is the one upon which we train our eyes. She is the Desdemona of the text, and as so, what she says and does is limited to the parameters of the written word. The second Desdemona is the *character* in the tragedy. This tier emphasizes the power structures of genre and how the character is confined by and manipulated within them. The third Desdemona is the *role* that exists beyond the textual and performative confines of the tragedy. This Desdemona comes into being with every new actor who steps into her shoes. She is fluid and ever-changing, becoming larger as more and more people contribute to her legacy through performance, scholarship, and engagement. While the first two Desdemonas are unaware of one another's existence—existing in their own bubbles— the third Desdemona sees not only the first and second, but also herself in the role of the third. This complexity informs how the

right to suffer of any given character is multidimensional. It may be simultaneously constrained and harnessed, exploited and owned, violated and shared.

To add to this, I also employ the use of the terms *site* and *sight.* This distinction between *site* and *sight* appears throughout this thesis as a way to address the physicality, corporeality, and objectification that occurs as the female figures descend into spectacles of suffering, as well as the active and fluid ownership they are able to command over their suffering. For example, Titus addresses Lavinia as a "map of woe," lamenting to her, "Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs" (3.2.12). With this statement, Titus encapsulates an important tension between objectification and performance. Lavinia has become a *site* of suffering, a permanent fixture in social space that may be read by all who encounter her. Her suffering is violently etched onto her body, and as a result, part of her control over others' access to her suffering is robbed. However, Lavinia also becomes a *sight* of suffering; as she navigates her post-traumatic space, her suffering moves and changes with her. How she adapts to her suffering, and her transformation into a site of suffering, turn her into a sight of suffering in which she may influence the narrative of her suffering as well as others' access to it.

Recent feminist scholarship on Shakespeare's tragic heroines has looked to explore the tremendous dramatic power of the heroines in light of their spectacles of suffering.[3] While this is undoubtedly an important milestone in the critical history of Shakespeare's women, transforming assumptions that heroines appear in the tragedies solely as passive objects of innocence or conniving temptresses of evil, it is also an incomplete one. By emphasizing female suffering as

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[3] Frances E. Dolan's article "Re-reading Rape in "The Changeling" is a prime example of this scholarship as she debates the complex "distributions and abuses of power between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna" and contemplates the implications of reclassifying "a character from a rape victim to powerful agent" (7).

the most prominent agent of power, projection of agency, or social influence these women are able to access, we reinforce a voyeuristic preoccupation with female suffering as something consumable—that others have a right to see and to understand—and, in doing so, transform it from a personal experience to a public event. Chanel Miller powerfully articulates this sentiment when she notes "how quickly victims must begin fighting, converting feelings into logic, navigating the legal system, the intrusion of strangers, the relentless judgement" (52). However, the suffering of those who do not step into the public sphere (often also the male visual field) because they cannot access it, choose not to, or are barred from accessing it, is just as valid as those who do. One of the most prolific examples of this is the human rights crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada (also referred to as MMIWG). While a national inquiry only began in 2016, activists began speaking out against this violence decades prior (National Inquiry 54). The suffering of these women, and their willingness to voice it, has always been there, even when no one is listening. Therefore, suffering exists regardless of the victim's access to a means to share it and regardless of whether or not audiences acknowledge it. As Connie Walker powerfully asserts, "Indigenous women don't need a voice. We need more microphones" ("Indigenous").

Suffering has the ability to function as a language in the political realm, the medical community, religion, the justice system, social activism, and throughout popular media in general; however, access to this language is highly gendered. Many institutions attempt to censor its access due to its extraordinary power to incite action. This censorship happens both within the world of Shakespeare's tragedies and within the structure of the plays themselves. Frequently, as illustrated throughout the performance history and critical history of these plays, when these

women are discussed, when discussed at all, the focus is on their suffering.[4] By completing this thesis, I, too, contribute to this legacy of suffering. However, my desire to do so is to draw attention to how these tragedies address the problems with having suffering serve as the most effective agent for social action and influence while at the same time being built upon that very exploitation.

Multiple facets of scholarship relate to and inform this topic; as a result, I have sought to bring together the works of dramatic, literary, and performance theorists, Early Modern specialists, feminist Shakespeareans, and contemporary culture analysts. Prominent Early Modern scholars such as Valerie Wayne, Sara Eaton, and Martin Ingram cross paths with such social commentators and scholars as Rebecca Solnit, Jacqueline Rose, and Elinore Cleghorn in order to accomplish my goal, which is to understand Shakespeare's tragedies by bringing them into conversation with the world today and moving them toward an understanding of the present by way of an engagement with his tragedies. The dismissal, promotion, and appropriation of female suffering is hardly a new thing; however, the mediums today—such as social media, modern medicine, and televised politics— through which they function are.

One of the foremost scholars addressing violence against women in Early Modern performance is Kim Solga. Her work addresses both the past and present implications of performing violence against women on the stage and brings together theatrical and cultural history alongside performance ethics to analyze the "problems that adhere to the female body in

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[4] This claim is not intended to condemn the scholarship on female suffering, but rather acknowledge how, if we wish to write on tragic heroines of the Early Modern stage, their suffering is what offers us the most material to analyze. To paraphrase Jacqueline Rose, addressing and analyzing violence is a way in which to move towards ending violence in our world (33). Some scholarship that rises to this challenge by focusing on violence against women is Kim Solga's *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance*, Karen Bamford's *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage*, and Nicole Loraux's *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*.

representation during moments of literal stage violence" (4). Like Solga, I am interested in what it means to walk the tightrope between past and present implications of staged violence against women. Additionally, I am interested in building upon her insights to further the conversation around the contemporary connections between the mechanics of the violence depicted both within Early Modern drama, and those that continue to plague our societies today.

In regards to drawing these parallels between past and present, Helen Morales' recent book *Antigone Rising* serves as a keen example of the effectiveness of doing so. Morales puts forward heroines of ancient Greek myths and the worlds in which they inhabit to shed light on our own times directly. She incites awareness of how presumably patriarchal texts and the structures that shape them can be reclaimed, reevaluated, and reimagined in order to enlighten the current social context in which these myths are upheld as canonical. The ability to use dramatic tragedies of the past to unpack real-life tragedies of the present is not only an important critical task within academia but within the broader community itself, as we strive to dismantle the structures that bind us and to heal a world still bound within the structures upon which it was built. While Morales' area of focus predates Shakespearean tragedy, her means of connecting seemingly different worlds has greatly informed how I have structured this thesis.

In addition to critical scholarship on Shakespearean tragedies, I have also looked towards actor-centric sources. In particular, Dame Harriet Walter and Paige Martin Reynolds, who played the characters they examine, are extraordinarily insightful and add a layer of intimacy to the analysis, as I question what it means for female bodies to perform these roles today. Actors' understanding is unique given their first-hand engagement with characters and the active role they have in accessing these characters' right to suffer.

Much of the scholarship within the field of Early Modern drama looks at the practical reality of staging violence against women, and feminist theatre scholars, in particular, have examined sexual violence on the Early Modern stage. I seek to broaden the scope to include multiple kinds of female suffering to understand the commonalities in how the staging of female suffering is gendered, regardless of the kind of suffering inflicted. While I aim to compare and contrast the women of the tragedies at hand, I do not intend to debate the severity and relevance of their suffering in relation to one another. By tilting arguments toward who suffers the worst, we undermine individuals' right to their own suffering. Instead, I strive to unify the women in these plays by analyzing how their suffering is positioned within their respective tragedies and how the broader treatment of their suffering within them influences, and often impedes, their individual right to suffer.

To do so, I have chosen three Shakespearean tragedies with widely different experiences of female suffering. While the kinds of suffering and how the suffering is inflicted vary throughout *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, the women of the tragedies share common ground in how their right to suffer is controlled, disregarded, and exploited by the tragedy as well as by the men in their worlds. Although for the sake of this thesis, I am focusing on women in Shakespearean tragedy and how they parallel to women in the world today, the questions I raise with regard to suffering can and should be discussed beyond this limited group. The questions of suffering in Shakespearean tragedy and suffering, on the whole, go far beyond the bounds of sex and gender. Women are only one group of many whose suffering is potentially threatening to the very same power structures that desire to commodify and exploit it.

Additionally, in regards to diversity, Chapter II discusses menstruation. Although I have strived to use inclusive language to the best of my ability, I want to acknowledge my discussion's focus on cis-gendered women's experiences of menstrual periods. Of course, not all people who menstruate are women, and not all women menstruate. However, as I examine instances of female suffering in these Shakespearean tragedies, I focus on this specific identity for the sake of the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, given the tragedies I have selected and the questions I am interested in asking, this thesis references multiple potentially triggering topics such as sexual assault, domestic violence, infanticide, child mortality, maternal mortality, and miscarriage.

Although I have limited the scope of this thesis to Shakespearean tragedy, many other tragedies of the Early Modern period are worth keeping in mind throughout this analysis. Works such as *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, *The Changeling*, *Women Beware Women*, *The White Devil*, and' *Tis Pity She's a Whore* all tackle in some way the complicated relationship women have to the right to suffer on stage. The plays themselves, in some capacity, ask questions about how men and the male gaze dominate the suffering of female characters.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter explores a different avenue of female suffering and its relation to the right to suffer. Rebecca Solnit writes, "all the world is not a stage: backstage and beyond the theatre are important territories, too" (25). For much of the tragic action, heroines wait in the tiring house. However, beyond the tragedies, they wait as well, their legacies of suffering speaking largely for them and their spectacles of suffering being the primary way in which they are identified and, therefore, remembered.

Chapter I examines *Titus Andronicus* and how female suffering is primarily included as something to be interacted with by the male characters rather than as an experience endured by

the female characters. It is seen as something more significant than the individual and, as a result, is used by the men of the play to justify further violence. While both Lavinia and Tamora, the play's two named female characters, have very different experiences within the tragedy, they both die at the hands of the titular character without a final word. Chapter II focuses on the spectacle of psychological suffering in *Macbeth* and how it manifests upon Lady Macbeth's own body. Her body, like the ravished and mutilated Lavinia, becomes both a sight for the audience to see and a literal site on which her suffering is written. Lavinia's stumps transform her body into a marked site of the suffering she endured and act as a visual cue for her suffering to her family as well as the audience. Lady Macbeth's hands which appear bloody to her but clean to onlookers, serve the same function, but rather the suffering they spark is her own rather than that of her male relations. Lady Macbeth's suffering, void of physical violence, and her remarkable ability to control access to it, ultimately inform the tragedy's treatment of her death. Chapter III addresses *Othello* and what happens to an individual's right to suffer following their death. I am interested in how both Othello and Emilia attempt to take on Desdemona's suffering differently as soon as she is dead and thus leave her no control, not even retrospective control, over it.

The way in which I have read these tragedies is to acknowledge the women and their suffering, question how we participate in it, and attempt to engage with it in a different way than the tragedy initially prompts. All the women are silenced by the tragedy that has profited from their suffering in one way or another. Yes, there is power in sharing suffering, in having it be a spectacle, but what I want to address is the step beyond this that pressures women to transform their suffering into a spectacle, but aims to remove them from the force this action can have.

With increased awareness of this power dynamic, we can begin to recognize our own roles in, and relationships to, women's right to suffer, both in the Shakespearean tragedy and beyond, and actively seek to reposition it in a thoughtful and ethical manner.

Chapter I

"Thou map of woe": Female Suffering as Catalysts in *Titus Andronicus*

The most spectacularly gory play in the Shakespearean canon, *Titus Andronicus* (1594), explores the aftermath of war and struggle for power and justice through familial tensions and graphic violence. A spectacular fifteen deaths occur, all but five of which take place on stage. From burnt entrails and mutilation to cannibalism and starvation, *Titus* is littered with highly varied gruesome acts and is thus one of the premier plays for discussing violence in Early Modern drama. Although a father is placed in the titular role of the tragedy, it is the suffering of his daughter that propels the revenge plot and anchors the ruthlessness displayed and justified by her male relations. The tragedy ultimately seizes her suffering to function as a cue for male suffering, and as a result, calls attention to the relationship the women have to the right to suffer. The tragedy positions her suffering as something to be interacted with rather than something that is experienced, and in doing so, renders Lavinia a beacon of suffering that allows her family, but in particular, her father, to justify further violence and ultimately scapegoat their actions.

Two families are at the core of the tragedy: one helmed by a matriarch, Tamora, and the other by the patriarch Titus. A mother on one side, a father on the other, several sons on both, and only one daughter on either. As the lone daughter, Lavinia is isolated within a male-dominated world. Without a maid, mother, or confidante, she is sequestered from any form of female companionship and solidarity. Interestingly, this isolation is also what makes her so valuable within the tragedy, as well as loosely threatening to Tamora.

