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Author(s): Lindsey A Scott

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# **Caught Between Presence and Absence: Shakespeare's Tragic Women on Film**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
University of Liverpool for the degree of  
Doctor in Philosophy

By

Lindsey A. Scott

October 2008

## **Declaration**

I declare that the material presented in this thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted for another award of the University of Liverpool or any other Higher Education Institution.

**Signed** Lindsey A Scott

**Dated** 27/08/09

**Usually a physical presence – moving in space or making its own distinctive sounds – the body may also manifest itself only in verbal traces, or in echoes which signify its absence.**

Patrick Campbell,  
'Introduction',  
*The Body in Performance: Contemporary Theatre Review*  
ed. by Patrick Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-3 (p. 1).

# Caught Between Presence and Absence: Shakespeare's Tragic Women on Film

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## Abstract

In offering readings of Shakespeare's tragic women on film, this thesis explores bodies that are caught between signifiers of absence and presence: the woman's body that is present with absent body parts; the woman's body that is spoken about or alluded to when absent from view; the woman's *living* body that appears *as a corpse*; the woman's body that must be exposed *and* concealed from sight. These are bodies that appear on the borderline of meaning, that open up a marginal or *liminal* space of investigation. In concentrating on a state of 'betweenness', I am seeking to offer new interpretive possibilities for bodies that have become the site of much critical anxiety, and bodies that, due to their own peculiar liminality, have so far been critically ignored. In reading Shakespeare's tragic women on film, I am interested specifically in screen representations of Gertrude's sexualised body that is both absent and present in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Desdemona's (un)chaste body that is both exposed and concealed in film adaptations of *Othello*; Juliet's 'living corpse' that represents life *and* death in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; the woman's naked body in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) that is absent from Shakespeare's play-text; and Lavinia's violated, dismembered body in Julie Taymor's (*Titus*, 1999) and *Titus Andronicus*, which, in signifying both life and death, wholeness and fragmentation, absence and presence, something and nothing, embodies many of the paradoxes explored within this thesis. Through readings that demonstrate a combined interest in Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare films, and Shakespeare criticism, this thesis brings these liminal bodies into focus, revealing how an understanding of their 'absent presence' can affect our responses as spectators of Shakespeare's tragedies on film.

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## **‘A Better Head Her Glorious Body Fits’: Space and the Body, Shakespeare and Adaptation**

In the opening sequence of Julie Taymor’s *Titus* (1999), the spectators who fill the coliseum of ancient Rome are ghosts. The film begins with a young boy playing war games at his kitchen table; suddenly an explosion occurs, and he falls ‘through an “Alice in Wonderland” time warp’.<sup>1</sup> As the ‘Shakespearean clown’ steps out onto the coliseum floor and raises the young boy triumphantly above his head ‘like a trophy’, the act is greeted by the sound of thunderous cheers from the galleries.<sup>2</sup> The clown begins to circle for his gratified audience, revealing the boy for all in the coliseum to see, but as Taymor’s camera follows him, the galleries that appear in the background of the frame are revealed to be empty. The clown, an ‘obese and grotesque apparition’, smiles and responds to his audience with notable enthusiasm while the young boy looks out in stunned silence; his face reflects our own bewildered response to these ‘invisible’ citizens of Rome, who can be heard, but not seen.<sup>3</sup> As Taymor herself explains: ‘As to the spectators in the bleachers, there are none. We hear only the sound of their cheering, as if ghosts of the past centuries were being awakened’.<sup>4</sup> But despite the absence of their bodies, these spectres, as *spectators* in Rome’s ‘archetypal theatre of cruelty’, have a pivotal role to play in Taymor’s *Titus*.<sup>5</sup> As Judith Buchanan suggests, the ghosts are to be understood as ‘emphatically *present* as part of the scene’.<sup>6</sup> Although their own bodies have long since faded into the dust, their voices still call out to those who enter into the coliseum. Through their absent presence, they raise questions regarding the potency of our own bodies as spectators of Taymor’s film: our understanding of our role as audience is first played out within the questionable and contradictory space of their representation. In the surrounding darkness of the coliseum, we know them to be present, even when their empty, unoccupied seats confirm their absence.

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Taymor, Eileen Blumenthal and Antonio Monda, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York: Abrams, 1999), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay, Adapted From the Play by William Shakespeare*, with an introduction by Jonathan Bate (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Taymor, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> Taymor, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (Essex: Pearson, 2005), p. 247; my emphasis.

Giving potency to the ghosts of Taymor's *Titus* allows me to introduce the bodies that are the central focus of this thesis. In offering readings of Shakespeare's tragic women on film, I am concerned with exploring bodies that are *caught between signifiers of absence and presence*. Rather than concentrating specifically on Shakespeare's ghosts, I am exploring how such contradictions find expression in the representation of the female body itself: the woman's body that is present with absent body parts; the woman's body that is spoken about or alluded to when absent from view; the woman's *living* body that appears as a corpse; the woman's body that must be exposed *and* concealed from sight. These are bodies that appear on the borderline of meaning, that open up a marginal or *liminal* space of investigation.<sup>7</sup> Such bodies suggest their own particular forms of liminality: a 'suspension of normal rules and roles, a crossing of boundaries and violating of norms'.<sup>8</sup> Through readings that demonstrate a combined interest in Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare films, and Shakespeare criticism, this thesis brings these liminal bodies into the arena, revealing how an understanding of their own 'absent presence' can affect our responses as readers and spectators of Shakespeare's tragedies on film.

To begin by offering a framework for this thesis, my readings of Shakespeare's tragic women are themselves dependent on interpreting bodies that are both visible *and* no longer present for today's spectators: the bodies that once filled the space of Shakespeare's stage in the performances of early modern theatre; and the highly visible bodies that fill the space of the cinematic frame in a variety of contemporary film adaptations. Like the ghosts of Taymor's film, the potency of all bodies under discussion in this thesis therefore remains questionable. For instance, while each chapter attempts to recover something about Shakespeare's tragic women through the practices of early modern performance, *these* bodies from the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages did not, of course, belong to women; instead, they belonged to

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<sup>7</sup> For significant work on Shakespeare's ghosts, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2001) and Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987). The work of such critics plays an important part in my own later reading of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Julie Taymor's film; however, it is the *concept* of the ghost that remains central to the ideas of this thesis, rather than the ghosts as they appear in Shakespeare's plays. For reasons that will become more explicit later in this project, it is ironic that a focus on Shakespeare's ghosts entails a focus on male bodies and male protagonists, whilst my own work seeks to address how such collisions of absence and presence occur within the *woman's* body.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 30.

boy actors.<sup>9</sup> Members of Shakespeare's audiences would have been required to see the female body as simultaneously absent and present on the stage – absent in terms of the physically present body, but always present through representation. As Philippa Berry observes, 'the tragedies ironically construct what is most notoriously excluded from the Shakespearean stage – the female body – as an absent presence'.<sup>10</sup>

By extension, all bodies on the stage reveal how theatre itself 'shows loss': as 'live' performance, 'theatre exists only for a moment, demonstrating the mortality of both actor and spectator'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, while we may refer to the women in Shakespeare film adaptations as 'present' female bodies, all bodies that we see on the screen, be they male or female, are, in effect, ghosts – they are not the *real* bodies of live theatre, bearing, as Carol Rutter observes, 'the brunt of performance'.<sup>12</sup> Rather, they are 'ghostly, flickering shadows on the screen' that can elicit 'a sense of emptiness and death more often than the experience of "real" life', creating for us an illusory sense of presence through image rather than substance.<sup>13</sup> Like the ghosts in Taymor's coliseum, and all other ghostly forms, they are bodies that exist 'under erasure; that is their status'.<sup>14</sup>

Such paradoxes regarding women's bodies in Shakespeare's theatre and Shakespeare films have provided me with the background for the central arguments of this thesis. In concentrating on a state of 'betweenness', I am seeking to offer new

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to point out here that in this study of women's bodies, the body of the boy actor on Shakespeare's stage does not have any particular bearing on my readings of the plays. This is primarily due to my emphasis on the absent presence of the female body, and partly due to the fact that much of this thesis is informed by my readings of *Shakespeare's women on film*. In order to provide a smooth transition from play-text to film text and to clarify my own standpoint when interpreting the characters of these plays, I refer to all female characters throughout as 'she'. While I am concerned with reading what are essentially 'liminal' bodies – and the liminality of the boy actor's body dressed as a woman may be seen to have some relevance here – it is also a bodily condition that exists within a much wider cultural performance context: to suggest that the boy actor's body has any particular relevance to the bodily conditions that I am exploring would give undue emphasis to an aspect of bodiliness that was common in Elizabethan stage practice. For further relevant discussions, see Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), and Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Philippa Berry, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Pizzato, *Edges of Loss: From Modern Drama to Postmodern Theory* (USA: Michigan Press, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. xii.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann, 'Images of the "Reel": Shakespeare and the Art of Cinema', in *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. by Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002), pp. 9-22 (p. 10).

<sup>14</sup> Garber, p. 19. Garber is referring most specifically here to the ghost of Hamlet's father when she points out that all ghosts, in fact, exist under erasure; she does not directly refer to bodies on screen.

interpretive possibilities for bodies that have generated much critical anxiety and bodies that, due to their own peculiar liminality, have so far been critically ignored. Each chapter focuses on different forms of absence and presence that are played out through the body's representation, exploring how modes of liminality are confronted and embodied by the plays and their subsequent film adaptations. Most specifically, I am exploring filmic representations of Gertrude's sexualised body that is both absent and present in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Desdemona's (un)chaste body that is both exposed and concealed in film adaptations of *Othello*; Juliet's 'living corpse' (5.2.30) that represents life *and* death in *Romeo and Juliet*; the woman's naked body in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) that is absent from Shakespeare's play-text; and Lavinia's violated, dismembered body in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) and *Titus Andronicus*, which, in signifying both life and death, wholeness and fragmentation, absence and presence, something and nothing, embodies many of the thresholds explored in this thesis.

### ***Groaning Shadows***



#### **1.1. Spectres for spectators: the ghosts of Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)**

To return to the opening of Taymor's film, the spectators of the coliseum in ancient Rome are first understood through signifiers of *absence*; as Taymor explains,

‘there are none’: we cannot see them.<sup>15</sup> As ghosts, they are, as Marjorie Garber explains, ‘a cultural marker of absence, a reminder of loss’.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Shakespeare’s tragic women have often been explored in feminist criticism within the parameters that confirm their absence, not simply in terms of the absence of the woman’s performing body from Shakespeare’s stage, but also in terms of the characters in the plays themselves. Dympna Callaghan summarises such concerns in her study of women and gender in Renaissance tragedy when she suggests that it is ‘a crucial aspect of the construction of the category of woman in tragedy that major female characters are often absent, silent or dead’.<sup>17</sup> She imagines such characters as ‘the “unconscious” of Shakespeare’s texts, precisely because the unconscious ‘is not present’.<sup>18</sup> However, like many feminist critics, Callaghan seeks to give potency to such female characters, and does so by pointing out that ‘speech, silence, absence and presence operate contrapuntally’, so that ‘traces of absence and silence are always latent in speech and presence’.<sup>19</sup> If the tragic male hero is primarily understood through presence, and the female character through absence, then ‘presence is always haunted by vestiges of vacuity’.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis expands the territory of Callaghan’s statement, reading ‘traces of absence’ that are ‘always latent’ in presence through the body’s representation. For most of this project, I am exploring the potency of bodies that have elsewhere been rendered absent either through their silence, their rigidity, or their lack of stage presence: the silenced and mutilated Lavinia; the rigid body of Juliet’s ‘living corpse’ on the bier; Gertrude’s limited dialogue and stage appearances. Attempts to address the problem of Gertrude in feminist criticism often tend to struggle when returning to the play for textual evidence, as Gertrude’s character remains so undeniably ‘absent’ from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. As Rebecca Smith observes, ‘Gertrude appears in only ten of the twenty scenes that comprise the play; furthermore, she speaks very little,

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<sup>15</sup> Taymor, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, p. 236.

<sup>16</sup> Garber, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A Study of ‘King Lear’, ‘Othello’, ‘The Duchess of Malfi’ and ‘The White Devil’* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Callaghan, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Callaghan, p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> Callaghan, p. 74.

having less dialogue than any other major character in *Hamlet* – a mere 157 lines out of 4,042'.<sup>21</sup>

With a different implication of absence, Juliet's 'living corpse' (5.2.30), as a body on the stage that remains caught between signifiers of life and death, has been left relatively unexplored in criticism.<sup>22</sup> Leslie Thomson comments that after taking the potion, 'Juliet is as good as dead from this point in the action', due to the scene's foreshadowing of her eventual death.<sup>23</sup> Such readings emphasise the tendency to interpret Juliet's rigid body only within the context of the play's – and indeed her own – 'end'; her contemplations of the tomb in her soliloquy, quickly followed by the transformation of her body and the lamentations of the characters who discover her, are all interpreted as 'preparation for her later death'.<sup>24</sup> But if Juliet is 'as good as dead' from this point on in the play's action, does her part in the play, the work that her body must perform on stage, and her remaining role in the eyes of the audience become virtually insignificant? Discussing Juliet's rigidity in the context of her eventual death – a context that inevitably configures the body in terms of absence rather than presence – seems to render the significance of her 'living corpse' as wholly 'absent' from Shakespeare criticism.

Rather than attempting simply to 'fill in the gaps' by reading bodies that are primarily understood through signifiers of absence, my thesis considers the significance of their *crossing* of familiar boundaries, thus opening up a liminal space of investigation that allows me to offer my own unique approach to reading Shakespeare's tragic women on film. The arguments that make up this thesis seek not only to address these otherwise absent bodies: they also seek to offer something beyond absence and presence by exploring the significance of their liminality. As Ania Loomba observes of Renaissance drama, patriarchal discourse 'invites women to inhabit spaces split by a series of oppositions (for example, between man and woman, goddess and whore, public and private)' which, in turn, involves 'a constant shifting, a torturous but dynamic movement between two positions which it is impossible to

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<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Smith, 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: the Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Gayle Green, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983) pp. 194-210 (p. 199).

<sup>22</sup> All quotations and line numbers from Shakespeare's plays that appear in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the RSC *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Leslie Thomson, "'With Patient Ears Attend": *Romeo and Juliet* on the Elizabethan Stage', *Studies in Philology*, 92 (1995), 230-47 (p. 240).

<sup>24</sup> Thomson, p. 240.

occupy at the same time'.<sup>25</sup> The necessity for such divisions is exemplified through Othello's inability to cope with his doubt over his wife's fidelity: 'By the world, / I think my wife be honest and think she is not: / I think that thou art just and think thou art not. / I'll have some proof' (3.3.424-7). Desdemona must either be cherished as a goddess or condemned as a whore; she cannot be both: 'to be once in doubt / Is to be resolved' (3.3.202-3). But as Loomba's study shows, Renaissance drama becomes 'increasingly preoccupied with the disorderly woman', a woman who can 'no longer be presented as a stable entity' in stories that are themselves 'deeply contradictory and contestable'.<sup>26</sup> Oppositions frequently merge and overlap in Shakespearean drama, suggesting an interrogation of the boundaries between life and death, comedy and tragedy, male and female, private and public, emotional and political, wholeness and fragmentation, and so forth. No longer a stable entity, the woman becomes 'the means of the interrogation in this drama of the series of boundaries induced by dominant paradigms'.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than viewing such oppositions as problematic, this thesis examines how contradictions are played out powerfully through the female body, and considers to what end this is done for modern readers and spectators of the plays and film adaptations. Loomba argues that such complexities 'are not just *reflective* of the conflicting positions women necessarily occupy in patriarchal societies, but are also experienced as painful confusions by the women themselves'.<sup>28</sup> My own argument suggests that such complexities can be embodied powerfully and that, through the contradictions placed upon it, the body can be interpreted as a site that challenges boundaries. In exploring bodies beyond boundaries, my own reading of Shakespeare's tragic women, particularly through its contemplation of Juliet's liminal body in the tomb and Lavinia's body as an image of life-in-death, expands Philippa Berry's questioning of 'the presumed finality and fixity of these cultural versions of ending' to offer a further study of the tragedies where 'endings are repeatedly unravelled'.<sup>29</sup>

However, while Berry's study focuses specifically on how 'a repetitive pattern of feminine or feminised tropes performs an allusive reweaving both of tragic teleology and of orthodox *conceptions of death*', my project, which encompasses both

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<sup>25</sup> Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Loomba, p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> Loomba, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> Loomba, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Berry, p. 3.



the play-texts and film adaptations, seeks to readdress ‘the “end” of tragedy’ in a much broader context, exploring female bodies that not only unsettle boundaries between life and death, but which also elude other boundaries between absence and presence.<sup>30</sup> The bodies of this thesis also exist in the territory between disciplines, between stage and screen, and between past and present contexts. How else may we explore these liminal bodies? How have their various positions between boundaries been approached in criticism, and how are they subsequently dealt with on film? If feminist criticism of Shakespeare’s plays is itself fragmentary and contradictory, caught between signifiers of absence and a desire to enact a sense of presence in reading women’s bodies, how have film adaptations responded? By focusing on signifiers of absence and presence that are played out through the body *simultaneously*, I am here opening up a new space of investigation that allows for a more powerful mode of interpretation for reading these bodies on film.

While the ghosts of Taymor’s coliseum are understood through absence because they cannot be seen, they also enact a sense of presence for the spectator through the rising, potent sound of their voices; like the ghosts of Titus’s sons at the beginning of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, they are ‘groaning shadows’ (1.1.126). This positioning between signifiers of absence and presence signals their transition of familiar boundaries and simultaneously marks their own position as unnervingly powerful. Ghosts are, in essence, *liminal* beings. Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the liminal, in its simplest terms, as a ‘blurring and merging of distinctions’.<sup>31</sup> However, such a condition of ‘ambiguity and paradox’ also connotes power: as “betwixt and between” all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification’, liminality is also associated with ‘the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless’.<sup>32</sup> As Elisabeth Bronfen explains, the person ‘who enters into a marginal state, into a disordered realm beyond the confines or external boundaries of society, acquires a power inaccessible to those remaining within the realm of order’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Berry, p. 3; my emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), p. 26. In defining the liminal, Turner builds on Van Gennep’s three phases of *rites de passage*: ‘separation’, ‘margin’ (or *limen*), and ‘aggregation’. See A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

<sup>32</sup> See Victor Turner’s chapter, “Betwixt and Between”: the Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*, in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (London: Cornell UP, 1967), pp. 93-111 (p. 97).

<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992), p. 201.

However, Turner's theory, in describing what he refers to in human experience as 'social dramas', implies that the liminal phase must come to an end in order to ensure 'a stable state once more'.<sup>34</sup> Critics such as Bronfen and Caroline Walker Bynum point out that the concept of liminality acts only as 'a metaphor' that is essentially applicable 'to male stories'.<sup>35</sup> However, my project seeks to allow the reader to explore modes of liminality in different ways. Like Bynum, I am using Turner's ideas as a tool for exploring my own, but I am also suggesting 'a fundamental limitation in the Turnerian idea of liminality' through bodies that resist a return to a stable state within familiar boundaries.<sup>36</sup> By exploring liminal bodies such as Juliet's 'living corpse', the content and structure of this thesis endeavours to *extend* a sense of 'the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless' through its explorations of the woman's body in Shakespeare and in Shakespeare films.

Suggestions of liminality haunt the plays under discussion in this thesis. For instance, as Susan Zimmerman observes in her discussion of *Macbeth*, 'the text is pervaded – one might say obsessed – with the *uncategorisable*, the marginal, the in-between: androgynous witches who disappear into the air, "sightless couriers" who ride the winds, nightmarish ghosts, dreams and illusions'.<sup>37</sup> Bodies on Shakespeare's stage played out contemporary concerns about death and 'new understandings of the possible relationships between the material and the spiritual worlds', thus calling attention through performance to that marginal space 'in between'.<sup>38</sup> Other performance aspects of the plays, such as the function of the prologue, have been explored for their own peculiar liminal quality in occupying 'a zone of multiple transitions'.<sup>39</sup> However, in exploring the concept of liminality through the

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<sup>34</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Bronfen, n37, p. 203. Bronfen here expresses her agreement with Bynum, who argues that Turner's theory of liminality 'looks *at* women' while the 'historian or anthropologist needs to stand *with* women as well'. However, whilst Bynum considers how the three phases in Turner's theory 'describe the stories and symbols of men better than those of women', I am applying the phase of liminality in particular to representations of Shakespeare's women characters. Through a reading of Juliet's 'living corpse', I demonstrate not only how such a body experiences liminality, but also how that body continues to resist a termination of the liminal phase and how we may interpret such a resistance as powerful. See Bynum's chapter, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality', in her *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 27-51 (esp. pp. 32-3).

<sup>36</sup> Bynum, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), p. 173. Berry also describes the period of the original performances of the plays as a 'liminal' time of 'religious and intellectual crisis'. See Berry, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border Crossings in the Tragedies and the Henriad* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare's Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 23.

representation of the woman's body, my readings of Shakespeare's women seek to offer the possibility of interpreting their bodies beyond 'confines or external boundaries', allowing us to approach them in revealing and thought-provoking ways.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Headless Rome***

I endeavour to evoke a sense of fluidity in my movements between Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare films, and between space and the body, transcending conceptual and disciplinary boundaries in my readings of these tragic women. Like so many research projects, this thesis began with a rather different focus. Originally inspired by the imagery of so many film adaptations and encouraged through the very nature of adaptation studies to concentrate on the relationship between the spoken word and the visual image, I began by exploring Shakespeare's women primarily through conceptions of space: the space within the frame, and the physical space of the stage in theatrical performance.<sup>41</sup> But as one moving persistently between the work of performance studies and explorations of the body, to film adaptation and my developing interest in the concept of space, I found myself caught 'in the midst' of my own 'betweenness'. The end result, in bringing together Shakespeare and film, space and the body, was an examination of the liminal dimensions that inform the readings that here follow: bodies that are caught between signifiers of absence and presence are interpreted not only through an exploration of the body as a site of meaning, but also through an interpretation of *space* as revealing the signifiers of that body in its absence.

Just as 'presence is always haunted by vestiges of vacuity', absence always contains signifiers of presence, such as the empty galleries of the coliseum in Taymor's film that contribute to our sense of the expected presence of spectators.<sup>42</sup> 'Phantoms' are thus drawn to our attention here through spatial signifiers, particularly through the construction of the auditorium, which, although appearing empty and deserted, carries the sounds of a cheering crowd of onlookers accompanied by the

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<sup>40</sup> Bronfen, p. 201. Also, see Turner's work on theatre in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Russell Jackson, for instance, points out how 'anxiety about the visualised image usurping the spoken word's legitimate function has often dominated commentary on filmed Shakespeare'. See Russell Jackson, 'From Play-script to Screenplay', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 15-34 (p. 24).

<sup>42</sup> Callaghan, p. 74.

visible billows of dust from their invisible, moving bodies. Markers of the body are carried through these spatial signifiers, even if the physical body itself remains absent. My thesis traces such signifiers of the body in its absence, or, to quote a performance text, the ‘undersurfaces of the body’ that ‘open into shadows’, producing ‘a map of the landscape of [the] body’ across the spaces it once inhabited.<sup>43</sup> The notion that space connotes absence, and that the body connotes presence, is thus frequently overturned, and as each chapter focuses on bodies that connote absence and presence simultaneously, I argue that such bodies should also be read through both spatial *and* bodily signifiers.

To demonstrate the ways in which the thesis explores ‘the messages the body leaves of itself’, it may be helpful to provide a further example from Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. When Titus returns to Rome, Marcus asks him to take up the empery so that he may ‘help to set a head on headless Rome’ (1.1.186). Titus replies, ‘A better head her glorious body fits / Than his that shakes for age and feebleness’ (1.1.187-8); he is, of course, extending Marcus’s conventional metaphor for the body politic. The image of ‘headless Rome’ is, on its simplest level, a metaphor that collapses the space of Rome with the space of the body: the people of Rome with its head or leader. If we consider Titus’s first words to his daughter, Lavinia, when she enters on stage just a few lines before: ‘*Kind Rome*, that hast thus lovingly reserved / The cordial of mine age to glad my heart’ (1.1.165-6, emphasis added), and Bassianus’s earlier description of Lavinia as ‘Rome’s rich ornament’ (1.1.52), the metaphors that imagine space through the body, and the body through space, can be understood as interchangeable. Metonymically, Lavinia is also Rome, for the violation that her body will suffer later in the play will be tied to Rome’s defilement. Similarly, Bassianus refers to Lavinia as ‘Rome’s rich ornament’ when she herself is *absent* from the stage. At this point in the play, Lavinia has yet to appear before the audience: we are first called to imagine Lavinia not through the body, but through a metaphor of space, as an ‘ornament’ of Rome itself. Likewise, when Lavinia is present on the stage, Titus imagines Rome through the body or, more specifically, through *her* body.

Such metaphors allow me to illustrate how space will be explored in relation to the body throughout this thesis. When the body is absent from our sight (Lavinia

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<sup>43</sup> Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *Body Space Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (Hampshire: Dance Books, 1993), introductory page and p. 51.

off-stage), that body may still be interpreted through spatial signifiers, and my work frequently considers both physical space (the stage), and metaphorical space (Rome's body politic), in order to broaden a sense of the collisions between absence and presence that are being explored here. Likewise, in the body's presence, space is mapped out across the territory of the body, so that the relationship between the two becomes interchangeable: the territory of Lavinia's own body becomes, for Titus, Rome's 'map of woe' (3.2.12), so that signifiers of meaning appear to move freely between space and the body. As Dennis Kennedy observes, we are ultimately 'bodies which occupy space and, metaphorically speaking, are occupied by it'.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship between theatrical and cinematic space has been given considerable critical attention, particularly in the work of Anthony Davies, Lorne Buchman and H. R. Coursen.<sup>45</sup> As Evelyn Tribble observes, a 'common strategy in Shakespeare and film criticism has been to examine the ways that verbal elements in Shakespeare's text are rendered visually in cinematic space'.<sup>46</sup> While such an approach will be evident in my own readings of Shakespeare films, it is by no means a central focus of this project. The thesis shows an interest in Davies's explorations of the 'contrary dynamics of theatrical and cinematic space', and demonstrates a particular interest in how the actor's body can become 'part of the composition' within the cinematic frame, and not as in theatre, 'a manipulator of space'.<sup>47</sup> Such observations imply a deeper understanding of the body's relationship to the space it occupies on film, how that relationship differs from the actor's body on the stage, and how the filmed body, in a sense, may become 'part of the composition'.

However, in this thesis, I observe how spaces *on film* relate specifically to the *representation of the body*, particularly as a means of signifying the body in its absence, as well as in its presence. Buchman's study, for instance, illuminates 'the

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<sup>44</sup> Dennis Kennedy, 'Shakespeare Played Small: Three Speculations About the Body', *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994), 1-13 (p. 1). In this short but useful essay, Kennedy examines the relationship between space, the performing body, and the spectator's experiences of both theatre and cinema: 'If our starting point is that Shakespeare's work was intended to be seen in the theatre, then the absence of the performer's body is the most significant phenomenological difference in Shakespeare on film and television' (p. 8). However, my argument demonstrates how all bodies discussed within this thesis are caught between signifiers of absence and presence.

<sup>45</sup> See Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: the Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988); Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and the Moving Image* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994); Lorne M. Buchman, *Still in Movement: Shakespeare on Screen* (Oxford: OUP, 1991); and H. R. Coursen, *Shakespeare in Space: Recent Shakespeare Productions on Screen* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Evelyn Tribble, "'When Every Noise Appalls Me": Sound and Fear in *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*', *Shakespeare*, 1 (2005), 75-90 (p. 75).

<sup>47</sup> Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*, pp. 16 and 101.

temporal and spatial attributes of the cinematic medium' in filmed adaptations of Shakespeare, concentrating on elements such as *mise-en-scène* and the spatial field of the close-up.<sup>48</sup> In forging the significance of this relationship, Buchman asks: 'How can one speak of a dynamic of inside and outside spaces, of theatrical and filmic space ... without understanding how these features of cinematic space operate *in time*?'<sup>49</sup> It may be useful to say that my own particular study of cinematic space asks the question: how can one speak of 'inside and outside spaces' without understanding how such spaces operate in relation to the body? In exploring the boundaries between absence and presence, the boundaries between space and the body, and the internal and the external, become inextricably blurred.

Other film critics have also expanded their usage of the term 'space' to incorporate elements of cinematic production. For instance, while Buchman reads 'the workings of the temporal field' as 'an implicit part of the analysis of the spatial field', H. R. Coursen expands a reading of space further to argue that 'one cannot evaluate production until one accounts for the "space", actual and conceptual, within which the production appears'.<sup>50</sup> While continuing to observe the differences between 'real space' on the stage and filmic space on the screen, Coursen also refers to space not just as a 'physical area', but as a conceptual area that includes time, genre, production, and the audience's subjective response as '*part of the space of production*'.<sup>51</sup> Whereas Coursen incorporates many different lines of enquiry under the bridge-term 'space', my application of the term is far more localised. Although I may at times refer to the space of the spectator, I am, for the most part, concerned with the space represented within the cinematic frame and how that space may play a significant part in our interpretation of the filmed body.

### ***Glorious Bodies***

There are many other bodies, besides the invisible bodies of Taymor's ghosts, which inform the central arguments of this thesis. In undertaking this project, I am expanding the rich and diverse interpretive space that has already been created by a number of readings of Shakespeare's works. My ideas have evolved primarily from

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<sup>48</sup> Buchman, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Buchman, p. 10; my emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> Buchman, p. 10; Coursen, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Coursen, p. 6.

performance and film criticism of Shakespeare: in particular, Carol Rutter's 'performing' bodies on stage and screen, who create 'more space for the kind of work women do in play'.<sup>52</sup> Like Rutter, I am concerned with reading women's bodies in search of 'meanings that do not disappear when words run out or characters fall silent'.<sup>53</sup> However, while Rutter focuses on filmed bodies *and* the 'theatrical' bodies of modern stage performance, this thesis reveals a specific focus on filmed bodies and film adaptation.<sup>54</sup> Through my readings of Shakespeare's tragic women on film, I seek to address the tensions between the woman's performing body and the woman's filmed body, exploring aspects such as mise-en-scène, editing, camera shot and perspective to consider how these bodies are cut, edited, and displayed as partial fulfilment of the director's project. Such tensions have been explored in order to add a further layer of 'betweenness' to the scope of the thesis, allowing me to draw more probing conclusions about the absent presence of the woman's body in Shakespeare films.

My readings of Shakespeare's women are also influenced by Pascale Aebischer's 'violated bodies'; 'silenced, stigmatised, mutilated, erased bodies' that 'fill the empty spaces of our stages and screens, their textual absence compensated for by their physical presence'.<sup>55</sup> Like Aebischer, I have also become preoccupied by that 'empty space' which signals 'the expulsion of some bodies from both playtexts and their critical reception'.<sup>56</sup> However, rather than concentrating on how performance 'challenges the erasure of Shakespeare's violated bodies', this project examines filmed performances, not to combat suggestions of absence or erasure, but to explore how notions of liminality can allow us to approach them in new and perhaps unexpected ways.<sup>57</sup>

Other critical bodies play a significant part in this thesis. In seeking to open up a new line of critical inquiry through an exploration of the borderline between absence and presence, my work is also influenced by psychoanalytic theory. To quote an example of the significance of psychoanalysis in feminist criticism of Shakespeare,

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<sup>52</sup> Rutter, p. xv. See also Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Rutter, p. xv.

<sup>54</sup> Rutter also offers readings of various screen adaptations alongside her explorations of stage performances in *Enter the Body*; in my own readings, however, I am concentrating specifically on the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare film adaptations.

<sup>55</sup> Aebischer, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Aebischer, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Aebischer, p. 5.

Callaghan bases her observations about women in Renaissance tragedy on the premise that a woman is ‘marked by a very fundamental absence in the patriarchal scheme: lack both of a phallus and phallic power, a ‘deficiency’ upon which all absences are predicated’.<sup>58</sup> Many observations in this project, such as my contemplation of Gertrude’s ‘inmost part’ (*Hamlet*, 3.4.23) and the dual exposure and concealment of *Othello*’s private ‘parts’, demonstrate an awareness of what this fundamental absence or ‘lack’ pertains to in reading Shakespeare’s women in both the play-texts and film-texts. However, as the thesis develops, an examination of signifiers of absence shifts from the territory of the female body to a wider investigation of the male subject, to contemplate how the woman’s liminal body can be understood as relating more specifically to ‘tragic protagonists whose masculinity is figuratively unsettled by their encounter with tragedy’.<sup>59</sup> I shall return to this point later.

By evoking a sense of what lies ‘in between’, I am undoubtedly informed, although not explicitly guided, by Julia Kristeva’s theories of the abject – that part of ourselves which we attempt to disavow that inevitably fails to ‘respect borders, positions, rules’, disturbing ‘identity, system, order’ through its evocation of the ‘in-between, the ambiguous’.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps, in concentrating on the significance of the border in between absence and presence, it could be said that I am exploring, rather than diminishing through a sense of horror or repulsion, the power of the abject, as well as acknowledging how related concepts such as Barbara Creed’s work on the ‘monstrous feminine’ occur in filmic representations of the bodies under discussion here.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, in contemplating the abject, I am also contemplating Freud’s definition of ‘the uncanny’, ‘that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar’; an awareness of the return of what we undoubtedly seek to repress is most clearly apparent in my exploration of the ghostly bodies in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Taymor’s film adaptation.<sup>62</sup> Through a

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<sup>58</sup> Callaghan, p. 75. See also Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 49 (as referenced by Callaghan on p. 87).

<sup>59</sup> Berry, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Barbara Creed, ‘Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection’, in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Austin: U of Texas P, 1996) and ‘*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine’, in *Alien Zone*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990), pp. 128-41.

<sup>62</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 124.



reading of Lavinia, and other transgressive bodies explored within this thesis, Mikhail Bakhtin's 'body grotesque' is frequently evoked through its 'concept of the body as a whole and of the limits of this whole'.<sup>63</sup> By extension, the 'female grotesque', discussed by critics such as Peter Stallybrass and Mary J. Russo as 'open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing', is also, no doubt, in the background of my readings of *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*.<sup>64</sup> However, psychoanalysis, too, is a type of ghost in this project. A reader may benefit from forging stronger connections between the discussions of this thesis and psychoanalysis; for my own part, in focusing specifically on the relationship between interpretations of Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare films, psychoanalytic theory remains potent in its absence.

While the ghosts of psychoanalysis are most explicitly confronted in my opening chapter on *Hamlet*, other significant critical bodies haunt the margins of later chapters, such as Gail Kern Paster's explorations of the Renaissance body and her emphasis not on the boundaries between inner and outer worlds, but on the early modern understanding of 'the relation of macrocosm to microcosm, of world to body, of the movements of wind or water to the movement of the passions'.<sup>65</sup> Paster terms this relation of inner and outer a 'premodern ecology of the passions', and while her study concentrates more specifically on the fluid relationship between 'the mind, the body, and the world', my own emphasis on a fluidity of meaning lies more particularly with the relationship between the body and space, and how, in an exploration of the borders between absence and presence, this relationship can become significant.<sup>66</sup>

It is important to note, however, that studies such as Paster's have influenced my ideas regarding fluidity and a transcendence of boundaries in my approach to the bodies discussed in this thesis; I am not seeking, for instance, to offer a detailed historical account of the cultural meanings attached to the body, as Paster does. In a similar fashion, I have been influenced by Francis Barker's ideas about the Jacobean

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<sup>63</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), p. 315.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 8. See also Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1986), pp. 123-42.

<sup>65</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Paster, pp. 9-10.

body, described as ‘at once sacred and profane, tortured and celebrated in the same gesture, because it traverses even the polarities of the culture’s investments: or rather, it is the medium and the substance in which, ultimately, those meanings are inscribed’.<sup>67</sup> However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer, as Barker does, an in-depth exploration of ‘a social order in which the body has a central and irreducible place’.<sup>68</sup>

As studies that frequently explore the boundaries between life and death that are played out through bodies such as Juliet’s and Lavinia’s, Elisabeth Bronfen’s pioneering work on representations of the woman’s dead body; Philippa Berry’s explorations of death and femininity; Michael Neill’s reading of death in English Renaissance tragedy; and Susan Zimmerman’s study of the early modern corpse in Shakespeare’s theatre all play a significant part in shaping the discussions in this thesis.<sup>69</sup> Such texts successfully evoke a sense of unsettled or questionable boundaries in their explorations of death as an ending; for instance, Michael Neill’s reading of *Hamlet* reveals how its ‘dramatic narrative is punctuated by a remarkable series of inset narratives whose conspicuously abrupt or incomplete form draws attention to the play’s own difficulties in completing itself’, and concludes that ‘Hamlet’s revenge does little to resolve the play’s anxieties’.<sup>70</sup> It is precisely within the context of such unresolved anxieties that my exploration of Gertrude’s absent presence lies. Similarly, my reading of Juliet’s ‘living corpse’ evolves from Bronfen’s description of the corpse as ‘an interminable surface for projections’ and Philippa Berry’s argument that, by crossing death with the enactment of desire, ‘the sexualised body is mysteriously privileged rather than overcome’.<sup>71</sup> However, unique to my own exploration of the bodies that *embody* signifiers of absence and presence is a contemplation of their representation on film.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Barker, p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> See Bronfen, Berry, and Zimmerman, and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Neill, pp. 45-6.

<sup>71</sup> Bronfen, p. 64;

<sup>72</sup> A final critical body that may apply here is that of the film ‘star’ body or star persona. Star personae in relation to the Shakespearean film industry and other generic roles are touched upon in this study; however, as Richard Dyer asserts, ‘star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual’, and as the filmed bodies of this thesis are primarily discussed in relation to their Shakespearean counterparts, the star body is not discussed extensively. For relevant work, see Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 3; and Christine Geraghty,

## *Now is a Time for Film*

By opening this introduction with reference to a scene from Taymor's film rather than from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, I am not only indicating the centrality of Shakespeare film adaptations to this project, but I am also illustrating how my ideas about these liminal bodies in Shakespeare's plays came into being. My work on the absent presence of Gertrude's sexualised body was first inspired by the undeniable *presence* of Glenn Close's body in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990); the dual desire for the exposure and concealment of Desdemona's body came to light through spaces of anxiety in Orson Welles's *Othello* (1952); ideas about the significance of Juliet's 'living corpse' were inspired by Zeffirelli's careful inclusion of this body in the heroine's journey from adolescence to womanhood (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1968); thoughts about 'naked frailties' (*Macbeth*, 2.3.133) came about through the physical presence of the naked body in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971); and the many ghosts of *Titus Andronicus* would never have been *seen* were it not for their powerful absent presence in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999).

It is important to note that throughout this thesis I am also using filmic representations as a means of offering up new ways of interpreting Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's tragic women. By demonstrating how *film* adaptations have shaped my own approach and understanding of the tragedies, this thesis seeks to offer a *circulation* of meanings that do not necessarily begin or end with the 'source text' of the adaptation in question. I am here referring to recurring debates about 'fidelity' that continue to plague the progress of Shakespeare and adaptation studies.<sup>73</sup> As Elsie Walker comments, in the case of Shakespeare, 'problems of fidelity remain: the desire and sense that it might be possible to "get back to Shakespeare", to represent his work

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'Re-examining stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance', in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 183-201.

<sup>73</sup> For some key texts and articles that question or challenge the fidelity model throughout the course of adaptation theory, see George Bluestone, *Novels Into Film: the Metamorphosis of Fiction Into Cinema* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957); Robert Giddings, K. Selby and C. Wensley, *Screening the Novel: the Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatisation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990); Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in *Film Adaptation*, ed. by James Naremore (London: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 54-78; Robert Stam, 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation', in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (New York: Blackwell, 2005), p. 1-52; Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2007); and Russell Jackson, *Shakespeare Films in the Making: Vision, Production and Reception* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

authoritatively, persists'.<sup>74</sup> The study of adaptation, particularly when focused on a 'canonical' author such as Shakespeare, can often establish literature 'as a proximate cause of adaptation that makes fidelity to the source text central to the field'.<sup>75</sup>

However, questions such as 'Is it Shakespeare?' or concerns about 'getting back to Shakespeare' are not the overall focus of this project. Rather, it is my intention to reveal how our experiences of Shakespeare films can radically alter our experiences of the plays, and this line of enquiry becomes more prominent as the thesis develops, particularly through my focus on films such as Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* and Taymor's *Titus*. It may be more apt to say that my approach favours Kamilla Elliott's analogy for the adaptation process when she suggests that we imagine literature and film as 'reciprocal looking glasses': reciprocal, because this ensures 'an endless series of inversions and reversals rather than a one-sided usurpation'.<sup>76</sup> Such an approach avoids any suggestion of hierarchy, as 'each is the secondary and figurative modifier of the other'.<sup>77</sup>

The film adaptations discussed in this thesis have not been selected in order to perpetuate what may be considered an 'elitist' approach to Shakespeare films, or as a response to what may or may not be deemed as acceptable for the 'canon' of Shakespeare on screen in criticism.<sup>78</sup> As the overall project of this thesis demonstrates how films can affect our understanding of Shakespeare's plays just as the plays can inform our reading of Shakespeare films, film adaptations that have allowed me to shed further light on the issues under discussion in each particular chapter have been included for debate. It is not the aim of this thesis in discussing Shakespeare films to offer pioneering work in the field of Shakespeare adaptation by looking at what twenty-first century culture 'does' with Shakespeare. Neither is it my intention to perpetuate a sense of what Richard Burt describes as 'the end of the Shakespearean',

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<sup>74</sup> Elsie Walker, 'Getting Back to Shakespeare: Whose Film is it Anyway?' in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 8-30 (p. 12).

<sup>75</sup> Leitch, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 209-12; my emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> Elliott, p. 212.

<sup>78</sup> Many Shakespeare critics have produced hugely influential works that have, in effect, canonised various Shakespeare film adaptations and magnified their importance in the critical field. See, for example, Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977); Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*; Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/ Shakespearean Directors* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Davies and Wells, *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*; Kenneth Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose, eds, *Shakespeare, the Movie II: Popularising the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); and Russell Jackson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

by concentrating on films that essentially do not push beyond what has been thought of as the ‘heyday’ period of Shakespeare on screen.<sup>79</sup> The films that I discuss within this thesis are adaptations that I have used as a platform from which to develop my own views and opinions both about Shakespeare and Shakespeare films. Therefore they have proved to be *my* most ‘fertile climate’ for developing early ideas about the body, liminality, and Shakespeare’s women.

The responses both to the plays and to the film adaptations within this thesis are my own *subjective* responses. Just as Shakespeare criticism has demonstrated a growing awareness of the dangers inherent in discussing ‘the authority of texts’, so has criticism of Shakespeare films become increasingly aware that adaptations are not ‘stable artifacts’ themselves but ‘contingent, unstable, ephemeral experiences’.<sup>80</sup> As Elsie Walker points out, these films are, ‘to a certain extent, “remade” rather than pinned down in each interpretive text about them’, and in this thesis I am carrying out my own ‘remaking’ of them through subjective interpretation.<sup>81</sup> As a further instance of subjectivity, I have included stills from each film adaptation discussed, particularly where I have considered them to have a particular relevance; however, these images are not intended to act as a substitute for the reader’s *own* viewing experience.

As any reader or critic of Shakespeare films is aware, the scope of available viewing material, ranging from what may be described as ‘adaptation’, ‘appropriation’ or ‘cinematic offshoots’, is too broad and far-reaching to be satisfactorily incorporated within the space of this project.<sup>82</sup> As the thesis is so

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Burt, ‘*Shakespeare in Love* and the End of the Shakespearean: Academic and Mass Culture Constructions of Literary Authorship’, in *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 203-31 (p. 226). Referring to the current relationship between Shakespeare and mass culture, Burt emphasises ‘the breakdown not so much of Shakespeare’s cultural authority as an author but of the specifically Shakespearean – that is, those characteristics that can be said to define his writings as *his* writings’ (p. 227). In terms of Shakespeare on screen’s ‘heyday’ period, I am referring in particular to films of the nineties, described by Thornton Burnett and Wray as ‘the heyday of the Bard’s screen revival’. p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Imagining Shakespeare: A History of Texts and Visions* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 4; Douglas Lanier, ‘Drowning the Book: *Prospero’s Books* and the Textual Shakespeare’, in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 187-209 (p. 203), (as quoted in Walker, pp. 12-13).

<sup>81</sup> Walker, p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> For a recent comprehensive collection of Shakespeare films, see, for instance, Daniel Rosenthal, *100 Shakespeare Films: BFI Screen Guides* (London: BFI, 2007). For definitions of ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’, see Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). Sanders here refers to the adaptation as clearly signalling ‘a relationship with an informing source-text or original’, and appropriation as affecting ‘a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain’, which may still require ‘the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another’. See Sanders, p. 26. For a discussion of cinematic offshoots of Shakespeare, see Tony Howard, ‘Shakespeare’s Cinematic Offshoots’, in *The*

focused on reading the body's relationship to cinematic space, it excludes an analysis of those films that blur the lines of film adaptation and theatre production, such as Tony Richardson's *Hamlet* (1969) and Stuart Burge's *Othello* (1965). My reasons for such exclusions are best summarised by Anthony Davies's observation that the 'cinematic dimension of these presentations' tends to 'to take the form of an overlay and to be, at best, unevenly integrated with the more dominant dramatic conventions and aesthetics of the theatre.'<sup>83</sup> Despite maintaining a clear focus on the cinematic presentations of Shakespeare films, the thesis refers to such productions where they have particular relevance. I also refrain from focusing on RSC televised productions such as Trevor Nunn's *Othello* (1990); however, once again, these productions have been referred to where they further the discussion of a particular chapter.

It may appear that this study does not pay worthy attention to what Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray describe as 'a less voluminous, or at least less obvious, corpus of screen "Shakespeares"' in the immediate post-2000 period.<sup>84</sup> Again, this is not intended to draw any heavy-handed conclusions about what is or is not Shakespeare; for instance, my discussion of *Othello* on film does not refer to Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001). This is not to suggest, as James Welsh does, that Nelson's film, or any other teen appropriation, reduces Shakespeare's tragedy to 'absurd teen melodrama that cannot stand alone without the support of Shakespeare's diction and rhetoric'.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, I am not here concerned with Carolyn Jess-Cooke's observation that the 'processes of revisionism, hybridity, secondary identities, updated language and transnationality in twenty-first-century Shakespeare on film' can often mean that 'Shakespeare serves less as an originating text or a cultural icon than as product placement'.<sup>86</sup>

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*Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 295-313. Howard here investigates how the plays function 'as myths and sources' and 'materialise repeatedly and often unnoticed on cinema screens through allusions and variations, remakes, adaptations and parodies'. See Howard, p. 295.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Davies, 'Filming *Othello*', in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Anthony Davies (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 196-210 (p. 196).

<sup>84</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray, 'Introduction', in *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

<sup>85</sup> James M. Welsh, 'Classic Demolition: Why Shakespeare is Not Exactly "Our Contemporary", or, "Dude, Where's My Hankie?"', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 30 (2002), 223-27 (p. 226). For a more positive interpretation of Nelson's film, see Steve Criniti, 'Othello: A Hawk Among Birds', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 32 (2004), 115-21.

<sup>86</sup> Carolyn Jess-Cooke, 'Screening the McShakespeare in Post-Millennial Shakespeare Cinema', in *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), pp. 163-84 (p. 166).

While the scope of this project does not cover enough material in order to debate such concerns, I am, perhaps, in my efforts to reveal new approaches to reading Shakespeare's plays through Shakespeare films, taking issue with Robert Shaughnessy's point that Shakespearean film studies have 'become fully cinematised, so that the plays' theatrical origins, potentialities, and histories of performance have come to seem embarrassing or irrelevant'.<sup>87</sup> The 'cinematisation' of Shakespeare film studies continues to provide us with diverse and innovative ways of approaching Shakespeare, and this project shows how reading Shakespeare's plays through the lens of film continues to be a fruitful and enlightening enterprise for both readers and critics. However, as Shaughnessy observes, even films such as Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* seem to 'value the ghosts of live performance'.<sup>88</sup> In light of such contemporary critical issues, a question that may seem potent for the reader of this thesis is: has *theatre itself* become the ghost in Shakespeare film criticism? Certainly, the bodies discussed within this thesis most frequently belong to the films and to the play-texts rather than to stage performance; however, at certain points, as in my chapter on *Romeo and Juliet*, the implications of theatrical space are given further consideration.

### ***Into One Body***

The bodies that fill the space of Taymor's arena are ghosts; the liminal bodies that fill the space of this thesis are Gertrude, Desdemona, Juliet, the Witches and Lady Macbeth, and Lavinia. The thesis begins with Gertrude, a character who has provoked many responses in feminist criticism due to the absence or lack of her speech when compared to the consuming presence of her sexuality in what the men of the play say about her. The thesis begins here, not only because *Hamlet* is the most widely known and frequently adapted Shakespearean tragedy, but also because Gertrude is a character who has been described as embodying many feminist concerns: as Lisa Jardine writes, Gertrude 'captures for feminist critics the constructedness of femaleness which has absorbed us for more than a decade', and admits that her

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<sup>87</sup> Robert Shaughnessy, 'Stage, Screen, and Nation: *Hamlet* and the Space of History', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 54-76 (p. 56).

<sup>88</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 59.

character was ‘one of the original textual stimuli’ for *Still Harping on Daughters*.<sup>89</sup> Jacqueline Rose’s discussion of the play and of T. S. Eliot’s description of it as ‘the Mona Lisa of literature’, discovers that, through Gertrude, femininity becomes ‘the stake, not only of the internal, but also of the *critical* drama generated by the play’.<sup>90</sup> My own continued interest in Gertrude stems partly from what seems to have become the ‘problem’ of Gertrude in feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, evolving primarily from ‘the cultural dynamics of blame, and its relation to questions of gender’, and partly from her equally problematic representation on film.<sup>91</sup>

By considering how the ‘absent presence’ of Gertrude’s sexualised body manifests itself in criticism and on screen, this chapter searches for ‘in between’ spaces that permit a sense of *ambiguity* in Gertrude’s characterisation. Rather than reading her through the excess of her sexuality (an excess that is present only through the descriptions that we hear from the play’s male characters, but which is additionally often present for the spectator’s gaze through Gertrude’s sexualised body on film) or the ‘deficiency’ or absence of her characterisation (an absence that is a deliberate feature of the play-text but one that is often confused in the transition to film), this reading allows Gertrude to occupy a space that accuses her of neither ‘too little’ nor ‘too much’ because her ‘heart’ remains, in a sense, non-penetrable: ‘let me wring your heart, for so I shall, / If it be made of penetrable stuff’ (3.4.40-1). In so doing, what inevitably comes to the fore is a sense of Gertrude’s unknowability, a quality that is, of course, for Hamlet and many critics such as Eliot, the most powerful and threatening of all.

My chapter on *Othello* extends the idea of absence through the *concealment* of the female body, a concealment that is undoubtedly turned on its head through the play’s dual desire for exposure – Iago’s voyeuristic desire to ‘show’ – and film’s apparent *necessity* to show, in terms of Desdemona’s sexualised body and supposed

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<sup>89</sup> Lisa Jardine, ‘Afterword: What Happens in *Hamlet*?’ in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 316-26 (p. 316). See also Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

<sup>90</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘*Hamlet* – the *Mona Lisa* of Literature’, in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 104-19 (p. 104; my emphasis). See also T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Jardine, ‘Afterword: What Happens in *Hamlet*?’, p. 316. Rose also writes: ‘*Hamlet* poses a problem for Eliot, therefore, at the level of both matter and form. Femininity is the image of that problem; it seems, in fact, to be the only image through which the problem can be conceptualised or thought’. See Rose, p. 109.



infidelity. These opening chapters on *Hamlet* and *Othello* therefore remain closely linked; the *Othello* chapter, however, offers a stronger focus on the relationship between space and the female body, as it explores the dual desire for exposure and concealment as it is played out across Desdemona's body and through the spatial representations on film. Here, 'private parts' has a dual meaning, as the chapter explores both the representations of female privacy, and the spatial representations that signify the 'private parts' of a woman's body.

*Othello* harbours the desire for the exposure *and* concealment of a woman's 'private parts', and this desire also manifests itself through the screen representations of women's private spaces in film adaptations of the play: although initially signalled to the viewer as private or intimate, these spaces are frequently threatened, disrupted, or intruded upon by male voyeurs. As a result, private moments between women are never wholly private – instead, they are caught between privacy and intrusion. In the dominant discourse of Shakespeare's play-text, what women keep behind closed doors or locked within chambers has been reconfigured as something 'rank', 'foul', 'villainous' and 'monstrous'. Convinced by Iago of Desdemona's infidelity, Othello imagines the territory of her body as a 'closet lock and key of villainous secrets' (4.2.24). As a result, a woman's 'private spaces' must paradoxically be exposed, and remain hidden.

My chapter on *Romeo and Juliet* extends explorations of absence and presence through the representation of Juliet's liminal body – her 'living corpse', which is closed 'in a dead man's tomb' (5.2.30). Despite the fact that, as Pascale Aebischer observes, Shakespearean performance studies have recently benefited from 'a lively dialogue with film theory and gender studies', which has resulted in 'fascinating analyses of the female body on stage and screen', surprisingly little attention has been paid to the paradoxical condition of Juliet's 'living corpse'.<sup>92</sup> Caught between signifiers of life and death, presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, agency and passivity, Juliet's living yet rigid body implies a significant threshold state that merits further exploration. This chapter seeks to address this significance through a reading of Juliet's 'living corpse' both on stage and screen. Primarily, it addresses the physical condition of Juliet's body through Turner's definitions of liminal experiences

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<sup>92</sup> Pascale Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence: Negotiating Masculinities in Branagh's *Henry V* and Taymor's *Titus*', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 112-32 (p. 112).

and, through this analytical framework, considers how Juliet's liminality not only denotes stages of symbolic death and rebirth, but also challenges the parameters of such theories.

The thematic interests of this thesis are carefully reflected in its structure, as I explore liminality as a critical concept in the 'liminal chapter' of the thesis itself. After offering a reading of Juliet's body, the thesis begins to move in several different directions; while a broader spectrum of film adaptations are considered for *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the final two chapters focus on two particular adaptations of *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*: Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) and Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999). A close analysis of these films marks a departure from more 'mainstream' or conservative Shakespearean adaptations, as I direct my attention more specifically toward what Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann refer to as alternative or 'countercinema': films that embody 'the marginal, radical, and experimental uses to which Shakespeare has been put in twentieth-century film culture'.<sup>93</sup> Thus my thesis seeks to emphasise the significance of its own 'liminal phase' through this deliberate shift from the mainstream to the marginal.

Films such as Polanski's *Macbeth* and Taymor's *Titus* may be thought of as appropriations rather than adaptations; Per Serritslev Petersen, for instance, identifies Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* as 'modern appropriation', reading the values that 'Polanski chose to project into his Shakespeare text, the *Macbeth* film'.<sup>94</sup> Such projections are given serious consideration in this thesis, as I argue that the 'marginal' interests of such films, created by the director's own unique and personalised vision, can powerfully alter our own readings of Shakespeare's plays. Whereas Petersen concludes that Polanski's appropriation is 'incomplete' because it leaves an 'artistically unabridged gap between Shakespeare's supernaturalism and the modern director's naturalism', it is precisely this 'unabridged gap' that my own chapter on *Macbeth* seeks in part to address, by reading the absence of supernaturalism in Polanski's film through the 'naturalism' of its violence. Violence in Polanski's *Macbeth* is made all the more disturbing through the director's exploration of the concept of 'naked frailties' (2.3.133).<sup>95</sup> In reading the film's own unique forms of

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<sup>93</sup> Starks and Lehmann, p. 14.

<sup>94</sup> Per Serritslev Petersen, 'The "Bloody Business" of Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*: A Case Study of the Dynamics of Modern Shakespeare Appropriation', in *Screen Shakespeare*, ed. by Michael Skovmand (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 38-53 (p. 51).

<sup>95</sup> Petersen, p. 52.

liminality, its position on the borderline between fantasy and reality, this chapter explores the presence of the naked female body that is *absent* from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and, in doing so, discovers the 'absent presence' of another woman body: Sharon Tate, Polanski's wife, who was murdered in 1969.

The two final chapters also mark a more significant shift in the trajectory of the thesis, as they begin to interpret signifiers of absence through the *male body*, thus exploring the woman's liminality in relation to the male subject. In the *Macbeth* chapter, the destruction of Macbeth's bodily potency is also explored through the representations of nakedness and violence in Polanski's film; in the final chapter of the thesis, the duality of presence and absence that occurs in Lavinia's mutilated body is explored in relation to the absence that consumes Titus in Taymor's film. While the opening chapters of the thesis inevitably reveal a sense of struggle in their search for the empowered liminal body in mainstream Shakespeare films, these final chapters demonstrate how a shift from the mainstream to the marginal can allow us to explore fully the potentiality of liminal bodies, by considering film adaptations that powerfully transgress the boundaries of Shakespeare's plays and mainstream cinema.

In both chapters, I argue that these films allow us to move beyond the limitations of the play-texts with a new understanding that takes the emphasis off the woman's body in terms of a loss of male potency or subjectivity. Through an analysis of such 'marginal' adaptations, we can discover what Jacqueline Rose describes as entirely possible: 'to lift the onus off the woman, who has for so long now been expected to take the responsibility, and to bear the excessive weight' – not only in Shakespeare criticism, but also in Shakespeare films.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, as the thesis develops, so too does the nature of the woman's place between absence and presence: it is no coincidence, therefore, that the final chapter of the thesis also marks the presence of the woman *behind the camera*.

Concluding with a reading of Taymor's *Titus* also makes the thesis circular, initiating a return to where this discussion began - with Taymor's own account of the opening of her film. While I begin with a reference to Taymor's ghosts, the final chapter fully addresses these ideas in her film and in Shakespeare's play and, in a sense, works to make the thesis 'whole'. By positioning a reading of *Titus* at the end

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<sup>96</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 97-120 (p. 120).

of this work, rather than at the beginning (as Shakespeare's early tragedy), I am also emphasising what Jonathan Bate endeavours to show in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play-text: that, despite my talk of ghosts, *Titus Andronicus* is 'an important play and a *living* one'.<sup>97</sup>

The thesis briefly concludes by tracing some further filmic images of Shakespeare's *other* women – Ophelia, Bianca, Lady Capulet, and Tamora – images that, like the central discussions of this thesis, do not deny or simplify moments of 'betweenness'. Instead, they present these women as both present and absent, not always definable, not always conclusive, not always a 'fixed point' on the screen but somehow, if only for a short time, existing beyond the boundaries of representation.

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<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Bate, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3; my emphasis. My readings of Shakespeare's tragedies give precedence to this play over his other major tragedy, *King Lear*, as an acknowledgement of its importance both within the canon, and within the field of Shakespeare adaptation (Taymor's *Titus* is the only major film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*). But the presence of *King Lear* can often be detected throughout the explorations of this project: through the 'nothing' explored within *Macbeth* that recalls Lear's powerful 'Nothing will come of nothing' (1.1.82); through Lavinia's ghostly return to Titus which recalls Cordelia's return to her father; and through Titus's own 'Lear-like' tragedy. In many ways, *King Lear* becomes the ghost tragedy of this body of work.

## **‘Such Black and Grained Spots’: Gertrude on Film**

A queen enters at the top of a flight of stairs. Her two serving ladies appear behind her and attempt to place a cloak about her shoulders, but they are too late. Raising her skirts slightly and descending with giddy steps, she hurries to greet her lover; throwing her body against his, she steadies herself as she places her hands on his shoulders and welcomes him with a passionate, hungry kiss. She whispers something in his ear. He looks sullen as she turns her head and nods towards an upstairs chamber where someone is waiting. Returning her eyes to his, she kisses him again and looks at him imploringly. He sighs, lowers his head for a moment, and then looks back at his queen. We do not know what she has said to him, or why she continues to observe him with pleading looks, but we do know that she has succeeded in her subtle manipulation of him. Succumbing to her will, he takes her by the hand and she leads him away toward the chamber. This queen is clearly a sensuous woman, capable of manipulating men with her verbal and physical charms. On first reading, this queen might be Cleopatra, welcoming Mark Antony to Egypt; or perhaps it is Tamora, whispering eagerly her plan of revenge to her new husband, Saturninus. Instead, this queen is Gertrude.<sup>1</sup>

While much critical attention has been devoted to the problem of Ophelia’s representation as ‘a victim of the critic’s and director’s gaze’, comparatively little has been done to question the representations of Gertrude on film.<sup>2</sup> It has often been the case with *Hamlet* that, if Ophelia is read as innocent, then Gertrude is read as corrupt: a ‘faithless mother and wife’.<sup>3</sup> Frequently accused of incest and sexual wantonness,

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<sup>1</sup> The actress playing Gertrude is Glenn Close; the actor playing Claudius is Alan Bates, and the film adaptation is Franco Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet*, UK, 1990, starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet. This wordless encounter between Gertrude and Claudius occurs immediately before the film’s formal introduction to Gibson’s Hamlet.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cartmell, ‘Reading and Screening Ophelia: 1948-1996’, in *‘Hamlet’ on Screen*, ed. by Dimiter Daphinoff and Holger Klein (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 28-41 (p. 28). For a significant feminist argument on Ophelia, see Elaine Showalter, ‘Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism’, in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by John Drakakis (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 280-95; see also Carol Rutter’s chapter on Ophelia in *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27-56.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Levin, *The Question of ‘Hamlet’* (London: Oxford UP, 1959), p. 66.

her ‘flaw of lust’ – namely her second marriage to Claudius – is typically regarded as the catalyst for a chain of events that brings about the play’s tragic end.<sup>4</sup>

Of all of Shakespeare’s adapted plays, *Hamlet* on film may have the closest relationship with the play’s criticism, and this relationship has proved to be most detrimental for Gertrude. As Rebecca Smith observes, the ‘misrepresentations that these film versions of Gertrude perpetuate take their cues from respected critical interpretations of Gertrude, which seem to assume that only a deceitful, highly sexual woman could arouse such strong responses and violent reactions in men’.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the prolonged critical interest in Gertrude’s ‘sin of incest’ has also had an adverse effect on screen representations of her character.<sup>6</sup> Such opinions have led several directors to portray her not only as sexual but also as highly immoral until Hamlet chastises her in the closet scene.

The relationship between *Hamlet* and psychoanalysis has also influenced the ways in which the play has been adapted for film; as Lisa S. Starks observes, ‘psychoanalysis has appropriated the tragedy for its own theoretical ends, leaving its mark indelibly on the history of cultural and cinematic appropriations of *Hamlet* in the twentieth century’.<sup>7</sup> Such readings place further onus on Gertrude’s role in the tragedy. Indeed, most spectators ‘now see *Hamlet* as a drama in which sexual issues are predominant’.<sup>8</sup> James Simmons attributes much of this interest in ‘sexual issues’ to the influence of Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* (1948), a film that takes just as much influence from Freudian thinking as it does from Shakespeare; after this production,

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<sup>4</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Hamlet’s Mother and Other Women* (New York and Chichester: Columbia UP, 1990), p. 17. It is necessary to point out here that Heilbrun’s reading of Gertrude is a favourable one, however she still describes Gertrude’s sexual desire as a fault that brings about further tragic events: ‘Gertrude’s flaw of lust made Claudius’ ambition possible, for without taking advantage of the Queen’s desire to still be married, he could not have been king’. See Heilbrun, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Smith, ‘A Heart Cleft in Twain: the Dilemma of Shakespeare’s Gertrude’, in *The Woman’s Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Gayle Green, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983) pp. 194-210 (p. 195).

<sup>6</sup> John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in ‘Hamlet’* (Cambridge: CUP, 1937), p. 44. As marriage to her first husband’s brother would have been considered incest at the time of Shakespeare’s writing, Wilson refers to Gertrude as a ‘criminal’ for her second marriage, describing her sin as ‘filthy’, and one that undoubtedly leaves her ‘rotten’. Like several other critics, he also argues that Gertrude was unfaithful to her first husband before his death, although Shakespeare’s play-text provides no evidence of this. However, despite being convinced of adultery on Gertrude’s part, Wilson agrees that she took no part in the murder of her first husband, and acknowledges the textual evidence that maintains her innocence in this matter. See Dover Wilson, p. 293.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa S. Starks, ‘The displaced body of desire: Sexuality in Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet*’, in *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 160-78 (p. 160).

<sup>8</sup> James R. Simmons Jr., ‘“In the Rank Sweat of an Enseamed Bed”: Sexual Aberration and the Paradigmatic Screen *Hamlets*’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 25 (1997), 111-18 (p. 111).

almost every filmmaker regarded 'the matter of aberrant sexual contexts as a prerequisite for a good and true representation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'.<sup>9</sup> A consideration of film adaptations post-Olivier justifies Simmons's assertion: Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) for instance, as referred to above, certainly takes its cue from the Oedipal relationship that Olivier inserts between Hamlet and his mother, and Glenn Close's Gertrude under Zeffirelli's direction is even more overtly sexual than Eileen Herlie's.<sup>10</sup> While I agree with Simmons's assertion, it is not, as he suggests, Hamlet's sexuality that has become 'the indisputable central issue of the play' on film; rather, it is indisputably Gertrude's.<sup>11</sup>

The centrality of Gertrude's sexuality on film is troubling, particularly when we consider what Gertrude's character says in Shakespeare's play-text. Gertrude's speeches do not suggest that she is an erotically powerful queen; she is no alluring Cleopatra, who describes her body as a 'morsel for a monarch', making royal men 'stand' and 'grow' and 'die' to look upon her (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.5.36-8). Similarly, she is no promiscuous Tamora, using the valour of her tongue to 'enchant' men with 'words more sweet and yet more dangerous / Than baits to fish or honey-stalks to sheep' (*Titus Andronicus*, 4.4.87-9). Although Gertrude has 'less dialogue than any other major character in *Hamlet*', when she does speak, none of her words imply lust or wantonness. Janet Adelman asserts that, due to the play's 'investment in Hamlet's fantasies' we are not permitted to see Gertrude as 'a separate, fully-fledged character'; rather, she is 'more a screen for Hamlet's fantasies about her than a fully developed character in her own right'.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Steven Urkowitz refers to her character as 'a relatively passive mirror of events, a surface without independent motives for action'.<sup>13</sup> Such critical opinions, however, imagine Gertrude's character in terms of absence rather than presence, and Gertrude on film has an undeniable

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<sup>9</sup> Simmons, p. 112. Simmons also notes how the winning of five Academy awards established Olivier's *Hamlet* as 'a landmark Shakespearean film, because as the first such adaptation to win any major Academy Awards, it was immediately considered an authoritative version of *Hamlet*'. p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> In his focus on the Oedipal complex, Olivier takes influence not only from Shakespeare but also from famous critical readings of Shakespeare, particularly in the works of Freud and Ernest Jones. See Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

<sup>11</sup> Simmons, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, From 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.34.

<sup>13</sup> Adelman, p. 34; Steven Urkowitz, 'Five Women Eleven Ways: Changing Images of Shakespearean Characters in the Earliest Texts', in *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986*, ed. by Werner Habicht, D. J. Palmer and Roger Pringle (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1988), pp. 292-304 (p. 300).

presence. How should we read Gertrude on film? How should we interpret the promiscuous, sexually alluring body that we often find in film adaptations of *Hamlet*?

It is the apparently inevitable choice of reading the tragedy from Hamlet's point of view, 'a powerful first-person force in the play who encourages one to see all events and people from his perspective', that has so eroticised Gertrude's body.<sup>14</sup> As Barbara Hodgdon observes, the hegemony of the Freudian narrative 'indicates how twentieth-century readers have (always already) activated *Hamlet* through Hamlet's eyes and have eroticised Gertrude's body to mask the consequences'.<sup>15</sup> Given how little Gertrude's character says about her second marriage in Shakespeare's play-text, and how much Hamlet and the ghost obsess over the sexual part of her marriage to Claudius, it seems a preordained conclusion for critics and directors to read Gertrude through the male descriptions of her 'rank' sexuality (1.2.136). In Hamlet's first soliloquy, we hear of his inability to come to terms with the 'wicked speed' of his mother's second marriage after the death of his father (1.2.156). Hamlet is repulsed by Gertrude's sudden haste to 'incestuous sheets' (1.2.157), and while he condemns her 'frailty' for this second marriage, he idealises the image of his lost father who was, in comparison to Claudius, 'Hyperion to a satyr' (1.2.140). For Hamlet, 'a beast that wants discourse of reason' is more human than his mother's wantonness (1.2.150), and he sees her body not only as less than human for her sexual 'dexterity', but also as 'rank' and contaminating, an 'unweeded garden' grown 'to seed', polluted and corrupted by her 'incestuous' marriage (1.2.135-6).<sup>16</sup>

It is this famous speech, so lingered over by both actors and critics, which primarily reduces the play's queen to a deceitful woman of superficial shows and strong sexual desires. The ghost also describes Gertrude as a 'most seeming-virtuous queen' (1.5.51), whose 'will' was seduced by 'wicked wit and gifts' (1.5.49-51) and whose 'lust' now feeds 'on garbage' (1.5.60-2). Such passages have become 'proof' of Gertrude 'as failed widow, hasty in mourning because lustful in bed'.<sup>17</sup> However, such images from the play evoke in the 'mind's eye' (1.2.186) what may be kept

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, 'The Critic, the Poor Player, Prince Hamlet, and the Lady in the Dark', in *Shakespeare Reread: the Texts in New Contexts*, ed. by Russ McDonald (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994), pp. 259-93 (p. 281).

<sup>16</sup> See Janet Adelman's essay for a fuller psychological argument on the maternal body: pp. 11-37 (pp. 19-20).

<sup>17</sup> Julia Reinhard Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard, *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993), p. 113.



absent from the performance. As we are permitted to see and hear Gertrude *before* Hamlet's – or, indeed, the ghost's – speech, we may find much in the performance that contradicts Hamlet's opinion of his mother.

How are we, as spectators and critics, to understand the liminality of Gertrude's sexualised body? How do film adaptations instruct us to read Gertrude's body, and to what purpose? As Marvin Rosenberg observes about the character in performance, Gertrude 'in her silences' will 'have much to *show*'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, if Gertrude's speech in the play prevents us from making any definitive claims about her character, then we must look to the body in performance for answers. On film, it often appears that what Gertrude's body must inevitably 'show' is evidence of Hamlet's misogynistic claims about women. The scene described in this chapter's opening paragraph from Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* is interpolated: here, Glenn Close's Gertrude says nothing – at least, nothing that we are permitted to hear – and thus, without words, the camera directs us toward a reading of her promiscuous body. Through this performing body, the spectator may interpret Close's Gertrude as lustful, sexually alluring, and manipulative, an image that, in turn, allows spectators and critics to make sense of the Hamlet/*Hamlet* universe. If *Hamlet* is indeed 'the most problematic play ever written by Shakespeare or by any other playwright', then it would appear that its central perplexing problems for both Hamlet and for *Hamlet*'s critics can often be solved through this *showing* of Gertrude's sexualised body.<sup>19</sup> As her words do not pertain to lust or desire, then film adaptations must provide, to quote *Othello*, 'ocular proof' (*Othello*, 3.3.363) of this sexual desire, writing its excess not in words but through the performing body on screen.

As Shakespeare's 'problem' play, *Hamlet* indeed provokes more questions than it provides answers. However, unlike the many other complexities of the play that are frequently praised or accepted by critics, the problem of Gertrude must inevitably be solved if we are to understand the actions of the protagonist and to perceive his quest as heroic and honourable. *Hamlet* films often look to the female body to offer the solutions; what comes to the fore in Carol Rutter's reading of these essentially masculine film-texts is the necessary *erasure* of Ophelia's body. Rutter argues that by positioning the camera to see things 'through Hamlet's eyes', and by

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<sup>18</sup> Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992), p. 70; my emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> Levin, p. 131.

failing to look upon Ophelia's corpse in her grave scene, the male abuse that her body should speak of is thus removed, silenced.<sup>20</sup>

As if to balance this observation, what primarily comes to the fore in my own reading of *Hamlet* on film is the subsequent *exploitation* of Gertrude's body. In other words, if the heroic project of *Hamlet* on screen is ultimately achieved under strategies of erasure – namely, by erasing the female body in the grave – then it is also equally achieved by strategies of bodily exploitation. In Ophelia's case, as Rutter suggests, the camera effects a move away from Ophelia's corpse; therefore the suffering that Hamlet has caused is removed from the evidence of her body, and the blame for his actions is hidden. Where it cannot be hidden, it is necessarily displaced onto Gertrude's own body. Her sexuality is frequently manipulated in order to 'fill in the gaps', and make the masculine concept of a heroic Hamlet far more plausible. An erasure of Ophelia's victimised body works to erase Hamlet's crimes; however, an exploitation of Gertrude's sexualised body also serves to transfer those crimes from the male subject to the female object.

While film adaptations give Gertrude's sexualised body a physical presence, and while her own part in Shakespeare's play suggests absence, this chapter endeavours to offer something in between. In so doing, I am positioning my argument between Rosenberg's acute observation of the two ways in which other critics have traditionally read Shakespeare's Gertrude: 'by her silences, and by what others say of her'.<sup>21</sup> From a standpoint that views these two alternatives as both useful and problematic, I am here arguing that what is essential for a reading of Shakespeare's Gertrude is an acceptance of her *ambiguity*. Even the most favourable critical interpretations of her character eventually concede that in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 'many questions about Gertrude arise that cannot be fully answered'.<sup>22</sup> But despite such acknowledgements, critics and film directors still determine to provide answers where Shakespeare's play does not. Why do film directors and critics alike so often seek to 'pluck out the heart' of Gertrude's 'mystery' (3.2.313-4)?

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27-8.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, p. 196. Toward the close of her argument, Smith writes: 'Gertrude is problematic not because of layers of complexity or a dense texture such as that of Hamlet but because, as with the ghost, Shakespeare does not provide all the "answers"'. Interestingly, Smith here compares Gertrude's ambiguously drawn character to that of the ghost, a 'body' that is also both absent and present, and such paradoxical conditions, both literally and figuratively in the body's representation, are central to this thesis. See Smith, p. 207.

In my discussion of *Hamlet* on film, I illustrate the ways in which directors create a Gertrude based on what the men of the play say about her, using the territory of her body essentially to *show* what remains to be confirmed by her own words in Shakespeare's play. Gertrude's body, as it is represented on screen, offers the visual proof for Hamlet's misogynistic attack on female sexuality; however her ambiguous characterisation in Shakespeare's play prevents us from making any such assumptions. The many ambiguities surrounding Shakespeare's Gertrude mean that we cannot make any definitive claims about her character; film adaptations, however, tend to erase such complexities through the presence of the mother's sexualised body.