Titus is based on the source narratives of Philomel, Tereus, and Procne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a few other Roman texts, and incorporates two folktales, "The Revenge of the

Castrated Man" (ATU 844) and "The Maiden Without Hands" (ATU 706).[5] The play's folktale roots are what most ultimately inform the link between Tamora and Lavinia. Female rivalry, particularly a jealous rivalry, is a commonplace force across various folktale patterns and, as Charlotte Artese notes, the frequent cause of other women's persecutions (63). She further notes how hints of this rivalry appear between Tamora and Lavinia in the play, citing how "Saturninus proposed first to Lavinia, then to Tamora, making Lavinia both a rival to Tamora and the emperor's first choice" (63). Despite their stark differences and the tragedy's pitting of them against one another, Tamora and Lavinia are linked as the only two named female characters in the play, both of whom face immense suffering, albeit suffering that is vastly different.

The actors portraying the female characters are also linked as the lone two company members portraying female characters of significance. While productions today may incorporate gender-blind roles into their casting, the potential for two women to be cast as Tamora and Lavina while all other characters are played by male actors still exists. This reality highlights how amidst rivalry, there is also potential for camaraderie. The isolated heroines within the worlds of Shakespeare's tragedies parallel the contemporary actresses competing to play them, as well as the potential isolation of an actress amidst a potentially predominately male cast should she indeed land the role. Ida Prosky addresses this very power dynamic in her book, whose title says it all, *You Don't Need Four Women to Play Shakespeare*. Prosky recounts a story of an interview with an actor who "felt that anyone who has done a lot of Shakespeare would know that 'you don't need four women to play Shakespeare. You need a young one, an old one, and someone who is willing to play the maid'" (1). This assertion highlights "a central difficulty for

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[5] Charlotte Artese discusses the blend of classical and folk traditions in the second chapter of her book *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* (2015).

women who choose to work on stage" (Prosky 1), but it also highlights the increased stakes that the female actors who land these roles face. Thus, the fortitude frequently required to land limited female roles may also serve as an underlying motivator for contemporary actors to reclaim the right to suffer on behalf of the character they have fought to portray.

The opening scene of *Titus Andronicus* introduces the sight of suffering as an essential catalyst in the tragedy. As soon as suffering is seen, it becomes bigger than the person experiencing it—this is significant given that the suffering of female characters is typically seen very differently than the suffering of their male counterparts. The sight of suffering has the power to provoke revenge, spark madness, justify violence, and launch conflict, all of which appear throughout *Titus Andronicus* and more broadly throughout the drama of the Early Modern period in general. However, the sight of suffering significantly impacts the victim whose suffering is being seen. In her book, Miller recounts how difficult it was to inform her parents of her assault; she describes wanting to "preserve their peace" (41), but also heartbreakingly confesses, "I feared what would happen when I experienced the assault through their eyes; their sadness would scare me" (42). Miller's desire to shield her parents from her own trauma is partly to protect them, but also a desire to shield herself from her own suffering. The sight of suffering is a continuum on which victims and onlookers exchange relationships to the experience.

Parental suffering marks the play's opening spectacle of suffering. Tamora and her sons enter the tragedy as war prisoners, paraded alongside the coffins of Titus' deceased sons. This spectacle is a performance of suffering in itself, a mourning father and helpless mother fuel the tension which drives the rest of the scene. Titus laments about his role in his sons' deaths as they lay the brothers to rest (1.1.86), but his surviving son Lucius has different priorities and demands

vengeance: “Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths, / That we may hew his limbs, and on a pile *Ad manus fratrum* sacrifice his flesh” (1.1.96-8).[6]

This threat of sacrifice kickstarts Tamora’s suffering, which she recruits as she desperately pleads for her son’s life. Before he is dragged off to be sacrificed, (1.1.127) she begs:

> Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
> A mother’s tears in passion for her son:
> And if thy sons were ever dear to thee
> O, think my sons to be as dear to me.
> Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome
> To beautify thy triumphs and return,
> Captive to thee and thy Roman yoke?
> But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
> For valiant doings in their country’s cause?
> O, if to fight for king and commonweal
> Were piety in thine, it is in these.
> Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood. (1.1.105-16)

The suffering of Alarbus, the soon-to-be sacrifice, is secondary to his mother’s in this scene. Alarbus does not plead for his life; instead, his mother does. Frequently, the character who loves the person experiencing direct harm or violence is more dramatically interesting, especially when that person is a parent. This dramatic interest in the suffering parent continues today with the television adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* incorporating it in Episode 3 of

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[6] *Ad manus fratrum* is Latin for “to the hands of our brothers.”

Season 4; however, in this example, no harm actually befalls the child in question ("The Crossing"). Instead, the mere threat of seeing the child suffering in a place of potential violence is enough to torture her mother into revealing important information—similar to Aaron's fate in Act 5, Scene 1. This strategy frequently appears throughout Early Modern drama but is portrayed very differently between mothers and fathers. Nonetheless, Tamora's personal suffering in *Titus'* opening scene kickstarts the chain of tragic events.

Unlike the fatherly characters of Titus and Aaron, both of whose children face real threats and violence, Tamora recognizes her suffering's own social force and brings it forth as a performance in an attempt to save her child. While Titus and Aaron both express their sorrow and fear, neither do so with this motivation. Aaron saves his child by revealing information (5.1.64-9), not broadcasting his love and desperation. Titus articulates his fatherly suffering because he is the title character of a Shakespearean tragedy and thus has that right. In fact, after entering amid one of his father's lamentations, his son tells him, "O noble father, you lament in vain: / The tribunes hear you not, no man is by, / And you recount your sorrows to a stone" (3.1.27-9). To which Titus responds:

> Why, tis no matter man: if they did hear,
>
> They would not mark me, or if they did mark,
>
> They would not pity me.
>
> Therefore I tell my sorrows bootless to the stones (3.1.33-6)

This is, of course, ironic since if his sorrows were truly bootless, they would simply not appear on stage; however, by simply being in the tragedy, they are doing *something*. The difference is, unlike Tamora's pleas for her son, Titus is not articulating his suffering with hopes to effect

change or alter the course of the tragedy—he is simply experiencing emotional turmoil and that experience is deemed significant enough to garner space in the tragedy. Titus is the lead of the tragedy; he has the ultimate right to suffer: the right to the individual experience and impact of suffering on a person. Titus is so entitled to this privilege that he recites his sorrows to the stones. Women in tragedy are not given the space to recite their sorrows to the stones. Their suffering has to do something, be something, cause something if it is going to take up space on stage. For example, Tamora's pleas which aim to spare her son's life, and Lavinia's pleas which aim to spare Lavinia's own virtue, and most notably, her rape and mutilation, directly propel the revenge plot.

Within the world of tragedy, we are trained to accept specific reactions to the sight of suffering as appropriate. At the sight of the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Bosola converts; at the sight of their son's hanging corpse in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo vows revenge, and Isabella runs mad; at the sight of Romeo's dead body, Juliet takes her own life; however, for Titus, the sight of Tamora's motherly suffering prompts dismissal, not pity. This cruel response is defiant of the code of suffering and the expectations of the social force it carries. Tamora is unable to save her son by offering her own suffering up to Titus, and thus her suffering is void of the social influence it is presumed to harbour. However, ironically, this hurdle increases the actor's opportunity to harness the character's right to suffer as it draws out Tamora's suffering and desire for justice and draws out her presence and influence in the tragedy.

In addition to the authentic suffering she is experiencing, Tamora clearly understands the stakes of her ability to translate that suffering, to perform it so others may see it, understand it, and access it. In doing so, she channels the well-established tradition of supplication. In ancient

Greek texts, the pose of supplication is "the suppliant's gesture of lowering himself to embrace his opponent's knees, thus showing his humility and desperation" (Pedrick 125). Interestingly, there is nothing in Tamora's speech to indicate she kneels. Frequently, actions are embedded in Shakespeare's dialogues in place of stage directions; this can be seen in the same scene moments earlier when Lavinia welcomes her father, saying, "And at thy feet I kneel with tears of joy" (1.1.161). A stage direction here to indicate Lavinia kneels, as the Modern Library edition has added (9), is redundant since Lavinia's speech directly establishes it. No such line is present in Tamora's speech, nor is there a stage direction listed in the folio editions to indicate she kneels; yet, it is hard to imagine any iteration of staging in which she remains fully upright. It is the weight of the audience's expectation of how desperation is read that brings her to her knees. If she does not fall, her performance of suffering risks being read differently. It is only later in the scene when she references her speech to Titus where she confirms her use of this gesture: "And make them know what 'tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (1.1.457-8). A keen actor playing Tamora will, of course, use this line to inform their performance of her speech to Titus. What I am suggesting is noteworthy is the lack of textual indication of this gesture at the time of speech. Lavinia directly comments on her own kneeling position, but Tamora does not.[7] Nevertheless, she does kneel, as evidenced by her later comment (1.1.457-8). Thus, the social expectations of what emotional suffering looks like are so strong that neither Tamora nor the text needs to reference the gesture—in other words, it is "a given" that she will be on her knees at this moment. In performing this action, and thus complying with

[7] There is no stage direction to dictate Tamora knees here listed in either the quarter or folio editions (Blount et al. and Danter)

the visual expectations of motherly suffering, she casts her body as a site of suffering and invites it to be read by Titus and the surrounding eyes upon her.

Continuing with the theme of examining the more social and less bloody moments of violence in this tragedy, perhaps the most challenging scene to stomach is not the cannibalism or mutilations, but the scene between Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius, where the rape of Lavinia is plotted. Kimberly Huth notes how we are aroused to share the pain of the characters on stage:

> Any engagement with tragedy necessarily entails at least an imagination of the types of pain that actors would portray on stage, but there is an undeniable intensity to theatrical portrayal of pain, as evidenced by those performances that cause audience members to look away or to wince. These types of reactions demonstrate the power of imagination, as if we feel in our own bodies what is enacted on stage. (182)

The plotting of Lavinia's rape between Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius does not present us with portrayals of pain, but rather a window into how the ultimate thing women are taught to fear arises. This threat of impending pain for Lavinia interestingly evinces the same reaction Huth describes. Aaron's assertion "I have found the path" (2.1.118) lands in our stomachs like a bowling ball, and the weight only grows heavier as he continues, "The forest walks are wide and spacious / And many unfrequented plots there are / Fitted by kind for rape and villainy" (2.1.121-3). As we watch the plan fall into place, our response is not only to wince and look away, but also to want to scream a warning to Lavinia. We feel the fear in our bodies not only for Lavinia, as Huth's analysis recognizes, but for ourselves. The scene is so terrifying because it preys on the expectations women have been conditioned to prepare for all their lives:

> Don't go out there, you'll be raped! And inside each of us, the same rage and fear. Every female child absorbs it, buries it inside like some shameful secret. When the rapist jumps out at us, we have been expecting him all our lives. (D.Symth 40)

This scene between the three men shows what happens before that jump. The threat of pain holds just as much potential as portrayals of pain to cause audience members to look away and wince. Additionally, the scene establishes the assault on Lavinia as premeditated and, by doing so, implicates the audience in her attack. We, like Chiron and Demetrius, know it is coming. However, there is an additional expectation of knowing, built by rape culture, that we, as women, know the assault is coming regardless.

In the scene, Chiron and Demetrius argue over their love of Lavinia, Aaron presents rape as a valid solution to this condition, and both brothers easily see the logic in this plan. It is a stunning representation of the power dynamics of rape and a stark portrayal of how gender-based violence brews. Aaron reasons:

> Take this of me: Lucrece was not more chaste
> Than this Lavinia, Bassianus' love.
> A speedier course than ling'ring languishment
> Must we pursue, and I have found the path. (2.1.115-8)

He then outlines how they will be able to capture Lavinia in the forest during the upcoming hunt and will be able to rape her (2.1.119-25). Aaron transforms the brothers' view of Lavinia throughout his speech by comparing her to Lucrece and ultimately conflating her with a doe to be hunted (2.1.124). This choice of metaphor is strategic, as Amanda Montell notes:

> When English speakers want to insult a woman they compare her to one of a few things: a food (*tart*), an animal (*bitch*), or a sex worker (*slut*)…that we have used language to systematically reduce women to edible, nonhuman, and sexual entities is no coincidence. (31)

In his metaphor, Aaron reduces Lavinia to a nonhuman entity to further justify the heinous act he proposes. Over the course of the scene, Lavinia is transformed from a desirable woman into a desirable target. Suddenly, the power dynamics of rape are not only a viable option but an alluring one. Chiron and Demetrius go from claiming a love of Lavinia to resolving to rape her.

In many ways, this scene calls to mind Donald Trump's appalling "Grab them by the pussy" tape. Amidst the 2016 presidential election, a tape was revealed by the *Washington Post* where Trump tells Billy Bush:

> You know I'm automatically attracted to beautiful…I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything…Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything. ("US election")

Trump articulates an entitlement to women because of his status as a "star," and Chiron and Demetrius settle on an entitlement to rape Lavinia because of their unrequited love for her. Both instances are predicated on men rationalizing that their statuses afford them the right to rape the women they desire. This thinking is not only a root cause for substantial female suffering; it also is predicated upon the notion that male perceptions are more significant and more valid than female perceptions. The potential impact on the women in question is not even referenced, let alone considered by the men. Their own experience is the priority, and their entitlement to that

experience outweighs the significance of any suffering a woman attributes to it. This neglect forms the basis of the hurdle women's right to suffer must overcome.