My own reading of Shakespeare's Gertrude, unlike Hamlet's own attempt to 'set it right' (1.5.206), raises further questions about film adaptations that seek to solve the 'problem' of Gertrude, for what undoubtedly lies beneath these attempts to define Gertrude's sexuality on film is the uncertainty of her character's nature and desire, the failure of Hamlet's own attempt to reveal her 'inmost part' (3.4.23). Gertrude herself provides no definitive answers as to her desire in Shakespeare's play. Even her alleged 'confession' of guilt in the closet scene remains wholly ambiguous: 'O Hamlet, speak no more: / Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grainèd spots / As will not leave their tinct' (3.4.87-90). Despite her son's attempts, and despite any critical attempts, to provide answers, Gertrude's 'inmost part' remains undoubtedly hidden from our sight: the 'black and grainèd spots' of her 'very soul' paradoxically reveal both something and nothing.

Therefore, rather than perpetuating the dominant stereotype of her character on film, this chapter offers a more positive reading of Shakespeare's queen by locating the ambiguous spaces or moments of resistance in the performances of women who play Gertrude. Reading their performances – in particular, Julie Christie's performance in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) – I here consider moments on film that maintain, rather than diminish, a sense of Gertrude's ambiguity, thus inviting multiple readings and allowing us to perceive her as something beyond the hegemonic representation of her character. Such resistant spaces provoke further questions about Shakespeare's play: is Gertrude only loosely defined as a character so that these male fantasies can be easily played out over her body? Or is the evident gap between her character and their fantasies more crucial to the structures of the play as a whole?

Through an acknowledgement of these spaces of resistance, I argue that what essentially comes to the fore in a reading of Gertrude's presence and absence is a sense of her unknowability, a condition that is at once both powerful and threatening. This achieves what Murray Biggs determines is crucial in reading *Hamlet*: to 'step closer to its simultaneous complexity'.<sup>23</sup> Like Biggs's, my own discussion of film adaptations of *Hamlet* serves to move closer to the play's complexity, rather than to 'simplify its problems'.<sup>24</sup> I am also agreeing here with McCombe's observation that many Hollywood productions 'undermine the ambiguities' that make Shakespeare's plays 'so readily available to interpretive criticism'.<sup>25</sup> However, unlike McCombe, who bases his observations on Hamlet's character, my own particular focus resides on the complexity of Gertrude.<sup>26</sup> Such a reading serves to privilege women's bodies over male perspectives, not least through a discussion of the actresses who perform Gertrude on film, but more crucially through a privileging of Gertrude's ambiguity, which has so long troubled critics of the play. Film adaptations, to make sense of the *Hamlet* universe, are quick to make Gertrude's character *knowable*, to provide reasons for her otherwise ambiguous words and actions. But the 'matter' of Gertrude's character begs further attention: the 'art' of her body's representation on film must be questioned, for like Polonius's wordplay, it confuses and hinders our understanding.

### ***Inmost Parts***

In criticism, it often seems that Gertrude must be interpreted either as an 'excess', charged with having 'too much' sexuality, or as a 'lack', a lack of speech and a lack of subjectivity.<sup>27</sup> As Dorothea Kehler observes of Gertred (as she is named in the First Quarto), her 'speeches and actions are characterised almost exclusively by

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<sup>23</sup> Murray Biggs, "'He's Going to His Mother's Closet": Hamlet and Gertrude on Screen', *Shakespeare Survey*, 45 (1992), 53-62 (p. 62).

<sup>24</sup> Biggs, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> John P. McCombe, 'Toward an Objective Correlative: The Problem of Desire in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 25 (1997), 125-31 (p. 125).

<sup>26</sup> McCombe writes: 'Hamlet's loyalties are divided. He feels obligated to the dead King as both a political father and a paternal father, but the duties to the two fathers are often directly opposed'. Although McCombe analyses the centrality of the mother/son relationship in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, the concern for a lack of complexity or ambiguity here only pertains to Hamlet: 'As evidence of a massively reduced complexity, the Hamlet of Zeffirelli's film simply seeks to satisfy his mother's desires'. See McCombe, pp. 126 and 128.

<sup>27</sup> In a reading of *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*, Jacqueline Rose writes: 'In both of these plays, the central woman character finds herself accused – Gertrude in *Hamlet* of too much sexuality, Isabella in *Measure for Measure* of not enough'. See Jacqueline Rose, 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 97-120 (pp. 97-8).

meekness and silence’, and ‘her own subjectivity’ is ‘underdeveloped’.<sup>28</sup> Kehler also acknowledges that although Gertred is obedient and passive, her representation in Q1 is still ‘complicated by underlying sexual issues’, concluding that, for Hamlet, ‘in all three texts of the play, his mother’s sexuality is perverse’.<sup>29</sup> Gertrude is either ‘nothing’ – a blank canvas or ‘a screen for Hamlet’s fantasies’ – or she is everything, the result of an unruly sexual appetite, an ‘increase’ that has ‘grown / By what it fed on’ (1.2.144-5).<sup>30</sup>

Somewhat unsurprisingly, even Gertrude’s absence or lack has been implicated in Hamlet’s – and *Hamlet*’s – failures: not only is the excess of her sexuality of tragic consequence for the play’s protagonist, but the deficiency of her characterisation has also been regarded as problematic for the play’s aesthetic form. In T. S. Eliot’s widely established critical concept of objective correlatives, the writer observes ‘Hamlet’s bafflement at the *absence* of objective equivalent to his feelings’.<sup>31</sup> As Jacqueline Rose observes, for T. S. Eliot, ‘the aesthetic matching of emotion to object, which is the precondition of proper aesthetic form, fails in *Hamlet* because Gertrude is not sufficient as a character to carry the weight of the affect which she generates in the chief character of the play’.<sup>32</sup> Thus the *absence* in terms of the play’s aesthetic form is ostensibly Gertrude’s: here, she provides ‘too little’ rather than too much. Within such critical speculations of absence and presence, Gertrude becomes the destructive black hole, a ‘conjunctive’ nothing (4.6.16) that, although measured in terms of absence, pulls Hamlet ‘out of [his] star’ (2.2.143) and moves Claudius ‘in his sphere’ so that he may only be guided ‘by her’ (4.6.17-18). Gertrude is also, for Claudius, a liminal body: ‘My virtue or my plague, be it either which’ (4.6.15).

Alternatively, some critics give potency to Gertrude’s lack of presence and speech. J. Anthony Burton, for instance, argues that Gertrude’s small number of lines ‘is no measure of her importance’.<sup>33</sup> His argument identifies a ‘constant’ in her words that gives Gertrude a character of her own: ‘in the presence of social discord or

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<sup>28</sup> Dorothea Kehler, ‘The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertred’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (1995), 398-413 (p. 404).

<sup>29</sup> Kehler, p. 408.

<sup>30</sup> Adelman, p.34.

<sup>31</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 101; my emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> Rose, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> J. Anthony Burton, ‘The Lady Vanishes or, the Incredible Shrinking Gertrude’, in *Acts of Criticism: Performance Matters in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of James P. Lusardi*, ed. by Paul Nelsen and June Schlueter (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006), pp. 217-31 (p. 217).

awkwardness, it is Gertrude's characteristic to respond quickly if not wisely to resolve it'.<sup>34</sup> Examining this characteristic through her physical and verbal intervention, he again gives absence potency: 'the practiced ease by which she restores harmony time and again may explain why it is so easy to overlook her part in doing so'.<sup>35</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun also approaches absence or lack of speech more assertively by arguing that 'conciseness of statement is not the mark of a dull and shallow woman'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Rebecca Smith argues that, although speaking very little, Gertrude speaks 'plainly, directly, and chastely'.<sup>37</sup> However, just as Gertrude's words and actions do not confirm what the men of the play say about her, they likewise confirm little else. The only 'constant' that can be detected in Gertrude's characterisation and her small amount of dialogue is the enigmatic nature of her speech, as the motives behind her words often remain questionable. As Rosenberg concludes, 'Gertrude herself never admits any specific wrongdoing, only remorse for what may be *unspeakable*'; therefore, 'Shakespeare never tells', and so 'the heart of *her* mystery also remains unpluckable'.<sup>38</sup>

When it comes to the queen – or as I am here tempted to pun, the *player* queen – the mystery must be solved for Hamlet himself. What lies 'within' must 'pass[ ] show' (1.2.85); this becomes apparent in Hamlet's first appearance on the stage and his evident dislike at his mother's words, 'Why seems it so particular with thee?' (1.2.75). In the closet scene, the play's 'emotional centre', Hamlet determines to 'speak daggers' (3.2.339) to his mother, to 'set [her] up a glass' that will reveal her 'inmost part' (3.4.22-3).<sup>39</sup> The 'emotional centre' that is being probed here is clearly Gertrude's own: her 'very soul' (3.4.88) or 'heart' must, for Hamlet, be made of 'penetrable stuff' and its content must be known (3.4.40-1). But the only answers that Hamlet seems to find here come from his own utterances. Gertrude herself asks at least twelve questions in this scene, often responding to her son's words not with definitive answers but with further questions that reveal little evidence of what lies behind them: 'Why, how now, Hamlet?' (3.4.14); 'Have you forgot me?' (16); 'What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?' (24); 'O me, what hast thou done?' (29); 'As kill a king?' (34). When Gertrude responds to Hamlet's charge of murder with yet

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<sup>34</sup> Burton, p. 219.

<sup>35</sup> Burton, p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> Heilbrun, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Rosenberg, p. 78; my emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> G. R. Hibbard, ed., *Hamlet*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 276.

another question, Hamlet replies ‘Ay, lady, ’twas my word’ (3.4.35), making it even more apparent that it is Hamlet’s ‘word’, not Gertrude’s, that here instructs the dialogue. Hamlet thus orchestrates Gertrude’s ‘part’ as he earlier orchestrated the players: ‘Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you’ (3.2.1). When Hamlet condemns her for living in ‘the rank sweat of an enseamed bed’ (3.4.92), Gertrude only requests that he ‘speak no more’ (3.4.87); there is no sufficient evidence of repentance, or confession, or even guilt. What is in fact revealed at Gertrude’s ‘very soul’ is itself ambiguous: the ‘black and grainèd spots’ reveal both the permanent ‘tinct’ or stain *and* the black, empty abyss of their colouring.

In attempting to solve the mystery of Gertrude, we are in fact positioning our attempts with Hamlet’s own. Psychoanalytic readings of the play suggest that Hamlet’s failure to act is tied up with his need to comprehend his mother’s desire. Lacan, as Lupton and Reinhard explain, ‘locates the essential vacillation of Hamlet’s will in the field of Gertrude’s ambiguous desire’.<sup>40</sup> Lacan writes that this desire of the mother ‘is essentially manifested in the fact that, confronted on one hand with an eminent, idealized, exalted object – his father – and on the other with the degraded, despicable object Claudius, the criminal and adulterous brother, Hamlet does not choose’.<sup>41</sup> By locating Hamlet’s inability to act within his mother’s ambiguous desire, resolution for Hamlet and *Hamlet* becomes tied up with solving the enigma of Gertrude. If, as Lacan here suggests, Hamlet’s problem is Gertrude, then critics have taken it upon themselves to solve the problem of Gertrude by ‘filling in the blanks’ of her ambiguous desire. The threat of this desire is best summarised by Slavoj Žižek:

[W]hat prevents Hamlet from acting, from accomplishing the imposed revenge, is precisely the confrontation with the “*Che vuoi?*” of the desire of the Other: the key scene of the whole drama is the long dialogue between Hamlet and his mother, in which he is seized by doubt as to his mother’s desire – What does she really want? What if she really *enjoys* her filthy, promiscuous relationship with his uncle? Hamlet is therefore hindered not by indecision as to his own desire; it is not that “he doesn’t know what he really wants” – he knows that very clearly: he wants to revenge his father – what hinders him is doubt concerning the *desire of the other*, the confrontation of a certain

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<sup>40</sup> Lupton and Reinhard, p. 74.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*’, in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1982), pp. 11-52 (p. 28). Also quoted in Lupton and Reinhard, p. 68.

“*Che vuoi?*” which announces the abyss of some terrifying, filthy enjoyment.<sup>42</sup>

The enigma of Gertrude’s desire is therefore what is most threatening, both to Hamlet, and to those critics or directors who seek to answer *Hamlet*’s ‘problem’. As Lacan’s reading clearly indicates: ‘It’s not [Hamlet’s] desire for his mother (*pour sa mere*), but rather his mother’s desire (*de sa mere*) that’s in question’.<sup>43</sup> Gertrude is indeed most destructive to Hamlet – and to *Hamlet* critics – when her desire cannot be explained. But the fact remains that Gertrude’s brief comments throughout the play reveal very little about her: she is a mystery to us because she is so talked *about* but does so little talking herself; she is criticised by Hamlet for her actions, yet her actions throughout the play leave us with nothing substantial to criticise; she is accused of crimes yet never directly admits to these crimes herself; she is described as lustful, yet none of her words or actions towards her husband (or son, for that matter) suggest lustfulness.

How do film adaptations confront Gertrude’s ambiguity? In terms of her questionable desire, she is, on the most obvious level, caught between men – her heart ‘cleft ... in twain’ (3.4.161). She is also, as Kehler’s discussion of Gertrude highlights, caught between representations, displaying varying characteristics in the Quartos and Folio, leaving her character almost as indefinable or, at the least, unstable and constantly shifting, a condition that also ironically pertains to a woman’s sexual desire. Part of Gertrude’s power resides in her unknowability – the fact that we cannot easily pinpoint her motives, her desires, her words or her actions. And in *Hamlet*, where the protagonist is already searching for answers regarding his mother’s desire even *before* the entrance of the ghost, what is ‘known’ is persistently defined in male terms, while what is ‘unknown’ is persistently defined in terms of the woman.

The representation of Gertrude in mainstream film, it seems, must necessarily be a straightforward one: there is a necessity to demystify her, to solve the puzzle, to read her as lustful or deceitful and to leave little to speculate over in her representation. However, the discussions of film adaptations that follow here, while reading Gertrude as the films direct us, also offer a form of resistance, tracing the inevitably small spaces that challenge the male directors’ control over the depiction of the female body – or perhaps, the spaces that exist ‘in between’ the dominant spaces

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<sup>42</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 120-21.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Hamlet, par Lacan’, *Ornicar?*, 25 (1982), 13-36 (p. 20). Also quoted in Lupton and Reinhard, p. 83.



of representation on film. If Gertrude's words leave us with unanswered questions, film directors instruct us to read the body in performance. But what does that body tell us? If, as Rosenberg suggests, Gertrude's 'face and body will speak eloquently in her silences', how are spectators of the film adaptations instructed to read that body, and how may the woman's body resist or refute such a reading?<sup>44</sup>

### ***Foul Disproportions***

Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) opens on a smoke-filled castle top, where the wind whistles eerily, and the sounds of chiming bells and a pounding drum, like that of a heartbeat, announce the arrival of the ghost.<sup>45</sup> Olivier's Elsinore is an oppressive and sinister space, with very few camera shots signalling the world beyond its castle walls. It is an almost artificial world, 'a shadowy and claustrophobic cinematic psychogram on the screen that corresponds to the fears and anxieties of Hamlet's interior universe'.<sup>46</sup> The displacement of Marcellus's line, 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.4.72), not only concludes this first scene but marks the beginning of the long, emphatic camera movement from the battlements and the canons, through the many arches, long dark corridors and winding staircases of the castle, only to come to its dramatic focus on the 'labia-like bed' of Claudius and Gertrude.<sup>47</sup>

The repositioning of Marcellus's line before this camera movement directs the spectator's gaze toward exactly what is 'rotten' in the state of Denmark, as Olivier's 'disembodied' camera comes to rest on the royal bed – the 'couch for luxury and damnèd incest' (1.5.88). The image then dissolves into a mid close-up of Claudius, drinking the remains of a goblet of wine before a celebrating crowd. These two images combine Claudius's taste for 'luxury' with the sexualised female shape of the bed; in the film's constructions of space, Elsinore becomes a maze of Hamlet's confusion, where female sexuality is hailed as the force of corruption and the 'bloat king' (3.4.180) gorges his lustful 'appetite'. The labia-shaped bed lies at the centre of this maze, thus feminising the 'nasty sty' (3.4.94); its inviting image also answers the

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<sup>44</sup> Rosenberg, p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> *Hamlet*. Dir. Laurence Olivier. UK. 1948.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence Guntner, 'A Microcosm of Art: Olivier's Expressionist *Hamlet* (1948)', in *'Hamlet' on Screen*, ed. by Dimiter Daphinoff and Holger Klein (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 133-52 (p. 134).

<sup>47</sup> John Ottenhoff, 'Hamlet and the Kiss', in *'Hamlet' on Screen*, ed. by Dimiter Daphinoff and Holger Klein (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 98-109 (p. 100).

film's opening dilemma in Olivier's invented line: "This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind".<sup>48</sup> What prevents Olivier's Freudian Hamlet from making up his mind is undoubtedly tied to his mother's sexual escapades.



### 2.1. Feminising the 'nasty sty': the royal bed in Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948)

Eileen Herlie's Gertrude – thirteen years younger than Olivier's Hamlet – embodies a sexual presence that extends to the visual motifs of every frame. She is first shown seated on her throne beside Claudius, with her back turned on the spectator; immediately, then, there is a mystery to her that must be 'unplucked' by Olivier's probing camera. Bodies often turn their backs on us in this film adaptation of *Hamlet*, implanting in the spectator the desire to read that body, to examine – borrowing a phrase from Lady Capulet – 'every several lineament' that the filmed image permits (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.3.64). In the second shot of this scene, we now see Gertrude with her face and body leaning toward Claudius, as if 'increase of appetite' has 'grown / By what it fed on' (1.2. 144-5). Hamlet later uses these words to describe how Gertrude would 'hang on' his father; this action, however, now adopted for Gertrude and Claudius, uses Gertrude's body to emphasise a faithless and disloyal nature, as she now hangs on one brother as she did on the first.

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<sup>48</sup> Simmons also observes the 'phallic shaped doors' of Gertrude's bedroom and the bed, 'around which curtains hang, presenting the unmistakable image of a vagina waiting to be entered'. Simmons, p. 113.

Although Olivier's camera tends to focus on individual bodies throughout this film, in this scene at court, the frame is often overcrowded with spectators. This implication of bodies grouped tightly together within the space of the frame seems to imply subtly the incestuous nature of the royal union between Claudius and Gertrude. Further aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, particularly striking in this scene, also signify the female body and symbolise Gertrude's sexual appetite. Womb-like interiors, oval-shaped archways, vaginal corridors and long sweeping drapes from high ceilings – equally as suggestive as those above the bed – all connote the looming presence of female sexuality. As Claudius prepares to make his royal announcement, trumpets sound among the tunnel-like archways, dominating the background of every shot, beckoning the spectator's eye toward their darkness. These inherently female shapes hang heavily around the court, high above the male bodies that fill this space. Thus, although Olivier's court scene is predominantly a male domain, Gertrude's sexuality is always present as Claudius proceeds to make his royal announcements concerning state affairs. When Herlie's body does appear in the frame, she captures the attention both of the film spectator and of the male spectators at court: as she leaves her chair and approaches Hamlet at the far end of the room, all eyes fall upon her.



2.2. 'Ay, madam, it is common': Laurence Olivier and Eileen Herlie in Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948)

Gertrude's body deliberately stands out in this scene. The pale material of her dress highlights her from the other darker costumes in this shot; her long flowing hair, the heavy folds of her gown and its darker upper bodice are equally suggestive of a sensual femininity. Interestingly, however, her movement is more exaggerated than that of any other character in this scene.<sup>49</sup> Hamlet and Laertes both remain rigid whilst delivering their speeches, and while Claudius moves in his approach of Hamlet and Gertrude, his pace is slow and hesitant, its fluidity broken by the exchanging camera shots. Gertrude apparently glides across to her son's chair in a long shot of the tableau, all eyes upon her – except for Hamlet's, the gaze she appears longingly to seek out.

Gertrude's freedom of movement ironically positions her both as object of the patriarchal gaze, and as a body that problematises patriarchal boundaries. This freedom of movement gives Herlie's body momentary control, or as Biggs suggests of Herlie's performance, 'moments of initiative'.<sup>50</sup> Her illuminated figure moves freely through the crowd of on-lookers, so rigid in their stature that their bodies are more like the theatrical positions that might have been held for Olivier's stage performance of the play. Her movement also emphasises her control over her son at this point: Hamlet does not respond to Claudius's remark, 'How is it that the clouds still hang on you?' (1.2.65); instead, it is Gertrude who coaxes him into speech. This makes her persuasion of her son – with the movement of her body, as much as her words – suggestively powerful, but her choreographed movements quickly reveal the dangerous effects of her sexuality, as she uses 'a passionate, lover's kiss as part of her plea that Hamlet remain in Elsinore'.<sup>51</sup>

What lingers in the memory of Herlie's body in performance is *her* 'paddling' fingers (3.4.183), forever about Hamlet's shoulders, neck, and face. While the other rigid bodies here emphasise the theatricality of Olivier's film, which is a favoured feature throughout, their lack of movement only further instructs the spectator's gaze towards Gertrude's promiscuously posed body. For her line, 'Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet' (1.2.118), Gertrude positions her body directly between the gaze of Claudius and Hamlet. Her positioning between them – showering her son with

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<sup>49</sup> See Mulvey's argument for a fuller discussion of movement in relation to sexual objectification. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6-18.

<sup>50</sup> Biggs, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 48.

questionable kisses and taking Claudius's hand a moment later – indicates that she possesses the ability to manipulate them both, and her body is her chief weapon. If the emphatically large bed seems to hint at a solution to the Oedipal dilemma, then Olivier's directing of Herlie's Gertrude also implies that she has 'room to accommodate both father and son at once'.<sup>52</sup>

Herlie's Gertrude is evidently capable of 'showing' a range of emotions, but Olivier's camera seeks out moments that pertain to guilt, just as his construction of the 'play within the play' seeks to capture Gertrude's 'conscience' for Hamlet (2.2.537). In 'The Mousetrap', the player queen is easily seduced with 'wicked wit and gifts' (1.5.49) by the murderer, and as the camera pans right to reveal Herlie's Gertrude, with her hand raised to her face and her expression as guilty as the king's, it is obvious that the play has also affected her. In Shakespeare's play, the ambiguous nature of Gertrude's response to the performance reveals both something and nothing: 'The lady protests too much, methinks' (3.2.200). Incidentally, this response is one of only three lines that Shakespeare's Gertrude speaks throughout the entire scene, and thus her response to the play can never be determined accurately. However, if ambiguity is lost in Olivier's film, then Herlie's Gertrude is permitted a brief moment of vengeance. As Claudius rises from his throne and the crowd disperses, Gertrude gives her son a look that almost pertains to fury: if the performance has awoken her conscience, then it has also awoken her anger. But the camera cuts back almost immediately to Olivier's Hamlet, registering her obvious displeasure: a momentary look of regret flashes across his face.

While Herlie's Gertrude is capable of expressing further anger at her son's actions in the closet scene, she is also detrimentally portrayed as Hamlet's love interest through shot and frame composition, looking outward 'in an almost supplicating way' at both Hamlet and the spectator, 'her face upturned like a lover'.<sup>53</sup> As Olivier's camera searches to expose her 'inmost part' – as Hamlet does with his phallic sword – Herlie's Gertrude is left with little room for manoeuvre. Herlie again has her back to the camera as the scene begins; once Polonius has concealed himself, the camera then cuts to the position of Hamlet's entrance in the doorway, so that Gertrude almost looks to camera as she momentarily adjusts her appearance and waits for her son's arrival. The camera also assumes the perspective of the ghost, surveying

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<sup>52</sup> Biggs, p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Simmons, p. 113.



2.3. 'Why, how now, Hamlet?' Eileen Herlie's Gertrude in Olivier's closet scene (1948)

the scene as it speaks to Hamlet; thus the spectator must read Gertrude's body as the men of this scene read her, and her exposure under their gaze (with Herlie's décolletage frequently displayed) is evident. Hamlet takes Gertrude's heart 'in twain' as a suitable confession of guilt and remorse; at this point, he embraces her, kisses her, and lays his head in her lap, satisfied with their encounter.

Although Shakespeare's Gertrude never confirms to Hamlet that she will avoid Claudius's 'reechy kisses' (3.4.182), only that she will not repeat what her son has said to her, Herlie's Gertrude shuns her husband's touch after the closet scene, holding her waist after his embrace as if wounded by it. There is now a more maternal element to be detected in Herlie's performing body, as the mad Ophelia clings to her lower waist almost as Hamlet did in the closet scene. Ophelia instructs Gertrude to wear her rue 'with a difference' (4.4.185); the 'difference' that Gertrude evidently must assume in Olivier's film is from wife, mother, and queen to *only mother*. As if to emphasise the erasure of her previous roles, in the final duel scene, the king descends the stairs to the same royal flourish not with Gertrude on his arm, but Laertes. Interestingly, this erasure not only places Laertes with the king and Gertrude with Hamlet, but it also forges a link between Gertrude and Laertes.

In Shakespeare's play, Gertrude is symbolically tied to Laertes rather than to Hamlet or Claudius, as they are both victims rather than instigators of the action. As

Gurr and Ichikawa suggest, it is possible that Gertrude would have been seated on her throne on Hamlet's side of the stage, and Claudius on Laertes's side, both facing out to the audience, as they watch the duel take place.<sup>54</sup> Claudius, seated 'on the right, drinks from the right-hand cup, tacitly admitting which side he is on'.<sup>55</sup> Gertrude, seated on the left-hand side of the stage, is fated to drink from the poisoned cup, even though this was not Claudius's intention. The division of their sides is also implied in their movements: Claudius stepping down to mutter aside to Laertes; Gertrude leaving her seat to wipe Hamlet's face when he is 'scant of breath' (5.2, 239/40). Roles and identities frequently merge in *Hamlet*, and in this scene, Laertes becomes a substitute antagonist for Claudius – the king is, of course, Hamlet's real target for his intended revenge – and while Hamlet is Claudius's intended victim, it is Gertrude, not Hamlet, who drinks from the poisoned cup. Laertes and Gertrude have both become victims of the battle between these two 'mighty opposites', and their chosen sides lead to their deaths – Gertrude as 'accidental' stand-in for Hamlet, Laertes as rival substitute for the king.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, their last moments have also been delicately entwined: Hamlet wounds Laertes fatally, just as the queen falls to the ground after drinking the poison.

Olivier's duel sequence emphasises the division, with several tableau shots that position Gertrude on Hamlet's side of the frame. Although ambiguity surrounds the death of Shakespeare's queen, Olivier clearly indicates that Gertrude drinks deliberately from the poisoned cup; her refusal to obey her husband thus becomes verbal proof that she has sided with her son and chosen to protect him in her own death.<sup>57</sup> There is no room for questioning the nature of Gertrude's desire, or to whom she chooses to remain loyal – if, indeed, she does in fact choose. Instead of ambiguity, Olivier provides us with all the answers for this 'wretched queen' (5.2.279). When Hamlet makes his last 'adieu' beside Gertrude's body, there is no body for us to look upon. All that remains visible of her bodily 'presence' is one final sweeping camera

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<sup>54</sup> Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Gurr and Ichikawa, p. 156.

<sup>56</sup> Olivier (*Hamlet*, 1948), amongst other directors, suggests that Gertrude deliberately drinks from the poisoned cup, although there is no evidence from the play texts to verify this. For the most part Gertrude's poisoning seems accidental, particularly as she offers the cup to her son immediately after drinking from it (5.2.231-4).

<sup>57</sup> The differences in the play-texts add further ambiguity to whether or not Gertrude deliberately disobeys Claudius in this moment. As Kehler observes of Gertrude in Q1: 'she does *not* disobey when she drinks from the poisoned cup; in Q1 Gertrude drinks *before* Claudius orders her not to'. See Kehler, p. 405.

pan of the feminised bed. As the canons roar and the prince's body is carried to the tower where the film began, the 'rest' is not 'silence': it is all Hamlet's (5.2.307).<sup>58</sup>

If Gertrude's body is positioned between Hamlet and Claudius in Olivier's film, then her 'feeling for her son is outweighed by her lust for Claudius' in Grigori Kozintsev's Russian *Hamlet* (1964).<sup>59</sup> While Olivier's seemingly floating camera offers the viewer a psychological interrogation of Hamlet's mind, roaming through the maze-like interiors of the castle at Elsinore, the visual images of Kozintsev's Russian film offer the spectator a deeper mode of archaic symbolism. Kozintsev's filmic space is dominated by the ocean, a 'sea of troubles' that beats relentlessly against Hamlet's 'outrageous fortune' (3.1.64-5). In the film's opening shots, the castle itself is nothing more than a shadow cast across the ocean's slow-moving waves. Like Olivier's film, Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is circular, beginning and ending with these images of the sweeping tide. As the titles roll, a flaming torch in a sconce stands erect against a stony backdrop, a comparative constant against the sea's ever-changing tides. Innokenti Smoktunovski's Hamlet rides home for his father's funeral and is greeted by Elza Radzin's mourning Gertrude. Again, we do not initially see her face, only her hands covered with black, lace gloves as they cling to Hamlet's back when she embraces him and weeps 'like Niobe, all tears' (1.2.149). The castle – Hamlet's 'prison' (2.2.239) – slowly closes its gates, and as Claudius reads his speech rigidly to the court from a manuscript, 'our sometime sister' (1.2.8), the sentiment is not heartfelt but unnatural and forced. The court is always present in Kozintsev's film, watching, following, moving along with the action, silently observing. There seems to be no escape from spies.

The immediate object of their watching eyes is Gertrude. In the celebrations that follow, Gertrude smiles at her reflection in a hand-mirror: 'all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity' (1.2.71-2). Hamlet watches her, perplexed and bewildered by this sudden change – what does this Gertrude see looking back at her in the mirror? Admiring her reflection vainly, her actions contradict her present words; the tears that stained her cheeks only moments ago have been replaced by another one of her 'paintings' (3.1.142). Here, then, the film's juxtaposition of scenes is just as

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Starks argues that Olivier's camera here 'positions the viewer as a "mourner" trailing Hamlet's funeral procession'. See Starks, p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> *Hamlet*. Dir. Grigori Kozintsev, USSR. 1964. Mark Sokolyansky, 'Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 199-211 (p. 204).



detrimental to Radzin's Gertrude as the 'mirror' that she now holds which must eventually 'show' her true 'nature' (3.2.16). As the celebrating crowd departs, a solitary Hamlet tells Horatio, 'methinks I see my father' (1.2.184), and gazes into the burning flames of the fire. The flames lick higher as Horatio reports his tale of the ghost's appearance, engulfing the two bodies that stand before the fire. In the stark symbolism of this film, the burning torches and fires represent Hamlet's father's spirit, the only constant light of truth for him to follow in Elsinore's darkness; the changing tides represent his mother's ambiguous desire: inconstant, unknowable and ungovernable. When the ghost appears before Hamlet, the ocean waves crash and roar thunderously behind as we hear his 'horrible' tale of 'damnèd incest' (1.5.85-8).<sup>60</sup>

Claudius and Gertrude's bed has equal prominence in Kozintsev's film, although here affairs of state have shifted closer to this 'couch for luxury' (1.5.88). As Polonius enters the royal bedchamber to discuss the matter of Hamlet's madness, Claudius sits in a large chair to the right of a grand, four-poster bed with curtains, raised on a platform and thus dominating the frame. During their conversation, the camera suddenly cuts to an inside shot of the curtained bed that reveals Gertrude, lying beneath the 'incestuous sheets' (1.2.157). She brushes her hair and responds nonchalantly to the subject of their talk: 'I doubt it is no other but the main: / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage' (2.2.59-60). As Claudius leans in, she stares at him longingly; it seems that even affectionate concern for her son is easily replaced by lustful thoughts for her husband. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Kozintsev's presentation of 'The Mousetrap' serves to 'catch the conscience' of the queen even more so than Olivier's. At the performance, Gertrude shifts uncomfortably in her excessively lavish gown and holds her hand to her breast 'to hide what is there from herself and others'.<sup>61</sup> On the stage, after the murderer poisons Gonzago and steals his fallen crown, the player queen re-enters and embraces her soon-to-be second husband about the waist. Such actions not only seek to reveal Gertrude's lustful desire to be remarried to Claudius, but they also dangerously implicate Gertrude in her first husband's killing. Claudius later consults his reflection in his confession scene, an act that immediately associates his 'confession' with Gertrude's earlier contemplation of her own reflection in the mirror.

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<sup>60</sup> Jack Jorgens writes that Kozintsev's film is 'not solely narrative' but 'a cinepoem of stone, iron, fire, sea, and earth'. However, he interprets these symbolic elements rather differently to my own interpretation. See Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977), pp. 222-23.

<sup>61</sup> Jorgens, p. 220.

In the closet scene, a tableau shot positions Gertrude between her own shadow (appearing on the tapestry where the ghost appears to Hamlet) and a mirror – Hamlet’s ‘glass’ where Gertrude must ‘see the inmost part’ of herself (3.4.22-3). Held for several moments, this image captures Gertrude’s dilemma, caught between her own absence and the image of herself that the men of the film project for us to see. This Gertrude has much guilt to confess and, like Herlie’s queen, she reveals a distinctly altered countenance after the closet scene. The ‘inmost part’ of Gertrude is slowly exposed: the figure in the tapestry appears to penetrate the ‘heart’ of her shadow; a removed hair-piece sits on its stand beside the mirror; when the curtain falls under the weight of Polonius’s dead body, it reveals the headless dummies that wear Gertrude’s luxurious dresses – ‘mute witnesses to the murder’.<sup>62</sup> All that Hamlet’s crime of murder has exposed for the spectator is his mother’s vanity. Her outer layers now stripped away, Gertrude suddenly appears old; as her son makes his departure, she turns her back on the camera and moves dejectedly toward the bed, as if finally accepting the passing of her youth and the necessary ‘virtue’ of ‘a matron’s bones’ (3.4.81-2).



2.4. Seeing her ‘inmost part’: Elza Radzin’s Gertrude in Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* (1964)

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<sup>62</sup> Jorgens, p. 227.

Like Herlie, Radzin's Gertrude complies with Hamlet's instruction to avoid his uncle's 'reechy kisses' (3.4.182), as we later see her pulling away from Claudius's advances in the bedchamber. She arrives late for Hamlet's duel with Laertes, as if she had no prior knowledge that it was taking place. As she enters hurriedly and looks concerned, the camera lingers on her in mid close-up, drawing the spectator's eye toward a chain about her neck: is it the locket that contains the portrait of Hamlet's father? Did Hamlet leave it for her in the closet scene? Such a change of 'heart' would seem most appropriate for this Gertrude. Has she decided to 'live the purer with the other half' (3.4.163)? Interestingly, this is not the case. It is, in fact, the same necklace that Gertrude has been wearing for most of the film, showing a large jewelled pendant with three hanging droplets (Old Hamlet, Claudius, and her son?); but while it does not seem to hold a picture of her first husband, likewise, there is no implication that it holds a picture of her second. Does it contain a picture at all? Despite Claudius's attempt to dispose of Gertrude's body – now the evidence of his 'rank' offence (3.3.39) – as she calls out to Hamlet about the poisoned cup, the camera instead lingers over her body in death, and we see the necklace again. This is the one space of ambiguity that Kozintsev permits for Gertrude's body; as the film comes full circle in its close, the waves of the tide continue to move restlessly.

While the visual spaces of both Olivier's and Kozintsev's expressionist films often externalise the threat of female sexuality through their imagery, Glenn Close in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) must internalise this threat, as sexual desire and excess are written across every movement of her body.<sup>63</sup> Clearly 'the most overtly sexual of any actress who formerly played the role', Close's sexualised Gertrude necessarily balances Mel Gibson's masculine prince; while the film offers the ultimate fantasies for a heroic Hamlet, this, it seems, can only be fully justified and counterbalanced by a highly sexualised Gertrude.<sup>64</sup> As Simmons observes of the film, 'any man – son or lover – would become a mass of neurotic, sexually confused jelly' around this woman.<sup>65</sup> It is arguable that, out of the numerous screen adaptations that the play has inspired, Zeffirelli's mainstream film is most detrimental to Gertrude through the inclusion of an assertive, heroic prince who does not 'unpack' his 'heart with words' but who instead prefers action (2.2.518).

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<sup>63</sup> *Hamlet*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. UK. 1990.

<sup>64</sup> Simmons, p. 116.

<sup>65</sup> Simmons, p. 116.

Zeffirelli's film moves through the events of the play with vigorous pace, avoiding any of its ponderous hesitations, so that its climax – Hamlet's revenge – is never in question for the spectator. As Michael Skovmand observes, 'situations are, as it were, "disambiguated" to create superfluity – or *excess* – of simple gratification, in which effects do not work in counterpoint, but in *amplification* of each other'.<sup>66</sup> As the film's opening score climbs and falls with an impulsive yet oppressive rhythm that sounds caught in the middle of its possible climax (thus implying the indecisive nature of the hero) the word 'Hamlet' remains on the screen, a constant presence almost filling the frame, while all other cast names appear and fade against it in much smaller type. With Gibson's Hamlet so evidently the action hero, Gertrude must become more villainous: Hamlet's first soliloquy is cut short to end on the line, 'frailty, thy name is woman' (1.2.146); watching from his chamber window, the only viewer absent from the crowd below, he slams the shutters closed as the royal couple ride off on their white horses like some mock fairytale; after discovering his father's murder, Hamlet almost spits out the words: 'O most pernicious woman!' (1.5.110).

In the film's opening scene, where the body of Old Hamlet is laid out for the funeral, the camera tracks down the tomb's stairway, and 'the very first diegetic sound of the film' that we hear in the darkness is 'the sound of a woman – Gertrude – sobbing'.<sup>67</sup> Old Hamlet's body first appears to us in a different form, not the 'dreaded sight' (1.1.29) of a ghostly apparition that fills its onlookers with 'fear and wonder' (1.1.50), but instead at a funeral, laid out in an open sarcophagus to be buried in the royal tomb. With the coffin lid not yet closed, the 'memory' of a 'dear brother's death' (1.2.1-2) is no memory: the body is still present for us to see. Somewhat tellingly, however, the first body we actually look upon in this scene is Gertrude's. Both Claudius and Polonius also watch her as she lifts her veil to look down on her husband's body. She takes a flower pin from her hair and lays it down inside the coffin, but it is not a real flower: it is metallic, cold, static. Does this suggest the true nature of Gertrude's 'heart' – cold, and impenetrable? The pin's sharp, pointed edge is also suggestive of the 'thorns' lodged within that heart which 'prick and sting', tainting her symbol of mourning with the insinuation of her concealed guilt (1.5.92-3). The insertion of this dull and grainy funeral scene, juxtaposed with the colourful,

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Skovmand, 'Mel's Melodramatic Melancholy: Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*', in *Screen Shakespeare*, ed. by Michael Skovmand (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 113-31 (p. 118).

<sup>67</sup> Skovmand, p. 116.

triumphant scene at court that follows, most strongly affects our impressions of Gertrude by deliberately emphasising the ‘wicked speed’ of her second marriage to Claudius and by leaving the spectator uncertain about how quickly after the funeral the wedding actually took place. At the funeral, Gertrude is also portrayed as Niobe, whilst on her throne beside Claudius, her evident pleasure is indicative of one who ‘may smile and smile and be a villain’ (1.5.114).



#### 2.5. Thorns that ‘prick and sting’: Glenn Close’s Gertrude in Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet* (1990)

Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet* is ‘full of suspicious glances’, with the possibility of others listening, hiding and secretly observing in the hidden spaces of every scene.<sup>68</sup> At the film’s opening, the crowd of mourners outside the castle stare outwards, their bodies motionless. Zeffirelli’s Elsinore, almost like a stage production, extends the space of the actors toward the space of the audience, as eyes, at times, look so closely toward the camera lens that they seem to be searching for our own. Zeffirelli’s filming of the gaze and overheard conversations ‘is not so much voyeuristic as the *representation* of voyeurism’ where voyeurism itself ‘alienates, fragments, and dislocates’.<sup>69</sup> But while other characters often exchange looks of intimacy, knowledge or distrust, it is Gibson’s Hamlet who is permitted to observe others with his gaze without being seen. Concealed beneath his hooded cloak, he quietly observes the looks between Gertrude

<sup>68</sup> Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: ‘Hamlet’* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995), p. 197.

<sup>69</sup> Lupton and Reinhard, p. 84.

and Claudius and watches them from his chamber window; he listens to Ophelia's conversation with Polonius from the secure distance of the castle rampart. When Hamlet *is* observed by others, as in the nunnery scene, he is fully aware of it.

Gibson's Hamlet is the true manipulator of the gaze in Zeffirelli's film. Frequently permitted to occupy a space as voyeur, he is able to move toward his course of action with the advantage of omniscience. However it is Gertrude, not Hamlet, that other characters are persistently seeking out with their gaze. As well as attracting the attention of both husband and son, she also repeatedly falls under the watchful gaze of Ophelia and Polonius: Ophelia watches her intently in the film's interpolated banquet scene, before the queen raises her goblet in celebration; Polonius observes her movements in the scene at court with a scrutinising eye. But Gertrude's actions are of most interest to her son Hamlet, and Zeffirelli tends to align the camera with Hamlet's own viewpoint. If Hamlet directs the gaze, and in turn, directs our own, then Gertrude's body inevitably becomes its central object.

With the camera's repeated instruction to look at Gertrude's body in these early scenes, Zeffirelli's film has already visually signalled where the blame should lie for this tragedy. However, there is no doubt that Zeffirelli's adaptation places additional emphasis on Gertrude. Van Watson observes how Zeffirelli 'privileges Gertrude, editing her role far less than he does that of either Claudius or Horatio'.<sup>70</sup> Hodgdon also ironically comments that it is Close's Gertrude, not Hamlet, 'who is "too much I' the sun"'.<sup>71</sup> What exactly is it that thrusts Close's Gertrude into the spotlight in Zeffirelli's film? How are we being instructed to read her body?

While Zeffirelli's choice of Gibson's star persona ties the prince to action, his choice of Glenn Close also ties Gertrude to sexual desire. Reading Close's body through other film texts, we are encouraged, as film spectators, to reread her previous performances in films such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and *Fatal Attraction* through her performance as Gertrude. Given her previous film roles, it seems apparent that we are already reading an established ideological project and associating particular images of femininity and sexuality with her body. But Close's Gertrude is also something of a *femme fatale*; as a woman who embodies several characteristics of the

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<sup>70</sup> William Van Watson, 'Shakespeare, Zeffirelli, and the Homosexual Gaze' in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 235-62 (pp. 254-5). Van Watson here suggests however that the 'faithlessness of Gertrude' allows Zeffirelli's 'reactive focus a transfer from homophobia to its misogynist corollary' (p. 254).

<sup>71</sup> Hodgdon, p. 285.

woman in *film noir*, she is ‘above all else unknowable’; as the ‘hero’ of the film, Gibson’s Hamlet must also solve the ‘double quest’ of the *film noir*: ‘to solve the mystery of the villain and of the woman’.<sup>72</sup> Comparing *Hamlet* to a *film noir* is a far stretch in some respects, and not so much in others, particularly when considering Close’s performance; the impact of a star’s image and her previous roles, which had conventional associations with the *femme fatale*; and Hamlet’s own ‘quest’ to solve the ‘mystery’ of Gertrude. As Simmons acknowledges, Close’s portrayal of Gertrude ‘elevates her character to a whole new level of complexity’.<sup>73</sup> It is this ‘complexity’ – or rather, ambiguity – in Close’s performance that I want to explore here for a moment.

If any Gertrude were to be charged with having ‘too much’ sexuality, it would be Close’s Gertrude; ‘at once overanxious and oversexed’, her ‘hungry kisses and caresses’ extend to both Claudius and her son.<sup>74</sup> Lupton and Reinhard suggest that Zeffirelli’s adaptation, when seen in relation to Olivier’s, ‘parallels the shift from a Freudian to a Lacanian problematic’; in other words, it is not Hamlet’s desire that we are concerned with here, but Gertrude’s.<sup>75</sup> Positioned not as object in desire but as ‘Other of demand’, her oversexed body must simultaneously carry the blame for every twist in this tragedy. Even her death has been sexualised and, as a result, her last moments are inevitably tied to Hamlet, not to Laertes, with her body reacting violently to the poison at the exact moment that her son is fatally wounded. Like the physical positioning of mother and son in Zeffirelli’s closet scene, Gertrude dies underneath Hamlet, her body writhing and convulsing before finally lying still. She is permitted to speak her final words to Hamlet, but this is something other than a concerned mother’s farewell, with its visual similarity to the sexual overtones of the scene in Gertrude’s bedroom.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Dyer, ‘Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*’, in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI, 1978), pp. 91-9 (pp. 92 and 93).

<sup>73</sup> Simmons, p. 116.

<sup>74</sup> Lupton and Reinhard, p. 83.

<sup>75</sup> Lupton and Reinhard, pp. 82-3. As if emphasising this point, Starks also observes how ‘mourning gives way to Gertrude’s desire’ in Zeffirelli’s film. Starks, p. 169.

<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in Tony Richardson’s televised film production of *Hamlet* (1969) Judy Parfitt’s Gertrude ‘dies’ with emphasised, climactic screams that suggest sexual climax. Interestingly, Simmons also finds a similar suggestion in Herlie’s screams in Olivier’s closet scene: ‘if one listens closely, although this is ostensibly a scream of fear, it sounds much like the scream of a woman in the throes of an orgasm – it rises, louder, louder, until it reaches a crescendo-like peak’. See Simmons, p. 113. While Richardson’s film manages to avoid the pitfalls of the Oedipal complex, Gertrude’s excess of sexual desire remains as the defining aspect of her characterisation – only here, it proves more dangerous. Gertrude’s incestuous second marriage to Anthony Hopkins’s Claudius not only leaves her ‘stained’;

However, what fascinates about Close's Gertrude is that, despite the film's insistence that she clearly desires her son, she is a body always moving and changing in appearance before the camera. Close's Gertrude seems to wear a different dress in every scene, the colours ranging from deep purples to royal blues and cream, to crimson red and gold. She is the body to be decorated in comparison to Helena Bonham Carter's deliberately plain Ophelia, and while her changes in appearance seem to imply another of Hamlet's 'paintings' (3.1.142), they also leave the spectator permanently uncertain about her motives or desire. Her visible changeability that leaves her just beyond the reach of the spectator's knowledge is often emphasised by the haste with which she moves.

Although there are moments when Gertrude betrays herself – her bitterness at her son's remark that Ophelia is 'mettle more attractive' is barely disguised (3.2.91) – Close's performance as Gertrude remains undoubtedly complex because she *is* so capable of easily making herself another 'face'. Close's skills as an actress frequently convince us of it: she cries bitterly in the funeral scene; she smiles coyly in the scene at court; she kisses Claudius passionately; she kisses Hamlet equally passionately to silence him; she is defiant when charged with murder; she attempts to run from the mad Ophelia; she laughs at her son's foolery in the duel scene. If Gertrude's body must 'show' her lustful desire, then it might be apt to say that Close's Gertrude shows more than the spectator is capable of comprehending: indeed, Close has, ironically, been accused of 'overacting' in this film.<sup>77</sup> However, despite such claims, and despite being shown to justify her son's misogyny, this Gertrude remains, at the least, 'unknowable'.

Kenneth Branagh's four-hour film version of *Hamlet* (1996), a full-length adaptation of the Folio text, sets out to achieve the task of representing Hamlet as heroic on many different levels.<sup>78</sup> Most obvious is the film's depiction of its central character, 'a swashbuckling hero swinging from the chandeliers, instead of the usual

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its contaminating force spreads outwards to infect all at Elsinore, making the weeds 'ranker'. Gertrude's lingering kisses keep Claudius from dealing with the affairs of state, and Ophelia succeeds in deceiving Nicol Williamson's vulnerable Hamlet in the nunnery scene. Richardson's choice to purify Hamlet's character and to emphasise the corrupt ways of others may be considered a dramatic reversal of the structures of the play itself. It is also a choice that dismisses the many ambiguities of the play-texts.

<sup>77</sup> See Skovmand, p. 120.

<sup>78</sup> *Hamlet*. Dir. Kenneth Branagh. UK. 1996.



brooding melancholic'.<sup>79</sup> As Sauer points out, this Hamlet is severely lacking in his reflective side, particularly throughout the second half of the film where the hesitancy of words seems completely lost from Branagh's performance: 'No more interiority for this Hamlet; once he has decided to be heroic, he is that entirely'.<sup>80</sup> But even without Hamlet's chandelier-swinging antics in the film's sword-fighting scene, Branagh is equally concerned with defending Hamlet's 'less than heroic' actions. Given his pledge to follow the Folio text faithfully, he cannot alter, cut, or manipulate Shakespeare's words.<sup>81</sup> Nothing has been removed from this *Hamlet*. However, in order to fulfil Hamlet's heroic quest – and indeed, Branagh's quest for the heroic in *Hamlet* – much has been added.

In light of Branagh's concerns regarding textual fidelity, the additions to this film are visual, not verbal. Branagh extends the space of Shakespeare's play through his use of *flashcuts* – an excessive number of interpolated scenes that visually signal a time and space that exist outside the action of the play itself. The exact chronology of these flashcuts in relation to the play's events is often confusing. The viewer is left questioning whether these visual additions are objective or subjective, real or imaginary, past or present.<sup>82</sup> As Bernice Kliman observes, visual codes are only loosely established for the viewer because Branagh 'does not code the flashcuts consistently'.<sup>83</sup> Whether or not these are omniscient images, or images projected from Hamlet's mind, remains uncertain. It is primarily through these flashcuts that Branagh's *Hamlet* attempts to offer plausible explanations for Hamlet's actions by exploiting the weaknesses of female sexuality. While this adaptation does considerably less than others in visually exploiting Gertrude's body, female sexuality still seems to be collectively responsible for events that spiral out of control – less in the form of Gertrude's wantonness, and more in the shape of Ophelia's.

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<sup>79</sup> David Kennedy Sauer, 'Suiting the Word to the Action: Kenneth Branagh's Interpolations in *Hamlet*', in *Hamlet on Screen*, ed. by Dimiter Daphinoff and Holger Klein (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 325-47 (p. 325).

<sup>80</sup> Sauer, p. 339.

<sup>81</sup> Branagh does, however, occasionally manipulate *who* is speaking Shakespeare's verse. For example, rather than having Polonius read the content of Hamlet's letter to Claudius and Gertrude, Ophelia herself reads the letter. Overcome with emotion and unable to finish, she exits in tears, and Polonius finishes the reading.

<sup>82</sup> Sauer counts forty-five interpolations in his essay, providing a full chronological list, with act and scene, from Branagh's film-script. See Sauer, n12, p. 344.

<sup>83</sup> Bernice W. Kliman, 'The Unkindest Cuts: Flashcut Excess in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*', in *Talking Shakespeare*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell and Michael Scott (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 151-67) p. 153.

As in Kozintsev's *Hamlet*, Gertrude is played by a woman who is of a convincing age to play Hamlet's mother, thus repressing any temptations to turn the image of her body into an emblem of dangerous female sexuality or the object of Hamlet's desire. Julie Christie's Gertrude is far more modest and demure in her dress, and her desire for her new husband is 'suitably' low-key in comparison to Close's. However, her white wedding dress in the court scene, while in keeping with the atmosphere of celebration, underlines the fact that Gertrude is no blushing virgin bride but is in fact taking a second husband somewhat later in her life. The visual portrayal of the ceremony, 'with the newlyweds running out through confetti', hints at the illegitimacy of the royal wedding, as well as subtly mocking Gertrude's youthful or virginal desires.<sup>84</sup>

Branagh is also careful to avoid the suggestion of any sexual attraction between mother and son.<sup>85</sup> In this scene, Gertrude's expressed compassion and concern for Hamlet seems wholly genuine, rather than tainted with sexual manipulation as in Olivier's film. Gertrude approaches Hamlet's chair and kneels before him as she asks 'cast thy nightly colour off, / And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark' (1.2.67-8). It is a tender gesture that shows her to be humble before her son, particularly given the audience present for the royal announcement. Christie's Gertrude, although made to look a fool in her wedding dress, is strong, dignified: here, the costumed body and the performing body seem to be working against each other. She is a mature woman, capable of making her own choices without being expected to answer to her son, and this makes Hamlet's resentment appear all the more foolish. Unlike Zeffirelli, who pulls Shakespeare's two women apart – not only in appearance but also by placing them in direct competition for Hamlet's affections – Branagh also handles the similarities between Gertrude and Ophelia (Kate Winslet) with a certain amount of sympathy. Before Gertrude is dismissed by her husband in the nunnery scene, the two women stand side-by-side, holding hands, tied together. They both look concerned by what is to follow. When

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<sup>84</sup> Sauer, p. 326.

<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, Starks remarks that, by avoiding any suggestion of an Oedipal complex, Branagh's film 'provides the most "Oedipal" of all filmed *Hamlets*, ironically replicating Freud's own repression of the maternal through symptomatic denials and displacements in its representations of desire and sexuality'. As a result, she argues that Christie's Gertrude, no longer Lacan's demanding (m)Other, 'fades into the blank white background, her own desires obscured by those of Claudius and Hamlet'. However, in reading Christie's performing body, I interpret a resistance to the Hamlet narrative where the obscurity of Gertrude's desire ultimately becomes powerful. See Starks, pp. 160 and 174.

Derek Jacobi's Claudius mildly instructs Gertrude to leave, she looks shocked, offended, agitated.

At this point, I want to offer a brief reading that interprets Christie's body playing Gertrude, *not* Christie's body as it is positioned for Branagh's camera. When Hamlet enters the closet scene, Christie's Gertrude stands erect behind a chair, her gown buttoned up to the neck. Fiercely, she thrusts her body forward: 'Have you forgot me?' (3.4.16). Branagh's Hamlet responds with shouts, but Gertrude's voice remains defiant: 'Nay, then. I'll set those to you that can speak' (3.4.20). At this point she makes as if to leave the room, but Hamlet catches her in his arms and throws her violently into a chair; as he vows to reveal her 'inmost part', her dress becomes unlaced in the struggle. Gertrude, with her bosom exposed, is thrown onto the bed as Hamlet cries 'Sit you down, / And let me wring your heart' (3.4.39-40).



2.6. 'Ay me, what act?': Kenneth Branagh and Julie Christie in Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996)

As the camera tracks in a half circle to the left, it pans right, and we see the pink curtains of the bed pulled back, as if a deliberate re-enacting of Olivier's sexualised imagery were occurring.<sup>86</sup> As Branagh's Hamlet continues to rage and

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<sup>86</sup> While Branagh manages to avoid the Oedipal implications of the bed in Gertrude's closet, it can still be seen elsewhere in the film to draw our attention to the sexual part of the royal marriage. As Hamlet describes to Horatio how the king 'takes his rouse' and 'drains his draughts' for 'the triumph of his pledge' (1.4.9-11), his voiceover accompanies a brief interpolated scene of Claudius and Gertrude drinking before a celebrating crowd. They then stumble forward into the bedroom with their arms

Gertrude remains silent, this closet scene appears doomed to fall into all the familiar clichés. However, as the camera continues panning right, it appears that Christie's Gertrude has somehow managed to cover the exposed part of her body; as she responds to her son, her tongue has lost none of its vigour: 'Ay me, what act, / That roars so loud and thunders in the index?' (3.4.58-9). Her anger and her determination seem to grow with every breath, and she gives this line such emphasis that our thoughts are bent toward Hamlet's own 'act' of murder only moments before, one that also 'calls virtue hypocrite' (3.4.46-8). Branagh's camera, however, does not observe Polonius's body at this point.

After the appearance of the ghost, Hamlet and Gertrude move away from the bed for the remainder of the scene. Seated beside her son on the couch, Christie's face is now solemn and stained with tears: 'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain' (3.4.161). She continues to observe Hamlet with serious looks, but as the camera cuts from its position over Hamlet's shoulder to a position over Gertrude's, something unexpected happens: as Hamlet warns Gertrude to avoid Claudius's 'reechy kisses', Christie smiles. The smile is intriguing, because it is not half-hearted or fleeting; likewise, it is not a smile to which Branagh's Hamlet seems to notice or respond.



**2.7. 'Dost thou not laugh?': Christie's ambiguous smile in Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996)**

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around each other and collapse onto the royal bed. As a hastily dressed Claudius greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the royal bedroom, Gertrude enters from an adjoining room, still putting on her earrings. A maid quickly makes up the bed: a 'couch for luxury' (1.5.88). Already the official business of the court seems to be slipping.

Looking away from Branagh for a moment, Christie raises her eyes and smiles almost irrepressibly as if something has amused her, and yet, when the camera returns to its position over Hamlet's shoulder, the smile has vanished. Gertrude is as solemn as before: 'Be thou assured, if words be made of breath / And breath of life, I have no life to breathe / What thou hast said to me' (3.4.195-7). The effect is almost comical. What should we infer here? Is Gertrude mocking Hamlet? Or is Christie mocking Branagh? How does this smile affect our interpretation of Hamlet's speech, and Gertrude's response to it, at this point in the scene?

Despite not being able to give a definitive answer here, for this moment, Hamlet's obsessions about his mother's sex life seem trivial, petty, and juvenile, the actions of a petulant child at whom Gertrude cannot help but smile, given her own womanly maturity in such matters. This Gertrude is no fool, no weakling, no victim of her son's violent outbursts; she knows well enough what lies at her core, and yet she reveals nothing: 'O, shame, where is thy blush?' (3.4.80), cries Branagh's Hamlet. Christie's Gertrude doesn't have one. Rather, she seems to tell herself that if things are to work out, this is one argument that she must let her son win. Instead of confirming guilt, she simply shakes her head and cries with as much power as before: 'No more' (3.4.104). Similarly, when Christie's Gertrude speaks later of her 'sick soul' as 'sin's true nature is' (4.4.18) – another indication of her alleged guilt – she exhales deeply and rolls her eyes to heaven. If this Gertrude does have a 'sick soul', it is only because her son has stubbornly and wilfully named it so.

If Christie's body often refutes what Branagh's camera attempts to 'show', then it is never very long before Branagh readdresses the balance. As Hamlet and Gertrude share their farewell embrace in the closet scene, the camera tracks back so that both bodies are now reflected in the massive pool of blood that has poured from Polonius's corpse. In this moment, both Hamlet and Gertrude are implicated in the crime that Hamlet has committed, and as he drags Polonius's body from the chamber, the trail of blood left behind it sweeps along the side of the royal bed and out of its hanging curtains where Hamlet proceeds to make his exit. Hamlet's crime – the evidence of which is Polonius's body – is literally hidden by this image of his mother's sexuality, and Gertrude, left sighing beside the blood, is the body left 'stained'. Again, Branagh's analeptic flashcuts are detrimental for Gertrude: one shows Gertrude flirting with both Claudius and her first husband whilst playing a game; as Hamlet and his father turn their backs, she embraces Claudius, and although

this embrace is essentially innocent, it makes Gertrude a bigger cause for Claudius's act of murder. Also, the following momentary shot of a female body being 'unlaced' from its corset implies that Gertrude might have been unfaithful *before* her first husband's death. Branagh's manipulations of space, in the closet scene and elsewhere in the film, clearly favour Hamlet's representation, not Gertrude's.

Aside from this single close-up shot of hands undoing the laces of a corset (which we assume, given its context, are Gertrude's body and Claudius's hands), there are no explicit visual references to Gertrude's sexualised body in Branagh's film. Instead, the film relies on interpolated scenes to exploit *Ophelia's* body visually. Ophelia's first associated space is a maze of confusion: as she listens to her brother's warnings about Hamlet, the garden's labyrinth stretches out behind her, filling the space of the screen. The second space associated with Ophelia is a confession box. After Laertes's departure, we see Polonius close the iron gates on Ophelia inside a small church – an early visual metaphor of his attempts to lock away her sexuality. But in Branagh's representation of the play's events, Polonius's attempts have come too late. As Polonius demands of Ophelia 'give me up the truth' (1.3.102), he literally forces her into a confession box: it is the same filmic space where Claudius will later make his confession for his sin of murder. This Ophelia must have a guilty conscience; her 'offence', as 'rank' as that of Claudius, 'smells to heaven' (3.3.39). As she speaks, we begin to see several interpolated shots of Hamlet and Ophelia in bed together. While there has been much critical speculation and controversy about the film's many flashcuts, the most concerning aspect about them is that Branagh confirms a sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia.<sup>87</sup>

While Kate Winslet's interpretation makes for 'an intelligent, sensitive Ophelia', if we are to accept that these images in fact belong to Ophelia's memory, then Branagh's film generates some dangerous concepts about her character.<sup>88</sup> My central concern here is the use of the eroticised female body in this context, and its

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<sup>87</sup> Other critical concerns stem from the possible or improbable subjectivity of these interpolated scenes of Hamlet and Ophelia in her bedroom. Sauer asks 'from whose point of view is the affair presented? Are these scenes flashbacks? Fantasies? Memories or dreams?' See Sauer, p. 331. Despite the fact that these flashcuts occur to Polonius's voiceover, *all* of the images are integrated with close-up shots of Ophelia's face – the camera begins with her, and returns to her for the closing shot, after each interpolated shot of their lovemaking. The images also continue *after* Polonius's exit. Although Branagh's techniques throughout are somewhat confusing, I would suggest that, in this case, there is ample confirmation that the images are from Ophelia's mind. Her guilty and embarrassed behaviour before her father also signals to the viewer that these are *remembrances*, not childish fabrications. Also, see Rutter, pp. 47-9.

<sup>88</sup> Kliman, p. 159.

implications for the story of *Hamlet* as a whole. When Polonius demands of Ophelia ‘give me up the truth’, she does something that no previous representation of her character has confirmed in this moment: she lies. She recalls sexual encounters with Hamlet at the very moment that her father questions her in the confession box and instructs her to ‘tender [herself] more dearly’ (1.3.111). She therefore makes a mockery of her promise to obey him, of her promise to her brother only moments before, and of her word before God. If she can lie to Polonius at this point, her deceiving of Hamlet in the nunnery scene only confirms her to be a weak, inconstant woman, incapable of demonstrating true loyalty to either father or lover. The visual treatment of Winslet’s body condemns Ophelia to a representation that is in line with Hamlet’s misogynistic treatment of her, and the viewer is encouraged to align their perspective with his own, to see her as he does – using one fair ‘face’ but making herself another.

While Branagh’s excessive flashcuts are damaging to the pace and rhythm of the film, and to Ophelia, they ‘protect’ Hamlet’s character by avoiding ‘any gesture toward non-normative sexuality’ and providing further justification for his actions towards Ophelia.<sup>89</sup> Branagh’s nunnery scene actually shows a tender kiss between Hamlet and Ophelia on first meeting, suggesting that Hamlet is still committed to their relationship at this time. Once she has deceived him about her father’s whereabouts, the trust is broken and all affection is taken away as punishment. From this moment on, Hamlet remains closed off from Ophelia when previously he was open.

It is now *Ophelia* who is guilty on both counts, and her ‘sin’, as it is coded within the visuals of the film, is directly linked to her state of madness. In the search for Hamlet after Polonius’s murder, Ophelia’s bed is one of the first places to be searched by the guards. They storm into her chamber and throw back the covers of the ‘enseamed bed’; clearly her sexual relationship with Hamlet is not as secret as she may have hoped in the court at Denmark. In her madness, she is shown lying on her back on the floor, pretending to have sex. As she chants ‘An thou hadst not come to my bed’ (4.4.64), the camera cuts away to the same interpolated images of her in bed with Hamlet. The visual connection between these two scenes only further removes Hamlet (and indeed Polonius) from any blame, as Ophelia’s madness is now directly

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<sup>89</sup> Starks here argues that these flashcuts ‘invest Branagh with the screen image of a “healthy” hetero-Hamlet, who exemplifies normative ideals of masculinity and sexuality’. See Starks, p. 177.

associated with her own lie, and her own misjudgement. Film adaptations of *Hamlet* frequently emphasise that it is Gertrude's apparent 'flaw of lust' for which she must be blamed. In Branagh's *Hamlet*, it seems to be Ophelia's.



**2.8. Placing the blame: searching the 'enseamed bed' of Kate Winslet's Ophelia in Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996)**

If, as these film texts seem to indicate, Gertrude's representation is inevitably tied to Hamlet's and the unravelling of Hamlet's/*Hamlet's* 'mystery', then *Hamlet* on film will always prove to be problematic for Gertrude's ambiguity, not only as a result of the overpowering influences of our own critical history, but also for the conventions of mainstream film. The concept of a heroic Hamlet can easily be played out when the classical narrative structure of mainstream film is frequently dependent on the disruption and subsequent resolution of the hero's 'quest'. Therefore the decision to popularise *Hamlet* for a mass audience via mainstream film conventions will undoubtedly lean towards the necessity for a heroic Hamlet who fulfils the requirements of the narrative's resolution, thus pushing aside all mistakes, confusions and ambiguities that are so central to Shakespeare's play. It appears that our past cultural tendencies to sentimentalise Hamlet's character have indeed found the ideal medium. However, how are spectators instructed to read Gertrude when Hamlet is *not* the hero?



## *The Film Within the Film*

For a director seeking to bring Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to a mass audience, a heroic Hamlet is the easiest choice – not to mention the most lucrative. Michael Almereyda's adaptation (2000) faces up to the biggest challenge when adapting *Hamlet* for film: portraying Hamlet as a man who is something *less* than heroic.<sup>90</sup> The fact that Almereyda's *Hamlet* rejects the heroic project is perhaps part of the reason for the film's lack of mainstream success. For some critics and audiences, Ethan Hawke's representation of 'the protagonist's alienated impotence and eventual defeat', was obviously far less than most were hoping for it to be.<sup>91</sup> Somewhat ironically, my reading of Gertrude concludes with a reading of Hamlet; however, by readdressing the problem of Hamlet's representation on screen, Almereyda moves us one step closer to addressing the complexity of Gertrude.

In Almereyda's contemporary, technology-dependent world, bodies are being continuously videoed, recorded, captured and replayed, thus emphasising 'the proliferation of surveillance practices that characterises postmodernity'.<sup>92</sup> The absent presence of this surveillance is almost stifling: 'an anonymous institutional gaze', which is 'as omnipresent as it is invisible'.<sup>93</sup> On televisions, camcorders, security monitors and cinema screens, some crucial turning points from Shakespeare's play occur in 'the frame within the frame'. Alone in his own editing studio, Ethan Hawke's Hamlet 'plays with film in an endeavour to pinpoint the "mystery" of things'.<sup>94</sup> 'The Mousetrap' becomes a short film (directed by Hamlet, of course) which is played to its audience in Claudius's private small-screen cinema, and the ghost of Old Hamlet first appears for his bewildered observers on a CCTV camera monitor. The most revealing of the film's use of visual technologies is for Hamlet himself, as he uses a hand-held camcorder to film his own soliloquies. For his first soliloquy at the end of the court scene, Hamlet records images of himself speaking, and then replays it for us to see, almost as if he were crafting his own documentary.

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<sup>90</sup> *Hamlet*. Dir. Michael Almereyda. USA. 2000.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Shaughnessy, 'Stage, Screen, and Nation: *Hamlet* and the Space of History', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 54-76 (p. 54).

<sup>92</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett, "'I see my father" in "my mind's eye": Surveillance and the Filmic *Hamlet*', in *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), pp. 31-52 (31).

<sup>93</sup> Thornton Burnett, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> Thornton Burnett, p. 38.

Unlike other adaptations where the director uses the camera to portray events through Hamlet's eyes, Almereyda's film throws these subjective visions back at the spectator for critical reassessment. As Katherine Rowe observes, a preoccupation in Almereyda's *Hamlet* is technologies of *memory*: 'the way film and video mediate past experience'.<sup>95</sup> Just as a director's interpretation of a Shakespeare play will undoubtedly reflect the concerns of the time, Hamlet's *memories* – a collection of images filmed on his camcorder – are not exact reconstructions of the past but edited occurrences that serve his present concerns: his grief over his father's death, and his anger at his mother's second marriage. Suddenly Hamlet's viewpoint, and his forms of remembrance, may prove unstable, questionable, ultimately nostalgic, or deliberately sceptical. The images that he records for his first soliloquy are in fact a strange collection of historical images that, whilst held together by his *own* experience of past events – his 'mind's eye' – hold no singular 'truth' or make little sense for the film's spectator: 'Renaissance painting, military footage, cartoon monster'.<sup>96</sup>

For my own reading of Almereyda's film, these visual 'fragments' serve as an early warning that what Hamlet 'sees' in his video-recordings will not be history itself as it occurred but a juxtaposition of separate occurrences that he will manipulate in order to tell his own story. Nostalgic images of his father appear in black and white as Hamlet famously compares the first king to the second – 'Hyperion to a satyr'. Juxtaposed with these shots are images of Hamlet as he talks to camera. We see close-ups of his face, forehead, eyes, so that when *we* look on these 'remembrances', we see only too clearly who has created them: Hamlet is both subject and director of his artwork. Rowe sees Hamlet's video soliloquies as a way of understanding his interiority.<sup>97</sup> However, I would also suggest that, because *he* is recording his own personal moments of experience, they become stripped of their assumed universal 'truth' as a result. This is particularly true of the 'to be or not to be' speech, where Hamlet films himself with a gun to his head in contemplation of suicide. Is this an action we could ever be convinced of him carrying out? With his camera – and Almereyda's – always rolling, Hamlet's intentions remain questionable.

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<sup>95</sup> Katherine Rowe, 'Remember Me: Technologies of Memory in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularising the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. by Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 37-55 (p. 46).

<sup>96</sup> Rowe, p. 46.

<sup>97</sup> Rowe, p. 47.



2.9. 'To be, or not to be': keeping the camera rolling in Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)

Whether unintentionally, Almereyda makes an ironic comment on the play's subsequent history on film by drawing our attention to the fact that the story we are hearing, the story we have always heard, is Hamlet's, and here it has been recorded, cut, edited and replayed in order to reflect his own state of mind. By moving spectators to a new subjective artistic space, Almereyda emphasises that Hamlet's 'film within the film' – an extended and magnified example of Hamlet's play within the play – is not objective, but what he has chosen for his audience to see, the story as he wishes it to be heard. Suddenly in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, we find that there are two sides to the story. Such possibilities on film can help to alter the ways in which we read other central characters in *Hamlet*, and Gertrude in particular.

While Diane Venora's Gertrude remains highly sexualised in Almereyda's film, she is still portrayed with a certain amount of sympathy, as is Julia Stiles's Ophelia. When she first appears at the media conference in Elsinore Hotel, she is seated beside Claudius as he makes his speech; glamorously dressed and behaving appropriately, she smiles for all the cameras before the couple share a public kiss. As soon as the speeches are over, she clings to her new husband, wrapping her arms around his waist. Her body is always kept in the centre of the frame as Claudius addresses Polonius and Laertes, while Hamlet and Ophelia can be seen talking in the background of the shot. However, outside the hotel, Gertrude seems different again: a long grey coat now covers her body, and her eyes remain hidden behind a pair of

large, dark sunglasses. When Hamlet retreats to the solitude of his studio, he plays some old black and white footage of his mother and father walking together, arm in arm. These shots are private, intimate, and Gertrude here appears relaxed, happy and at ease.

While public image is everything to this Gertrude, she appears to behave in accordance with who is observing her at the time, and the spectator is quickly made aware that there may be a public *and* a private side to her character. Hamlet plays the video footage of his parents together again and again, rewinding it, pausing it, and then finally fast-forwarding it in order to view some more recent footage of Stiles's Ophelia. As Ophelia sits on a bed reading a book, the camera moves closer; suddenly, she pulls the book away and the footage ends on an extreme close-up of her beautiful, innocent face. While Almereyda's *Hamlet* does not portray the same friendship between Ophelia and Gertrude that Branagh's film does, the bond that *is* established between the two women is far more poignant. When Gertrude attempts to put on her public face at another evening party, the mad Ophelia enters and proceeds to shatter the illusion, letting out a terrifying scream that stops the celebration in its tracks. It is only after hearing the news of Ophelia's drowning that Gertrude is able finally to recognise the tragic ties that will bind them. If the death of Ophelia's father finally breaks Ophelia, then it is Ophelia's death that finally breaks Gertrude.

Venora's Gertrude remains loyal to her husband *and* to Hamlet when she knowingly drinks from the poisoned cup. In the film's final scene, she sits motionless in a chair, her pale face expressionless, her long black coat buttoned up to the neck. Although there are many others present to watch the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, Gertrude no longer cares for public appearances. She doesn't even pretend to be entertained by the fight; instead, her eyes remain fixed on the poisoned drink. Suddenly jumping out of her seat, she takes the glass in her hands, positioning her body directly between Hamlet and Claudius. While Olivier's film no doubt influenced Almereyda's interpretation of this scene, Olivier shows a significant change in Gertrude after the closet scene to indicate her siding with Hamlet; in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Gertrude remains loyal to her husband *as well as to her son*: her words 'I pray you, pardon me' (5.2.232) just before she drinks the poison, are delivered with evident sadness to Claudius. Thus, she is able to say goodbye to him before she turns to say her final farewell to Hamlet. Perhaps, then, Venora's Gertrude does move us one step closer to the complexity of Shakespeare's.

A reading that implies absence or presence, lack or excess, too little or too much, can be detrimental for Shakespeare's Gertrude. Despite the presence of her sexualised body on film, an acceptance of her body's absence in Shakespeare's play can be just as counterproductive as an acceptance of her excessive sexuality. However, while Gertrude's 'inmost part' essentially remains unknowable to us in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, what remains undoubtedly *knowable* to us in the next play under discussion – *Othello* – is Desdemona's virtue. Desdemona's innocence of her husband's charge of infidelity is never in question for the audience. But despite being guiltless of the crimes of which her husband accuses her, her body on film nevertheless becomes, like Gertrude's, a liminal space that must be controlled. While Gertrude's sexualised body is necessarily exploited on film as confirmation of her guilt, Desdemona's screened body remains caught between the dual desires for exposure and concealment; like her sexuality, her body is a 'closet lock and key of villainous secrets' (4.2.24) that, once opened, must also be stopped, closed, hidden. Desdemona is therefore, on several levels, another liminal body, tantalisingly exposed yet simultaneously concealed, neither whore nor angel and, like Gertrude, neither wholly innocent nor guilty due to the alignment of the spectator's gaze with that of the play's male protagonist. However, while the site of Gertrude's sexualised body frequently masks male crimes, Desdemona's body becomes the site upon which male crimes may be acted out.

## ‘A Closet Lock and Key of Villainous Secrets’:

### Filming *Othello*’s Private Parts

[L]et a woman have chastity, she has all.  
Let her lack chastity and she has nothing.<sup>1</sup>

As an innocent woman accused of infidelity, *Othello*’s Desdemona is caught between the two fixed positions regarding chastity in Ruth Kelso’s definition of the Renaissance woman. Desdemona herself is, undoubtedly, a chaste woman. Even after the audience have witnessed her husband strike her, verbally abuse her, call her ‘Devil’ (4.1.238) and ‘that cunning whore of Venice’ (4.2.98), she remains faithful to him even up to the moment when he takes her life: ‘Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!’ (5.2.145). Despite her chastity, Desdemona ends up with nothing: tying her ‘duty, beauty, wit and fortunes’ to ‘an extravagant and wheeling stranger’ (1.1.142-3), she abandons her home, her ‘guardage’, her father, ‘so many noble matches’, ‘her country’ and ‘her friends’ (4.2.139-40) for a husband who determines that her own ‘wretched fortune’ (4.2.142) must be death. When believed to be chaste, Desdemona can indeed be everything to Othello: ‘Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul, / But I do love thee! And when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again’ (3.3.100-102). However, once Iago has persuaded Othello of her affair with Cassio, she becomes, in Iago’s own implication, no more than ‘trash’, not a precious ‘jewel’ to be treasured but ‘something, nothing’ (3.3.178). What Iago’s perverse analogy here implies is that Desdemona’s chastity is the ‘immediate jewel’ (3.3.177) of Othello’s soul; once lost, she becomes of no greater value than common coins to any man: ‘’Twas mine, ’tis his, and has been slave to thousands’ (3.3.179).<sup>2</sup> She is an ‘unstable commodity’; like

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1956), p. 24. Also quoted in Peter Stallybrass, ‘Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed’, in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1986), pp. 123-42 (p. 137). Kelso cites two early modern sources: Guazzo, *Dialoghi piecevoli* (1586), pp. 129-30, 134; and Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (1547), f. 23a.