Before Chiron and Demetrius can execute their assault on Lavinia, however, their mother upstages their plot. Immediately after Bassianus is stabbed, Tamora makes ready to kill Lavinia herself and requests the poniard from her sons (2.3.120); however, they stop her, arguing, "First thrash the corn, then after burn the straw" (2.3.123)—again using language to reduce Lavinia to a nonhuman entity. Initially, Tamora appears indifferent to their request, simply telling them to do what they will, but to be sure to kill Lavinia afterward to avoid ramifications (2.3.131-2). Then, a cruel transition of thought occurs for her on stage.

Lavinia, desperate and articulate, attempts to reason with Tamora. Echoing the stakes of Tamora's initial performance of suffering for her son in the opening scene, Lavinia recruits her own suffering in an attempt to save herself. Demetrius' comment highlights this plea as he suggests to his mother to listen and "… let it be your glory / To see her tears, but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain" (2.3.139-41). Demetrius points to how Lavinia's spectacle of suffering will enhance Tamora's satisfaction. As Lavinia continues to plead with Tamora, Tamora embraces Lavinia's spectacle of suffering and allows it to fuel her. While she was initially inclined to kill her swiftly, Tamora begins to relish the additional level of punishment her sons will inflict on Lavinia; she realizes that this worse-than-killing lust will not only be worse for Lavinia, but for Titus as well.

Notably, Tamora also references her own recruitment of suffering while justifying the proposed violence to her sons:

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain

To save your brother from the sacrifice,

But fierce Andronicus would not relent.

Therefore away with her and use her as you will:

The worse to her, the better loved of me. (2.3.163-7)

Here, she references that initial spectacle of suffering she recruited and how the code was violated. In addition to the emotional trauma of losing her son, she feels additionally wronged by Titus, who robbed her suffering of the social force it carries. She "poured forth tears in vain" (2.3.163): she rendered her vulnerability accessible for nothing.

Lavinia's pleas to Tamora to spare her honour echo Tamora's initial pleas to Titus that began the tragedy; however, like Titus, Tamora dismisses them outright. Lavinia desperately appeals to her:

'Tis present death I beg, and one thing more

That womanhood denies my tongue to tell:

O, keep me from their worse-than-killing-lust,

And tumble me into some loathsome pit

Where never man's eye may behold my body.

Do this, and be a charitable murderer. (2.3.174-8).

Lavinia is at the mercy of Tamora, and as a result, so is her right to suffer. Whatever Tamora decides will directly impact Lavinia— what kind of suffering she experiences and whether or not she is alive to share it. Lavinia does not plead for her life, only for the sanctity of her body; thus, when her plea is ignored, the violation and the publicity of the violation are all the more

traumatic. Not only does Tamora leave Lavinia to her sons, but her sons also disregard Lavinia's pleas and their mother's instructions to kill her. Instead, after raping her, they mutilate her and then taunt her in her bloodied state before leaving her stranded (2.4.1).

This cruel aftermath is just the beginning of the consequences Lavinia will face as a result of her assault. Nowadays, "many girls and women report that the harassment they face after the assault is worse than the assault itself" (Oliver 7). Whether or not this rings true emotionally for Lavinia, the fact of the matter is, as a result of being raped, Lavinia loses her tongue, her hands, and eventually her life. In addition to this physical aftermath, she also endures her male relations instructing her, observing her, and using her to justify their own actions and outrage. In this way, her body becomes a map of woe, but her character also, in some ways, becomes a map of woe for the tragic plot.

Chiron and Demetrius' mutilation of Lavinia brands her with their crime and is intended to ensure her position of shame and submission in relation to it. She also functions as a living trophy of their domination, shared and seen in the same way nonconsensual photographs perpetuate trauma for contemporary victims today. They serve as visual cues of a traumatic event and reduce the victim herself to an icon of suffering. Lavinia has no control over the transformation of her body into a visual map of woe that alerts onlookers to her suffering. In this way, Chiron and Demetrius undermine Lavinia's right to suffer; however, this undermining heightens the power Lavinia later asserts when she reclaims her right to suffer by revealing the names of her rapists—despite their efforts, she will not be silenced.

Of course, attributing any kind of positive force to the outcomes of heinous acts is a slippery slope. As Huth notes, "assigning meaning to pain is a delicate endeavour, one that risks

giving sensibility to otherwise “senseless” violence” (171). Lavinia’s rape and mutilation is the result of utterly senseless violence, as is her status and influence throughout the duration of the tragedy. However, to dismiss her as a victim of circumstance when she actively seeks to partake in the action of the tragedy following her assault would also be an injustice to her. This tension between recognizing the suffering of women and the force it carries and giving sensibility and validation to the violent powers that inflict it makes playing and studying the roles of Shakespeare’s tragic heroines such a challenging but worthwhile endeavour. It is this tension that fuels the complexity of the concept of the right to suffer. Suffering is surely not a simply positive aspect of human living, but it is a reality of being human, and thus everyone has a right to it.

The lasting impact of the crime on Lavinia’s body transforms her into a site of suffering and alters the manner in which she can exert influence within the tragedy. Gesture becomes the language Lavinia, as well as the actor portraying her, must harness. This reality invites an access to Lavinia’s body in so far as from the moment she appears on stage following the assault, her body begins to be read. She does not receive the valuable real estate in tragedy to appear alone on stage and instead is immediately found by her uncle, who proceeds to describe her suffering for himself, the audience, and by extension, his niece.

Upon finding Lavinia cast aside by her attackers, Marcus recites a lengthy, blazon-like speech that transforms his niece into an Ovidian emblem. This speech marks yet another key spectacle of suffering in the play. It highlights the power the sight of suffering has on both the sufferer and the spectator. Once Lavinia is spotted by her uncle, her suffering no longer belongs to just her. Instead, she is pressured to share and explain her suffering to her uncle. Initially, she tries to run from him (2.4.11), implying a reluctance to be seen or permit interactions. Upon her

decision to turn back and engage with him, she transforms into an icon of suffering for Marcus to interact with, relying on mere gestures to respond to his leading questions.

In regards to Marcus' speech, Emma Smith notes how "Marcus describes in a long speech, a long and highly poetical speech, Lavinia's bleeding and mutilated body, seeming to do nothing other than address her and aestheticize her."[8] Upon his entrance, Lavinia is further silenced because her suffering becomes available for interpretation without her consent. She is given no time to construct or convey her feelings to the audience, or even to Marcus because he is so wrapped up in his own reaction to her. Chiron and Demetrius silence Lavinia by removing her tongue, but the tragedy silences her too—and this silencing is every bit as telling of the power structures surrounding her suffering. The actor playing Lavinia, however, through their performance, may attempt to reclaim Lavinia's suffering as well as the scene's focus. In doing so, one of the ways Lavinia's right to suffer may be achieved is by willingly embracing herself as a spectacle of suffering for her uncle as well as the audience.

Lavinia is silent within the tragedy from the moment she is silenced within the world of the play. This silence is interesting given that the theatre of the 1590s is neither realist nor naturalist. Although her uncle is afforded an unnaturally lengthy monologue upon seeing her, Lavinia receives no such space in the tragedy. The spectacle of her suffering is controlled by the powers which surround her. The actor playing Lavinia, of course, still has a tongue, and therefore, may speak on behalf of the character if given a chance. Shakespeare gives monologues to personifications of Time; he creates storms through language and frequently uses the convention of the aside—the suspension of disbelief is not an unfamiliar requirement for his

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[8] See Emma Smith's lecture on *Titus Andronicus* in her podcast series *Approaching Shakespeare*.

audiences. Therefore, a larger gendering of silence is at play. If Lavinia were a Lavinius, would he have received a monologue explaining his own experience to the audience, telling them himself what happened to him, rather than being present while his uncle claims that task? If Lavinia were a Lavinius, he likely would have the right to relay his own suffering. Then again, a man would likely not have been subjected to losing his tongue in the first place.

Silent and mutilated, Lavinia's body becomes a physical cue for Titus' suffering, which he uses to justify violence towards not only her, but also her attackers and their mother. Marcus prepares Titus for the sight of Lavinia, telling him, "Titus, prepare thy noble eyes to weep, / Or if not so, thy noble heart to break: / I bring consuming sorrow to thine age" (3.1.58-60). Lavinia, now an icon of suffering, exists on the margins of the scene while "Titus is the centre…his suffering is the suffering that matters" (Solga 52). Lavinia is punished for her father's discretions; however, in addition to bearing the initial brunt of the consequence, she also serves the tragedy as the primary cue for the suffering of the titular character. Ultimately Titus' suffering is a compilation of several factors, namely the murder of his son at his own hand (1.1.344) and then the execution of his two other sons for a crime they did not commit (2.3.288-91), all contributing to his overall emotional suffering and unhinged state. However, it is ultimately Lavinia's suffering he moves to avenge and utilizes to justify his own acts of violence against Tamora and her sons.

Lavinia is presented to her father and brother by her uncle. The sight of her causes Lucius to fall to his knees (3.1.64), to which her father demands he rise up and look upon his sister (3.1.65). The sight of her suffering is so powerful that Titus will not allow her brother to look

away. As a result, Lavinia's suffering is being displaced from her to her male relations—how her suffering impacts them becomes the focus.

For the duration of the scene, Lavinia is present while her male relations react to her embodiment of suffering. It is important that they see her body, a site of suffering, because they will transform that sight into a catalyst for further violence: Lucius off to recruit the Goths, specifically citing avenging Lavinia (3.1.297), while Titus begins his descent into revenge (3.1.276). They task themselves with decoding Lavinia while neglecting her own emotional response and prioritizing their own. Although these responses to her suffering are primed to be seen as 'positive' within the world of the tragedy, they ultimately still reduce Lavinia to a character who is set aside from her own suffering.

One of the many notable comments Titus makes immediately upon seeing Lavinia for the first time is, "Give me a sword, I'll chop off my hands too" (3.1.72). In suggesting he will willingly maim himself in the same manner as his daughter, Titus disrespects his daughter's suffering and the lack of agency she has in the loss of her hands. Furthermore, the comment itself is merely said to emphasize his own suffering; he does not intend to chop off his own hands in his grief. He will, however, cut off his hand to save his sons.

It is Aaron who enters the scene proclaiming to bring a message to Titus from the emperor that says, "If thou love thy sons / Let Marcus, Lucius, or thyself, old Titus, / Or any one of you, chop off your hand / And send it to the king" (3.1.151-4). Thus, bickering ensues between the men about who will sacrifice their hand for the cause. This, of course, is all cruelly happening in front of the silent Lavinia, whose own hands were taken not only without her consent. In contrast, the hand her male relations are fighting to give will serve as ransom for

Titus' sons (3.1.156). This again highlights the gendering of physical violence between male and female bodies in the tragedy. While "tragic protagonists suffer more than their crimes deserve, to open a space for us, as readers or audiences, to experience and grieve for the injustice of their fates" (Keyishian 456), female characters in tragedies frequently suffer in service to the tragic protagonists that dominate the action, and thus the actors portraying them take on the responsibility for advocating for their character's own experience suffering and its significance.

Ultimately, Lavinia's suffering culminates in her father's honour killing of her; however, before that occurs, she works to be heard even amidst her silence. Cleverly, she draws Marcus' and Titus' attention to young Lucius' copy of Ovid's *Metamorphosis,* directing them to the tale of Philomel, whom she has already previously been compared to by the men. The prop of the text thus takes on an interesting authority and meta-theatrical presence in the play. It helps Lavinia communicate while also being the source text to which her fate is bound. In this way, it functions as both the cause and solution to her isolation and suffering, and thus aids and abets her right to suffer.

Her moment of triumph and resourcefulness, however, is short-lived. Immediately, once the events that have befallen her are revealed to her relations, her uncle concocts a strategy for her to divulge her rapists' identities. This is a key moment since

> Lavinia's job is to show and tell her pain in order that the perpetrators may become known and the event may be translated into an experience of and for her male relations. Until that happens Titus' revenge drama cannot continue. (Solga 47)

For a brief moment, Lavinia holds the power. She is in control of her right to suffer and its impact on the tragic plot; however, Marcus quickly steps in to control this shift by suggesting she

communicate through a degrading gesture saturated with phallic symbolism. He instructs her to take his staff in her mouth and guide it with her stumps (4.1.72-3). This submissive gesture reduces the power of Lavinia's communication and repositions her to the margins so that her male relations, again, may step into the centre of the scene.