<sup>2</sup> After murdering Desdemona, Othello’s line echoes Iago’s earlier analogy, thus completing the associations between it and Desdemona: ‘Iago knows / That she with Cassio hath the act of shame / A thousand times committed’ (5.2.239-41). A similar analogy occurs in *The Duchess of Malfi*, when the Duchess says: ‘Diamonds are of most value / They say, that have pass’d through most jewellers’ hands’ (1.2.220-21). Consider, also, Ferdinand’s dying words, ‘*Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust*’ (5.5.71-2). See John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Brennan (London: A & C Black, 1993) for line references.

Lavinia, she becomes a ‘changing piece’ (*Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.311), ‘a function of her status as passive object of exchange’.<sup>3</sup>

To use Iago’s analogy, Desdemona must become, on many levels, both ‘something’ and ‘nothing’. In order to succeed in his plan to destroy Othello, Iago must first turn Desdemona’s ‘virtue into pitch’ (2.3.324). However, he must also turn nothing into *something* – Desdemona’s innocent and guiltless ‘nothing’ into a monstrous something that will convince Othello of her infidelity: ‘When Iago cunningly replies “Nothing” to Othello’s request to know what ails him, his comment is ironically exact; but he speculates rightly that Othello will promptly read some dreadful something into this temptingly blank text’.<sup>4</sup> As Terry Eagleton’s reading of the play also associates the word ‘nothing’ with its possible meaning in Elizabethan English as the female genitals, this oscillation between something and nothing extends to the female body itself: woman’s ‘modest nothing’ which ‘begins to look like some sublimely terrifying all’.<sup>5</sup> In both these respects, Iago reveals ‘nothing’ for Othello: by prompting Othello’s suspicion, he lets Othello read something more into his absence of speech, and by convincing Othello that Venetian women ‘do let heaven see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands’ (3.3.225-6), he reveals Desdemona’s ‘nothing’ as ‘foul’ and monstrous.

In a reading that collapses space and the body, this chapter considers the representation of *Othello*’s private ‘parts’ on film, examining the play’s dualities that are played out through the woman’s body, and the private feminine spaces that exclude the presence of men on Shakespeare’s stage. By examining how film adaptations appropriate Shakespeare’s play-text and its feminine spaces, this chapter traces the realignments of the relationship between what is shown and what remains hidden for the satisfaction of the male spectator’s gaze. It is the *spatial* suffocation of women’s bodies that has become a visual focus for screen adaptations of *Othello*, one that is frequently defined by a deliberate accentuation of the play’s implications of male voyeurism. This chapter examines the representations of *Othello*’s spaces for women in three film versions of the play; primarily, it takes as its concern the

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<sup>3</sup> Dymphna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A Study of ‘King Lear’, ‘Othello’, ‘The Duchess of Malfi’ and ‘The White Devil’* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton, p. 65. Philippa Berry also notes ‘tragedy’s identification of ‘seeing nothing’ with the ‘nothing to see’ of the female genitals: a connection reinforced in the Renaissance by contemporary allusions to ‘eyes’ as slang for the genitals’. See Philippa Berry, *Shakespeare’s Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 77-8.

reduction of private female enclosures and the enlargement of the play's scopophilic possibilities that can be found in Orson Welles's *Othello* (1952), and considers Sergei Yutkevich's *Othello* (1956) and Oliver Parker's adaptation (1995) in light of the influences of Welles's film.

### ***Are Your Doors Locked?***

In Renaissance culture, what confirms Desdemona's position between the polarised opposites of chaste and unchaste woman is her elopement. In *Othello*'s opening scene, we learn from Roderigo that Desdemona has fled from her family house in the 'odd-even and dull watch o'th'night' (1.1.130), without suitable protection for her safety but with 'a knave of common hire' (1.1.132), in order to marry with Othello. When challenging Brabantio about Desdemona's whereabouts, Iago asks provokingly, 'Are your doors locked?' (1.1.88): it is a question that, given the context of his lewd insinuations about Desdemona and the Moor 'making the beast with two backs' (1.1.123), alludes to Brabantio's desire to 'lock' away his daughter's chastity. Brabantio's exclamation, 'O heaven! How got she out?' (1.1.178), further reveals this desire and constitutes the father's house as a space for attempting to contain, and thus control, female sexuality.

In a discussion of Renaissance definitions of the woman's body as male property, Peter Stallybrass suggests that 'surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house'.<sup>6</sup> Observing how these three areas 'frequently collapsed into each other', Stallybrass thus highlights how both silence and chastity are 'homologous to woman's enclosure within the house'.<sup>7</sup> From its opening scene, the household in *Othello* is marked as an interior domain for women that represents the closed borders of a daughter's chastity and her obedience to her father's rule. Similarly, by positioning the elopement off-stage and thus excluding it from the performance space of the play's events, Shakespeare's *Othello* presents Desdemona's desiring act as outside, transgressive, threatening. The elopement is, conveniently for Iago, both nothing *and* a threatening something: it is an act which in itself confirms nothing more than Desdemona's love for Othello, but it

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<sup>6</sup> Stallybrass, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> Stallybrass, p. 127.



may also act as a 'sign' of the unchaste woman.<sup>8</sup> Such dualities are symbolised through the handkerchief itself, a small and modest nothing, a trifle 'light as air' (3.3.358), which also carries with it implications of woman as both 'chaste bride' and 'sexual object'.<sup>9</sup> On receiving it from Emilia, Iago observes shrewdly: 'this *may* do *something*' (3.3.360, emphasis added).

Desdemona's 'gross revolt' (1.1.141), depicted for the audience through the image of the 'open' house, is undoubtedly punished, 'not only in a loss of status, but even of life', and her punishment for abandoning her 'guardage' is reflected in the play's spatial developments that mirror the culmination of its plot.<sup>10</sup> As Lena Cowen Orlin observes, 'Desdemona's "place" in a patriarchal familial and social structure is defined by the direction in which she tenders obedience; as already implied by the dereliction of household duties suggested in her "hasty dispatch" of them, her spatial displacement implicates her in a violation of the patriarchal hierarchy as well'.<sup>11</sup> Desdemona's elopement validates the intrusive patriarchal notion that men must be 'watchers' and that spaces for women must be guarded or 'supervised' by a controlling male gaze. In *Othello's* spatial plan, the failure of the father's house to

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<sup>8</sup> If, as Stallybrass suggests, the closed mouth is another sign of a woman's chastity, then Desdemona's speech in the first half of the play also problematises the notion of the 'enclosed' body as she speaks freely before the Senate, vows to 'talk' her husband 'out of patience' (3.3.25), and participates in Iago's bawdy banter on arrival at Cyprus. Some critics have indeed struggled with Desdemona's verbal participation here; as Valerie Wayne observes, Desdemona's 'engagement in this banter reveals that she is not the perfect creation Cassio described her as being, or Ridley wished she were'. See Valerie Wayne, 'Historical Differences: Misogyny and *Othello*', in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 153-79 (p. 162) and *Othello* ed. by M. R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1958) for both arguments. Wayne's argument emphasises Iago's misogyny, as 'even an absence of woman's speech is described by Iago as "too much"'. See Wayne, p. 160. Also, see Carol Rutter's discussion of Emilia's role in the quayside banter in *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 149-52.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Snow writes that the handkerchief acts as 'a nexus for three aspects of woman – chaste bride, sexual object, and maternal threat'. See 'Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in *Othello*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 10 (1980), 384-412 (p. 392). For an earlier reading of the symbolic power of the handkerchief, see Lynda E. Boose, 'Othello's Handkerchief: "The Recognizance and Pledge of Love"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 5 (1975), 360-74. For a modern reading that discusses the handkerchief in terms of memory and performance, see Carol Rutter, "'Her first remembrance from the Moor": actors and the materials of memory', in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, ed. by Peter Holland (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 168-206. For a modern reading that imagines the handkerchief as 'an important symbol of Desdemona's pity and love for Othello', see Shawn Smith, 'Love, Pity, and Deception in *Othello*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 44 (2008), 3-51 (p. 28); pp. 23-36 for a discussion of the handkerchief in particular.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Newman, "'And wash the Ethiop white": femininity and the monstrous in *Othello*' in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. by Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 143-62 (p. 153).

<sup>11</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Desdemona's Disposition', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), pp. 171-92 (p. 175).

contain Desdemona's sexuality is necessarily counterbalanced by the ensuing voyeuristic strategies that are frequently accompanied by implications of confinement, concluding with the claustrophobic on-stage 'spectacle' of Desdemona's murder. Ironically, the elopement itself is already a supervised act, as the audience only hears about it in male report: absent from the action of the stage, it is reduced to the obscene descriptions of Iago's gossip. Finally, Desdemona's territories are reduced, enclosed, and controlled, until Othello banishes her attendant from her chamber and her confinement comes to its terrifying climax with the act of smothering in the enclosed and 'contaminated' space of the bed (4.1.200).<sup>12</sup> These progressions from the open or abandoned father's house to the enclosed, murderous bedchamber allude visually to the recontainment of 'open' or unruly female sexuality.<sup>13</sup> In such Renaissance plays, 'the attempt to control female deviance becomes spatially explicit'.<sup>14</sup>

Desdemona's elopement with Othello sets up the play's relationship between men in the act of looking and the spaces that women occupy, one that will later play an essential part in Iago's successful manipulation of the protagonist. The elopement thus gives credit to Iago's insinuations about women and infidelity: 'She did deceive her father, marrying you' (3.3.229). Iago will later enrage Othello by associating the image of Brabantio's closed eye with Othello's ignorance of Desdemona's alleged affair: 'She that so young could give out such a seeming, / To seel her father's eyes up close as oak' (3.3.234-5). The suggestion that Brabantio's eyes were closed to Desdemona's deceit comes swiftly after Iago's warning about the 'cuckold' who 'lives in bliss' (3.3.189), ignorant because he would 'turn a blind eye' to his wife's act of sexual betrayal. Not only does the 'open' house imply Desdemona's 'open' sexuality, but the location of Venice itself, 'always gendered feminine' in its early modern representations and reputed 'as a site of feminine sexual corruption', suggests

<sup>12</sup> It will in fact be Othello's act of murder that 'contaminates' the space of the marital bed, rather than Iago's false suggestion of Desdemona's sexual infidelity: 'strangle her in her bed, / even the bed she hath contaminated' (4.1.204-5).

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Sara Eaton traces a similar spatial movement in *Titus Andronicus* that is a reflection of the action of the play: 'Lavinia, who begins the play potentially unruly in her speech and her humanist education, her writing, her teaching, is rendered a macabre and reified image of the chaste, silent, and obedient wife and daughter after her mutilation – or because of it – and is from her rape enclosed in her father's house'. See Sara Eaton, 'A Woman of Letters: Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), pp. 54-74 (p. 66).

<sup>14</sup> Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 69. Loomba is referring specifically here to the 'increasing confinement' of the Duchess of Malfi; Beatrice in *The Changeling*; Bianca in *Women Beware Women*; Penthea in *The Broken Heart*; and Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, as they are variously 'confined, locked up, and closed'. See Loomba p. 69. For her discussion of Desdemona in *Othello*, see pp. 54-62 in particular.

an outer beauty and an inner threat that easily translates to the woman: 'Like Venice, Desdemona has the appearance of purity (and discretion) even as she boldly lays herself *open* to Othello's suit'.<sup>15</sup> Immediately, then, designated spaces for women provoke anxiety for the play's men, as Desdemona's transgressive act only confirms that the woman's body 'must be subjected to constant surveillance'.<sup>16</sup> When fathers are not watching, daughters abandon their homes for the company of 'lascivious' moors (1.1.133); when husbands are not watching, wives turn whores and bedchambers become brothels (4.2.31-2).

However, the play harbours a dual interest in such conceptions, exploring not only the desire to expose and observe the spaces that women occupy, but also simultaneously to hide and conceal them. In the temptation scene, Othello is trapped between his desire for 'ocular proof' (3.3.398) and the yearning for 'nothing known' (3.3.385): 'What sense had I in her stol'n hours of lust? / I saw't not, thought it not, it harmed not me' (3.3.376-7). He later attempts to expose Desdemona's whoring, the 'closet lock and key of villainous secrets' (4.2.24), while simultaneously keeping it closed off, to 'turn the key' on the bedchamber that he believes to have become a brothel (4.2.103) and lock away this 'subtle whore' (4.2.23), finally suffocating her in 'the bed she hath / contaminated' (4.1.199-200).

By oscillating between the desire to observe and the desire to close off women's spaces, the language of the play evokes what Patricia Parker describes as the 'quasi-pornographic discourse of anatomy and early modern gynaecology', which 'seeks to bring a hidden or secret place to light' under the scrutiny of the male gaze, only to develop a sense of this 'secret female place as something too "obscene" for "show"'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Philippa Berry's discussion of *Othello* focuses on the 'ocular opening which is also a darkening or concealment', thus reading the play not only as a play of discovery, but also as 'a play that is shrouded in darkness, and is centrally

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<sup>15</sup> Margo Hendricks, "'The Moor of Venice', or the Italian on the Renaissance English Stage', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), pp. 193-209 (pp. 196 and 202; my emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> Stallybrass, p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Parker, '*Othello* and *Hamlet*: Dilation, Spying, and the "Secret Place" of Woman', in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, ed. by Russ McDonald (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), pp. 105-46 (pp. 106 and 116). For a reading that associates the play's obsessive desire to 'show' both with racial and sexual meaning, see Patricia Parker, 'Fantasies of "Race" and "Gender": Africa, *Othello* and Bringing to Light', in *Women, 'Race', and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 84-100. See also Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 156.

concerned with what *cannot* be seen'.<sup>18</sup> The end result is an irresolvable fusion of the desires for show and concealment of a woman's private 'parts', one that can be located repeatedly within the play's spatial metaphors: the elopement that is reported but not shown; the consummation of the marriage that has been referred to since the play's opening; the murder itself that is both 'shown' and 'hidden' by the bed curtains. The critical uncertainty about whether Desdemona's suffocation would have occurred on the 'exposed' space of the stage for the audience to witness or within the 'concealed' space of the curtained bed is a spatial ambiguity of the Elizabethan and Jacobean performances which, perhaps ironically, colludes with the play's implications of male voyeurism and its relationship to women's spaces.<sup>19</sup>

As a play that raises many questions about racial difference, *Othello's* structure concerns itself with the instability of oppositions, exhibiting what Daniel J. Vitkus refers to as 'a conflation of various tropes of conversion – transformations from Christian to Turk, from virgin to whore, from good to evil, and from gracious virtue to black damnation'.<sup>20</sup> While the play deals with anxieties over such conversions through its central male character, it also explores the instability of oppositions through the women.<sup>21</sup> However, to describe Desdemona's representation as simply a 'conversion' from 'virgin to whore' is not only to simplify her 'betweenness' but also to align our perspective with that of the protagonist. Desdemona is both 'A maiden never bold, / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself' (1.3.105-7), *and* a 'fair warrior' (2.1.185) of 'downright

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<sup>18</sup> Influenced by Parker, Berry writes: 'Although it is the investigative desire for an unambiguous visual knowledge or 'discovery' of this feminine secret which causes the irresistible turn towards tragedy, the signs of darkness which cluster around the female body configure it as a site of hiddenness or self-concealment that, even in death, eludes this masculine drive to unconcealment'. See Berry, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion that seeks to address such uncertainties, see Richard Hosley, 'The Staging of Desdemona's Bed', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (1963), 57-65. Pascale Aebischer also argues that this point has indeed been 'blurred by stage history', but contends that Desdemona's murder is 'clearly meant to happen in full view of the audience, probably on a centre-stage bed, and her body is to remain visible till the bed-curtains are drawn at the end. A witness account of a production in 1610 tells us that much'. See Aebischer, 'Black Rams Tugging White Ewes: Race vs. Gender in the Final Scene of Six *Othellos*', in *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto, 2001), pp. 59-73 (p. 59). See also Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 52 (as referenced by Aebischer, p. 69).

<sup>20</sup> Daniel J. Vitkus, 'Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48 (1997), 145-76 (p. 145).

<sup>21</sup> For a reading of the relationship between femininity and racial difference, see Newman, pp. 143-62. Newman argues that the union between Othello and Desdemona 'represents a sympathetic identification between femininity and the monstrous which offers a potentially subversive recognition of sexual and racial difference', p. 152.

violence' whose 'storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world' (1.3.264-5).<sup>22</sup> She is, for Emilia, 'heavenly true' (5.2.157), and for the misguided Othello, 'false as hell' (4.2.44). Such dualities reveal themselves in phrases that simultaneously 'make' and 'unmake' Desdemona's virtue: 'By the world, / I think my wife be honest and think she is not' (3.3.424-5). How is this body, simultaneously perceived by the characters of the play as something/nothing, chaste/unchaste, angel/whore, open/closed, exposed/concealed, represented on screen? If, as Stallybrass suggests, the signs of the woman's 'enclosed' body – mouth, chastity, and the threshold of the house – frequently merge and collapse into one another, how does Desdemona's spatial representation on film relate to the representation of her body?<sup>23</sup>

Given the particular visual qualities of the medium and the opportunities presented for a voyeuristic gaze, *Othello's* scopophilia has perhaps found its most 'fertile climate' on film (1.1.73). However, an enlargement of the play's voyeurism may become problematic, for if Shakespeare's play explores the oscillation of the male desire for show and concealment of woman's private parts – both of the body itself, and her spatial territories – it also remains divided between representations of male surveillance and women's privacy. While fathers, jealous husbands, and military men must all be watchers, moments between women that exclude the presence of men still exist on the stage in spaces that, although perhaps marginally and unexpectedly, manage to remain outside the play's implications of male voyeurism. Alone with Emilia in her chamber, Desdemona pauses momentarily in her speech and asks: 'Hark, who is't that knocks?' (4.3.55). Emilia might listen for a moment before responding: 'It's the wind' (4.3.56). Despite all evidence to the contrary, they are indeed, for this short time, alone, and what unfolds between them – though shared with the audience – remains as a private, intimate exchange that will prove to be Iago's undoing.

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<sup>22</sup> See Stallybrass, p. 141. For similar points, see Carol Thomas Neely's argument in *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), pp. 105-35. Gail Kern Paster's exploration of the humours of the Renaissance body explains such dualities in Desdemona's character by opening up 'a hermeneutic space for the thermal transformations wrought by desire': 'The two described behaviours would mark the thermal difference between women married and unmarried, between virgins before the onset of desire and women – married or not – in its throes'. Interestingly, therefore, Paster locates such contradictory descriptions of Desdemona's character not in the self-interests of the men who describe her, but in the emotions that govern Desdemona's own body and become 'performative of versions of femaleness'. See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004), pp. 85 and 109.

<sup>23</sup> Stallybrass, p. 126.

Film adaptations of *Othello* often play on the voyeuristic devices of the camera to align the distortions of the protagonist's gaze with the spectator's own, thus controlling and enclosing the spaces that women occupy through the intrusive operations of the male gaze. Distanced from the live performances of the stage and the physical 'evidence' of a living body before an audience, Desdemona is, like Gertrude, in danger of being represented further through the eyes of the central male protagonist, as the camera frequently positions itself to film the action from *his* perspective. It is often the case that, in the camera's realignments of the gaze, all men become 'supervisors' of female spaces, and as spaces of female privacy are gradually erased, female private 'parts' are spatially connoted as 'open' and exposed. As Desdemona's 'parts' are simultaneously exposed and concealed, moments of female privacy also become private and not private: exchanges between *Othello's* women that exclude the company of men are still given space in these films, but that space is interrogated, intruded upon, and penetrated, often through the presence of on-screen male voyeurs or the spectator's own culpable position as voyeur, positioned by the camera to spy on women from the protagonist's point of view. In the eradication of sites of female privacy, the implications of Desdemona's literal suffocation in the play's final scene extend to the claustrophobic and repressive visual strategies that mark the representation of the play's women on film. It becomes apparent that these filmed spaces are also 'suffocating' the play's women, erasing private female enclosures and ultimately threatening to collapse the fundamental spatial structures that are central to Shakespeare's *Othello*.

In the critical acknowledgements of its references to voyeurism and the context of scopophilic jealousy, *Othello* has been described as a play that 'carries the tyranny of the male look to extremes'.<sup>24</sup> From its entirely masculine context, the play quickly establishes the operations of the look from this male perspective and defines its usages: from the beginning of the play, *Othello* establishes the importance of seeing within a military context. In the opening dialogue between Iago and Roderigo, Iago remarks bitterly that Othello's eyes 'had seen the proof /At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on others' grounds, / Christian and heathen' (1.1.28-30) of his loyal service, yet failed to reward it. Before the Duke in council, the Senator's response to the news that

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<sup>24</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, 'Kiss Me Deadly; or, The Des/Demonized Spectacle', in *'Othello': New Perspectives*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1991), pp. 214-55 (p. 216).

the Turkish fleet ‘makes for Rhodes’ continues the importance of seeing in a military idiom, as he reports that it is merely ‘a pageant, / To keep us in false gaze’ (1.3.23-4): a diversion to conceal an intended attack on Cyprus. These early references in *Othello* to seeing establish the primary function of the male gaze, and the qualities that men attribute to it. When Brabantio claims before the Senate that Othello has ‘abused’ his daughter with ‘some mixtures pow’rful o’er the blood’ (1.3.115) in order to marry her, the Duke responds with ‘this is no proof’, and declares that such claims can only be proven with a ‘more overt test’ than ‘poor likelihoods’ (1.3.118-20). His response alludes clearly to the value of ‘outward’ or external evidence over the verbalization of Brabantio’s weak probabilities.

Such indications of men observing the evidence in order to obtain ‘truth’ introduce to the audience the play’s central thematic interest, one which will culminate in Othello’s demand for ‘ocular proof’ of his wife’s affair during the play’s pivotal scene. Primarily, seeing is ‘proof’ for *Othello*’s men. By reconfiguring Othello’s wife as the enemy, Iago succeeds in directing Othello’s military eye away from the business of state affairs to the ‘business’ of housewifery, ‘to “puddle” men’s seeing by turning the masterful outward gaze obsessively inward, on to unmappable female interiors’.<sup>25</sup> In the search of women’s territories, the military gaze becomes dysfunctional, inadequate, as it persistently searches for ‘proof’ that remains hidden from its previously assured position of omniscient power. Once frustrated by the failure to see – and thus know – everything he attempts to seek out, Othello finds Iago’s false substitutions for ‘ocular proof’ easy to accept. Ironically, it is Iago’s insertion of a ‘false gaze’ that will conceal his own intended attack on Othello.

While the play’s language begins with these references to seeing in a military (and undoubtedly masculine) context, its plot opens with a female act that alludes to women’s unknown movements in the ‘dull watch’ of the night, thus pre-empting a collision between women’s territories and the meticulous military gaze. The play’s opening clearly implies that it will only be a matter of time before the obsessive military gaze will be directed towards an interrogation of the territories that exist beyond ‘all quality, / Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war’ in the world of men (3.3.391-2). When Iago instructs Othello, ‘Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio’ (3.3.220), the military gaze that searches for visual ‘proof’ is directed

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<sup>25</sup> Carol Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 146.

onto territories it cannot master in the usual or familiar sense. Iago ‘traps’ Othello by first ensuring his faith or his confidence in the gaze – ‘Men should be what they seem’ (3.3.144), a phrase that Othello then himself repeats (3.3.146) – only to insert an anxiety that women, in the act of ‘deceit’, possess the power not only to obscure that gaze, but to stop it completely, to ‘seel’ up men’s eyes ‘close as oak’ (3.3.235) and leave them in the dark. It is the prevention of the freedom and mastery of the military eye that relates to Othello’s earlier fears about his ‘unhousèd free condition’ being placed into ‘circumscription and confine’ (1.2.28-9). For ‘men of royal siege’ (1.2.24) such as Othello, ‘free condition’ alludes undoubtedly to the freedom to *see*: confinement is also darkness.

It is Iago’s manipulation of this gaze that brings about Othello’s dual desire for exposure and concealment regarding female territories and, in particular, the territory of Desdemona’s body. Later in the play, Iago will respond to Othello’s demand for ‘ocular proof’ with another perverse implication of voyeurism that not only positions Othello as central voyeur but simultaneously conceives satisfaction in ‘proof’ as sexual gratification: ‘but how? How satisfied, my lord? / Would you the supervision grossly gape on? / Behold her topped?’ (3.3.436-8). By suggesting to Othello ocular proof that is both ‘too painful to view and too impossible to catch’, Iago succeeds in confining Othello’s ‘free and open’ mind (1.3.388) to ‘foul’ and inescapable thoughts, and positions him between a desire for exposure and concealment: ‘I had been happy, if the general camp, / Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body, / So I had nothing known’ (3.3.383-5).<sup>26</sup> Just before he falls into a catatonic trance, Othello says ‘It is not words that shakes me thus’ (4.1.46). Rather, it is the debauched images of Desdemona’s sexual infidelity that cause his mind and his language to collapse: ‘Pish! Noses, ears and lips. Is’t / possible?’ (4.1.46).<sup>27</sup> The conflict between his roaming inner thoughts and his rigid outer body portrays the dual notion of exposure and concealment at crisis point: while his mind’s eye exposes the ‘fulsome’ acts of Desdemona’s infidelity (4.1.43), his catatonic state and the ceasing of his speech indicate the body’s attempt to conceal it within.

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<sup>26</sup> Joan Ozark Holmer, ‘Desdemona, Woman Warrior: “O, these men, these men!”’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 17 (2005), 132-64 (p. 134).

<sup>27</sup> Stallybrass writes, ‘If it is “not words”, it is the body (“Noses, ears and lips”) that shakes him’, and reads the metaphorical associations between these signifiers of the body and the handkerchief, ‘since those parts of the body are all related to the thresholds of the enclosed body, mediating, like the handkerchief, between inner and outer, public and private’. See Stallybrass, p. 138.



The distortions of the gaze seem to seep outwards in *Othello* to interrogate the audience's own, for while the play 'entertains rationality and is unwilling to abandon it completely', it also recognises that 'a scrutinising approach to the world is insufficient, that the eye can make mistakes'.<sup>28</sup> Although it is clearly 'Iago's project of ocular manipulation' on which the play focuses, moments of visual distortion in the narrative do not simply remain as a fixture of the perverse relationship between Iago and Othello.<sup>29</sup> On closer inspection, all central characters experience, in some small or devastatingly significant way, the effects of a 'false gaze'. While it is primarily Iago's verbal and voyeuristic manoeuvres that will 'work on' (4.1.48) to manipulate Othello's perception of Desdemona as the 'fair devil' (3.3.527), the play's distortions persistently 'work' on other characters and the audience, surfacing in false perceptions of Othello's blackness, Desdemona's 'still and quiet' nature (1.3.106), Cassio's 'smooth dispose' (1.3.386), Bianca's whoring, Emilia's gossiping, and of course, Iago's 'heavenly shows' (2.3.316). Each verbal implication of seeing in the play often verifies that the viewer on stage has failed to see the 'reality' – even Desdemona's noble declaration that she 'saw Othello's visage in his mind' (1.3.267) suggests, although perhaps unwittingly, a misperception of the true image. It also suggests that 'perception is itself a text, requiring interpretation before it means anything at all'.<sup>30</sup> The distorting gaze in *Othello* remains undeniably complex, primarily because it cannot be contained simply within the actions of one particular character, or within the parameters of the play's central distorting relationship. It is the deep rooting of such visual distortions in the play's structures that indicates to the audience that the existence of a 'false gaze' may well be a defect of the world in which Othello lives, rather than a flaw of the individual.

Although the concept of the 'false gaze' remains as a crucial fixture in Shakespeare's play, its distortions prove to be most destructive for the play's women. Desdemona is transformed into 'that cunning whore of Venice' (4.2.98) through the staged operation of a powerful and manipulative male gaze that epitomizes the dominant ideologies operating in the masculine world of *Othello*. By frequently instructing other male characters on stage to 'look' towards women, Iago constructs a false gaze that imagines the female body as object of blame and succeeds in

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Rutter, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Eagleton, p. 65.

instigating an act of looking which simultaneously conceals his own monstrous thoughts that are indeed 'Too hideous to be shown' (3.3.123). Under Iago's ocular distortions for reading women's bodies, Desdemona's 'goodness' becomes 'the net / That shall enmesh them all' (2.3.325-6). Iago also turns Bianca's genuine love for Cassio into something sinister and shameful, disguising his own planned attack on Cassio as 'the fruits of whoring' (5.1.127) and thus hiding his own 'malignant' actions under the guise of women's appetites. By instructing the other male characters on stage to 'Behold her well: I pray you look upon her' (5.1.119), he inserts a distorting male gaze that writes the blame for Cassio's attack over Bianca's 'whoring' body and reads 'the gastness of her eye' (5.1.117) as an admission of her guilt. In *Othello*, the distorting male gaze exerts its power over women, changing their words, their actions, their bodies, their private interiors, into something else – something potentially 'foul' and monstrous. While it is Emilia who exposes her husband's distortions and finally succeeds in turning the look of the gentlemen in Othello's bedchamber towards Iago's own 'monstrous act' (5.2.216), the revelation comes too late to save Desdemona; it also fails to save Emilia herself, as her own involvement in revealing the operations of the gaze ultimately leads to her own death.

Not only is the tyrannising male look controlling and destructive for all the women in Shakespeare's play, but it also affords them very little space outside its distortive operations. Although their stories and the nature of their relationships with men unite the play's three women, they are often estranged and spatially distanced from one another, so much so that when Bianca responds to Emilia's abuse with 'I am no strumpet, but of life as honest / As you that thus abuse me' (5.1.133-4), Emilia is incapable of recognising the similarities between them. All of the play's women are defined primarily through their relationships with men. They are daughters, wives, and courtesans. Desdemona, Bianca and Emilia all act out of love, yet all are abused by the men they love: 'Desdemona's absolute devotion to Othello accentuates his cruel treatment of her; Bianca's genuine affection for Cassio highlights his ridicule of her; Emilia's obedience to Iago likewise underscores his hatred of her, and of all women'.<sup>31</sup> However, in this brief exchange of words between Emilia and Bianca, the distorting gaze that Iago instigates has prevented one woman from recognising the

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<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Gajowski, 'The Female Perspective in *Othello*', in *'Othello': New Perspectives*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1991), pp. 97-114 (p. 97).

other. In the military world of Shakespeare's play, women's talk is deliberately marginalized while men's talk is privileged, just as spaces for women that exclude the presence of men are uncommon, often leaving the women isolated and more vulnerable to the distortions and misinterpretations of male observers.

However, *Othello's* complex explorations of the gaze would undoubtedly collapse if the audience were unable to identify some sort of truth behind its frequent distortions. Aside from the many instances of watching that are referred to throughout the play, there is also the implication of the gaze of the audience. Since theatre itself has been described as privileging the 'the gaze over the look', this example warrants our attention in *Othello*, particularly in terms of its unique relationship to the protagonist's gaze and that of the other characters on the stage.<sup>32</sup> What remains certain in terms of the audience's gaze is that we are never misled by the distortions that Iago projects for the other characters, therefore we are never encouraged to share in Othello's perception of Desdemona as 'false'. The play achieves the preservation of such distinctions by maintaining the boundaries between Othello's experiences of the gaze under Iago's voyeuristic and psychological manipulations, and the audience's view of actual events on stage. It is only because we are permitted to hear Iago's thoughts in soliloquy and comprehend the mechanisms of his 'malignant' evil that our gaze remains uncompromised by the ocular manipulations that he presents to Othello. Since Shakespeare ultimately confronts his audience with a narrative about the dangers of a 'false gaze' and the failure of seeing beyond its distortions, there is a direct implication for the audience and their own unique position as voyeurs, to ensure that they contrast their own observations of characters and events with those of the protagonist. Therefore the play offers a complex interrogation of structures of seeing; this requirement that the audience both question and trust what is being shown also reflects ironically on the dynamics of a theatre that works by illusion.

Another strategy that is employed in order to remove the audience from the visual manipulations that Othello experiences is to include scenes and spaces that deliberately exclude it. Part of Iago's success as the play's ocular and aural manipulator lies in his dominant presence on the stage, 'always around, organising the beginnings of scenes, tidying up their endings, manoeuvring, manipulating' and, as

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), p. 64.

Rutter observes here, he is kept absent from only two scenes in *Othello*.<sup>33</sup> In the willow scene, Desdemona and Emilia are alone. It is a scene that still begins with the presence of male characters on the stage, but moves quickly towards a space for women's talk that ends with a parting 'goodnight' between Desdemona and Emilia (4.3.107). It reveals, in its intimacy and poignant reflections on women's relationships with men, 'a feminine friendship of considerable dimension', a space that is perhaps, as Carol McKewin suggests, unique in Shakespeare's plays in its obvious devotion to women's private talk and in its capacity for 'a dramatic moment long enough to reveal that relationship'.<sup>34</sup> Why does Shakespeare devote this stage time to female privacy? What does its unique exclusion from a voyeuristic male gaze suggest about the play as a whole?<sup>35</sup> Such questions arise because the scene cannot simply exist to offer the audience 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's innocence – there is already sufficient evidence of this even if the willow scene had been entirely erased from Shakespeare's play-text. So why does it exist?

Evelyn Gajowski argues that Shakespeare's *Othello* allows the play's women to be seen in 'their wholeness – in high contrast to the fragmented notions of them held by men'.<sup>36</sup> She suggests that the willow scene is the culmination of Shakespeare's focus on the female point of view which 'places a value on women's affections that is different from their worth in men's eyes'.<sup>37</sup> What is also fascinating about the willow scene is that it provides a 'space in which women together can express their own perceptions and identities, comment on masculine society, and gather strength and engage in reconnaissance to act in it'.<sup>38</sup> The scene itself is simple, innocent and unremarkable in terms of its action, and yet it remains as the central focus of *Othello*'s male talk – what women 'do' in the spaces that exist beyond the control of the male gaze, or as Iago perversely describes the sexual licentiousness of Venetian women, 'their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but kept unknown' (3.3.226-7). Although spaces of female privacy seem misplaced, unconventional and

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<sup>33</sup> Rutter, pp. 160-1.

<sup>34</sup> Carol McKewin, 'Counsels of Gall and Grace: Intimate Conversations Between Women in Shakespeare's Plays', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Gayle Greene, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983), pp. 117-32 (p. 128).

<sup>35</sup> Rutter writes that 'the unique privacy of this women's scene' allows for the women to find 'reflections that, while they do not release women from patriarchal confines, at least claim some space for manoeuvre, some terms of survival and settlement within them'. See Rutter, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> Gajowski, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Gajowski, p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> McKewin, pp. 118-19.

unfamiliar in the distorting male world of Shakespeare's play, when they occur, they function as a pause, a moment of clarity or a slowing down of time which momentarily escapes the distortions of male discourse that have been passed back and forth since the play's beginning. The willow scene is a private enclosure for women that only the audience are privileged in observing, but when *Othello* finally opens up to allow the audience's gaze to penetrate the unknown and potentially 'monstrous' space of female interiors, the audience discovers very little – talk of men, mutual sympathy, a song, confusion, loss.

The willow scene acts as a demystifying of the female privacy that has generated so much male talk. As Rutter suggests, given the previous emphasis on male relationships throughout the play, 'the unique privacy of this women's scene, which privileges women's talk, women's bodies', is wholly unexpected; however, it is also wholly *necessary* – the play cannot function without it.<sup>39</sup> It is the bond of 'considerable dimension' between Desdemona and Emilia, which is 'revealed' in this scene of privacy, that will prove to be Iago's downfall, as Emilia chooses to speak of Desdemona's abuse rather than to remain silent about her husband's treachery: 'I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak' (5.2.210).

To return momentarily to the beginning of Shakespeare's play, the elopement itself also illustrates how the male gaze will never locate satisfactory 'proof' in its desired mastery of female interiors. The female body provokes anxiety in the male, even in its absence: Brabantio is driven to 'impatient thoughts' both when Desdemona is, and is not, 'in his eye' (1.3.257-8); his warning to all fathers, 'from hence trust not your daughters' minds / By what you see them act' (1.1.179-80), illustrates how a woman's presence, words, or actions will never be sufficient proof of her desires. To quote a Renaissance text of women's advice: 'Some of the fathers have written, that *it is not inough for a woman to bee chaste*, but even so to behave her selfe, that no man may thinke or deeme her to be unchaste'.<sup>40</sup> In *Othello*, the male need to observe women behind closed doors and thus 'penetrate' private female enclosures does not exist for satisfaction in proof, but merely for satisfaction itself. It is the answer that Iago knows only too well: '*How satisfied, my lord?*' (3.3.436; emphasis added).

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<sup>39</sup> Rutter, pp. 144-5.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Leigh, 'The Mother's Blessing: Or, The godly Counsaile of a Gentle-woman' (London, 1627), 39, quoted in Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1998), p. 86.