Upon the capture and impending murder of Chiron and Demetrius, Titus transforms Lavinia once again into a spectacle of suffering. He presents her to her rapists as a visual cue of their crimes while he recounts all of their offences:

> O villains, Chiron and Demetrius,
>
> Here stands the spring whom you have stained with mud,
>
> This goodly summer with your winter mixed.
>
> You killed her husband, and for that vile fault
>
> Two of her brothers were condemned to death
>
> My hand cut off and made a merry jest,
>
> Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear
>
> Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity. (5.2.169-76)

Titus strives to increase his own justification for their deaths by positioning Lavinia within their sight. Aside from all the other moments in the tragedy that make the role of Lavinia a daunting one to play, this moment, in particular, stands out. Regardless of whether the actor plays her as relishing in Chiron and Demetrius' torment and impending deaths, or distraught over being near them again, or disempowered by being shown to them in this way, the significance of the moment a rape victim comes face to face with her rapist under the setting of justice—illegitimate as the justice being administered in this case may be—is utterly brave.

While Lavinia is present for the murders of Chiron and Demetrius, she is ultimately executed by her father prior to the death of Tamora. In fact, she is executed in front of Tamora. Lavinia's death is a classic honour killing. Titus takes care to draw attention to the tradition of honour killings, and even tricks Saturninus into confirming the justice of his act before he kills her. He asks Saturninus, "Was it well done of rash Virginius / To slay his daughter with his own right hand, / Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?" (5.3.36-8). In posing this question, Titus not only references the higher power of the classical tales that inform much of the action of the text, but he also incites commentary on the dangers of narrative and story. Saturninus responds casually to Titus that Virginus did indeed do the right thing "Because the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence renew [Virginius'] sorrows" (5.3.41-2). However, once Titus turns around and slays his own daughter upon hearing this response, Saturninus is horrified: "What hast thou done? Unnatural and unkind!" (5.3.48). Interestingly, this reaction to Titus' killing of Lavinia comes prior to Saturninus learning she was a victim of rape. Once he does receive this information, he redirects his outrage from Titus to the named assaulters—technically his stepsons—Chiron and Demetrius. This transition of blame, though slight in the scheme of the tragic finale, is significant in that it subtly and disturbingly implies Titus is more entitled to commit violence against Lavinia than Chiron and Demetrius since "one way we know whose story it is has been demonstrated by who gets excused for hatred and attacks, literal or physical" (Solnit 16).

Titus's decision to publicly kill Lavinia and reveal her sexual assault to the onlookers is another instance of prioritizing his own response to Lavinia's suffering over hers. His suffering needs to be seen, but unlike Lavinia, he is in control of what he shows. Kim Solga writes how the

notion of a good death and the promise of salvation "become handy shorthand for turning acts of domestic battery into public images of godly benevolence and English political fortitude" (Solga 66). The logic of implying Lavinia is better off allows the focus to not be on her murder but rather the emotional toll it takes on her murderer.

Despite what he believes, Titus cannot truly know his daughter's thoughts. Though she did initially plead to Tamora for a swift death, there is no way for Titus to know that, and those pleas were before her assault and the aftermath which followed it. Although she is given no space to express her feelings towards the situation, her lack of action—in that she, unlike Lucrece, does not commit suicide—does suggest a swift death is no longer the priority it was before she was raped. Instead, she remains present, collecting blood as her father murders her rapists and serves them to their mother, the woman who dismissed her desperate pleas for mercy.

Because of its rapidity, Lavinia's execution is significant in the canon of tragic Shakespearean heroines. For example, the famous honour killing of Desdemona by Othello takes up considerable stage time. She is smothered by her husband (5.2.100) but only dies 45 lines later (5.2.145) after speaking an additional three times following the violent act itself. Lavinia's death is even quicker than the second act of uxoricide in *Othello*, the execution of Emilia by Iago. Iago threatens Emilia with his sword (5.2.255), and she responds bravely and brazenly with the truth, condemning her husband—and for this disobedience, she is slain (5.2.270). Tina Packer notes how

> In four great tragedies—*Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*— almost all the women die, and five (Portia, Ophelia, Desdemona, Emilia, Cordelia) because they tell the truth or want the truth to be revealed. (190)

However, Lavinia should be added to this cluster as well. Especially given her constant comparison to Philomela throughout the play, Lavinia's relationship to truth and the stakes that accompany its reveal is even all the more stark. Packer asserts that the awful truth to which Shakespeare arrived is "women speak the truth at their peril" (189). While Lavinia may be left out of Packer's analysis, she is ultimately the predecessor of the heroines Packer names who arrive at the same fate. In this way, Lavinia is transformed into a kind of script like that of the one she has been following. She becomes a rough draft for Desdemona, Ophelia, and Cordelia. Moreover, while they go on to speak louder than she was able to, her legacy of suffering permeates the tragedies, and the heroines they house, who follow her.

Tragedy's patriarchal roots incite anticipation, expectation, and leniency to the crimes committed by males, particularly against women, in their plots. This is reflected not only in Titus but in Tamora. While her sons physically commit the atrocities against Lavinia, the play guides audiences to condemn Tamora in a way Chiron and Demetrius escape. This is strongly reflected in her death and the playful violence which preludes it. Unknowingly, Tamora consumes the flesh of her sons in the pie served to her and Saturninus by Titus. He serves them (5.3.29) and allows them to eat in blissful ignorance while he conducts his honour killing. Only after they have been eating for nearly thirty lines does Titus reveal his revenge. Saturninus demands Chiron and Demetrius be brought forward, to which Titus responds:

> Why, there they are both, bakèd in that pie,
>
> Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,
>
> Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred
>
> 'Tis true, 'tis true, witness my knife's sharp point. (5.3.60-3)

Immediately, without giving her a moment to respond, he stabs Tamora. Just like Lavinia, her death is swift. Nevertheless, despite the atrocity she has committed by eating her own offspring, her right to suffer and respond to it is eclipsed by he who inflicted her suffering in the first place.

Ultimately Chiron and Demetrius escape the excessive persecution their mother receives. They are baked into a pie not to be further punished but to punish their mother severely. Titus kills them before cooking them (5.2.197-200), whereas Tamora consumes them and then is killed. While it can be argued that the brothers' bodies being fed to their mother was punishment for them as well, it ultimately occurs after death. In addition to unknowingly committing cannibalism and then being murdered, Tamora is also punished after death. In fact, it is the sentiment that concludes the play. Lucius, the newly crowned emperor decrees

> As for that heinous tiger, Tamora,
> No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weeds,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial,
> But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey:
> Her life was beast-like, and devoid of pity,
> And being so, shall have like want of pity. (5.3.195-200)

While sufferings should not and cannot be given a score, it is significant that Tamora receives greater condemnation and punishment than her sons for the same crime. It draws attention to the gendering of punishment and how the use of public suffering within that punishment is also highly gendered.

That being said, of course, Tamora is not innocent of wrongdoing. Her role in Lavinia's rape makes defending her at all a complicated ethical matter; however, she is an important figure

to unpack when referencing female suffering. She is not like Lavinia, innocent of the crime for which she is killed, and thus, Tamora's relationship to the right to suffer in the tragedy is all the more complicated. This makes her and Lavinia important foils but also calculated comrades in their confinement to a structure built for men. Though they respond very differently, the tragedy's treatment and exploitation of their suffering are strikingly similar.

Not a single female character of the sole three who appear in this tragedy survives it—a relatively common feature of the genre. However, the deaths of Lavinia and Tamora, the play's two named heroines, are particularly noteworthy in Shakespeare's tragic canon because they *both* die at the hands of the title character. As Morales notes, "violence against women is integral to heroism, or at least a particular kind of macho heroism" (7). In this regard, Titus echoes the heroes of Greek myth but also calls to mind contemporary leaders and political figures who still rely on and adhere to this display of power. Furthermore, through this stunt, either of words or actions, females and their suffering are diminished into anecdotes, separated from their experience, detached from their right to suffer, and the social creativity and force it carries.

Chapter II

Access Denied: Lady Macbeth's Ability to "Stop up th'access and passage" to her Suffering

The colour of *Macbeth* might be blood (Bradley 308), but its principal form of suffering is psychological. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, the infamous Scottish couple, share not only a name but also the murder of a king. Despite the blood they have on their hands, it is their psychological responses to it that the tragedy brings forward as its primary spectacle of suffering. The suffering in Macbeth's mind is represented externally through hallucinations and flashbacks distinct from his body, while Lady Macbeth's is deeply internal—her own body acting as the site where she encounters her suffering. Although the couple's trauma responses differ, the tragedy's gendering of their different responses ultimately isolates them from one another. Where Macbeth is allowed to remain articulate and even cynical, Lady Macbeth resists the pressure to display her suffering outwardly. In holding her cards close to her chest, she reveals her suffering only for her own use. This denial of open access to her suffering is her primary gender transgression. In the tragedy, the price she pays for it is an offstage death shrouded in ambiguity; the price she pays for it beyond the tragedy, in critical history, performance history, and popular culture, is a legacy of monstrosity and unnatural womanhood.

Lady Macbeth, muttering to herself and fervently commanding, "Out damned spot!" as she scrubs her clean hands, is nearly as recognizable as Hamlet holding a skull. "Throughout the world, her name is a by-word for monstrosity, the unnatural woman, the evil power behind the throne" (74), notes Dame Harriet Walter, who played Lady Macbeth in 1999 with the Royal Shakespeare Company. This legacy makes Lady Macbeth unique among other female characters

in Shakespearean tragedy. She does not sit amongst the chaste and innocent figures of Lavinia and Desdemona, nor does she fit alongside the sexually perverse mother figures of Tamora and Gertrude. Lady Macbeth is her own category: both villain and victim within the play. She is the agent of her own destruction. Like the deaths of Juliet and Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth's death is not inflicted by the hands of any of her male relations. However, unlike Juliet and Cleopatra, whose suicides are active, central, and final in their respective tragedies, Lady Macbeth's death occurs offstage, without a specified cause. In this way, she is similar to Ophelia; her final appearance on stage is a spectacle of psychological suffering, but her death is not afforded the same emotional afterthought and significance that Ophelia's is, since, after all, "she should have died hereafter" (5.5.17).

Lady Macbeth enters the tragedy alone onstage. Interestingly, the first words she utters are those of her husband. Reading a letter from him aloud, we hear Macbeth's summary of his encounter with the weird sisters through the voice of his "dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.10). Macbeth's decision to share this information with his wife is notable in itself. Other married couples of Shakespearean tragedy do not have this rapport. Portia and Brutus of *Julius Caesar* are prime examples: Portia, desperate for her husband to confide in her, voluntarily wounds herself to prove her ability to keep his secrets (2.1.311-4); whereas, Macbeth shares his with Lady Macbeth not only willingly but with tenderness. Her first spoken words being his words cements their connection and her relationship to his potential.

The real significance of her entry, however, is her independence. She is afforded precious real estate in the tragedy to speak and exist alone on stage. She enters the tragedy alone and will exit it alone; however, only her entrance is given space on stage. Additionally, the letter through

which she introduces her voice is written in prose, but immediately upon finishing it, Lady Macbeth begins to speak in verse. This subtle transition is the first indication of her exceptional command over language, especially in relation to her husband.

Her powerful command of language comes into full force when, upon finishing the letter, she begins her most famous and canonized speech. Throughout the speech, "Lady Macbeth's call to the spirits to "unsex" her resembles a witch's curse or conjuration" (La Belle 384). She commands

> …Come you spirits
>
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
>
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
>
> Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,
>
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse.
>
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
>
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
>
> Th'effect and it…(1.5.41-8)

Lady Macbeth's demands are pointed and connect her to the running motif of blood in the play. Since blood is, as Bradley says, the colour of *Macbeth* (308), "it cannot be an accident," he explains, "that the image of blood is forced upon us continually, not merely by the events themselves, but by full descriptions, and even by reiteration of the word in unlikely parts of dialogue" (308). However, the blood to which Bradley refers is the blood of violence. The blood of battlefields and treason, murder and suicide. While her husband may shed this kind of blood, the blood Lady Macbeth is accustomed to shedding is different: it is monthly, personal, and

deeply connected with fertility. This, I argue, is the blood present in her speech, and it is the blood most present and intimate for the majority of people who menstruate: the people who have blood on their hands every month.

In a play "steeped in images of children, of birth, of inheritance and future generations" (Bate xvi), the reality of menstruation should also be considered when looking at the imagery of blood riddled throughout the entire tragedy. Lady Macbeth's phrases, "Make thick my blood," "th'access and passage to remorse," "visitings of nature," "sightless substances," "nature's mischief," all incite allusions to menstruation. For both the members of the audience and the actors playing Lady Macbeth who experience menstruation, the notion of "sightless substances" and "visitings of nature" are all too familiar. Additionally, in a speech widely recognized to be about casting off the female attributes seen to contribute to her position of inferiority, referencing menstruation, a bodily function historically cited as one of the medical reasons for the second-class status of female bodies, is paramount to Lady Macbeth's appeal to the spirits to "unsex her."[9] While interpretations of the speech may vary, I argue its explicit references to blood and the female body amidst a play fraught with questions of agency and fertility certainly link to menstruation and that its significance underpins Lady Macbeth's traumatic relationship to blood and her own body, which eventually peaks in the sleepwalking scene of Act 5.