## *An Inviting Eye*

The opening sequence of Orson Welles's *Othello* (1952) begins with a close-up shot of Othello's face upside down on a funeral bier, his features barely visible in the darkness. As the doors open, light floods in and spreads across his face like curtains parting on a lit stage, turning darkness into light, black into white, and merging filmic and theatrical convention in a single shot. Othello's face is the territory of Welles's stage; the world of the film is mapped out across his features – a world turned upside down by Iago's malignant evil – and the camera zooms in to emphasise every contour of his face. With his body lifeless on the funeral bier, his gaze is 'stopped', while at the end of the sequence, we see a close-up of Iago's widening eye as his gaze continues to roam over the view of the mourning procession from the space of his cage.<sup>41</sup> In this opening sequence, Iago's gaze remains active, despite his physical confinement; thus it is 'the ironically elevated perspective of Iago's view of the world' that dominates here, and by commencing with the image of Othello's closed eye and ending with that of Iago's open eye, there is the unnerving suggestion of a continuation of the manipulative gaze.<sup>42</sup> Iago continues to 'scan' the evidence of his 'work' as the bodies of Othello and Desdemona are carried in the funeral procession below him, but his face expresses neither satisfaction nor remorse and, as ever, the spectator is left guessing about the motivations for his 'monstrous act'. Of course, Iago is both a manipulator of the gaze and an object for speculation in this opening scene, but by alternating the camera's point of view, Welles ensures that we look *outwards* from the cage as much as we look *inwards* at the spectacle of Iago as prisoner, and the camera continues to align our own view of events with his voyeuristic and frequently elevated position throughout the film.

While the opening visuals of Welles's *Othello* run without any accompanying dialogue, signalling, as Skoller suggests, the 'seniority of the eye' for the spectator, they also reveal something more about the film's operations of the gaze.<sup>43</sup> Just as Martin Wine suggests of the play-text that we can never fully know or understand any character in *Othello*, the visual style of Welles's film often implies that we are never

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<sup>41</sup> *Othello*. Dir. Orson Welles. Morocco/Italy. 1952.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: the Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Skoller, 'Problems of Transformation in the Adaptations of Shakespeare's Tragedies from Playscript to Cinema' (unpublished PhD thesis: New York University, 1968), p. 350 (as quoted in Davies, p. 105).

seeing the full picture.<sup>44</sup> Famously described as a ‘flawed masterpiece’, the film’s visual and aural synchronisation can seem uneven, with many shots lasting for only a fraction of a second.<sup>45</sup> This gives a sense not only of the influence of time over the narrative’s events – evident in Othello’s ‘we must obey the time’ (1.3.318) – but also of loss, evoking a clear sense of ‘the provisional, unfinished, never-to-be-fixed state of so much of Welles’s work’ and with it, a feeling of paranoia about the images or occurrences that the spectator’s eye may have missed.<sup>46</sup> The eye of the spectator is not merely given seniority but is frequently challenged and called upon to look *further*, as the film’s editing style and its images move so fast that the spectator is caught between a deliberation of what is being shown and what is kept absent. As Kathy Howlett observes, the editing style ‘continually suggests to the viewer that he has missed something, has failed to glimpse all the action’, and it is this persistent implication of what remains beyond our gaze that aligns our sympathies with the position of the protagonist and simultaneously defines us as voyeurs like Iago and Othello.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Welles’s confused editing evokes a sense of paranoia about what remains ‘unseen’ in a similar fashion to Shakespeare’s Iago. Perhaps most dangerously, through our participation as spectators in the film’s manipulation of our gaze, we are reduced to the voyeuristic pleasures that define Iago’s relationship to the world; like his perverse insinuations about Desdemona to Roderigo, in order to be ‘satisfied’, our ‘eye must be fed’ (2.1.229-30).

In this funeral sequence that precedes the action of the film, Desdemona’s face is blackened in comparison to Othello’s illuminated features. Her visual appearance mirrors that of Othello’s description of her blackened name: that which was ‘as fresh / As Dian’s visage’ is now ‘begrimed and black’ (3.3.427-8), while Othello wears the whiteness of her visage in this initial reversal of light and dark. Desdemona’s corpse on the bier is not fully revealed for the gaze of the spectator but partially obscured, shrouded in a black veil; thus Iago’s ‘net’ that shall ‘enmesh them all’ makes its first visual appearance in the film over Desdemona’s body, paradoxically both preserving

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<sup>44</sup> Wine, pp. 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> Jack J. Jorgens, ‘Welles’s *Othello*: A Baroque Translation’, in *Focus on Orson Welles*, ed. by Ronald Gottesman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 146-56 (p. 146).

<sup>46</sup> Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture* (New York and Chichester: Columbia UP, 1999), p. 99. The filming itself took place ‘in pieces’ over a three year period and even left the director with regrets about its losses: ‘in *Filming Othello*, a 1978 television documentary, he sits watching his film and mutters about all the improvements he wishes he could make’. See Daniel Rosenthal, *100 Shakespeare Films: BFI Screen Guides* (London: BFI, 2007), p. 168.

<sup>47</sup> Kathy M. Howlett, *Framing Shakespeare on Film* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2000), p. 52.

and distorting its image. Desdemona's corpse appears in only four shots in this opening sequence, but these images set up the tensions that Welles's film will play out across the territory of her body: the dual desire for exposure and concealment, preservation and defilement. If the first shots of Othello's body in this grim flashback signify a heroic world turned upside down, then Welles's first shots of Desdemona indicate how her body will be displayed as immobilised and fetishised object, used primarily to 'serve male subjectivity' and 'perpetuate the hegemony of male artistic practice'.<sup>48</sup> The black veil that shrouds her corpse not only indicates how the artistry of Iago's plan will use Desdemona's body, but also how Welles's visual artistry as director will shape and distort Suzanne Cloutier's performance.

Desdemona's elopement, despite becoming a part of the action in Welles's narrative sequence of events, is represented as an act that must be necessarily controlled and reduced through its spatial depiction. Filmed through several compositions that deliberately enclose and obscure her body, Desdemona's image is reduced in the frame. Our first glimpse of her shows her entering from behind barred doors in an upstairs chamber in her father's house; she then moves onto an outside balcony where she tentatively peers down to observe Othello's arrival on the canal. But as soon as she appears from behind the grated doors, the camera cuts to a point-of-view shot that is projected from Othello's perspective. We now look up at Desdemona, a small figure on the balcony, lost in the detail and dark arches of the Venetian household. The camera then cuts to a dark, twisted stairwell where Desdemona's white figure is barely visible as she quickly descends. When she appears at the bottom, she hurries towards the camera, shot through a lattice grille that once again reduces her image to fragmented body parts behind the bars. As the camera moves to a position behind her, we see her press herself against the bars to peer through at Othello's gondola on the water. A final image shows her emerging from the house and stepping out into bright sunlight, her fair gowns spread wide, hair softly plaited, the whiter than white handkerchief held out in front of her.

Desdemona's departure from the family household connotes powerlessness rather than agency, as her body is repeatedly dominated by Welles's compositions that cut into and erase parts of her body within the frame. The final shot of her emerging from these spatial enclosures emphasises how the film's visual patterns

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<sup>48</sup> Hodgdon, p. 217.



depict her body as an object that Welles's camera will both expose *and* conceal, associating the erased parts of her body with the elopement – the 'secret haste' of her desertion of the father's house – and her exposed body with the handkerchief, itself a fetishised object for male speculation. After the visual display of Desdemona as corpse in the film's opening sequence, Welles frequently associates the absent or 'off-screen' spaces of the film with Desdemona's sexuality, thus imagining these unseen spaces as the undisclosed territory of her body for the spectator's censored gaze. Grilles, bars and stairwells are not only visual motifs of the 'net' or snare that features so prominently in Iago's language; they are also visual devices that fracture or erase parts of Desdemona's image from the spectator's gaze, encouraging us to associate absent or removed spaces in the film with this deliberate concealment and, by extension, associating our desire for 'show' with the exposure of her body.

The beginning of this film also shows how Welles uses *Othello's* implications of voyeurism to reduce privacy. When Othello is observing Desdemona as she appears on the balcony, Iago is also observing the scene from his position on the canal bridge. The first shot of this sequence shows Iago spying on Othello from behind a wall as Othello arrives in a gondola. Even as Othello's character is being introduced to the spectator by the voiceover narration, "There was once in Venice a Moor, Othello...", Welles's camera is actually introducing Iago, whose cloaked figure fills the screen as the words of the prologue dissolve into image. When Othello greets Desdemona on the edge of the canal, the camera observes them from a distance, and a dark, silhouetted figure moves before the camera, momentarily obscuring our gaze. The shot is brief, and cuts quickly to a subsequent shot of Iago positioned on a bridge, leaning forward intently, his face partially concealed by his cloak.

Therefore, the 'secret' elopement is not a private occurrence belonging to Othello and Desdemona; instead, Welles uses Iago's voyeuristic presence to reduce, and intrude on, its privacy in much the same way that Shakespeare uses Iago and Roderigo's gossiping to turn this secret meeting into public scandal. The male report in Shakespeare's *Othello* distorts the audience's perception of the event just as Iago's voyeuristic presence affects the spectator's view of the elopement in Welles's film, compelling us to recognise our own position as voyeur and to share Iago's intrusive viewpoint from the secure distance of the canal bridge or the back of a church. While the elopement and the marriage ceremony only occur in speech report in Shakespeare's play, in Welles's film they have become 'silent' spaces for Iago's

‘active’ gaze – Desdemona and Othello, although appearing in several shots, have no dialogue under Iago’s voyeuristic presence.

In these initial shots, all characters remain, in some way, concealed from us: Desdemona is shot through obstructing bars and stairwells; Othello is kept at a distance as a mysterious turbaned figure in a gondola; and Iago, hooded and cloaked, fades into the reflections of the canal water. However, the visual devices that obscure parts of Desdemona’s body from the camera’s gaze encourage the spectator to associate absent or hidden spaces in the film with her sexuality. As Roderigo and Iago stand on a canal bridge and discuss Othello’s marriage, they watch Othello and Desdemona pass beneath in a gondola. The wedded couple are so close to the onlookers that we can hear the water lapping, but no verbal exchange occurs between them. Their silence is unnerving and further reduces them to spectacle, objects for the gaze of the onlookers, and our own.

As the camera tilts down to look on them, we hear Iago’s words to Roderigo: ‘It cannot be long that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor’ (1.3.347-8) – now the camera focuses on Desdemona in close-up, her face turned toward her husband’s – ‘it was a violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration’ (1.3.349-50). Desdemona is clearly unaware that she is being spied upon: ‘Fill thy purse with money’ (1.3.351). These words carry the same sexual connotations as they do in Shakespeare’s play: they allude to a woman’s private parts. Iago suggests that Desdemona’s sexual ‘appetite’ is something that can be bought for a price, and as the image of her body moves beyond the space within the frame, Welles’s camera implicitly provokes the same desire for exposure that Iago’s words provoke in Roderigo.

In the film’s early instances of voyeurism, Welles’s dialogue concentrates upon Iago’s allusions to Desdemona’s sexual appetite and diminishes Iago’s speculations to Roderigo about Othello’s: ‘The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida’ (1.3.351-2); ‘These Moors are changeable in their wills’ (1.3.350-1). These lines are suppressed in favour of a narrative that indulges in the contemplation of Desdemona’s sexual desires and accompanies Welles’s voyeuristic camera that tracks Desdemona’s body. As the gondola glides smoothly along the canal and beyond the space of the camera’s gaze, Desdemona’s face disappears from view behind a dark pillar, prohibiting the spectator’s gaze and prolonging our intrigue over her body. Spaces that are hidden,

that remain beyond the movements of Welles's tracking camera, are thus associated with Desdemona's appetite for 'change': 'she must have change, she must'.<sup>49</sup>

What immediately follows in the scene change is the harsh and disruptive sound of alarm bells, accompanied by the sounds of men's voices: 'Look to your house, your daughter and your bags! / Thieves, thieves!' (1.1.83-4). Shadows and reflections of light flicker wildly on a coved ceiling; the camera tilts down to reveal the space beneath it – Brabantio's bed – where Brabantio turns violently in sleep until he wakes. Iago's speculations about Desdemona's sexual relationship with Othello are closely associated with Brabantio's nightmare, signified visually by the reflections of light from the canal water that move hauntingly on the ceiling above the bed. They act as a visual substitute for Brabantio's line: 'This accident is not unlike my dream: / Belief of it oppresses me already' (1.1.150-1). Fears over the nature of Desdemona's sexuality are associated with undisclosed spaces in both texts – the hidden, off-camera spaces of Welles's film, and the imagined, unknown and undisclosed space of Brabantio's dream.

In Welles's spatial representations of Venice, Desdemona is literally passed from one house of confinement to another after she elopes from her family home to live with Othello. In the visual language of the film, she has indeed been 'stowed' away, or hidden, as Brabantio suggests (1.2.75). As Brabantio's soldiers flood into the space of Othello's courtyard, a brief shot shows Desdemona looking down on the scene from behind the barrier of a lattice grid. As she comes towards the bars and kneels silently to observe the scene, her gaze almost meets that of the camera, but her image is once again fractured and partially obscured: her omniscient position and the agency of her gaze must be strategically controlled.

During the scene before the Senate, we see three shots of Desdemona approaching the chamber hall, although it is difficult to recognise her, given the speed of the editing and her distance from Welles's camera. Her pale gowns and her long plaited hair allow us to identify her figure, and we watch her run towards the camera down an arched outdoor passage, as the action inside the chamber commences. However, it is another space for female agency that must be necessarily erased.

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<sup>49</sup> A phrase used in Welles's script that does not appear in Bate's and Rasmussen's edition of the Folio. Bate and Rasmussen use the 1623 First Folio as copy text, and as they are the first to edit its contents in its entirety for over 300 years, it has been used in this thesis to offer modern readers the latest interpretations of Shakespeare's works. For the positioning of this phrase in Iago's speech, see The Arden Shakespeare edition of *Othello*, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 158, line 1.3.352.



### 3.1. Hidden spaces: Suzanne Cloutier's Desdemona in Welles's *Othello* (1952)

In the following scene, we see Iago and Roderigo walking down the same arched passage, Iago taunting his companion about the 'violence' with which Desdemona 'first loved the Moor': 'To love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet heart think it' (2.1.228-9). Micheál Macliammóir's Iago creeps perversely into the spaces that are associated with Desdemona's body – the 'fertile climate' in which Othello dwells – erasing her agency with a verbal degradation of her constancy and plaguing women's interiors with 'flies' (1.1.74).<sup>50</sup>

Within a moment, Othello's noble speech before the Senate has been sullied by Iago's remarks about 'prating' and 'fantastical lies' (2.1.228-9), and Desdemona's appearance at the citadel to defend her love for the Moor has been turned inside out. The scene ends with Macliammóir's powerful delivery of the line, 'I am not what I am' (1.1.67), and the ominous tolling of a bell before a view of the cityscape merges with his image and the sound of his voice, as if echoing Iago's power. Suddenly we

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<sup>50</sup> By inserting his own contaminating presence into women's interiors, the influence of Welles's/Macliammóir's Iago can be seen in the movements of Frank Finlay's Iago in Stuart Burge's *Othello* (1965), with Laurence Olivier as Othello. A filmed version of John Dexter's stage production of the play at the National Theatre (1964), Burge's cinematic dimensions are undoubtedly less complex than Welles's; however, we still see Finlay's Iago lurking provocatively in the arched entrance of Brabantio's house, concealing himself from Brabantio's gaze and simultaneously infiltrating this feminine space – the threshold of the father's house, the border of the chaste/unchaste woman. The gendering of this threshold space is revealed fully when, after Iago's departure, the serving ladies of the house linger in its doorway, weeping at Desdemona's 'gross revolt'. See *Othello*. Dir. Stuart Burge. UK. 1965.

are transported to Othello's bedchamber and the site of marital consummation: Iago's inner monstrosity is thus associated with the private, intimate space of the marriage bed. Tellingly, it is not the 'monstrous birth' (1.3.393) of Iago's engendered plan that is associated with the storm at Cyprus, but the marital act of consummation, or, more specifically, the 'opening' of Desdemona's sexual desire, alluded to visually by Welles's opening of the bed curtains.<sup>51</sup> The dangers unleashed in the 'foul and violent tempest' (2.1.36) also recall the 'violence' of Desdemona's passion for Othello that Iago referred to only moments before.



**3.2. Plaguing women's interiors 'with flies': Cloutier's Desdemona in Welles's *Othello* (1952)**

Desdemona now appears on the bed from an upside-down camera angle – although her image is not completely inverted, the camera is tilted far enough to allow the spectator to associate the composition with the film's ominous opening image of Othello on the funeral bier. The gauzy curtains that surround the bed also recall the veil that covers Desdemona's corpse in the opening sequence, and the effect is not

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<sup>51</sup> On the imagery of the bed in Welles's film, Rutter writes: 'On her wedding night, Desdemona lies motionless in headshot as black hands rip apart the bed curtains – her hymen? – and Othello looms over her, a sequence later repeated when, suspecting her, he returns to their bed, rips back the curtains and tries to read the sheets'. See Carol Rutter, 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 241-60 (p. 254).

only foreboding, but also deliberately immobilising for her sexualised body. Desdemona remains motionless on the bed as Othello approaches her, while his movements virtually erase her face and the upper part of her body. When he kisses her, covering her mouth, her cheek, her brow and forehead, all that remains visible is a glimpse of her closed eye that can be seen through the small gap between Othello's thumb and forefinger. Just as Iago's physical presence seeps into the spaces of Desdemona's agency in Venice, in this sequence, Desdemona's active gaze – emphasised briefly in the scene before the Senate – has now been stopped: the eye that 'must be fed' in Iago's fantasy must now be closed. As one of the film's most revealing scenes in terms of Welles's appropriation of her body, Desdemona's representation mirrors the play's desires for show and concealment – the body that is 'shown' by the opening of the bed curtains, and subsequently 'hidden' by Othello's possession of that body, and by Welles's virtual erasure of Cloutier's onscreen presence.

The representation of Desdemona's body changes with the film's shift to Cyprus, along with many other elements of the film's visual strategy. After the marital consummation in Venice, the outline of her body is more prominent in light, almost transparent fabrics and a darker corset to emphasise the upper part of her body. As if to accentuate the voyeuristic pleasures in observing her body, the *mise-en-scène* is frequently dominated by images that signify the eye – or the vagina: rimmed arches that loom over bodies and oval spy holes that appear in the ceilings above the castle's underground chambers are frequently present within the frame. The most explicit image that alludes both to the territory of Desdemona's body and the implication of a voyeuristic gaze is the small, lit window in the castle tower. The tower contains Othello's and Desdemona's sleeping quarters and is often observed from the outside of the castle in long shot: it first appears when Roderigo glances up at its window, while Iago tells him that Desdemona's 'eye must be fed'; later, as Cassio looks towards the tower and its 'discreet' window, he and Iago discuss Desdemona's 'inviting eye' and her 'parley to provocation' (2.3.20-1).

Interestingly, Iago is the only one who is not shown gazing up at the 'eye' of the tower, although his words prompt Roderigo, Cassio, and the camera, to look. Instead he turns his back on the tower – just as he averts his eyes when Desdemona and Othello kiss – and concludes with his debauched remark: 'Well, happiness to their sheets' (2.3.24). This Iago finds no sexual gratification in the voyeuristic gaze he

arouses in others. The film proceeds to take the spectator inside the space of the tower, where Othello, as if fearful of observers, looks out from the bedroom door and closes it on the camera. Again, as with the earlier shot of Desdemona in Othello's quarters at Venice, there is a momentary suggestion of the spectator's gaze being returned, a brief implication that the viewer has been 'caught in the act' of observing and that our own voyeuristic desire to see beyond the chamber door has been discovered.



3.3. 'Well, happiness to their sheets': the 'inviting eye' in Welles's *Othello* (1952)

Welles's film plays on the spectator's desire to enter *Othello*'s hidden or secret spaces, both privileging and punishing the spectator's gaze by alternating the camera's viewing position between exteriors and interiors. In the film's earlier bedroom scene, the camera initially positions the spectator *inside* the space of the curtained bed, as we see Othello's shadow on the outer side of the curtain before he parts them and enters. As soon as Othello approaches Desdemona on the bed, the camera position shifts. The camera now sits outside the space of the bed, so that the spectator is observing the action through the thin, veil-like curtains. We have exchanged positions with Othello: he is now inside the space of the curtained bed, whilst the camera has positioned our gaze outside it. For the scene's closing shot, the spectator is permitted to return inside, to see Othello kiss Desdemona in a movement

that virtually erases her from our view. Similarly, in the second bedchamber sequence, after Othello closes the door on the camera, the film cuts to a shot taken from inside the bedchamber, a 'privileged' and perhaps unexpected position for the spectator to occupy at this point. However when the camera does move beyond the closed door, we see no more than shadows on a wall: Othello's arm moves around Desdemona's smaller figure and her silhouette disappears in the ultimate erasure of her body. These sequences imply that Welles's camera can only reveal the spaces of Desdemona's sexuality if the female body is eradicated and thus subordinated to male presence and control; Othello's action of closing the bedroom door on the camera also betrays his own desire to 'close off' the space of Desdemona's sexuality.

What follows on from the second bedroom scene is the prelude to Cassio's and Roderigo's drunken brawl in the underground chambers of the castle, a spectacle of violence that soldiers and courtesans look down on eagerly through a giant spy-hole in the ground. The scene alludes to the sexual act in the tower that is taking place but cannot be shown; when Othello is disturbed by the sound of the alarm bell, a crane shot looks down on Othello and Desdemona's bed, revealing that the 'spectacle' which men's eyes desire to look upon is not the public brawl but the private sexual encounter.<sup>52</sup> Like Iago's earlier verbal insinuations about Desdemona, the violent nature of the brawl, juxtaposed with these shots of the bedchamber, alludes to the assumed 'violence' of Desdemona's sexual appetite that is being kept behind closed doors.

In Welles's handling of the space of the bedchamber, the 'wreck of intimacy' that Iago instigates in Shakespeare's play occurs long before any suggestion of Desdemona's infidelity.<sup>53</sup> Desdemona and Othello's bedchamber is never signalled to the viewer as 'private': it is intruded upon by the spectator's gaze and is always the underlying focal point of the action at Cyprus. When Iago tells Othello of Desdemona's alleged affair, it is the suggestion of her perverse or 'rank' sexual desires, 'Foul disproportions' and 'thoughts unnatural' (3.3.262), which prompts Othello to approach Desdemona and to examine the 'evidence' of the bedchamber.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Peter S. Donaldson writes that by cutting between 'the wedding chamber and the crypt', Welles's film allows the spectator to 'sense the potential for a sullyng of the marriage bed that their juxtaposition implies'. See Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>53</sup> Rutter, *Enter the Body*, p. 155.

<sup>54</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the mirror, the enquiring gaze, and the marriage bed in Welles's shot sequences, see Donaldson, pp. 102-104.



In the visual patterns of this sequence, Welles reinforces Iago's insinuations about Desdemona's sexuality by associating Othello's anxious examination of the bed with the marital consummation scene in Venice. Othello once again parts the bed-curtains: only this time, the bed lies empty. The 'evidence' of Desdemona's body is no longer necessary, as the space of the bed recalls the consummation and is enough to convince Othello of Desdemona's unnatural 'appetite'. In Welles's repeated use of the bedchamber, it is not only Iago's insinuations, but also the sexual union of Othello and Desdemona, which now 'sullies' the space of the marital bed and implies its contamination.

After Othello's departure in this scene, Desdemona becomes mentally and spatially lost in a maze of pillars as she searches for the husband she has lost. As he exits the castle chamber, he closes the door on her, leaving her alone in darkness. From this point onwards, Desdemona's time outside the castle's interiors begins to diminish: her image outside of the castle boundaries becomes notably smaller, as Othello observes her on the battlements with Cassio, and again as she walks outside with Emilia. This not only reflects on the distance that has now formed between Othello and his wife, but it also implies Desdemona's deterioration. She quickly becomes a prisoner in the castle: Iago watches her as she talks with Emilia; Iago then closes the door on her as she prays when Othello visits her; when Othello leaves, she is small and dejected, shot from a distance and leaning helplessly against a pillar; we then see Iago looking down on her as he exits at a door above. His departure draws attention to another silent observer: Emilia. She watches her mistress through the lattice grid of a window. The scene ends with Desdemona dismissing her, saying, 'Lay on my bed my wedding sheets' (4.2.115). As she walks away across a mosaic-patterned floor, her body is almost lost from sight in this crane shot.

From this point onwards in the film, Desdemona remains confined 'within doors' (4.2.161). Welles's tracking camera also implies a downward movement into the castle's lower chambers, despite the fact that we know Desdemona and Othello's bedchamber lies in the tower: we see the camera track downwards as Iago enters, eavesdropping when Desdemona and Emilia talk; Othello also enters down a flight of stairs in this scene when he orders Desdemona to go to bed. The sequence ends with Iago leading Desdemona away, herself almost in a catatonic trance, as Othello watches from his position at the top of the stairs. Although Welles cuts Othello's dialogue that refers to the chamber as a brothel, the film's spaces for women imply an

equally terrifying prison under ‘lock and key’: a dungeon underground. By instigating a shift from upper to lower territories, the film’s spatial dynamics also imply Iago’s perverse appropriation of the territory of the woman’s body: his growing ‘malignant evil’ in the ‘womb of time’ that will soon be ‘delivered’ in a ‘monstrous birth’ of ‘hell and night’ (1.3.364-5/392-3).

Before the willow scene dialogue begins, Welles uses two shots of the castle tower, now in darkness, its small window ominously lit. Welles’s version of this scene bears little resemblance to Shakespeare’s, in dialogue, or in intimacy. Desdemona and Emilia exchange some brief thoughts about men through the restrictive barrier of a lattice window: despite the scene’s opportunity for closeness and intimacy, the women remain physically distanced from one another, with Desdemona’s body spatially removed and ‘imprisoned’ within the chamber. Cloutier’s Desdemona quietly murmurs, ‘O, these men, these men’ (4.3.63), and the words fall under her breath as a dejected lament to herself, not as a call for solace to her female companion. When Fay Compton’s shrewish Emilia tries to offer some advice, she can only speak a few lines – unexpectedly, Desdemona cuts her off with a dismissive ‘goodnight’, then turns away to prepare for bed on her own. In the spatial fracturing of this scene, these women remain estranged from one another.



**3.4. ‘O, these men, these men’: Dividing Cloutier’s Desdemona and Fay Compton’s Emilia in Welles’s ‘willow’ scene (1952)**

Alongside this failure to communicate, the scene is also stripped entirely of its privacy. As Desdemona turns away to prepare for bed and Emilia departs from her place outside the chamber door, the camera follows her departure and in doing so, detects the looming shadow of a man in a concealed space. We recognise the shadow as Othello's, and although we cannot see him directly, the scene ends with a lingering shot of his shadow on the wall, the camera closing in on its darkness until it fills the space of the frame. The signifier of his presence is alarming: how long has he been there? What has he overheard from the women's conversation? What has he been permitted to see? The blackness of Othello's shadow dissolves into a shot of Desdemona in her chamber, undressing for bed – thus the implications of a voyeuristic gaze extend both to Othello's perspective from his concealed position, and to the position of the spectator.

The sexual implications of Desdemona's murder make this sequence, perhaps, the most disturbing of the film. Desdemona is smothered with a white sheet, a 'gauzy fabric' that is 'stretched across her features, distorting them into an eerie death mask'.<sup>55</sup> What exactly this 'gauzy fabric' is remains ambivalent. Carol Rutter writes that Othello covers Desdemona's face with 'what looks like a handkerchief' and, through it, 'kisses Desdemona, a kiss that gags, and finally suffocates her'.<sup>56</sup> Hodgdon, noting the fabric's visual ambiguity, writes that Othello 'draws the lace-edged handkerchief (or wedding sheet) over her face'.<sup>57</sup> Jorgens draws no further conclusions in his reading of the film, although there is no doubt that both the handkerchief and the 'contaminated' wedding sheets carry numerous connotations that allude to Desdemona's sexuality.<sup>58</sup>

However, both possibilities remain questionable, given the visual set-up and organisation of the events leading up to the murder, and the shots that represent the murder itself. The last time that Desdemona's handkerchief is seen in Welles's film is some time earlier, in the hands of the unsuspecting Bianca. The handkerchief is white: we see it several times throughout the film, often in close-up, and at no point do we see the dark embroidered trim that is visible on the sheet that Othello uses to smother Desdemona. Aside from this small visual detail, it seems highly unlikely that Othello would have been able to retrieve the handkerchief from Bianca himself. If we look

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<sup>55</sup> Hodgdon, p. 222.

<sup>56</sup> Rutter, 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film', p. 255.

<sup>57</sup> Hodgdon, p. 226.

<sup>58</sup> Jack J Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977), p. 182.

closely at the representation of the murder, the idea of the bed-sheets also poses further problems: firstly, the bed-sheets that cover Desdemona's body as she feigns sleep at the beginning of the scene are notably thicker, and darker, than the flimsy white material that Othello uses to cover Desdemona's face; secondly, the bed-linen is never shown in enough detail for us to be certain that it is used in the murder.

To these varying critical suggestions, I would like to add a third possibility: that Othello smothers Desdemona with the material of her own nightgown. The gauze that covers her face has a dark, embroidered trim, like that on her nightgown, which can be seen clearly by the spectator in several shots throughout the scene. Also, a shot during the murder sequence shows Othello on top of Desdemona on the bed, and as the bed covers have already been pulled back beneath his body at this point, his motion makes it difficult for the viewer to conceive of any other possibility. Although this possibility is itself not entirely unproblematic, I offer it to bring some further associations for the murder (and Welles's visual associations throughout the film) to attention.

The film's images that allude both to the eye and to the vagina resurface in the representation of Desdemona's murder, as both must necessarily be 'stopped' by Welles's Othello. This desire is echoed in Othello's announcement to Desdemona that Cassio's 'mouth' has been 'stopped' by Iago (5.2.86). Othello must also 'stop' Desdemona's 'opening': 'Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men' (5.2.6). In Othello's justification for murder, Desdemona must die so that she can no longer lie to, or *lie with*, other men. In Welles's murder sequence, Othello first stops Desdemona's eye by covering her face with the fabric and thus preventing her gaze, whilst his gaze remains active: 'the sequence opposes that dominant, all-seeing eye – which stares directly at the camera – to Desdemona's sightless face and represents the murder itself as a violation of sight'.<sup>59</sup> Her mouth is also stopped by the 'gagging' kiss. In the film's repeated associations of mouth, eye, and vagina, Welles's representation of the murder achieves the dual desire for exposure and concealment so frequently alluded to throughout the course of the film and in Shakespeare's play-text: by stopping Desdemona's eye, and her mouth, Othello is able to close off or to conceal Desdemona's monstrous vagina, whilst the act of smothering with the nightdress also reveals the dually harboured desire for exposure, the uncovering of the

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<sup>59</sup> Hodgdon, p. 226.



**3.5. Exposing and concealing private parts: Desdemona's murder in Welles's *Othello* (1952)**

vagina for an interrogating, voyeuristic male gaze that the film's imagery suggests but cannot show. In such a reading of the murder, both desires are simultaneously achieved and played out across Desdemona's immobilised body.

***What Did Thy Song Bode, Lady?***

Despite the fact that Sergei Yutkevich's Russian *Othello* (1956) is frequently described as being greatly influenced by Welles's adaptation, there are notable differences in the film's representation of women and women's privacy.<sup>60</sup> While Welles's film enlarges the play's implications of voyeurism and spatial confinement, Yutkevich 'gives us a film of blue skies, open sea and spaciousness'.<sup>61</sup> The film begins with an image of a hand resting on a large metallic globe, and as the camera zooms outward we see that the hand belongs to Othello. He stands before Desdemona and her father as they remain seated, listening intently to his stories of 'most disastrous chances' and 'moving accidents by flood and field' (1.3.148-9). There is no

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<sup>60</sup> *Othello*. Dir. Sergei Yutkevich. USSR. 1955. Jorgens, for instance, describes Yutkevich's film as a 'lush colour imitation of Welles's *Othello*' (p. 26) as discussed by Davies in his discussion of the two films. Davies, however, writes: 'The Welles *Othello* does, however, come persistently to mind as one views Yutkevich's film, not merely because many of Yutkevich's devices do tend to echo Welles, but more particularly because of the sheer memorability of the Welles images, and because one is aware of a major difference in overall effect'. See Anthony Davies, 'Filming *Othello*', in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image*, ed. by Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 196-210 (p. 207).

<sup>61</sup> Davies, 'Filming *Othello*', p. 201.

dialogue in this ‘prelude’ to Yutkevich’s film – just as there is no dialogue in the opening funeral sequence of Welles’s *Othello* – and yet the tone, perspective and content are strikingly different. Unlike Welles’s careful perusal of Othello’s face on the bier in his opening shot, Sergei Bondarchuk’s *Othello* remains unknown to us here, as he stands with his back to the camera and, promptly finishing his ‘traveller’s history’ (1.3.153), bows to Brabantio and Desdemona in turn and then exits with Brabantio.

Now only Irina Skobesteva’s Desdemona remains before the camera. Clutching a white handkerchief, she stands rapt in the wonder of Othello’s story, then slowly proceeds towards a window and, peering over its balcony, watches him depart.<sup>62</sup> Bathed in a soft blue, almost enchanting light, she then returns to the globe and begins to imagine Othello’s voyages at sea; the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of her mesmerised expression, and as the image dissolves the spectator is taken into ‘*her own reconstruction of the Othello narrative in visual terms*’.<sup>63</sup>



**3.6. ‘Othello’s visage’ in *her* mind: Skobesteva’s Desdemona in Yutkevich’s *Othello* (1956)**

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<sup>62</sup> The handkerchief that Desdemona holds here is not Othello’s. A later scene after their marriage ceremony shows her holding a distinctive red handkerchief with black lace trim, which she later drops. Its colour is thus associated with Othello’s red cape and with the Venetian flags, as well as ominously alluding to the red light that will dominate in the murder sequence.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, ‘Filming *Othello*’, p. 202; my emphasis.

We then see Bondarchuk's Othello clearly for the first time: in a head and shoulders image, he stands on the deck of a ship in a billowing red shirt; as the canons begin to fire, we witness his 'hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach' (1.3.150); we see him captured 'by the insolent foe' (1.3.151), stripped of his clothes, caged, and 'sold to slavery' (1.3.152); then, enslaved as an oarsman, a violent storm tears the enemy ship apart, and Othello's almost naked body is washed ashore onto the rocks; finally, the sequence ends with another shot of Othello's face and upper body, now dressed in fine robes, as he stands proudly before a red Venetian flag on a ship and looks masterfully out to sea. The image fades and we return to the close-up shot of Desdemona's face, the same delicate smile on her lips. As the camera zooms out and then pans right, she spins the globe, and the film's opening titles begin.



**3.7. Desdemona's globe: Irina Skobesteva in Sergei Yutkevich's *Othello* (1956)**

Unusually, the spectator first engages both with the narrative of Othello's 'history', and with his visual appearance, through the images contained within Desdemona's 'fantasy'. On a wider scale, the narrative of the film itself essentially begins with this visual representation of her fantasy about Othello, which is based on the stories she has devoured with 'a greedy ear' (1.3.163-4). However, while Desdemona herself has heard Othello's stories, we, as spectators of Yutkevich's 'unspoken' prelude, have not; all we have heard is the rise and fall of Aram

Khachaturian's strings in the film's score which accompany Desdemona's romanticised vision. While the music seems only to illustrate her feelings of desire further, so the space before the camera seems to elevate her thoughts: the soft blue lighting of the inner chamber transports her to the space of Othello's voyages at sea, whilst her gentle spinning of the globe allows her to trace the territories of his adventurous journeys with her fingertips, encouraging the spectator to associate the globe not with Othello himself, but with Desdemona's fantasy. Such associations not only emphasise the woman's desiring perspective and the agency behind that desire, but also represent Skobesteva's Desdemona as both within and beyond the spatial confinements of household interiors.

Within Yutkevich's evocation of the play's claustrophobic elements, there is also the implication of something grander, an ancient and timeless world that 'underscores the mythic, universal aspects of the tragedy'.<sup>64</sup> These implications include – rather than exclude – Skobesteva's Desdemona, thus allowing the spectator to view her as beyond the perversions of Iago's distorting gaze and belonging more essentially to the timeless, mythical world that Yutkevich creates. While Andrei Popov's Iago, the villain from within, lurks in the cracks and spy-holes of the fortress's walls, Skobesteva's Desdemona is indeed a 'fair warrior' when she greets Othello at Cyprus, dressed in black tights with a military-style jacket and commanding the upper territories of the castle. During 'the celebration of his nuptial' (2.2.5), Othello walks with Desdemona to the top of the tower where they look over a tranquil ocean and a slow-rising sun in an all-encompassing shot that seems to place them in another world. When Othello approaches Desdemona about the handkerchief, she sits outside on an enormous chair before a wide, checked stone floor like a chessboard, and when Iago has Othello cornered and entrapped in the lower cabin of a ship, we see her gliding across the ocean waves on a small boat, singing.