The stakes the sight of blood has to a menstruating person of childbearing age are fraught. For someone trying to get pregnant, the sight of blood signals the end to a possibility of conception. For someone carrying a child, the sight of blood might signal the loss of that child.

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[9] An excellent source for historical gender bias in medicine is Elinore Cleghorn's *Unwell Women*, which traces how women's bodies have been misunderstood and misdiagnosed for centuries and how these misunderstandings have informed inventions of "women's diseases" such as hysteria and the wandering womb.

For someone who does not desire a child, the sight of blood may be a relief—however, this desire is highly stigmatized. This multitude of potential relationships menstruating people have to their periods underlies not only Lady Macbeth's relationship to the blood on her hands, but the actors' relationships who portray her as well.

When Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech is interpreted simply as her banishing her ability to have children—a perversion of women's primary social role (Cleghorn 42)—her speech becomes a metaphorical assertion of her desire for autonomy. This independence quietly links Lady Macbeth to the witches of the play and even to the witches of the period; the majority of those persecuted were women, and the majority of these women were likely going through menopause (Cleghorn 42). The symptoms of menopause were interpreted by Early Modern medicine "as a depletion of humours, which made the body impure and riddled with poison" (Cleghorn 42). Interestingly it was also considered "both a physical and a physiological pathology; women going through the change were seen as unstable, querulous, ill-tempered, and intent on doing harm" (Cleghorn 42)—a description with a striking similarity to Lady Macbeth's infamous reputation and perceived temperament.

The most robust case for Lady Macbeth's desire to terminate her fertility comes from the citation "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall" (1.5.48-9). Human milk is directly associated with procreation. Thus, in requesting her milk be exchanged with, or function as, a sort of venom, Lady Macbeth dispels her potential to offer life-giving sustenance. Additionally, since "no masculine counterpart existed for pregnancy…the woman's relationship to God was unique" (Reynolds, "Sin" 31). Therefore, Lady Macbeth's desire to dissolve that role

is all the more condemned, as it also dissolves a valuable and exclusive relationship with the divine.

It is worth noting how menstruation itself as a bodily function has an intrinsic lack of agency. We can hold our breath, close our eyes, control our bowels, but a person who menstruates has no such bodily control over their flow or its timing. As a result, there is an increased presence of internal struggle linked to menstruation and how it functions symbolically. Additionally, ignoring for the moment factors that may cause amenorrhea, such as illness, genetics, or trauma, one of the only non-medical interventions to alter menstruation is conception. However, pregnancy itself is also a state of both high emotional and physical risk. In addition to the lack of control over the timing and ability to conceive, miscarriage, stillbirth, infant mortality, and maternal death are all additional risks beyond the control of the mother. Whatever Lady Macbeth's relationship to these stakes may be, they ultimately underpin the symbolic weight of her trauma response. While the text alludes to a potential history of fertility issues with the Macbeths, it is never explicitly discussed. Therefore, whether or not the distressing sight of the blood on her hands in the sleeping walking scene calls to Lady Macbeth's mind any of these experiences is inconsequential; however, for the actors who play her that have any kind of relationship to the process of menstruation or the organs involved in it, the likelihood of this connection informing their relationship to the text, as well as the character, is extremely plausible and opens up a space for the actor to reshape the character's right to suffer, as well as for the actor to utilize their relationship with the character to potentially inform their own personal experiences of suffering.

Unlike her husband, who is in control of the blood he regularly sheds, Lady Macbeth has no control of blood until she becomes an accomplice to murder. This blood, of course, is the kind to which Bradley refers. Nevertheless, before that, she first appropriates the language of menstruation and her relationship to it. La Belle convincingly argues for the role of amenorrhea in Lady Macbeth's speech by noting

> When [Lady Macbeth] pleads "make thick my blood, / stop up th'access and passage to remorse," she is asking for the periodic flow to cease, the genital tract to be blocked. Renaissance medical texts generally refer to the tract through which the blood from the uterus is discharged as a "passage." (382)

I want to build upon this interpretation by highlighting the parallel Lady Macbeth's request has to conception in addition to the cessation of menstruation. This appeal parallels what would happen to her body if she were pregnant: her blood would thicken to form a new life, and her visiting of nature would pause. This interpretative layer increases the pain of her request. She has no children, but this demand would cement that reality.

This desire for autonomy also importantly links her to the witchcraft that runs throughout the play. Susan Dwyer Amussen notes how "punishment and revenge were deeply embedded in Early Modern thinking about witchcraft" (28-9). Like the famous witch of Greek mythology, Medea, who punishes her husband by murdering their children (Euripides 801), Lady Macbeth's desire for amenorrhea may be interpreted as punishment of her husband; however, the tragedy offers no strong reason for this to be Lady Macbeth's motivation. This is important to note, given that female control of fertility is so often perceived as threatening, particularly to the patriarchal institutions that regulate it. However, Lady Macbeth's desire to control this bodily function is a

personal choice she makes for herself, not for anyone else. In doing so, she asserts control over her own relationship to all the potential avenues of suffering menstruation and childbearing may stir.

This quest for self-control of her biological functions and the potential for suffering they have builds upon the self-control she already has over her own social conduct. Never do we see her unwillingly share her suffering. Every time she does reveal her suffering prior to the sleepwalking scene, she does so deliberately—usually to make a point to her husband. The most striking example of this comes in her infanticide metaphor:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this. (1.7.58-63)

This passage is frequently cited as evidence of Lady Macbeth's perverseness. Walter, who played the role, notes how she too fell "into the trap of seeing this violent image as proof of Lady Macbeth's heartlessness" (83). However, in order for the metaphor to work, her claim of having "given suck" and knowing "how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" must come from a place of sincerity. Regardless of whether this statement is spoken from a hypothetical position or from experience, she has to mean what she says in order for her recruitment of suffering to succeed in bolstering the point she wishes to make to her husband. Therefore there is an

unspoken acknowledgement of pain between the childless couple. It is the recognition of this pain that powers the metaphor.

Lady Macbeth puts forward her suffering and positions it to goad her husband into action. In doing so, she exposes herself and establishes control over her right to suffer. As Walter understands it

> Lady Macbeth is conjuring the most horrendous sacrifice imaginable to her in order to shame her husband into keeping his pledge. To speak in such pain-laden words is in itself impressive, and Macbeth realizes what it costs her. (83)

As a result, the responsibility Lady Macbeth asserts in her statement about the infant's death increases the portrait of pain she paints. Like Portia, who cuts her leg and uses the pain to make a point to Brutus (2.1.311-4), Lady Macbeth harnesses her own pain to make a point to Macbeth. Portia uses a knife; Lady Macbeth uses her words.

As Kimberly Huth notes, "metaphor is a part of the reality of pain" (174). The structure of Lady Macbeth's metaphor is premised on her sacrifice; it is the pain of generating such a violent thought that she uses to emphasize her loyalty to her husband. Sinead Cusack, who played Lady Macbeth shortly after giving birth, describes her experience with the speech as follows: "every time I came to that line "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis…"—I can't say it even now—I thought, "I'm never going to be able to speak that line. Not while I'm nursing my own baby." (Reynolds, *Performing* 71). As a performer, Cusack's body informed the impact of Lady Macbeth's words and the emotional power from which the character is directly drawing. This tension between actor, character, and the suffering they portray is one of the many challenges in taking on the roles of Shakespeare's women, but also one of the prime ways actors

playing the women of Shakespeare's tragedies may redefine their characters' right to suffer: "the character cannot take such a stand on her own behalf, but the actor can. The feminist actor of Shakespeare's plays must frequently do so" (Reynolds, *Performing* 78).

While the Macbeths are joined in their marriage and the murder of Duncan at the start of the tragedy, the accessibility of their suffering and their relationship to blood ultimately divide them within the play. Nevertheless, despite her lack of hands-on experience with the blood of violence, Lady Macbeth possesses a keen awareness of her own limitations with it. She reflects, "Had [Duncan] not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't" (2.2.13-4). Whether or not she would have been able to follow through with this assertion if given the opportunity is less interesting than the fact that she makes it in the first place. She is in touch with the reality of the situation. Regardless of whether or not she would have killed Duncan had he looked different, she is heedful of the emotional weight the crime will cost to commit and cautions her partner "These deeds must not be thought / After these ways: so, it will make us mad" (2.2.40-1).

While she is correct in assuming the deed itself holds the power to drive them mad, she underestimates the power the sight of the aftermath holds. While her husband contends, "I'll go no more / I am afraid to think what I have done: / Look on't again I dare not" (2.2.59-61), Lady Macbeth dismisses him saying:

> Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
> I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
> For it must seem their guilt." (2.2.63-7)

Echoing her earlier jabs at her husband's manhood, she again prods him by disregarding his fear as childish. However, her naivety regarding the ramifications of the sight of suffering ultimately informs how her psychology crumbles. She cannot protect herself from threats she has underestimated. She returns to the crime scene under the assumption that her husband has already borne the brunt of the trauma, as he is the one who created the spectacle of slaughter. After returning to the crime scene to place the daggers, she reenters and notes to her husband, "My hands are of your colour" (2.2.75). Despite this acknowledgement of their joint role in the crime, she remains distant, or perhaps in denial, of its impact on both their psyches by reasoning for them both that a little water will clear them of the deed (2.2.78). This moment is particularly important to Lady Macbeth's right to suffer as it mirrors the forthcoming handwashing she will involuntarily perform in the sleepwalking scene. At this moment, she is in control of the handwashing and its effect to clear her of the deed.

Even with this naivety, Lady Macbeth appears to have an increased awareness of the logistics of their scheme and the performance of suffering that will accompany it. Like Tamora, aware of the stakes accompanying a performance of suffering, as she pleads for her eldest son, Lady Macbeth recognizes that her and her husband's ability to appear shocked and horrified at Duncan's murder is an essential component of their success. While Macbeth remains shaken, she retains her composure and tells him, "Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us / And show us to be watchers. Be not lost / So poorly in your thoughts" (2.2.81-3). Her grasp of the performance required of them in the aftermath allows her to maintain control of the situation. However, it also increases her understanding of the stakes their ability to perform carry. Therefore the stress she feels when their performance begins to get away from them, such as in

the banquet scene, is greater than that which her husband experiences. This, accompanied by the fact that "she helps [Macbeth], but never asks his help" (Bradley 338), contributes to the psychological collapse that renders her completely out of control of her own suffering and its social force.

Harriet Walter, who played Lady Macbeth alongside Antony Sher, reflects in her memoir of the role:

> Had the Macbeths been straightforward 'evil' psychopaths, they would feel no remorse. The fact that Macbeth experiences hallucinations and flashbacks and the fact that Lady Macbeth sleepwalks are signs that they are normally functioning human beings and are therefore more terrifying. (89)

Although there is an argument to be made for the couple's sense of remorse, symptoms of hallucinations and sleepwalking alone are not automatically indicative of this response. Additionally, the couple comprises two distinct people, both of whom are products of different social conditioning. These differences inform how they respond to their own pain and their ability to interpret the pain they inflict:

> Pain perception is a biological process that is part of the human experience of the world, but it is also unique to each individual. This combination of physical, cultural, cognitive, and affective qualities make pain an experience that is both universal and subjective. (Huth 171)

While both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undoubtedly experience psychological pain, this combination of factors informs their different symptoms and consequences of that suffering. Although their trauma responses are different, they are ultimately both triggered by the murder of

Duncan. It is the play's treatment of their different trauma responses that gender the experience of psychological suffering. This is achieved primarily through how their sufferings are observed, validated, and articulated by themselves and others within the tragedy. Lady Macbeth's right to suffer and the actor's ability to access it are challenged by these factors.

For a brief moment at the top of Act 3, Scene 2, Lady Macbeth breathes a moment of reflection. She calls to mind the uncertainty of their achievements, saying," 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy / Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy" (3.2.8-9). However, her moment of solitude is quickly interrupted by the entry of Macbeth, to whom she immediately redirects her attention. He echoes her concerns, stating, "We have scorched the snake, not killed it" (3.2.15). Nevertheless, while his articulation of suffering is the focus, he does acknowledge their unity and is aware that his wife is also experiencing disturbed sleep (3.2.20-1). That being said, Lady Macbeth does not confide the suffering she is experiencing to him. Instead, she prioritizes Macbeth's, confident she can retain control of her own suffering in front of others, but unconvinced her husband can do so.

While Macbeth is alone when he sees the dagger (2.1.38), he is not alone when he comes face to face with Banquo's ghost. Before the situation can get out of hand Lady Macbeth steps in and shields him from the questioning eye of the attending lords. She performs:

> Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus,
> And hath been from his youth. Pray you keep seat,
> The fit is momentary: upon a thought
> He will again be well. If much you note him,

You shall offend him and extend his passion:

Feed, and regard him not (3.4.61-6)

She specifically attempts to divert their gaze, knowing the power that the eyes of others have. By doing so, she aims to protect her husband's image, which is essential to their ability to maintain their innocence. Her ability to recognize this strengthens the violation of her right to suffer that occurs in the sleepwalking scene. We know she is aware of the potential consequences of others witnessing and interpreting her husband's suffering and, as a result, actively guards her own suffering for most of the tragedy. Thus, while she is sleepwalking, her gentlewoman and the doctor become figures of the very threat she shields her husband from at the banquet.

In the recent 2021 production of *Macbeth* at the Almeida Theatre, the director, Yaël Farber, substituted the production's audience for the banquet's guests. By doing so, Farber ensured that the audience's gaze was directly implicated in the stress imposed on the couple, and in particularly Lady Macbeth during Macbeth's encounter with Banquo's ghost. The increased presence of onlookers heightened the sense of the couple's isolation and Lady Macbeth's desperate attempts to control the access and interpretation of her husband's psychological suffering.

After dealing with the Lords, Lady Macbeth turns her attention to her husband. She scolds "Are you a man?" (3.4.67) and dismisses his fear by comparing it to the dagger hallucination: "This is the very painting of your fear: / This is the air-drawn dagger which you said / Led you to Duncan" (3.4.71-3). Ironically, while Macbeth is experiencing external manifestations of his psychological suffering, Lady Macbeth fails to appreciate their impact on

her husband—viewing them as something dismissible with proper reason; however, she too will fall prey to a variant of this symptom in due course.

One of the most distinct differences between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's outward manifestations of psychological suffering is their actual plausibility. In a play where witches make prophetic statements and conjure apparitions (4.1.74), the potential supernatural appearance of a mysterious dagger or aggrieved ghost is not out of the question. While both are viewed within the play as "fatal visions" (2.1.43) or "air-drawn" (3.4.72), the tragedy offers no definitive proof outside of the Macbeths' presumptions that they are such. Although Macbeth's hallucinations are most likely only illusions formed by a "heat-oppressèd brain" (2.1.46), the lack of definitiveness is what distinguishes his psychological suffering from Lady Macbeth's. His might be "real."

The same cannot be said of Lady Macbeth's delusions, which are clearly represented as such. This is achieved through the presence of two onlookers. Although Lady Macbeth enters the tragedy alone, and her ultimate spectacle of suffering takes place in private quarters, as opposed to a banquet hall like her husband's, two figures are placed in the scene to observe her suffering and interpret it alongside the audience.

As Lady Macbeth enters with a taper, the audience watches her alongside the doctor and waiting-gentlewoman. By positioning these onlookers, the scene forces access to the psychological suffering Lady Macbeth has largely kept guarded. Until now, she has remained in control over her performance of suffering, recruiting it to deploy against her husband strategically. The presence of the doctor and gentlewoman works to make real and visible Lady Macbeth's psychological suffering. By providing figures to confirm her suffering, the play

diminishes her role in it by having them narrate, analyze, and validate it as a significant problem. This is, of course, in addition to the fact that she has not willingly shared her suffering with anyone but her husband up until now, and therefore surely would not be revealing this if she were awake. She is distanced from the interpretation of her suffering because she is asleep, but she is removed from her right to suffer by having her suffering seen by others when she herself is not even present for the experience.

Lady Macbeth suffers silently and privately for most of the tragedy. Although the first and only time we see Lady Macbeth's nighttime affliction is in Act 5, Macbeth implies in Act 3 that the couple is battling with sleeplessness (3.2.21). As her husband falls deeper into his own trauma, she becomes isolated and, as a result, like so many lone female characters in tragedy, finds herself without an emotional outlet. Because she has no outlet, she has no option but to internalize her suffering until eventually it overwhelms her and sends her to her death.

Lady Macbeth only becomes a spectacle of suffering while she sleeps, when her inhibitions, as well as her agency, are diminished to the vanishing point. Reynolds describes it as her "'playing dead' scene" (*Performing* 74). The fact that Lady Macbeth's display of psychological suffering is confined to her sleep is a testament to her waking control of her right to suffer. She is not a willing spectacle of suffering; however, the tragedy finds ways to access the suffering she herself hides from it. It invades her personal quarters and implants two onlookers to narrate and interpret her actions. If the scene occurred without them, Lady Macbeth's suffering would primarily be her own, and she would have the freedom to convey it to the audience herself. Additionally, the element of sleep removes Lady Macbeth from her own experience of suffering: she is not present for it the way Macbeth is present for his own. It takes

the power associated with her spectacle of suffering out of her own hands and into the hands of the interpreters, much like Lavinia's fate at the hands of her male relations.

Lady Macbeth strikingly becomes the observation she initially made upon the murder of Duncan: "The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures" (2.2.63-4). She is sleeping, will soon be dead, and is, in essence, a picture of herself. One of the most significant ways this reflection of her is communicated is through her change in speech. While her command of language and the performance that accompanies it has been nothing but exceptional throughout the tragedy, she speaks in dishevelled and fragmented phrases throughout the sleepwalking scene. Since she is sleepwalking and the sleeping are but pictures (2.2.63), her agency in her final performance of suffering is lost. Of course, the same fate never befalls Macbeth, who is allowed to remain articulate and thoughtful as he navigates his episodes of psychological suffering.

Lady Macbeth's splintered speech in the sleepwalking scene is all the more noticeable because of its contrast to her earlier speech concerning blood and her body. In Act 1, she is cogent and unchaperoned, but in Act 5, she is stumbling and supervised. "Yet here's a spot" (5.1.30), she begins, recalling the blood she earlier banished. She continues in prose:

> Out, damned spot! Out, I say—One: two: why then, 'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky.—Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (5.1.33-7)

Lady Macbeth is traumatized by the image of blood she saw upon entering the crime scene following the murder. The blood she now imagines on her hands alludes to the blood that literally covered them following her handling of the daggers in Act 2 (2.2.75). However,

recalling Huth, pain's subjectivity comes from a combination of physical, cultural, cognitive, and affective qualities (171). Macbeth does not fixate on blood amidst his psychological suffering; his hallucinations are external and removed from his own body. Blood, for Lady Macbeth, carries an additional symbolic weight that informs and underpins the psychological suffering she experiences. Her suffering manifests itself on her body. Unlike Macbeth's external dagger and ghost, it is the image of Lady Macbeth's own hands that distress her. This betrayal of her own body is a heightened expression of her body's initial betrayal with her lack of conception of a child, or, even more simply, the natural biological functions of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth and the internal struggle with one's own body they demand.

Part of the dramatic appeal of Lady Macbeth is her defiance of the typical role of the wife of the tragic hero; she even seems to be aware of this defiance to a certain extent. Amidst her murmurings, she references Lady Macduff—"The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?" (5.1.40-1)—implying her murder is weighing on her mind. The murder of Lady MacDuff offers a contrast to Lady Macbeth's psychological spectacle of female suffering. Lady Macduff, alongside her children, dies violently at the hands of others; her death fulfils an expectation placed on female characters in Early Modern tragedy. As Nimmi Gowrinathan asserts

> An intrusive, instant violence punctures every women's life. As it violates, dismembers, and destroys she is expected to respond peacefully, carefully, commodifying her trauma for others to rally around—the morally righteous path to political change" (3).

While many tragic female characters respond in this way, Lady Macbeth does not. What is more, although Lady Macduff is an extremely marginal character, especially in comparison to Lady Macbeth, the violence and suffering she experiences along with her death do act as a rallying

point for her husband. Upon hearing the news of her death, Macduff is overcome with emotion. While Malcolm advises him to “dispute it like a man” (4.3.253) and “let grief convert to anger” (4.3.261-3), Macduff takes his time to process and lament his responsibility in their deaths and the emotional weight they lay on him. The hypothetical pain Lady Macbeth preys upon in her metaphor of infanticide is the pain Macduff feels upon the death of his family. He feels responsible for the death of his family, just as Lady Macbeth would have been responsible for the death of the baby. He resolves, “Cut short all intermission. Front to front / Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself; / Within my sword’s length set him” (4.3.266-8).

Although Lady Macbeth is the cause of her own suffering, in the end, she does not have control over her performance of suffering at its climax. Lady MacDuff, who is not the cause of her own suffering, is at least present for it. She receives a definitive death, and her death receives a definitive response from her husband. In this way, the tragedy supports her right to suffer. Nevertheless, what is supportive of this right is also potentially exploitative of her suffering. Although Lady MacDuff’s traumatic murder increases her tragic currency, it also remains a horrible spectacle of violent female suffering that serves the audience’s expectations of tragedy. As a result, the actor may attempt to reconcile this tension between the showing of senseless violence against innocents and the position of tragic significance offered to Lady Macduff’s experience of suffering.

While whether or not she dies on stage may vary from production to production, there is a concreteness to Lady Macduff’s death that is absent from Lady Macbeth’s. Lady Macbeth’s death is vague and invisible. As a result, she is denied the tragic currency afforded her female foil. Even Ophelia, another principal female character in a tragedy who dies offstage, has a clear

cause of death and description of that death stated and made known to the other characters as well as the audience (4.6.149-68). Regardless of how accurately Gertrude recounts the death of Ophelia, it is less important than the space it is given in *Hamlet* and the significance it has on the titular character. Lady Macbeth's death receives no space, almost no acknowledgement. While she avoids the exploitative voyeurism commonly attached to the sight of dead heroines, it also means she is denied the creative force of personhood the heroines can often access in their deaths.

In contrast to Ophelia, Lady Macbeth's death is reduced to a one-line explanation: "The queen, my lord, is dead" (5.5.17). In contrast to Macduff, Macbeth's response to his wife's death is deeply impersonal, only directly referencing her once when he says, "She should have died hereafter" (5.5.18). That being said, the news of her death does prompt the well-known "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" soliloquy. Usually regarded as a nihilistic speech, but when performed, the poetic energy it carries contrasts to the dark tone of the metaphors and sentiment. Macbeth's right to suffer is protected enough that he may indulge in nihilistic observations. Additionally, where Macduff's reaction ends with a call to action, Macbeth's reaction ends with nothing, literally (5.5.28).

Lady Macbeth's responsibility and influence on the tragedy are removed through her ambiguous offstage death. Never is there a moment where Macbeth admits his wife's role, nor is there a moment where the gentlewoman condemns Lady Macbeth with her insights. There is no inquiry into her role, yet she is still labelled a fiend in the play's final speech (5.7.114). This event reflects a gendering of crime that contributes to assumptions of gender roles that still exist today. Lady Macbeth is not innocent, but her role is removed from influence by the remaining

characters at the end of the tragedy. They bundle her together with her husband: condemning her only because she was his wife (5.7.114). This ignorance of her impact on the plot is the tragedy's final gendering of her suffering.

Part of the right to suffer is the right to control the access to one's own suffering. Lady Macbeth guards her suffering so closely that it is only revealed while she is unconscious and therefore unconstrained. In this way, Lady Macbeth loses access to her right to suffer and the force it carries in the tragedy. This is a consequence of the control she initially exerts over her right to suffer and how she limits access to her suffering for most of the play: she is not a willing spectacle of suffering. In response, the tragedy invades her privacy and exiles her to the margins. Her unwillingness to commodify her trauma contributes to her legacy of unnatural femininity, monstrosity, and fiendishness. In this way, Lady Macbeth reflects the increased pressure on women and other marginalized groups to commodify their suffering, or risk not only being disliked and dismissed, but invalidated.

Chapter III

"If wives do fall": Dying and Playing Dead in *Othello*

In the United States, three women are killed every day as a result of intimate-partner violence (Eltahawy 142). In the span of three hours, the approximate run time of a staged production of *Othello*, two women are killed by their husbands. Desdemona and Emilia, both articulate women and dutiful wives, die at the hands of the men they have married. Through their deaths, they join the large collective of women murdered by their intimate partners who populate the Early Modern stage. For Desdemona, the wife of the titular character, her death is unjust, unnatural, but ultimately final; however, for the actor playing Desdemona, her death is silent, substantial, and fortunately, staged. In this space of "playing dead," the actor may act on behalf of the character who has been ripped from her right to suffer. While Desdemona's suffering, caused by Iago and Othello, is appropriated by them to fuel their respective plots of tragedy and revenge, the actor playing her may combat this appropriation of suffering, as Emilia also attempts to do before her own death, to reclaim Desdemona's right to the social force and tragic impact of her own suffering.

Part of the hideousness of the violence inflicted on Desdemona comes from the cruelty that leads to the final physical confrontation. In addition to the violence Desdemona undergoes in the play, her legacy beyond the tragedy is similarly subjected to a kind of violence. As Paige Martin Reynolds explains, "the stories critics, spectators and practitioners tell about Desdemona frequently echo the stories the play's male characters have crafted" (*Performing* 40). For example, A.C. Bradley describes her as "helplessly passive" and asserts, "she can do nothing what[so]ever. She cannot retaliate even in speech; no, even in silent feeling" (170). Throughout

the play, Iago constructs volatile images of Desdemona. He creates, controls and perpetuates violent images to evoke real violence within the tragedy. However, what is genuinely horrific about this tactic is the effortless misogyny on which it is predicated. Iago readily implicates Desdemona, knowing she is innocent and knowing his torment of Othello depends on her condemnation. For his plan to work, Iago must believe, like Bradley, that Desdemona is helplessly passive and will not and cannot retaliate against the narrative he crafts. This presumption, of course, is just an attempt to rewrite the misogyny of others as a character trait of Desdemona. As if Iago's plan is based on her "passivity" and "weakness," rather than the toxic masculinity of "locker room talk," that leads Othello to believe the words of others over his own wife. Although his puppetry incorporates more people than just her, she is the primary victim. Othello may be Iago's main target, but his ability to hit him is dependent on Desdemona being struck first.