We hear the singing on the soundtrack, and Othello hears her, too; the swelling, almost unearthly quality of her voice, recalling his belief that she could 'sing the savageness out of a bear' (4.1.185), causes him momentarily to forget Iago's torments. As Othello seems to escape his misery under the call of this siren-song, so too does Yutkevich's camera take us out of the confined space of Iago's 'prison', to a panoramic view of the ocean where Desdemona's boat moves swiftly across the entire

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<sup>64</sup> Patricia Tatzpaugh, 'The Tragedies of Love on Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 135-59 (p. 147).



span of the frame.<sup>65</sup> Thus her appearance and the sound of her voice not only interrupt Othello's thoughts; they also momentarily break the flow of Yutkevich's film. The same effect is achieved in the willow scene as Desdemona sings for Emilia with all the score's orchestral accompaniments, causing the fluidity of the filmic narrative to pause for this scene between the women, which, although shortened, remains beautifully private. By placing Desdemona firmly within this timeless world, Yutkevich's film ensures that her image for the spectator remains unbroken by Iago's distortions, and allows her character to be perceived, somewhat unexpectedly, as 'whole'.

However, there is much within the closing moments of this adaptation that sits uncomfortably with Yutkevich's implied perspective and the filmic world that he creates. Voyeurism is not a central mechanism in this film; neither is Skobesteva's Desdemona portrayed as a passive victim. The representation of the murder sequence, which shows a terror-stricken Desdemona from Othello's perspective, framed by large, black hands that stretch menacingly towards her, is all the more terrifying because it is so wholly unexpected. Yutkevich's film here lapses into ugly horrors that recall Welles's murder sequence; as Daniel Rosenthal remarks: 'When a crazed Othello bears down on [Desdemona] like Frankenstein's monster, bathed in demonic red light, Yutkevich crosses the sometimes thin line between horrifying tragedy and melodramatic horror'.<sup>66</sup> A dissonant organ plays Desdemona's death song as the camera pans across dramatically from her smothered body on the bed to a candle blowing out in the wind, and then cuts to a shot of a weeping willow being tossed about violently before a black, thunderous sky. The film looks certain to follow Welles's lead in its final moments, but under Yutkevich's direction, Emilia is far more powerful: Antonina Maximova's Emilia draws her body to the full height of Othello's and looks him straight in the eye as he confesses to murder; she drags her husband to Othello and demands that he provide answers; and while Othello and Yutkevich's camera keep Desdemona concealed from sight after the murder, Maximova's Emilia dramatically pulls back the curtains and exposes Desdemona's lifeless body for all to see.

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<sup>65</sup> Tatspaugh also observes Desdemona as a singing siren, however her observation implies the dangers embedded within this representation: 'Yutkevich presents her as a siren leading Othello to destruction on the rocks'. See Tatspaugh, p. 147.

<sup>66</sup> Rosenthal, p. 167.

For this Emilia, the fallen handkerchief was a game, a dangerous attempt to have momentary control over her husband. When Iago takes the handkerchief from her, they stand beside the dark well in the ground where Iago first plotted to ‘enmesh them all’; but while Popov’s Iago ‘reaches into the well and disrupts the surface’, fragmenting his own image and ‘effacing his own features’, neither Emilia’s nor Desdemona’s reflection ever appears at the centre of its black, ominous ‘O’.<sup>67</sup> While Iago’s reflection is the only one to shatter in the well imagery – ironically, by his own hand – the film’s final images also show that his gaze, although still active, has been forced to confront his own malignant evil, as he is ‘bound to the mast of the ship that carries the bodies of Othello and Desdemona’ and is therefore ‘unable to raise his head and to avert looking at the bodies of the couple he has destroyed’.<sup>68</sup>



**3.8. Confronting monstrosity within: Andrei Popov’s Iago in Yutkevich’s *Othello* (1956)**

In Yutkevich’s imagery, it is not Desdemona’s body that is depicted as the ‘closet lock and key of villainous secrets’, but Iago himself, as he hands Roderigo a locked treasure chest and instructs him to ‘make money’. We know that the box itself

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<sup>67</sup> Donaldson here argues that the ‘mirror’ of Yutkevich’s well is used ‘primarily to explore the protagonist’s ethnic identity and Iago’s assault on that identity’, but while both Iago and Othello are shown to consult their reflections in its murky surface, the women have no association with its symbolism. See Donaldson, p. 95.

<sup>68</sup> Tatspaugh, p. 147.

is empty, just as Iago's promises to Roderigo are empty. All that lies at the centre of this 'O', conflated with the suggestion of Iago's ever-observing eye, is his own monstrosity looking back at him: the foul 'something' that lurks within this dark 'nothing' is Iago's own reflection.

With rather different connotations of the 'O' symbol, Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995) uses the 'O' of the film's title as a glowing red eye, immediately marking the ways in which paranoid scopophilia will play a major part in this adaptation.<sup>69</sup> In a representation of the male gaze that enlarges the implications of Welles's camera techniques, it is Laurence Fishburne's Othello, not Iago, who becomes the most dangerous voyeur of all. The film begins with Irène Jacob's Desdemona; as soon as she appears before the camera, she is watched, followed, and spied upon by others. Parker's first shot of her reveals no more than a hand pulling a curtain across as she tries to conceal herself in a gondola. As she steps out, her features remain hidden underneath a black veil that is only removed as she enters the church before marrying Othello. The veil may therefore symbolise the death of her old life as she casts it off to begin a new life with her chosen husband; however, it is also a visual signifier that links Jacob's Desdemona to her counterpart in the opening shots of Welles's film; a still, partly concealed corpse, shrouded in a black veil and carried in bleak silhouette through the crowd of mourners at Cyprus. As a result, Desdemona's fate, and her later smothering, starkly illustrated in the nightmarish opening sequence of Welles's *Othello*, is a visual association for Parker's first representation of Jacob's body.<sup>70</sup>

Here and elsewhere in the film, Jacob's Desdemona appears not 'whole', but as an anonymous or fragmented body: a mysterious woman hiding in the carriage of a gondola; a concealed face behind a dark veil; an eroticised body that is distorted, fractured and cut into by the camera's juxtapositions of her body parts; a figure blurred by the flimsy mesh of the bed curtains; an erased face when Othello smothers her with the pillow. Even in Parker's closing shots, the two bodies that are lowered

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<sup>69</sup> *Othello*. Dir. Oliver Parker. UK. 1995. On the Welles 1992 Castle Hill video cover, the 'O' in the title is used as a miniature frame to capture a black and white image of Othello's saddened face, looking down on Desdemona's, as she lies still and 'cold', 'Even like thy chastity' on the bed (5.2.312-13). However, the significance of the image is twofold, as it also recalls the moment in Welles's film where Cloutier's Desdemona momentarily feigns sleep. Once again, the female body is depicted as both chaste and unchaste, appearing as innocent but capable of foul deception and thus justifying Othello's inner torment: 'Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee / And love thee after' (5.2.18-19).

<sup>70</sup> Parker uses the image of Desdemona concealed by a black veil for a second time in his *Othello* when she arrives in Cyprus and is greeted by Cassio. This visual repetition prevents us from associating Desdemona's veil purely with her elopement and her later death.

into the water for the funeral at sea remain anonymous. While we may assume that they are Othello and Desdemona, the identity of the two wrapped bodies, shown sinking to the depths of the ocean bed, is left uncertain.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, confusion over identity also surrounds the first appearance of Desdemona in the film. The opening image shows a white woman and a black man in a gondola, eerily drifting past the camera's gaze. As they pass, the man holds a white mask up to his face, preventing us from seeing his features; the woman leans her head upon his shoulder, her eyes closed. The couple we see here is *not* Othello and Desdemona; rather, Parker uses this image to allude to the film's many visual deceptions, as well as to the anxieties surrounding miscegenation.<sup>72</sup> However, it is also an image that keeps Jacob's Desdemona at a deliberate distance from the spectator.

The suggested alignment of the protagonist's gaze and the spectator's is taken further as subjective camera shots are used to show how private moments between Desdemona and Emilia are intruded upon by the presence of male voyeurs. As Desdemona searches for the lost handkerchief in her bedchamber, she talks to Anna Patrick's Emilia about Othello, dismissing Emilia's suggestion that he may become jealous. They talk as if they were alone, but after only three lines of dialogue, the camera cuts to a subjective shot of someone observing them through the transparent curtains of the bed. The voyeur is Othello, and the camera shot positions the spectator to spy on the women as he does from his place of concealment. When Othello enters from behind the curtains, his first words are about the handkerchief, confirming that he has not only *seen*, but also *overheard* the women: 'That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give' (3.4.56-7).

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<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, Philip C. McGuire's suggestion that the bodies in Parker's final scene could in fact belong to Desdemona and Emilia. McGuire, 'Whose Work Is This? Loading the Bed in *Othello*', in *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*, ed. by Jay L. Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1998), pp. 70-92 (p. 86). For other critics, such as Tatspaugh, Iago's earlier manipulation of the chess pieces provides enough visual indication that the bodies belong to Othello and Desdemona: 'he pushes the chess king and queen off the castle wall and into the sea, a move presaging the burial at sea of Othello and Desdemona'. See Tatspaugh, p. 149. Deborah Cartmell also writes that Branagh's Iago's 'seemingly gratuitous gesture of throwing the chess pieces into a well prefigures the ceremonial throwing of the bodies of Othello and Desdemona into the sea at the completion of the film'. See Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (London: MacMillan, 2000), pp. 76-7.

<sup>72</sup> Whether the woman shown in the gondola was in fact Jacob's Desdemona has confused both viewers and critics: see Lois Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Othello'* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), p. 194. However, on close inspection of costume, the juxtaposition of camera shots and the actress's appearance, it is clear that it is not.

The scene ends with the presence of another male voyeur. As Othello exits in a jealous rage, the camera follows him, only to reveal Kenneth Branagh's Iago lingering in the doorway, observing the effects of his 'work'. In structures of seeing, men have control within this scene from beginning to end: what was a private exchange in Shakespeare's play has been turned inside out in Parker's film, and rather than observing women from a position that can only confirm Desdemona's innocence, the audience must now observe them through Othello's distorted gaze, as he even directs the camera to turn and 'look' upon his wife's whoring body: 'This is a subtle whore' (4.2.23); 'But look, she comes'.<sup>73</sup> As Othello speaks these words to camera, the camera then pans around sharply to examine Desdemona's face simultaneously with Othello. Othello continues to speak his soliloquies to the camera as Branagh's Iago has done since the beginning of the film, thus mimicking Iago's style and signalling to the spectator that he now sees the world – and his wife – as Iago does.



**3.9. 'This accident is not unlike my dream': dangerous visions in Parker's *Othello* (1995)**

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<sup>73</sup> This line is an addition in Parker's film. It may have been prompted by a line from Othello's earlier soliloquy: 'Look where she comes: / If she be false, heaven mocked itself! / I'll not believe't' (3.3.307-9). Gajowski here reads Desdemona's entrance in the play as momentarily breaking Iago's hold over Othello's imagination. See Gajowski, p. 97. However, in Parker's *Othello*, when Othello instructs the spectator to look, there is no doubt of his certainty that his wife has become a 'subtle whore', and as the camera also moves with his instruction, the spectator's gaze is left with no more room for manoeuvre than Iago leaves Othello.

The space of Desdemona's bedchamber is also transformed by the filmed images that we witness as Othello's nightmarish fantasies where, parting the bed curtains with his sword, he enters to find Desdemona in bed with Cassio. Although this is Othello's dream, Parker frequently reuses and reinvents camera shots from previous scenes to merge the content of these dreams with the film's intended 'reality', thus giving the spectator 'no indication that they *are* fantasies'.<sup>74</sup> As Pascale Aebischer observes, the focus on Desdemona's exploited body 'debases both her and Othello, whose obsession with sex is thus exposed while the audience has been given all the visual proof it needs to condemn Desdemona'.<sup>75</sup> Thus, ironically, Othello's private thoughts and Desdemona's private 'parts' are both revealed as derogated and perverse.



**3.10. 'Ocular proof': contaminating the bed with Irène Jacob's Desdemona and Nathaniel Parker's Cassio in Parker's *Othello* (1995)**

Later, in the willow scene, Othello is not positioned as voyeur or eavesdropper, but his visual presence is still used to disrupt and fragment the intimacy of this space. The willow song that Desdemona sings tells a story about women's suffering: 'My mother had a maid called Barbary: / She was in love, and he she loved proved mad / And did forsake her. She had a song of "willow"' (4.3.27-9). It is a

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<sup>74</sup> Potter, p. 194.

<sup>75</sup> Aebischer, p. 68.

narrative that will extend beyond Barbary's story to tell the story of Desdemona's own 'wretched fortune' for Emilia, and for the audience, as we listen to her singing it. At the end of the play, it will also tell Emilia's 'fortune', as she herself becomes the maid who dies singing its words. It is also a narrative that extends beyond its history and its usage within the play, as the song has prompted critics, speakers and writers commonly to refer to this scene as 'the willow scene'. However, when Desdemona sings the willow song in Parker's film, this history is rewritten. As we hear Desdemona's words, the camera repeatedly cuts to shots of Othello, standing alone in silhouette beneath a tree, looking out across the ocean. Just as adaptations of *Hamlet* tend to focus on Hamlet's narrative, the narrative that unites women and wives to each other is rewritten through the visuals of Parker's film to tell Othello's story. In the willow song, the 'poor soul' who 'sat sighing by a sycamore tree' is Barbary, or perhaps even another woman before her; as Desdemona describes the song as 'an old thing', we never know with whom it began.<sup>76</sup> But in Parker's film, the 'poor soul' sighing is Othello, shot beneath the hanging branches of a tree, wiping 'salt tears' (4.3.48) from his eyes. Here then, sites of female intimacy are not merely rewritten, but written *over*, erased, lost.



3.11. 'Sing willow, willow': Laurence Fishburne in Parker's *Othello* (1995)

<sup>76</sup> While Parker's film uses the line 'The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree', Bate and Rasmussen favour 'The poor soul sat *singing* by a sycamore tree' (4.3.42). For an edition of the play-text that illustrates Parker's choice, see *The Arden Othello*, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann, p. 291 (4.3.39).





3.12. 'My husband?': Anna Patrick's Emilia in Parker's *Othello* (1995)

Given the negative response that Parker's film in particular has generated in terms of the representation of Jacob's Desdemona, I would at this point like to offer a reading of the film's final scene that may provide some more positive insights about the story of *Othello*'s women and the notion of private parts.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, in Parker's film, as in Welles's, voyeurism is enlarged and female privacy is reduced and overturned in favour of a narrative that privileges male stories and male viewpoints. However, after Desdemona's murder, Anna Patrick's Emilia becomes a truly powerful presence for the first time in Parker's adaptation, and her performance in this final scene rivals all others, including Fishburne's and Branagh's.<sup>78</sup> In what Lois Potter describes as 'the most exciting moment of the film', Emilia turns to her 'wayward' husband with a look of utter horror and exclaims, 'O God, O heavenly

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<sup>77</sup> Several critics draw attention to the detrimental nature of Othello's visualised thoughts that actually show Desdemona and Cassio in bed together. For such arguments, see Rutter 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film', pp. 255-6; Potter, pp. 193-4; Aebischer, pp. 67-9. Patricia Tatspaugh is one of the few critics to read Jacob's/Parker's Desdemona in a more positive light: 'Instead of casting Desdemona in the tradition of beautiful blond cipher, photographing her in static or romantic situations, and redefining her character with a heavily cut text, Parker presents a Desdemona whose firmness with the Senate, fondness for Othello and feistiness when accused make her a suitable match for Fishburne's Othello. She struggles to save her life'. See Tatspaugh, p. 149.

<sup>78</sup> Another noteworthy performance of *Othello*'s Emilia comes from Zoe Wanamaker in Trevor Nunn's televised version of the theatre production for the RSC, released in 1990. The performance is so undoubtedly powerful because, as Rutter observes, 'this is the one *Othello* where the women's stories get fully told' and, as a result, the privacy of the willow scene is maintained. See Rutter, 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film', p. 257. For a more in-depth reading of Nunn's production, see Rutter, *Enter the Body*, pp. 142-77.



God!’ as she realises both his ‘villainy’ and her own fatal part in the tragedy in giving him the handkerchief.<sup>79</sup>

Patrick’s Emilia plays her final scene with both a ‘full’ heart (5.2.201) and a powerful voice. As she refuses defiantly to ‘go home’ (5.2.224), she refutes the woman’s confinement to the household and instead reveals her husband’s inner monstrosity for all to hear. After Iago stabs her, Emilia’s request to die by her ‘mistress’ side’ (5.2.271) is fulfilled and, in so doing, Parker ‘breaks with centuries of performance and editorial practice’.<sup>80</sup> We then see the captured Iago and Othello facing one another for *their* final ‘private’ exchange. Parker has the two men speak their words almost as a whisper, addressing each other with a continuing eye contact that denies the presence of all others in the room: Iago vows to Othello that he never again ‘will speak word’ (5.2.342); Othello responds with tears in his eyes: ‘Well, thou dost best’ (5.2.345). The moment recalls their private ‘blood-bond’ only a few scenes before. Thus it is not what women conceal, but what these two men have concealed between them, that is truly monstrous.



**3.13. ‘What you know, you know’: treacherous private bonds between men in  
Parker’s *Othello* (1995)**

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<sup>79</sup> For Potter’s reading of Parker’s film, ‘the poignant and sympathetic treatment of Emilia shows what it is at its best’. See Potter, p. 196.

<sup>80</sup> McGuire, p. 84.

However, the emphasis on Othello's treacherous bond with Iago is quickly wiped away by his 'healing' private bond with Nathaniel Parker's Cassio. Othello's faithful though castigated lieutenant secretly passes him a knife, thus responding with loyal duty to his general's words: 'in my sense 'tis happiness to die' (5.2.327). The exchange of looks between them says it all: Cassio's forgiveness and sympathy, Othello's repentance and gratitude. If private male bonds are perceived momentarily as monstrous, then they are quickly re-established as noble.

Finally, the sight of Iago's 'work' will here include the villain himself, as Branagh's Iago drags his body onto the bed and 'rests his head on Othello's leg'.<sup>81</sup> Rather than obeying Lodovico's instruction, 'Let it be hid' (5.2.410), Cassio opens the window shutters to flood sunlight into the room: Iago's monstrous deeds are exposed, and when we look on the 'tragic loading' of the bed, we see the blank face of Iago's incomprehensible villainy staring back at us.<sup>82</sup> Eventually in Shakespeare's play, the male gaze that interrogates female interiors for 'villainous secrets' is also turned inwards to confront the monstrousness of *male* interiority: in the play's final instruction to 'look', Lodovico says to Iago, 'look on the tragic loading of this bed: / This is thy work' (5.2.361-2). Now it is Iago who must look, and the sight that meets his eyes is a horror of his own making, the external 'proof' of his own inner monstrosity. As Mark Thornton Burnett describes this realignment of the play's visual directorship, '*Othello* finally declares that a viewer can be easily deceived in the detection of "monstrosity" and that its ultimate locations are never self-evident'.<sup>83</sup> Finally, then, it is Iago's inner or 'private' parts that are exposed as monstrous, thus shifting anxiety regarding the dual desire for exposure and concealment from the location of female interiors to the unfathomable and monstrous interiors of men such as Iago, who hide beneath external 'heavenly shows'. Iago's own 'peculiar end' (1.1.62) is to have his perversely outward-seeking gaze turned inwards, as it is in Yutkevich's closing images. However, in Parker's film, Iago's gaze continues to look outwards to confront the spectator. Through the gaze of Welles's camera and those films that take influence from his *Othello*, women's domains continue to exist as locations that will be probed for villainous secrets.

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<sup>81</sup> Tatspaugh, p. 150.

<sup>82</sup> McGuire argues instead that the sight of the bed's tragic loading is actually denied: 'Parker's audiences see Iago looking on his "work" ... but they do not see the "work" itself, do not see the bodies of Desdemona, Emilia, and Othello, which are (kept) out of sight, hidden'. See McGuire, p. 85.

<sup>83</sup> Thornton Burnett, p. 122.

Despite the strategies on film that often erase female privacy and continue to interrogate *Othello*'s private parts, the death of Shakespeare's Desdemona remains problematic for the men of the play who attempt to silence her and who finally assume control over her body. As Philippa Berry observes of Desdemona's dying on the stage, 'Desdemona comes and goes between life and death for several lines after she has been smothered, "stirring" even after her murderer has declared her "still as the grave"'.<sup>84</sup> For this brief moment, Desdemona is, like Juliet in the tomb, positioned somewhere between life and death. After Othello smothers her, he hears a noise, a voice, a disturbance that provokes him to ask of Desdemona's body on the bed, 'What noise is this? Not dead? Not yet quite dead? / I that am cruel am yet merciful: / I would not have thee linger in thy pain' (5.2.102-4). The voice he hears is actually Emilia's, as she calls outside the chamber door to speak with Othello. As Emilia discovers, Desdemona is, in fact, like Juliet on the bier, 'not yet quite dead', and while her body problematises boundaries between life and death, Emilia's voice also replaces Desdemona's, rising to 'report the truth' (5.2.149) and complicating further the silencing of her mistress's body. Emilia's words also refute the play's spatial recontainment of the woman's desertion of the father's house: 'Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home' (5.2.224). As Berry's observation testifies, Desdemona's positioning between life and death here complicates Othello's own ending and the final image of the 'loaded' bed. However, in Shakespeare's tragedies, the significance of the woman's body as positioned between signifiers of life and death is most powerfully illustrated through the *performance* of the liminal body in *Romeo and Juliet*.

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<sup>84</sup> Berry, p. 28.

## **‘In This Borrowed Likeness of Shrunk Death’:**

### **Juliet’s Liminal Body on Film**

How should we interpret Juliet’s body after she takes the potion in Shakespeare’s play? As a living body, or as a corpse? After dismissing her mother and the Nurse from her chamber, Juliet drinks the ‘distilling liquor’ that will ‘surcease’ her pulse and her breath, making her lips and cheeks ‘fade / To wanny ashes’; her eyelids close ‘Like death when he shuts up the day of life’; and her body appear rigid, ‘stiff and stark and cold’ (4.1.95-104). The description of her body’s appearance, also ‘being then in bed’ in her chamber (4.1.94), recalls Desdemona on the bed as we have just discussed her in *Othello*: ‘Cold, cold’ and ‘Pale as thy smock’ (*Othello*, 5.2.310-12). It also recalls Cordelia’s body in the final moments of *King Lear*, whose ‘breath’ will never again ‘mist or stain the stone’ (*King Lear*, 5.3.269). However, while her body will assume the outward appearance of a corpse, Juliet is, in fact, still alive: a ‘living corpse’, closed ‘in a dead man’s tomb’ (5.2.30). In this image, she is more like Hermione in the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale*, a living ‘statue’ whose body reveals ‘the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death’ (*The Winter’s Tale*, 5.3.22-3). Both Juliet and Hermione perform through their rigidity a bodily condition that blurs distinctions between life and death. Like the actor, whose performing body ‘plays’ at being dead, Juliet’s body is also performing here: her appearance of ‘shrunk death’ is merely a ‘borrowed likeness’ (4.1.105).

When interpreting the blurring of such distinctions, Juliet’s body poses further problems. The rigid Hermione, assumed by Leontes at first to be a statue, ‘mocks’ life: everything, from her veins that ‘verily bear blood’ to the motion in the ‘fixture of her eye’ (5.3.76-9) – even her ‘wrinkled’ appearance (5.3.32) – pertains to the ‘warm life’ of a living body (5.3.41). The rigid Juliet, assumed by her family to be a corpse, instead ‘mocks’ death in her physical appearance. On the discovery of her body, Lord Capulet laments, ‘she’s cold: / Her blood is settled and her joints are stiff. / Life and these lips have long been separated’ (4.4.58-60). For Capulet and the other onlookers on the stage, there is no blurring of distinctions in the appearance of Juliet’s ‘cold’ and ‘stiff’ body: ‘life, living, all is Death’s’ (4.4.74). To complicate matters further, Juliet’s speculation in her soliloquy that the potion may be ‘a poison, which the friar /

Subtly hath ministered' (4.3.25-6), may leave many members of the audience uncertain as to whether or not she will wake after drinking it.

However, if a merging of life and death here occurs through a disparity between what characters on stage and audience members perceive about Juliet's body, distinctions are unsettled further when the grieving Romeo, now beside Juliet's bier in the tomb, begins to notice signs of life in her body: 'beauty's ensign yet / Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks, / And death's pale flag is not advanced there' (5.3.94-6). As Brian Gibbons notes, the 'crimson' that Romeo detects in Juliet's lips and cheeks is 'returning, not, as he thinks, about to fade'.<sup>1</sup> Romeo's observation not only adds further tragic irony to Shakespeare's final scene by suggesting to the audience that Juliet is soon to wake; it also reveals that the condition of Juliet's body *changes*. From the 'wanny ashes' of her lips and cheeks as they were previously described, Juliet's 'stark and cold' body suddenly begins to show evidence of life. Such changes in appearance imply stages of development within the body, a development or *process* that, in turn, further complicates distinctions between life and death.

Despite the fact that, in recent years, Shakespearean performance studies have 'benefited from a lively dialogue with film theory and gender studies', which has resulted in 'fascinating analyses of the female body on stage and screen', surprisingly little attention has been paid to the paradoxical condition of Juliet's 'living corpse'.<sup>2</sup> Caught between signifiers of life and death, presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, agency and passivity, Juliet's living yet rigid body implies a threshold state, *embodying* what anthropologist Victor Turner terms 'liminality': a 'blurring and merging of distinctions'.<sup>3</sup> A further probing of Juliet's liminal condition raises several questions about the interpretation of her body on stage. To begin with, signifiers of oppositions that collide in the body's representation need to be determined rather than merely assumed. For instance, how can a silent, rigid body connote agency on the stage? Similarly, how can we refer to the changing condition of Juliet's living body as

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<sup>1</sup> See Gibbons's notes for 4.2.99 in *Romeo and Juliet*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. by Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Pascale Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence: Negotiating Masculinities in Branagh's *Henry V* and Taymor's *Titus*', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 112-32 (p. 112).

<sup>3</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), p. 26.

‘corpse-like’? How does an audience’s interpretation of Juliet’s rigidity differ from that of the play’s central characters, and how does this affect a reading of her body? An exploration of Juliet’s liminality reveals how this body demands to be read in the final scenes of Shakespeare’s play.

This chapter addresses the *significance* of reading Juliet’s ‘living corpse’, both on stage and screen. Primarily, it addresses the physical condition of Juliet’s body through Turner’s definitions of liminal experiences and, through this analytical framework, considers how Juliet’s liminal body denotes stages of symbolic death and rebirth. Turner himself frequently applies his anthropological points to literary texts and, by exploring the concept of Juliet’s liminal body, this argument broadens the spectrum of critical discussions that have already applied Turner’s theories to significant periods and works of art and literature.<sup>4</sup> I begin by addressing the implications of interpreting Juliet’s rigid body ‘as corpse’, and argue how such interpretations can diminish a sense of autonomy in her act of suicide with the dagger. In particular, reading Juliet’s body as liminal allows us to explore further the sexual agency of her suicide within the wider context of a transitional process.

In order to promote an alternative reading that explores the relationship between Juliet’s body and Turner’s theory, this chapter examines the conventions of Elizabethan stage practice, exploring bodily and spatial representations that begin with Juliet’s drinking of the potion and end with her eventual suicide. A consideration of the play on the Elizabethan stage *and* on film is particularly apt for a discussion that is primarily concerned with Juliet’s liminality.<sup>5</sup> As a body that problematizes the boundaries between life and death, Juliet’s body on the Elizabethan stage emblematically ‘plays’ out contemporary concerns about the meaning of death and ‘new understandings of the possible relationships between the material and the

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<sup>4</sup> I am thinking specifically, here, of the exemplary work that has been produced on liminality and Victorian literature, particularly with reference to Dickens. See Mark M. Hennelly, Jr. ‘The “Mysterious Portal”: Liminal Play in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 15 (1998), 155-166; Hennelly, ‘Carnavalesque “Unlawful Games” in *The Old Curiosity Shop*’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 22 (1993), 67-120; Hennelly, “‘In a State Between’: A Reading of Liminality in *Jane Eyre*”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 22 (1994), 103-27; and Sarah Gilead, ‘Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel’, *ELH*, 53 (1986), 183-97.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting here that the period of the original performances has been referred to as a ‘liminal’ time of ‘religious and intellectual crisis’. See Philippa Berry, *Shakespeare’s Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 7. Gilead, too, observes that ‘it was perhaps inevitable that a virtual obsession with liminality should characterise Victorian literature: social critics commonly characterise the period as an “age of transition”, as a liminal period in a history of spiritual, moral, and intellectual as well as material progress’. See Gilead, p. 186.

spiritual worlds'.<sup>6</sup> However, more significantly here, the physical condition of the stage itself implies a transitional or 'threshold' space: during the liminal phase of Juliet's body, the space of the stage is both at once Juliet's bedchamber and the tomb. As the interests of this argument lie specifically in reading Juliet's liminal body as part of a transitional process, this chapter looks at how these spatial transitions contribute to the development of Shakespeare's desiring heroine.

The second part of this chapter offers an analysis of Juliet's liminal body on film. Moving from stage performance to filmic modes of representation highlights the ways in which Juliet's rigidity can pose further problems when the body in question is not a 'live', physically present body on the stage but a projected image on the screen, already reduced in terms of bodily presence and subjectivity. As Dennis Kennedy observes: 'If our starting point is that Shakespeare's work was intended to be seen in the theatre, then the absence of the performer's body is the most significant phenomenological difference in Shakespeare on film'.<sup>7</sup> Such differences become more crucial when the body in question is without movement. Renato Castellani's film adaptation (1954) demonstrates the necessity of representing Juliet's 'living corpse' not as liminal, but as an *actual corpse*; this representation, I shall argue, not only absents her body's subjectivity but also subsequently represses her symbolic 'rebirth' in the tomb and the sexual agency of her suicide with the dagger. Alternatively, Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) allows us to interpret Juliet's body as liminal and, as a result, the film explores further the sexual agency of her suicide. Finally, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) has Juliet break her rigidity in the tomb *before* Romeo's act of suicide. However, as my discussion of Claire Danes's Juliet will demonstrate, the film's logical conclusion is to place further restrictions on her body.

### ***Closed in a Dead Man's Tomb***

Juliet's rigidity is often approached in terms that define the body *as corpse*. To begin with, her 'mock death' is typically examined within the context of the play's allusions to the role of fate, and the tragic foreboding of the lovers' deaths in the

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border Crossings in the Tragedies and the Henriad* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Kennedy, 'Shakespeare Played Small: Three Speculations About the Body', *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994), 1-13 (p. 8).

tomb.<sup>8</sup> When Juliet drinks the potion in her bedchamber, she prepares to ‘simulate her death’ which, in turn, prepares the audience for her death in the play’s final scene.<sup>9</sup> Leslie Thomson comments that after taking the potion, ‘Juliet is as good as dead from this point in the action’, due to the foreshadowing of her eventual death, which will occur at the end of the play.<sup>10</sup> While the interests of Thomson’s argument lie clearly in the verbal and visual preparation of the tomb scene, such an analysis emphasises the tendency to read Juliet’s rigid body only within the context of her eventual death: her contemplations of the tomb in soliloquy, followed by the transformation of her body and the reactions of the characters who discover her, are all interpreted as ‘preparation for her later death’.<sup>11</sup> Such a reading also raises the question that, if Juliet is ‘as good as dead’ from this point on in the play’s action, does her part in the play, the work that her body must perform on stage, and her remaining role in the eyes of the audience become virtually insignificant? Ironically, discussing Juliet’s rigidity within the context of her eventual death – a context that inevitably configures the body in terms of absence rather than presence – also seems to render the significance of her liminal body as wholly ‘absent’ from Shakespeare criticism.

In this corpse-like form, ‘stiff’ and ‘cold’ and soon to become an actual corpse in the tomb, Juliet’s body is transformed into an absence or ‘nothingness’, devoid of subjectivity, or as Elisabeth Bronfen describes the female corpse, ‘an interminable surface for projections’.<sup>12</sup> Conveniently, in this rigid and repressed body, Juliet becomes the site and *sight* of male projections regarding femininity, as she finally achieves the physical form most suited to the restraints of Romeo’s Petrarchan verse. On first seeing Juliet, Romeo remarks that her beauty is ‘too rich for use, for earth too dear’ (1.4.164); it becomes apt, then, that in the tomb, Romeo describes her assumed corpse as ‘fair’ (5.3.102). As if emphasising this point, Julia Kristeva notes that Juliet is in fact ‘more beautiful than ever in her rigidity’.<sup>13</sup> She asks ‘what is this body,

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<sup>8</sup> A descriptive term used by Peter Holding, *Text and Performance: ‘Romeo and Juliet’* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Leslie Thomson, “‘With Patient Ears Attend’”: *Romeo and Juliet* on the Elizabethan Stage’, *Studies in Philology*, 92 (1995), 230–47 (p. 239).

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Thomson, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup> Leslie Thomson, p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘*Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple*’, in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by John Drakakis (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 296–315 (p. 302).



erroneously dead and beautiful, if not the image of a contained, padlocked, one could say frigid passion because it was not able to give its violence free rein?’<sup>14</sup>

Within the parameters of Kristeva’s statement, Juliet’s sexuality is repressed by her rigidity, and the threat it poses to the male is thus contained. Her rigidity becomes a visual metaphor for male anxieties about uncontrollable female sexual desire, a strategy that aligns itself with feminist and psychoanalytical readings of the beautified yet sexually contained female corpse. In these terms, the transformation of a woman into a rigid corpse represents a form of control or repression by which ‘the erotic threat of the female body is psychically contained’.<sup>15</sup> Lidia Curti writes that the female corpse, in its absolute powerlessness, is in fact ‘man’s dream, or maybe woman’s dream – as she knows she had to be in the grave, passive, unattainable, distant, in order to attract him’.<sup>16</sup>

Should we read Juliet’s ‘mock death’ as a strategy for the containment of female sexual power? Rather than interpreting Juliet’s body through the repressions associated with the female corpse, we might ask, how are we to read the female body that occupies the physical form of death, by her own hand, only to break its still, unmoving, rigid form? How should we discuss the body that assumes an *image* of powerlessness, absence and passivity, only to wake and act with passion and autonomy? If we interpret Juliet’s rigid body in terms of absence, or as a blank ‘surface for projections’, then her body serves no greater purpose than to be transformed into Romeo’s object of grief, the cause of his ‘world-wearied flesh’, and the unoccupied space that will mark his own ‘everlasting rest’ (5.3.114-16).

In the final scene of *Othello*, the fact that Desdemona is ‘not yet quite dead’ (5.2.102) after Othello smothers her will in fact rupture the end of her murderer’s story and the ending of Shakespeare’s play.<sup>17</sup> An acknowledgement of Juliet’s body as ‘not yet quite dead’ is also required, for how we interpret the significance of this body in the context of the play’s continuing action will determine how we are to read its central characters and its tragic ending. Problems surrounding the interpretation of Juliet’s ‘living corpse’ have also rendered this body absent from the agency of her suicide. While the sexual overtones of Juliet’s suicide with the dagger are widely

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<sup>14</sup> Kristeva, p. 302.

<sup>15</sup> Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation* (London: MacMillan, 1998), p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> See Berry, pp. 28-9.

acknowledged by critics, the relevance of this autonomous act in relation to the condition of her previously immobilised body requires further attention.<sup>18</sup> Marjorie Garber, for instance, describes Juliet's suicide as 'an allusively sexual act', one that overturns the traditional signifiers of masculine and feminine: 'failing to find poison left in Romeo's cup – a conventional female symbol – she instead stabs herself with his dagger'.<sup>19</sup> However, while sexual agency is well noted here, the transitional phase of the liminal body – as a symbolic factor in the occurrence of this autonomous act – is not.

Philippa Berry offers one of the most potent readings of Juliet's sexual dying by exploring what she refers to as 'double dying', where the figuration of a literal death in sexual terms 'juxtaposes the prospect of death as an individualised end to a finite existence with the possibility of a virtual infinity or endlessness of erotic "deaths"'.<sup>20</sup> Berry argues that, by crossing death with the enactment of desire, 'the sexualised body is mysteriously privileged rather than overcome'; thus, Juliet's body becomes 'an uncannily disruptive force in her own family vault'.<sup>21</sup> My argument extends Berry's reading by addressing the 'double dying' of Juliet's suicide within the wider context of her 'double dying' on the stage: her *symbolic* 'death' in the chamber that occurs before her actual death in the tomb. If the sexual overtones of Juliet's suicide overcome bodily extinction, this must also be examined through the significance of Juliet's liminal condition on the stage, another symbolic transition that itself figures death 'not as an ending, but as a process'.<sup>22</sup>

By excluding the significance of the liminal body, Juliet's suicide remains, in a sense, 'cut off' from the previous action of the play. With a body that is still and silent and, at times, removed from the view of the audience, it seems apparent that the agency of Juliet's suicide is in danger of being lost under the accumulating layers of activity on the stage. Juliet speaks only thirteen lines in the tomb – in fact, these are her only lines for the remaining five scenes of Shakespeare's play. In the First Quarto, her farewell speech contains even fewer words as she takes up the dagger with which

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<sup>18</sup> For critical discussions that acknowledge the agency and, in particular, the erotic overtones of Juliet's act of suicide, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, "'O Happy Dagger": the Autonomy of Shakespeare's Juliet', *Notes and Queries*, 45 (1998), 314-16; Irene Dash, *Wooing, Wedding and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981); Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 144; Kristeva, pp. 301-302.

<sup>19</sup> Garber, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Berry, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Berry, pp. 23 and 5.