The power dynamics on which Iago builds his entire scheme are inherently patriarchal. The power dynamics he harnesses are the same ones on which creep shots, revenge porn, and rape culture all thrive today. Although Iago does not have access to the media today that allow content to go viral in seconds, he nevertheless exploits the same double standard, which enables the consequences of an explicit photo, video, or report to remain unduly condemning to women. The double standard of sexuality and constant anxiety around female sexuality is what Iago preys upon and what prompts and subtly condones Othello's aggressive response to Desdemona's perceived transgression. Although this anxiety around female sexuality is not always the primary component fuelling domestic violence, it is a frequent ingredient.

Toni Morrison's Desdemona opens the play, of which she is the title character, as follows: "My name is Desdemona. The word, Desdemona, means misery. It means ill fated. It means doomed" (13). In Morrison's adaptation of *Othello*, she repositions the right to suffer in the murdered Desdemona's power. She does not change the voice present in Shakespeare's text but instead gives it more space to speak. "I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose," says Desdemona (13). This line particularly draws attention to the ways in which tragedy controls the fate of those it engulfs. Morrison's Desdemona is aware that once a life is associated with tragedy, tragedy is in control of the life. It becomes the most prominent, most remembered, and most published aspect of an individual, and in this way, tragedy as an event has the power to claim individuals' right to suffer. It can give voice to suffering while also being a primary instigator of it. It can contribute to the harm of the characters through the same power structure which harms them within the world of the play. Morrison's Desdemona pushes back against this bequest by establishing the role of her own choices in her tragic ending. Shakespeare's Desdemona is not so fortunate as Morrison's, and by analyzing her, I, too, contribute to her legacy of suffering, a legacy beyond her control.

The couple begins the play, much like the Macbeths, in a well-matched marriage. In the beginning, it is clear that Othello and Desdemona are in love and that their love is mutual, as Othello proclaims: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (1.3.181-2). This mutuality increases the tragic pathos as the ability for Iago to manipulate Othello into believing falsehoods about the woman he loves is far more tragic for him and far more horrifying for us.

It is also what makes *Othello* such a fraught depiction of domestic violence and abuse. As Jacqueline Rose writes, "we know that passionate attachment can be the riverbed of hatred, that, as many women discover too late, sex is often the bedfellow of crime…" (Rose 247). Akin to Shakespeare's comic heroines, Desdemona independently chooses whom she wishes to marry. When brought forward to answer for her elopement, she stands firm in her choice before her father, the duke, and the surrounding senators (1.3.201-5). Morrison's Desdemona builds upon this strength of character, articulating, "my life was shaped by my own choices and it was mine" (16). However, choosing Othello is not the same thing as choosing her death.

In Act 3, Scene 3, Iago begins a step-by-step manipulation of Othello so that he will begin to doubt Desdemona's fealty and fidelity. He patiently maneuvers through a series of prompts intended to draw Othello's mind to where he wants it to go. Initially, Othello asserts to Iago, "No Iago / I'll see before I doubt" (3.3.212-13). However, Iago masterfully prompts him with comments such as "She did deceive her father, marrying you: / And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks / She loved them most" (3.3.229-31). As a result, Othello goes from disbelief to wanting proof to being all but convinced she is guilty, only needing the proof as a formality, all by the end of the scene. It is a masterful display of manipulation.

Regardless of Othello's status as Iago's victim and the insecurities and vulnerability Iago draws out of him, "vulnerability is no license to violence… It is no excuse" (Rose 257). This is important to consider when focusing on female suffering in a tragedy where violence is complex and multifaceted. As Rose explains

> Violence is a form of entitlement. Unlike privilege—which can be checked with a mere gesture, as in 'check your privilege', and then left at the door—entitlement goes deeper and at the same time is more slippery to grasp. (3-4)

Iago feels entitled to terrorize Othello just as Othello feels entitled to punish Desdemona for her perceived infidelity.

By the end of the scene, Iago has primed Othello's cognitive bias into near madness. I say near because, similarly to Macbeth and contrarily to Lady Macbeth, Othello remains articulate until his death. Additionally, to dismiss his actions as the result of madness inflicted by Iago would take the fault away from Othello. James Earl Jones, who has played the role of Othello seven times, notes how "if we take the fault away from Othello, then we make him a victim—which, in its own way is a form of racism" (132).

Violence as a form of entitlement comes into full force in Othello's prerogative to take revenge on Desdemona. At first, it begins with words:

> She's gone. I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage!
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours
> And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
> And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
> Than keep a corner in the thing I love
> For others' uses. (3.3.297-303)

However, it quickly escalates to action. This is evidenced in Othello's willingness, through the guidance of Iago, to actively prove Desdemona a whore. He asks Iago forthrightly to prove it:

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore:

Be sure of it: give me the ocular proof,

Or by the worth of mine eternal soul,

Thou hadst been better have been born a dog

Than answer my waked wrath (3.3.397-401).

By the end of this encounter, Othello is not in actuality a cuckold. Instead, he becomes so anxious about becoming a cuckold that he seeks to make himself one. Benson articulates this paradox as Othello begins to search for "the evidence, the absolute certainty, that Desdemona has cuckolded him and thus, renders himself the protagonist of his own domestic tragedy" (113). Othello can never gain the ocular proof he claims to require since Desdemona is innocent of the crime Othello fears. However, with Iago's help, Othello manages to construct his own "ocular proof" and begins to see what he wants to see even though it is fabricated.

In addition to tackling this fear of cuckoldry in *Othello*, Shakespeare also explores it in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, neither of which, fortunately for the heroines, are tragedies. In regards to *The Winter's Tale*, Reynolds notes how "even before she testifies, Hermione is condemned by virtue of the fact that she is standing trial in the first place" ("Sin" 41). The same is true of Desdemona. The logic that if she were innocent, she would never be under suspicion in the first place is, of course, dangerous thinking and is ceaselessly harmful in its ability to control and quiet women. It is just one variant of rape culture: if females took proper precautions, they would not get raped/assaulted/harassed.[10] The thinking that if

[10] Of course, by referring to "rape culture" in the context of the Early Modern period, I commit an anachronism; however, I believe looking at *Othello*, along with other plays of the period, as they function in the world today benefits from the use of current language to which we have access, especially when referring to things that have existed long before they have been named.

females were conducting themselves properly, there would be no cause for suspicion is not only ignorant; it disregards the agents responsible for perpetrating the violence in question. Desdemona is a perfect embodiment of this fear that "every female child absorbs" and "buries inside like some shameful secret" (D.Smyth 40). She does everything "right," conducts herself virtuously, and yet is still punished as if she were guilty: her innocence spares her no sanctuary, but the difference is, her murder is a tragedy because she is innocent. If she were guilty, *Othello* would need to get its tragic climax somewhere else. If she were guilty—if she did wear a short skirt—Othello's rashness and violent actions would not result in the same tragic fallout. It is the tragic significance Desdemona's death has that acknowledges it, and the factors that lead to it, as wrong.

The primary subject of Iago's manipulation and Othello's anxiety is Desdemona's body—its whereabouts, status, and sexual conduct. By the end of his encounter with Iago, Othello seeks to confirm his suspicions since his "relief / must be to loathe her" (3.3..298-9). The hold Iago's deceptions have on Othello's psyche leads him to a confirmation bias that proves powerful enough to drive him to murder. Eventually, "Othello wants to read her into the convention of the adulterous wife of domestic tragedy" (Benson 115) simply to alleviate his own pain and establish his honour since "the cuckold can only recover respect through the violent re-establishment of his manhood" (Dusinberre 302). In this way, Desdemona is reduced from a character to an icon, and as a result, her body becomes a site of suffering prior to its subjection to physical violence.

This transformation is thoroughly reflected in the manner Othello speaks about her. He begins the play as a loving husband and transforms into one capable of uxoricide. Words of love (1.2.27) disappear and are replaced by words of hate (3.3.524). This terrifying progression

culminates in on-stage strangulation. Othello resolves, “Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone: I strike it, and it hurts my hand” (4.1.189-91). With this statement, Othello specifically references Desdemona’s body. By desiring not only her death but her decay, he expands “the persistent image of an idealized cold, chaste, often dead, female body” common in these plays that are then “placed in juxtaposition to that same body’s fleshy failures, whether or not the inhabitants are sexually guilty” (Eaton 185-6). This focus on her body is continued when he asserts, “I’ll chop her into messes” (4.1.207). Othello initially desires to literally dismantle her and destroy the body he perceives to have lost control over. He quickly changes his mind and instead requests, “Get me some poison, Iago, this night: I’ll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again: this night Iago” (4.1.211-13). Iago, of course, already has an alternative death in mind. He suggests, “Do it not with poison: strangle her in bed, even the bed she hath contaminated” (4.1.214-15). This emphasis on the place of the honour killing underlines the premeditative nature of the crime and transfigures Desdemona’s death into a site as well as a sight of suffering. The thoughtfulness of where physical violence against women should take place mirrors the fate of Lavinia, as her rapists intentionally choose to assault her atop her dead husband (2.3.129-30).

Throughout the tragedy, Desdemona is reduced from an autonomous woman to Iago’s plaything, Othello’s property, and the tragedy’s martyr. The constructions of her conduct the men of the play endorse, largely unbeknownst to her, ultimately become her reality—she is killed for these false constructions. Desdemona becomes a part of a tradition that sees women in tragedy “become involved in men’s world of action and [suffer] for it” (Loreaux 21). Of course, Iago is the one who drags her into it this world and eventually “defeats her by drawing on the deeply

entrenched, reactionary cultural interest in insubordinate wives, which associates female self-assertion with betrayal, adultery and violence" (Dolan,"Revolutions" 205).

Upon the first instance of physical domestic violence she encounters, Desdemona is called Devil by her husband and then struck. Her response: "I have not deserved this" (4.1.255). Nevertheless, this instance will not be the last. Othello's anxiety and outrage only continue to brew. Once Desdemona is finally informed of the crimes she is accused of, she does not recoil willingly. She catechizes, "Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?" to which Othello responds, "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write 'whore' upon" (4.2.76-8). In one fell swoop, Othello draws Desdemona's body to the forefront, distinguishing her racial difference from his own, while also conflating her to an object fit for other's, or really anyone's, use.

Despite this, Desdemona stands firm and calls Othello out on his calumny, contending, "By heaven, you do me wrong" (4.2.87). Nevertheless, and though he initially demands ocular proof, by the end of the play, Othello is willing to murder Desdemona based on a narrative he has convinced himself to believe with the help of Iago. Much of this is a result of the ways in which her body is transformed into a spectacle. Despite the transgressions Othello perceives Desdemona to have committed with her body, he appears to hold it in value still. At the top of Act 5, Scene 2, he explains:

> …I'll not shed her blood,
>
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
>
> And smooth as monumental alabaster;
>
> Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men (3-6)

Othello notably cites Desdemona's complexion when justifying her murder to himself. Even more interesting, though, is his reasoning. In arguing, "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6), he highlights how his allegiance to his fellow men outweighs his affection and respect for his wife. It also suggests masculinity as something that must be protected and that he is responsible for doing so.

The climactic scene begins with Desdemona asleep in bed— a grim foreshadowing of the image of her motionless body that is to come. While she sleeps, Othello speaks and kisses her repeatedly. He laments, "So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep, / But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly, / It strikes where it doth love…" (5.2.20-2). Desdemona wakes to find Othello, and she tenderly asks, "Will you come to bed, my lord?" (5.2.25). Instead, she is met with talk of killing. Despite this surprise and threatening air, Desdemona never wavers in her innocence. She swiftly condemns the prospect of domestic violence:

OTHELLO Think on thy sins

DESDEMONA They are loves I bear to you.

OTHELLO Ay, and for that thou diest

DESDEMONA That death's unnatural that kills for loving. (5.2.44-7)

This, of course, is powerfully symbolized in the site of her suffering. By killing her in their bed, Othello transforms a site of love into a place of suffering. This irony also increases the voyeuristic fixation on the couple's sex life that permeates the tragedy. In her strangulation, Iago's initial voyeuristic image, "an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.86-7), manifests itself.

In the source story of *Othello*, *A Moorish Captain* by Giovanni Battista, Desdemona dies at the hands of Iago rather than at the hands of her husband. He beats her while Othello watches, and then the two men place her body on the bed and stage a collapsed roof over her to make it look like an accident (Harkup 149). The death of *A Moorish Captain's* Desdemona is not conducive to theatrical adaptation. Shakespeare could have easily retained this death scene and had it occur offstage, as he does with *Hamlet's* Ophelia and her drowning, but instead, he changes the cause of her death and the identity of her murderer. In actively choosing to stage Desdemona's murder, Shakespeare comments on the parallels between death and life and transforms Desdemona, her body, and her legacy into both a site and sight of suffering. Additionally, by having "Othello and Iago no longer work together…Othello becomes directly responsible for his wife's death" (Harkup 149). This tactic increases the intimacy of the violence while also increasing awareness of the terror that may lurk within love.

Desdemona's role, however, does not cease when she does. Initially, she revives, like Hero of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Hermione of *The Winter's Tale*, but unfortunately, her own revival is impermanent. Part of what makes Desdemona's death such a complicated spectacle of suffering is how she speaks not only in advance of her murder but also following it. Upon her brief revival, she cries, "O, falsely, falsely murdered" (5.2.136). The suffix of 'murdered' highlights the certainty of her death but also implies she is already dead. In this way, she has a unique position to speak beyond the grave as not a ghost removed from her body but rather still an inhabitant of it—a kind of living corpse.

While the actor playing Desdemona will then be performing dead for the scene's duration, she at least begins her performance of death with a voice. Before she falls silent, Emilia

prompts Desdemona to condemn her husband, asking, “O, who hath done this deed?” (5.2.143). Desdemona’s response is somewhat mystifying; she answers, “Nobody: I myself. Farewell. / commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell! (5.2.144-5). From a twenty-first-century perspective, it is easy to find Desdemona’s maintained loyalty to Othello problematic and likely influences the common interpretation of “Nobody—I myself” (5.2.125) as her accepting all the blame and absolving Othello.

It is key to remember that Desdemona chooses Othello, and this choice signifies a strength of character she maintains until her last breath. To reiterate, her name itself, as Morrison’s Desdemona explains, “means misery. It means ill fated. It means doomed” (13), but she then challenges this reality saying, “I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose” (13). In her final moments, Shakespeare’s Desdemona retains the same strength of character that empowered her to choose her own husband in the first place. However, this loyalty to Othello is what makes her death so atrocious and impactful as it becomes an extension of the choice that enables her to challenge her passivity in the system that runs her society—the same system that predicts a word that means misery is a suitable name for a girl.[11]

Tina Packer notes how “Desdemona, ignoring the convention of how young women should behave, makes choices that demand our admiration for her courage and inventiveness” (193). This admiration fuels the pathos which surrounds her death and transfers into the audience’s reaction to the sight of her body on stage. Reynolds, who played Desdemona in 2011, notes how:

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[11] The name Desdemona is derived from the Greek δυσδαίμων (dysdaimon). Various meanings include misery, ill-fated, unlucky, wretchedness, unfortunate, and ill-starred.

> the dramaturgy of the play demands that while Desdemona's corpse may be defiant, it also is defenceless and ever 'divine', providing for the audience as it does for Othello, the pornographic promos of necrophilia. And although the alterity of the Desdemona actor, dead yet alive, clarifies her subjectivity, it also allows the male voyeur the opportunity to indulge in Othello's necrophiliac fantasy free of guilt. (*Performing* 40)

This dramaturgy is what ultimately undermines her right to suffer. Praising the power of the dead Desdemona is akin to the way in which Iago weaponizes female suffering. Her suffering is profound because she is innocent of the crime for which she is killed. This innocence fuels the strong response audiences have to her death while also fortifying Iago's main intention—to harm Othello. When Desdemona's innocence is revealed to Othello after he has murdered her in cold blood on their bed, he casts himself—finally— as not only a victim but a villain. He ends up suffering even more because of the suffering of his innocent wife. This appropriation of female suffering removes Desdemona from her centrality in her own death and shifts it to a catalyst in her husband's demise.

The prevailing theory discussed around the deaths of innocent women in tragedy is as follows:

> Women in tragedy died violently. More precisely, it was in this violence that a woman mastered her death, a death that was not simply the end of an exemplary life as a spouse. It was a death that belonged to her totally, whether, like Sophocles' Jocasta, she inflicted it "herself upon herself" or, more paradoxically, had it inflicted upon her. (Loreaux 3-4)

While Loreaux's analysis focuses on Greek tragedy, much of the same principles and tragic ways of killing women carry over onto the Early Modern stage. However, as cultural

awareness of gender-based violence grows, it feels disconcerting to glorify the female body's influence and power after death—particularly in an age where recent real-life cases of sexual violence "make vivid the corpse-like nature of unconscious girls who are sexually assaulted and raped" (Oliver 88).

The blatant sexual undertones of Desdemona's murder are well-founded. Upon her murder, we finally see the image of the couple together in bed that sparked the initial outrage at the beginning of the tragedy. While Desdemona is not raped by her husband, he does assault her dead body with a kiss (5.2.402-3). This eerie intimacy is further established in his final words: "I kissed thee ere I killed thee—no way but this: / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (5.2.402-3). Michael Neill describes this as an erotic *mors osculi* which "transforms literal dying into the 'death' of sexual consummation" (n.358). While, as Neill notes, this act mirrors the final kisses of Romeo, Juliet, and Antony, who kiss their loves upon their deaths, the kiss of Othello is unique as he is kissing not only his wife, but his victim.

Although Desdemona avoids the corporeal experience of her murderer's kiss, the actor does not. The actor, playing dead, is fully conscious of the intimate physical exchange with the same actor who had pretended to strangle her moments before. The state she finds herself in of being unable to respond to not only her death but this kiss is directly rendered by him. As a result, this moment is a prime example of what Kim Solga recognized as a gap in feminist performance theory that has left "largely untouched the problems that adhere to the female body in representations during moments of *literal* stage violence" (4). While a kiss on the surface appears less violent and violating than other acts of domestic violence and sexual

assault, it is its unnerving proximity to the all too common experiences of the everyday that makes it so unsettling.

As a result, the actor playing Desdemona must confront her relationship with Desdemona's right to suffer as well as her own. Since, after all, it is she who undergoes a corresponding experience to an unconscious victim of sexual assault and violence. With the rise of social media, there has been an increase in victims, unconscious during their assault, who learn about it when published on platforms as content. Oliver notes how when this occurs:

> the victim is forced to confront her own mortality and her body as a corpse. It splits her experience into seeing her body as a corpse while experiencing it as a living body: she becomes a sort of living corpse. (89)

While the ability to publish such content is new, the power structures that delight in it are clearly not as evidenced by Desdemona's transcendent death. Where lifeless female bodies are integral to so many fantasies, what is it like today to play a female corpse with a female body? Reynolds describes her experience playing Desdemona's corpse as follows:

> [It] can feel like an afterlife of its own kind— presence without power, cognizance without control, sensation without speech. In some way, Desdemona's conspicuous corpse may figure forth what it means for a woman to put her body on the stage in Shakespeare's plays. (*Performing* 19)

There is something unnerving in extolling a woman's power most fervently when they are dead. By waiting until they are no longer an active threat, their suffering may then be appropriated by others without their consent or input on how its influence is used. Both Lavinia and Lady Macbeth also endure this and do so while they are alive: Lavinia's male relations feel confident

in their abilities to interpret her suffering for her, and Lady Macbeth's most impactful spectacle of suffering occurs while she is unconscious. Of course, not all suffering is appropriated negatively. Not all legacies of suffering undermine the original individual's right to suffer; however, the potential to do so is always there, always lurking.

Emilia, Desdemona's confidant and Iago's wife, is a prime example of an attempt at a positive reclamation of a deceased's right to suffer. Desdemona's death becomes Emilia's catalyst. It strengthens and encourages her to defy her husband, confront Othello, and speak the truth. Although Emilia too contributes to the martyr-like image of Desdemona by hissing to Othello, "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!" (5.2.152), she also advocates for Desdemona and the tragedy of her death, over the tragedy of a husband regretting the murder of his wife. In this way, Desdemona's tragedy is extended to Emilia as part of the fate suffered by the community of women under the patriarchal abuse of power. Emilia defies obedience to her husband after Othello reveals Iago's role in Desdemona's death to her and asserts, "'Tis proper I obey him, but not now" (5.2.223). In doing so, she aligns herself with Desdemona and dies as a result.

Although she takes up the torch for the murdered and silenced Desdemona, Emilia also contributes to the image that removes Desdemona from herself and transforms her into an icon of virtue, purity, and innocence. This reduction of personhood amidst attempts to avenge their deaths is a chief ethical problem that arises from the practice of reading meaning into suffering. The detachment of the individual from their suffering makes it easier to dismiss the power structures which enable the suffering to occur in the first place and simply attribute it to a more significant issue rather than an active experience.

Emilia claims the right to suffer through tragic sisterhood. Additionally, by acknowledging her role in the harm inflicted on Desdemona, she increases the tragic currency of her own suffering. She becomes suddenly alert to her entrapment in the social norms of wifely obedience, which compelled her to steal the handkerchief for Iago in the first place. Although she is aware of the emotional expense stealing the handkerchief will have on Desdemona (3.3.326), she is unaware of the fatal cost it will have. At the end of Act 4, Emilia says, "But I do think it is their husband's faults / If wives do fall" (4.3.91-2). Initially, when she says this, to "fall" appears to describe only a sexual lapse, given Emilia and Desdemona were discussing cuckoldry only moments before; however, upon her death, a dark pun emerges: Gratiano remarks, "The woman falls: sure, he hath killed his wife" (5.2.270). Iago is the reason Emilia "falls," just as she foretold the audience. The statement also holds true for Desdemona, whose sexual fall and fatal fall are both her husband's fault.

The physical violence that arises from words and their power disproportionately affects the women in the tragedy. Desdemona falls from what is said about her. Emilia falls for what she says. Neither of their voices lessens the grip domestic violence has over their conduct or enables them to escape from it. All the more troubling is how while Desdemona, Emilia and Othello are all dead at the end of the tragedy, we do not actually witness Iago, the primary instigator and perpetrator of dangerous racist and sexist thinking, face the consequences of his actions. This unsettling resolution leaves us with the most prominent image being that of the dead Desdemona, the husband who murdered her, and the friend who stood by her.

Conclusion

The right to suffer is not only the right to translate one's suffering into public action; it is also the right to control, or at the very least, have a say in this translation. Suffering, like violence, is multifaceted. It can be as quiet and creeping as it can be loud and forceful. By addressing the scope of depictions of suffering and how they vary from one another, a broader picture begins to emerge of how the access to suffering's social power is gendered, not only within the tragedies but also within the world as we know it.

In studying female suffering, we must be conscious of the risks of glorifying or overpraising the force it carries; if suffering remains the most effective way for women to be heard, suffering and the power structures that condone and inflict it will continue. For the women of *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, suffering is a principal vehicle through which they may not only be heard and seen but have real influence within the male-dominated world of the tragedy. That being said, the tragedy, the male characters who populate it, and the audience members who watch it all contribute to a removal of the women from their own experiences of suffering and the social force it carries. As a result, their suffering is more easily appropriated, commodified, or neglected by the structures responsible for inflicting it in the first place.

In many ways, throughout the tragedies, women's bodies become maps of woe, able to be read and consumed by all who witness them. However, their stories are also maps of woe that the tragedy seizes to propel itself to its conclusion. Where violence marks itself on their bodies, where their suffering takes place in the world of the play, and where their suffering takes place in the arc of the tragedy are all interconnected and make a point of how women's relationships to

their own right to suffer are frequently undermined and compromised by the powers that inflict it, profit from it, and consume it. The women of these three plays make up a small section of a larger map of woe that encompasses all female characters of Early Modern tragedy and has been used by Early Modern literary scholars for decades to make sense of the status of these women. I do not wish to suggest the map is faulty but rather prompt awareness of our use of it.

Jacqueline Rose writes, "If there is one thing of which writing about violence has convinced me, it is that if we do not make time for thought…we will do nothing to end violence in the world, while we will surely be doing violence to ourselves" (33). Denying a person's right to suffer is yet another layer of violence placed upon them in addition to what they are already enduring. Therefore, by being aware of a person's right to suffer and our own relationship to it, we can begin to make informed choices on how to move forward amidst it ethically and intentionally. The mindless consumption of others' suffering, and the entitlement to access it to validate it for ourselves, is as harmful as it is prolific. Moving forward, the right to suffer can help inform questions around the staging of violence in contemporary productions of Early Modern tragedies, the power dynamics at play within them, and the legacy of these tragic heroines' engagement with them promotes.

The archive of human stories has warned us of the consequences of mistreating women, disregarding women, and killing women, yet it still happens every day in every country of the world. If we turn our attention back to Shakespeare's tragedies with an eye to the now, they can offer a place of hypothesis for us to contemplate our own complicity in the systems that govern

our societies and how violence against women is perpetrated physically, psychologically, and socially through the modern-day mediums that did not exist for Shakespeare's characters, but play an integral role in perpetuating the same power dynamics which fuel the suffering of women in Shakespeare's tragedies.

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