<sup>22</sup> Berry, p. 5.

she kills herself.<sup>23</sup> By comparison, Romeo speaks forty-seven lines after he kills Paris and approaches Juliet's body in the Capulet vault, which implies that his act of suicide should be the central focus of this scene. Similarly, for most critics, Juliet does not possess the means for her own death; instead, she must look to her dead husband's body for her suicide weapon. In taking up Romeo's dagger, Juliet's actions appear to lack the control, self-reliance or dignity of Romeo's suicide.<sup>24</sup> Finally, in her resolve to follow Romeo, she fulfils one of the most traditional patriarchal myths of female suicide – she dies for love, thus complementing 'the familiar assumption that woman lives for love'; she does not live for herself.<sup>25</sup>

It is possible that, through an exploration of the liminal phase, Juliet's body can offer us something beyond the familiar feminist critique, yet the admission of her silence and the acceptance of her body 'as corpse' in the closing scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* has led to an eradication of the significance of this liminal body, particularly in the context of the play's sexual *rites de passage* and the heroine's erotic death. On the Elizabethan stage, Juliet's sexual maturity would have been given a much stronger emphasis through the visual representation of her death, and this emphasis must necessarily be understood through the transitional phase of the liminal body that connects Juliet's previous actions to her actions in the tomb. Despite her stillness and her lack of words in the remaining five scenes of Shakespeare's play, Juliet's body has all to *play* for.

### ***The Fearful Passage of Death-Marked Love***

The prologue to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* invites the audience to witness the 'fearful passage' of 'death-marked love' (*Prologue*, 9). This calls attention to the sexual *rites de passage* of the play's young lovers, and to the function of the prologue *itself* as initiating a rite of passage: 'By facilitating the transition from everyday world to playworld, from ordinary perception to imaginary reception, [prologues] reconstituted their own liminality in terms of textual and performative

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<sup>23</sup> The closing lines of the Second Quarto read 'Yea noise? Then ile be briefe. O happy dagger/ This is thy sheath, there rust and let me dye'. In comparison, the first Quarto has 'O happy dagger thou shalt end my fear/ Rest in my bosome, thus I come to thee' (5.3.69-70).

<sup>24</sup> For an alternative reading that discusses the dagger as possibly belonging to Juliet, see Duncan-Jones, pp. 314-16.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Higonnet, 'Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide', in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986), pp. 68-83 (p. 73).

strategies'.<sup>26</sup> By carrying theatre-goers 'over the threshold' and into the fictional world of the play, the prologue serves to emphasise modes of betweenness that are integral to the play's thematic structure and its performance. In these performances, Juliet's body is that of a boy actor playing the part, while the ever-changing locations of the play are represented on the unchanging physical space of the stage. Thus, the relevance of the 'fearful passage' is threefold: it implies the transitional or liminal aspects of plot, prologue, *and* performance.

Within this performance context, Juliet's liminal body becomes emblematic of the play's recurring signifiers of 'betweenness'. In terms of plot, the 'two hours' traffic' (*Prologue*, 12) of the stage will revolve around the lovers' period of adolescence, which is itself a liminal time. However, while Irving Ribner claims that 'to demonstrate the particular progress of the human life journey, Shakespeare concentrates upon Romeo', the symbolic transition of Juliet's body claims otherwise.<sup>27</sup> It is Juliet's body, not Romeo's, which will be used to represent the 'fearful passage' of 'death-marked love'. Her liminal condition implies a transitional state, thus marking a 'journey' to an eventual symbolic rebirth – not least in terms of the death of her old life as a Capulet and the beginning of her new life as a Montague.

Just as her later suicide with the dagger has been interpreted as a symbolic representation of the consummation that is implied but not shown, Juliet's liminal body symbolically represents the transitional phase from adolescence to womanhood. Juliet first appears to us as Capulet's daughter, a 'child' who has 'not seen the change of fourteen years' and is 'yet a stranger in the world' (1.2.8-9); by the end of the play, she has become a wife, a Montague, and her final 'duty' as a wife will be to perform the symbolic act of consummation that unites her with her dead husband. Although the marriage and the consummation occur before Juliet's liminal phase, the lovers remain in the 'childhood' of their 'joy' (3.3.96); it is only after her waking in the tomb that Juliet will be free to live with Romeo as his wife: 'that very night / Shall Romeo bear thee hence to Mantua' (4.1.118-19). In deciding to take the potion, Juliet refutes her father's rule, his choice of husband and, by extension, the confinements of patriarchy. Thus, her liminal body, despite its rigidity, will also challenge patriarchal

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<sup>26</sup> Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare's Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Irving Ribner, "'Then I Denie You Starres": A Reading of *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama in Memory of Karl Julius Holzknacht*, ed. by Josephine W. Bennett, Oscar J. Cargill and Vernon Hall, Jr. (New York: New York UP, 1959), pp. 269-86 (p. 276).

repressions and, given the erotic nature of her suicide, will play a central part in representing the sexual rites of passage. In this reading, the transitional state of Juliet's body, and the erotic overtones of her suicide, are necessarily intertwined and are indicative of *agency*.

Juliet's language and actions just prior to her drinking of the potion mark the phase of 'separation', which comprises 'symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual ... either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions'.<sup>28</sup> Before drinking the potion in her bedchamber, Juliet follows the Friar's instruction to 'lie alone' (4.1.92). She tells the Nurse, 'leave me to myself tonight' (4.3.2), and then instructs her mother to leave the chamber. After their departure, her body experiences a 'cold fear' that 'almost freezes up the heat of life' (4.3.16-17). Momentarily feeling afraid and calling for the 'comfort' and protection of the Nurse, she then pauses, and instead vows to proceed without help: 'My dismal scene I needs must act alone' (4.3.20). Her actions signify a detachment from her role as daughter and child within the Capulet household. Juliet's soliloquy thus marks a significant turning point, for it begins with her separation or detachment from the familiar social structure and ends with her contemplation of the liminal phase and the ambiguous 'fruitful darkness' to come.<sup>29</sup> Her speech, full of questions, fears and images of death, expresses her anxiety as she anticipates the bodily transition that is about to occur. Significantly, the transformation of her body most clearly represents the relationship between her 'living corpse' and the passage ritual of liminal *personae*:

structurally "dead", he or she may be treated, for a long or short period, as a corpse is customarily treated in his or her society. The neophyte may be buried, forced to lie motionless in the posture and direction of customary burial, may be stained black, or may be forced to live for a while in the company of masked and monstrous mummers representing, *inter alia*, the dead, or worse still, the un-dead.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, "'Betwixt and Between": the Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*', in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (London: Cornell UP, 1967), pp. 93-111 (p. 94). In defining the liminal, Turner uses Van Gennep's three phases of *rites de passage*: 'separation', 'margin' (or *limen*), and 'aggregation'. See A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

<sup>29</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 96.

Juliet will be treated as a corpse after she drinks the potion, and her motionless body will lie amongst the dead, whilst her thoughts threaten to carry her amongst the 'un-dead'. On the cusp of her liminal phase, her soliloquy is heavily layered with images of contagion, suffocation, and death: she imagines the 'horrible conceit of death and night'; the 'bones / Of all [her] buried ancestors'; and her dead cousin Tybalt, 'yet but green in the earth' and 'fest'ring in his shroud' (4.3.38-44). It is within this fearful contemplation of her companions in the tomb that she believes she sees the ghost of her cousin, 'Seeking out Romeo that did spit his body / Upon a rapier's point' (4.3.57-8). Here, Tybalt is paradoxically dead but not dead, absent in the tomb and 'festering' in his shroud, but also somehow present in Juliet's chamber, a ghost not yet laid to rest as he searches for his murderer and seeks out his revenge. Moments before drinking the potion, Juliet calls 'Stay, Tybalt, stay!' (4.3.58): while she closes her speech with a toast to Romeo, it is the 'un-dead' Tybalt who will accompany her on her journey to the tomb.

Caught between signifiers of life and death, presence and absence, Juliet's body also exemplifies the structural 'invisibility' of the subject of passage ritual, as one who is 'at once no longer classified and not yet classified'.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, her liminal condition is echoed through the spatial requirements of Elizabethan stage performance: in particular, the spatial manoeuvres that allow for Juliet's body to be both absent *and* present on the stage. Such a duality appropriately colludes with the condition of her 'living corpse'. When Juliet drinks the potion, she collapses onto the bed. As Graham Holderness's reading implies, the bed – with its own curtains – would have remained on centre stage.<sup>32</sup> Scenes that follow Juliet's collapse would have been 'played under the conventional pretence that the characters on stage were unaware of the heroine lying there, unconscious and partly concealed'.<sup>33</sup> If we accept this possibility, Juliet's body remains as a 'presence' on the stage but is also, at times, 'absent', due to the actions of the other characters and to her body's position, partially or fully obscured from the audience's view behind the bed curtain. This fluidity of bodily presence and absence on the stage supports and underlines the collisions of life

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<sup>31</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Graham Holderness, *William Shakespeare: 'Romeo and Juliet'* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Holderness, p. 60.

and death, mobility and immobility that occur within the liminal body's representation.<sup>34</sup>

Although a silent and rigid body, Juliet is far from 'absent', and in the visual set-up and organisation of the events leading up to Shakespeare's tomb scene, everything is keyed towards the desire to look on her liminal body. After her collapse onto the bed, there is a dramatic increase in pace towards the space of the tomb, or, more specifically, towards Juliet's body. This is, in fact, the sight that the audience is intent on seeing, why Romeo breaks into the vault, why the friar hastens towards the tomb and why Paris lingers in the graveyard. The audience's desire to see Juliet's waking is accentuated by the irony that neither Romeo nor Paris is aware that she is, in fact, alive. After acquiring a dram of poison, Romeo says 'To Juliet's grave, for there must I use thee' (5.1.89). However the following action does not lead us to the site of Juliet's 'grave' – the brief conversation between the two friars holds off audience expectations and increases desires to see Juliet's body in the tomb. Friar Lawrence's lines, 'Within this three hours will fair Juliet wake ... / Poor living corpse, closed in a dead man's tomb' (5.2.25-30), create a pivotal moment of tension for the audience, as they mark the long-awaited revelation of Juliet's body. Juliet is indeed alive, but enclosed, trapped 'in a dead man's tomb'; this image of confinement increases the desire to see the curtains opened and to look on the body that lies inside.

The space that Juliet's body occupied in the tomb scene could have been represented in a number of ways on the Elizabethan stage. While Holderness's reading favours the idea of the curtained bed, Andrew Gurr favours Edmond Malone's long-standing opinion that the Capulet monument was constructed around a trapdoor in the stage floor, and that Romeo would descend into a vault beneath the stage floor. He argues that, given the description of Romeo's tools, a 'mattock, an instrument for digging in the ground, and the crowbar or "wrenching iron"', it is probable that 'Romeo used the crowbar to lever up the trapdoor'.<sup>35</sup> However, if the trapdoor was employed for the entrance to the tomb, then we can only determine that

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the same visual set-up for both Desdemona's body - 'not yet quite dead' on the bed - and Hermione's living statue in *The Winter's Tale* is used. Consider, for instance, Othello's line 'let me the curtains draw' (*Othello*, 5.2.122), followed by Emilia's discovery of Desdemona's still living body, and Leontes's line 'Do not draw the curtain' (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.69) in response to Paulina's repeated threats to remove Hermione's body from sight: 'No longer shall you gaze on't, lest your fancy / May think anon it moves' (5.3.70-1).

<sup>35</sup> See Gurr, 'The Date and the Expected Venue of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 49 (1996), 15-25 (p. 24).

the bodies of Juliet and Tybalt would have been lying underneath it. Juliet must have been visible, at least, for her suicide and for the later discovery of her body by the watchmen. I am inclined to agree with Holderness that the physical properties of the Elizabethan stage worked in a more symbolic fashion, and that the curtained bed was used to represent the tomb *and* Juliet's bier. This would mean that, on entering the tomb, Romeo would have simply drawn back the curtains to reveal Juliet's body.

Due to the limited physical resources of the Elizabethan stage, it is probable that the tomb scene would have taken place within the same physical location as Juliet's bedchamber, and this threshold space supports the representation of Juliet's liminal body. As Thomson notes, the verbal metaphors that merge Juliet's bed and the funeral bier throughout Shakespeare's play may also have been more literally represented through spatial practicality, indicating 'a verbal – and visual – metamorphosis of bed into bier'.<sup>36</sup> The emblematic transformation of bed to bier would have visually implied that the bedchamber and the tomb are interchangeable or 'threshold' spaces, ultimately associated with Juliet's liminal body. Further verbal indicators conflate the two spaces. While Juliet's speech in the chamber takes the audience forward to the imagined space of the tomb, Romeo's speech before his death is full of images that initiate a return to Juliet's bedchamber: 'here will I remain / With worms that are thy chambermaids' (5.3.112-13).<sup>37</sup>

However, these verbal associations also appropriately collude with the symbolism of the liminal phase, which combines images of 'death, decomposition, catabolism', with 'symbols modelled on processes of gestation and parturition'.<sup>38</sup> For Romeo, the vault is not a dark, fearful place of death and contagion but 'a feasting presence full of light' (5.3.86), while in her bedchamber, Juliet imagines the 'loathsome smells', the 'terror of the place', and being 'stifled in the vault' (4.3.34-47). Romeo also describes the tomb as a 'womb of death' (5.3.45), while the Friar will later attempt to take Juliet's living body from a 'nest' of 'death' and 'contagion' (5.3.160-1). Juliet's eyes will close in the chamber, 'Like death when he shuts up the day of life' (4.1.102), while in the tomb, they will open, 'as from a pleasant sleep' (4.1.107). In these verbal and visual confluences of room, tomb, and womb, 'logically antithetical processes of death and growth' are 'represented by the same tokens': the

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<sup>36</sup> Thomson, p. 241.

<sup>37</sup> Thomson, p. 241.

<sup>38</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 96.



spaces that represent Juliet's body are therefore 'at once tombs and wombs'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, by extension, Juliet's 'rebirth' occurs in the paradoxical space of the womb/tomb, surrounded by conflating signifiers of death, decomposition, creation and birth.

Read as a corpse, Juliet's body can only connote absence. Read as *liminal*, Juliet's body connotes something *between* absence and presence, and such a condition of 'ambiguity and paradox' also connotes power: as "'betwixt and between" all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification', Juliet's body is thus associated with 'the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless'.<sup>40</sup> As Bronfen asserts, the person 'who enters into a marginal state, into a disordered realm beyond the confines or external boundaries of society, acquires a power inaccessible to those remaining within the realm of order'.<sup>41</sup> In this liminal condition, Juliet's body rejects all patriarchal forms of classification; she does not occupy the fixed position of the objectified female corpse, Romeo's object of grief. Instead, Shakespeare's play strategically undermines the traditional admiration and poetic beauty that the artistic imagination often attributes to the female form in death. When Romeo tells Juliet that death 'Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty' (5.3.93), the audience is fully aware of the tragic irony carried by these words, an irony of which Romeo himself is ignorant. Juliet is far more beautiful than the rigid, passive, unattainable Petrarchan mistress that Romeo imagines, and Shakespeare permits his audience to share in the knowledge of his protagonist's gross misapprehension. However, Juliet's body rejects the conventional position of the male mourner's aesthetic object, not simply because any attempts to idealise her body and beauty in death are undercut by the audience's knowledge, but also because her liminal body 'cannot be defined in static terms'.<sup>42</sup>

This rejection instigated by the liminal body is accentuated further by the play's overturning of patriarchal notions of male and female suicide.<sup>43</sup> Shakespeare's play presents a feminised male protagonist whose tears are 'womanish' (3.3.113), whose desire for Juliet makes him 'effeminate' (3.1.100), who indeed lives for love, not for himself. His submission to her is further reflected in his decision to die within the walls of the Capulet tomb, 'in her kindred's vault' (5.1.20), laying his body with

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<sup>39</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> Bronfen, p. 201.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>43</sup> For an argument that explores how Shakespeare's play reverses typical gender roles through the employment of falconry imagery, see Carolyn E. Brown, 'Juliet's Taming of Romeo', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), 333-55.

the remains of her ancestors and thus rejecting the traditions of his family history and of his father's patriarchal rule.<sup>44</sup> The nature of Romeo's suicide allows for the death of the heroine to take centre-stage in the spatial construction and symbolic set-up of this final scene. It is Romeo, not Juliet, who is 'feminised' by death, for he must follow Juliet, and while patriarchal depictions of female suicide are not entirely removed (for Juliet must also follow Romeo), Juliet's liminal body reverses the expected gender-play which dictates that 'the corpse is feminine, the survivor masculine'.<sup>45</sup> It is Juliet who will assume the traditionally masculine role of survivor, who will stand erect over Romeo's rigid corpse.<sup>46</sup> Unlike, for example, Cordelia, whose corpse is carried onto the stage in her father's arms as 'a prop for Lear's anguish', Juliet will deliver her final speech with Romeo's lifeless body as her emblem of grief, as the objectified material for *her* final stage performance.<sup>47</sup>

To open further the interpretive possibilities of the liminal body, any repression of female sexuality that has previously been associated with Juliet's rigidity is eradicated by the erotic nature of her act of suicide with the penetrating dagger. Although it is commonplace for critical editors of the Folio and the Quarto versions to assume that the dagger with which Juliet takes her life belongs to Romeo, Katherine Duncan-Jones asserts that the dagger could have belonged to Juliet. She points out that in the three versions of Shakespeare's play-text, there is no suggestion, 'as Steeven's stage direction "*snatching Romeo's dagger*" proposes', that 'Juliet takes her "happy" weapon from her dead husband'.<sup>48</sup> However, while I agree that the nature of Juliet's suicide merits her with far more control over her life and death than we may acknowledge, I would argue that Juliet's autonomy in death is not directly related to the ownership of the dagger. Rather, if it *is* Romeo's weapon that Juliet uses, then

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<sup>44</sup> An observation also made by Coppélia Kahn: 'Romeo's death in the tomb of the Capulets rather than in that of his own fathers reverses the traditional passage of the female over to the male house in marriage and betokens his refusal to follow the code of his fathers'. See 'Coming of Age in Verona', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Gayle Greene, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1983), pp. 171-93 (p. 190).

<sup>45</sup> Bronfen, p. 65.

<sup>46</sup> It is uncertain where the lovers would have lain in death. The alternative suggestion of the trapdoor would imply that, for the delivery of Juliet's final speech, her body would have been brought back onto the stage in Romeo's arms. Despite the obvious stage manoeuvres that make this notion problematic, in visual terms, this also renders Juliet's body as merely Romeo's object. Lifted out in his arms, as his possession, her only purpose for re-entering the space of the stage would have been to illustrate his grief. By favouring the opinion that Juliet's body would have remained on the bed/bier, my own reading of the tomb scene accentuates the role-reversal of the lovers. See Gurr, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Duncan-Jones, p. 314.

the nature of her suicide emblematically illustrates her control over the phallus and becomes a visual signifier of erotic gratification that Juliet alone commands.

The sexual overtones of Shakespeare's tomb scene symbolically contribute to a representation of female erotic power that further denotes Romeo's symbolic emasculation. Joan Ozark Holmer emphasises the differences in maturation between the lovers when she writes that Juliet's drinking of the Friar's medicine 'in order to live and love' is contrasted with Romeo's 'tragic drinking of the poison in order to die and lie with her'.<sup>49</sup> She continues: 'Romeo's deadly use of poison, unlike Juliet's use of a medicinal potion, recalls through dramatic imagery the Friar's verbal imagery for the weak flower's "medicine" and "poison" analogous to men's "grace" and "rude will"'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, it is the 'grace' of Juliet's decision to 'live and love' that comes to the fore in her symbolic rebirth in the tomb. On hearing the news of Juliet's 'death', Romeo makes his pledge: 'Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight' (5.1.36). The line expresses his intention to die by her side, as well as hinting at sexual gratification through the dual meaning of the word 'lie'. Romeo's words anticipate the play's climactic overlapping of sexual union and death in the final scene. However, his desire to 'die and lie' with Juliet is thwarted: his intended union with her, although sealed 'with a righteous kiss' (5.3.118) is ultimately denied and he dies in vain. As a result, his act of suicide signifies a loss of control rather than a possession of it, and his everlasting pledge to 'engrossing death' remains as an empty, unconsummated bargain (5.3.119). Juliet, however, 'dies' by Romeo's dagger: only Juliet is capable of truly 'uniting' the lovers in death.

### ***Take Her From Her Borrowed Grave***

When Juliet breaks her rigidity in the tomb, her actions also begin to problematise notions of liminality. As Turner writes, the end of the liminal phase implies 'a stable state once more', and the ritual subject is therefore 'expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards'.<sup>51</sup> Bronfen extends this point by arguing that 'regeneration solicited by death also requires the termination of the phase of liminality, the redrawing of boundaries and a recreation of

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<sup>49</sup> Joan Ozark Holmer, 'The Poetics of Paradox: Shakespeare's Versus Zeffirelli's Cultures of Violence', *Shakespeare Survey*, 49 (1996), 163-79 (p. 178).

<sup>50</sup> Holmer, p. 178.

<sup>51</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 94.

unambiguous concepts'.<sup>52</sup> On her waking, Juliet is comforted by the Friar, who informs her of Romeo's death and attempts to take her from the tomb and 'dispose of (her) / Among a sisterhood of holy nuns' (5.3.165-6). In a sense, it is the Friar who fulfils the role of authority during the liminal period of Juliet's 'unnatural sleep' (5.3.161), having first administered the potion, and then by attempting to unite the lovers. Thus it is he who bears 'the main burden of responsibility' which is typically 'borne by the elders' in the liminal phase.<sup>53</sup> It is a burden that he feels most heavily when his intents tragically fail, and his part confession in the closing moments of the play attests to his assumed role of responsibility in Juliet's transition. Significantly, rather than displaying signs of 'passivity', or 'malleability', or becoming 'once more subject to custom and law', Juliet disobeys the Friar's instruction to leave the tomb and, on hearing the approach of the watchmen, acts quickly to join her husband in death.<sup>54</sup> But even death is not final here. Rather, by 'dying' with Romeo's dagger, Juliet's death escapes the 'ultimate fixed point' that Turner suggests and instead, as Berry suggests, evokes an image of 'a female body whose sexuality is seemingly active even after death'.<sup>55</sup> Such a claim, in turn, powerfully recalls the images of Juliet's metaphor, where she describes her bounty as 'boundless as the sea' and her love 'as deep', for 'both are infinite' (2.1.184-6).

As a final observation, it is interesting that Juliet acts out her control over the phallus and the consummation of the lovers 'between' her symbolic 'death' and her actual death. Such an enclosure coincides with the notion of a woman's sexuality as 'liminal', the associations between death and sexuality and 'the uncanny liminality of erotic desire: its mysterious Janus-aspect as a portal of both life and death'.<sup>56</sup> And yet multiple readings are possible here, for if Juliet has, in effect, already 'died', do her words and actions in the tomb immortalise the union and consummation of the lovers? What would the audience make of Juliet's symbolic rebirth in the tomb? Would it have affected interpretations of her suicide? As Bronfen observes, the notion that 'rebirth marks the end of the death process' denies 'the irreversible and terminable

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<sup>52</sup> Bronfen, p. 198.

<sup>53</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 101.

<sup>54</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Berry, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Berry, p. 21.

nature of death'.<sup>57</sup> Another paradox from Kristeva ties in appropriately here, and that is her description of the 'sleeping death' of the lovers:

Even though the death of the Verona lovers is beyond remedy, the spectator has the feeling that it is only sleep. In the denial that makes us dream of the two corpses as being mere sleepers, it is perhaps our thirst for love – magical challenge to death – that speaks out. The risky game with the sleeping drug in the very events of the play already suggests such a confusion.<sup>58</sup>

There are further implications of a 'sleeping death' throughout the play: Juliet's words to Lady Capulet after Tybalt's death present an image of Romeo, 'upon receipt' of a poison, as soon to 'sleep in quiet' (3.5.102-3). The suggestion of sleep in Romeo's death overlaps with the implication of death in Juliet's 'sleep', and in so doing, the play suggests a liminal phase that knows no 'fixed point'. To return to *The Winter's Tale*, such a paradox is neatly summarised by Paulina's description of Hermione to Leontes: 'the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death' (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.22-3).

At the close of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Capulet and Montague vow to raise statues of the lovers in 'pure gold' (5.3.309). Such an act may well serve to reassert the permanence and stability of patriarchy and the rule of the fathers. As Jonathan Goldberg argues, the men who speak at the end of the play are 'bent upon securing the social through the dead couple', and thus the 'marriage of their corpses in the eternal monuments of "pure gold" attempts to perform what marriage normally aims at in comedy: to provide the bedrock of the social order'.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, it seems that Juliet could not be permitted to live after her liminal experience. But if Juliet's actions in the tomb problematise notions of liminality, if sexual gratification in death is 'endless', or if the audience (who will witness Romeo and Juliet rise again at the end of the performance to take their bow) partake in the dream of the sleeping lovers, then the condition of Juliet's living corpse does, at least, define the play's own 'fixed point' as questionable.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bronfen, p. 198.

<sup>58</sup> Kristeva, p. 314.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, 'Romeo and Juliet's Open Rs', in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1994), pp. 218-35 (p. 219).

<sup>60</sup> Mariko Ichikawa's exploration of the removal of 'dead bodies' in Shakespearean theatre instead argues that they 'had to be carried out in such a way as not to disrupt the reality of the play world'; in the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, supposing that the tomb was represented by the discovery space, the

The fact that the liminal state of Juliet's body is often undervalued has led to a disruption of the meanings that convey her as one of Shakespeare's most erotically powerful heroines. It is ultimately Juliet's liminal body that conflates the spaces of the chamber and the tomb and allows us to trace the most crucial phase of her sexual autonomy, as we move from her contemplation of the dagger in the chamber to the erotic gratification of her suicide in the tomb. The liminal body marks the final passage of Shakespeare's tragedy – both for the audience, and for the other characters on stage. As scenes and bodies move with haste throughout the errors and confusions of the play's final action, Juliet's body remains as a constant 'presence': she alone possesses the agency to intervene in the play's relentless powers of time and fate and the success or failure of the play's ending resides in the resolution of her body's liminality. Her suicide with the dagger simultaneously unites the lovers in death and represents the play's final conflation of sexual ecstasy and dying, an erotic act of which the transition of her liminal body is already a part. Erasing her body from the play's remaining action threatens to fragment the agency of her death scene from her performance on stage, a power that is thematically tied to the words and images of the bedchamber and is consistent with her character's expressions of desire, carnal knowledge and sexual maturity.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Filming a Corpse***

The representation of Juliet's liminal body on screen often reflects the repressions that have frequently surfaced within literary criticism, not only fragmenting the autonomy of her suicide in the tomb, but also attempting to suppress the erotic power of her body altogether. Renato Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet* (1954), despite the beauty and energy of its authentic Italian settings, creates an oppressive, stifling atmosphere, illustrated in the enclosed spaces and rigid positions that mark the representation of Juliet's body.<sup>62</sup> Verona itself is a confined space: its city gates are guarded; its narrow streets are empty with a deathly silence; and its buildings loom

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bodies of Romeo, Juliet, and Paris 'could have been put into it and concealed by the stage hangings, perhaps at the end of the play immediately before the general exit'. Only when 'the action of the play is completed', could onstage corpses be seen to 'reanimate themselves as actors belonging to the real world'. See Ichikawa, 'What to do with a Corpse? Physical Reality and the Fictional World in the Shakespearean Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 29 (2004), 201-15 (pp. 201, 205 and 213).

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of Juliet's verbal expressions of carnal desire, see Mary Bly, 'Bawdy Puns and Lustful Virgins: the Legacy of Juliet's Desire in Comedies of the Early 1600s', *Shakespeare Survey*, 49 (1996), 97-109.

<sup>62</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*. Dir. Renato Castellani. UK/Italy. 1954.

high above the characters in distorting and imposing compositions. After the film's violent portrayal of the first brawl between the Montague and Capulet men, Sampson and Gregory try to lose their pursuers in the dark alleys and long, arched tunnels of the city, in what is constructed as a desperate attempt to escape after committing a brutal murder. Tellingly, their opening dialogue does not exclude Sampson's misogynistic remarks about the Montague women, and instead lays particular emphasis on the sexual explicitness of his assertion that 'women being the weaker vessels are ever thrust to the wall' (1.1.13-14). Aldo Zollo's Mercutio, despite many of his misogynistic remarks being cut, makes a crude physical gesture toward the genitals when he speaks before the other Montague men about Rosaline's 'quiv'ring thigh' and 'the demesnes that there adjacent lie' (2.1.21-2).

The film's verbalised explicitness towards the sexualised female body is counter-balanced by Susan Shentall's virginal Juliet, whose stainless chastity seems to follow her to her deathbed. With her arched neck, lowered eyes and a face 'like a mask of porcelain', she is already the passive, unattainable Petrarchan mistress of Romeo's imagination.<sup>63</sup> Even her voice, with its low, almost inaudible tone and deliberate slowness of speech, appears to lack agency. In demure dresses of emblematic white for her death scene and for her first meeting with Romeo, her body is also a picture of feminine stillness. The film's visual detail often relies on the artistic inspiration of Italian Renaissance paintings, and Shentall had been cast because, in costume and make-up, she was 'the living embodiment of a fifteenth-century portrait'.<sup>64</sup> Shentall is often framed by Castellani's camera in statuesque positions; thus the visual representation of her body has already become a strategy for containment, not in the form of a rigid corpse, but as a fixed male construction of virginal beauty. In these portrait-like images, she is both desired and absent of desire herself.

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<sup>63</sup> James N. Loehlin, *Romeo and Juliet* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: Aldine Press, 1971), p. 98. Manvell comments that Juliet's ball dress came from Botticelli's 'Wedding of Nostagio degli Onesti', while a portrait shot of her at the ball was inspired by Veneziano's 'Portrait of a Young Lady'. In his notes, he also makes a reference to Meredith Lillich's essay for further examples of the film's artistic direction and inspirational paintings. See Manvell, p. 100, and Meredith Lillich, 'Shakespeare on the Screen: a Survey of How His Plays Have Been Made Into Movies', *Films in Review*, 16 (1956), 247-60.



4.1. Enclosing the virginal body: Susan Shentall in Renato Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet* (1954)

The spatial representations for Castellani's Juliet are thematically tied to a preservation of her chastity and an ultimate denial of her sexual maturity. Her expressions of desire to consummate her marriage are cut (3.2.1-31); she blushes and reprimands the nurse with lowered eyes after her bawdy remark that Juliet will 'fall backward when thou comest to age' (1.3.39); and the 'consummation' scene (3.5), like the lovers' meeting at Juliet's balcony, seems unusually cold: there is little physical contact between them. Significantly, the visual motif most frequently associated with Juliet's body is the window frame, a liminal space that here signals both physical constraint and repressed female desire.<sup>65</sup> After her mother asks, 'can you like of Paris' love?' (1.3.77), Juliet gazes down on Paris from a high window as he walks outside in the courtyard with Capulet. The movement initiates one of the only instances of active female looking in this film, and although Juliet's gaze allows her to determine for herself whether 'looking liking move', her appreciation of Paris's appearance extends to little more than a glance (1.3.78). Juliet is not, for instance, permitted to examine 'every several lineament' of Paris's features (1.3.64).

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<sup>65</sup> For a more detailed exploration of the interpretive possibilities of the woman at the window, see Julianne Pidduck's essay 'Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Austen Adaptations', *Screen*, 39 (1998), 381-400.



Rather than employing the liminal space of the window as a means for exploring Juliet's sexual agency, Castellani repeatedly represses Juliet's desiring gaze and uses the window as a visual mechanism for rigidly framing her body. In the balcony scene, her body remains motionless, framed between two pillars until she exits to speak with the nurse, while Romeo is permitted to command the space of the courtyard and move freely about the grand exteriors of the Capulet mansion.<sup>66</sup> In a later scene, as Juliet waits for the nurse's return with news of Romeo, she sits before a window impatiently mending her tapestry – only when the nurse arrives, and Juliet hurries across the hall to greet her, does she seem to possess any agency in this film. When Tybalt's corpse is carried into the courtyard, Juliet looks down on the morbid scene from behind the lattice grid of a hallway window. Another lattice grid over a window separates her from Romeo during their brief wedding ceremony and, as he departs, she remains framed by the small opening, stretching out her hand through the bars as if trying to reach him. With more overt suggestions of repression, Juliet's body is framed by a lattice window in her father's study while he reprimands her for refusing to marry Paris. Moments later, she sits passively before another window in the hall as the nurse attempts to persuade her that she will be 'happy in this second match' (3.5.233).

While arches, doorways and other framing devices are recurrent images in Castellani's film, the liminal space of the window is typically reserved for Juliet, signalling her distance from the film's action, her spatial confinement and, by extension, the repression of her desire. Ironically, here, a liminal space only signals her body's subjugation. Framed within a frame, Castellani's Juliet is still, muted; apart from the slow tilts of her neck as she turns her face away from others when speaking, her body is often motionless. With her face turned away and her eyes lowered, Shentall's Juliet often fails to suggest an assertive or desiring gaze. The denial of her look is even apparent in her first meeting with Romeo, thus removing the assertiveness of Shakespeare's Juliet who not only verbally demonstrates her control in this scene by taking over their shared sonnet, but who also refutes Romeo's chosen image for her as a still, unapproachable statue (1.4.213-26).

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<sup>66</sup> Castellani's balcony scene also lacks an imaginative awareness of the vertical distance between Romeo and Juliet that would have been a visual element of the performances on Shakespeare's stage. Romeo addresses Juliet from the midpoint of a staircase that stands to the left of her balcony, almost placing them on an equal level in several shots. Despite their proximity, there is no physical contact between the lovers, making their private exchange of vows seem rather cold and overtly formal.

Laurence Harvey's first appearance as Romeo begins a set of visual juxtapositions that associate Romeo's body with exteriors and Juliet's body with interior locations. When we first see Shentall's Juliet, she is dressed in a white undergarment, surrounded by serving ladies who bathe and dry her feet. Juliet smiles quietly as her servants and the nurse sing cheerful songs and fuss around her, before her mother enters to speak to her about Paris's desire for her hand in marriage. This scene comes directly after our first meeting with Romeo, who sits alone beside a stream beyond the city walls, in a vibrantly lush pastoral setting. While these parallel scenes may draw attention to 'Romeo's solitude by contrasting his situation with Juliet's', they also emphasise Juliet's spatial repression within the walls of the Capulet household.<sup>67</sup> We later see Romeo enter the ball scene through a long dark passage, while the camera follows over his shoulder; he opens a door in the darkness, flooding light into the passage and allowing the viewer to glimpse the festivities inside the Capulet ballroom, then enters and closes the door on the camera. This deep focus shot creates a perception of distance between the household interiors and the outside world. There is something rather sinister about the space of the Capulet ball: dimly lit corners, oppressive grated windows, and flickering torches seem to detract from the atmosphere of merriment; Capulet's outbursts of laughter and his exchanges with his guests seem forced; bodies move rigidly in the dance, with pillars obstructing gazes and masks that turn faces into cold, stony imitations.

Although Juliet's white ball-gown makes her stand out from the darker costumes in the crowd, her rigid movements and the denial of her gaze reduce her to a body that connotes *absence*. As the film proceeds towards her drinking of the potion, Juliet is further marked by visual signifiers that undermine her body's presence. As if mirroring the earlier scene in her dressing chamber, another interpolated scene shows Juliet's servants and the nurse flocking round a dummy that wears Juliet's wedding dress, while she herself sits motionless. Admiring its beauty, they fuss and primp and straighten its petticoats. A slow camera pan across the room reveals a sombre Juliet, staring vacantly at the commotion as Paris, kneeling at her feet, attempts to woo her. As in the previous scene, Juliet's mother enters, but this time she joins the other women in their admiration of the wedding dress on Juliet's simulated body and seems almost unaware of her daughter sitting in the room. The visual associations between

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<sup>67</sup> Patricia Tatspaugh, 'The Tragedies of Love on Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 135-59 (p. 139).

these two scenes mark Juliet's metamorphosis from a presence into an absence, as the hollow, empty cage of an imitation now threatens to replace her own body.

As Juliet goes to the Friar to 'make confession' (3.5.245), she approaches the church like a shadow, shrouded in a long, black, hooded cloak. As she begins to verbalise her feelings of desperation over marrying Paris, the Friar turns his back on her for a substantial amount of her dialogue; when he commands her to 'hold' her speech, he finally turns toward her and motions her to remain still. After she departs with the potion, the film cuts to Friar John in Mantua who, failing to deliver Romeo's letter, is trapped in a plague-infested room with a soon-to-be corpse. The weak, diseased, dying body of the plague-sufferer, enclosed in a room below the ground, is the visual preparation for Juliet's potion soliloquy. In the bedchamber, the Nurse and Lady Capulet both look towards the hollow body of the dummy wearing the wedding dress; acknowledging its presence with their glances as they make their exit, they turn their backs on Juliet, who sits behind them on the bed.

Already, Juliet is a body marked by absence; kept at a distance from the spectator's gaze, she speaks the majority of her soliloquy with her back to the camera, whilst the body of the dummy remains in the immediate corner of the frame. The dummy first becomes a visual signifier of Juliet's distress – the ominous outline of Tybalt's ghost; then it becomes a body double for herself, as she drinks the potion and staggers across the room hastily to remove its garments. We do not see her collapse onto the bed. In the following scene, the nurse enters Juliet's bedroom and the camera first tracks down to reveal the hollow cage of the dummy lying on the floor; in its second movement, the camera pans across to show Juliet lying on the bed, wearing the wedding dress. We are only permitted to see her face for a moment before the camera tracks down again and lingers on an image of her bare feet, already 'stiff' and 'cold'. The juxtaposition of these images signals the removal of Juliet's subjectivity and her transformation into a rigid, hollow body, and from this point onwards in the film, her *assumed corpse* literally becomes a corpse under the camera's gaze.

In keeping with the visual repressions used for Juliet's body throughout the film, Castellani represents Juliet's 'living corpse' not as liminal, but as an actual corpse, a corpse from which the camera – and therefore the spectator – must frequently turn away. The film contains two brief sequences for Juliet's funeral. The first shows her body 'uncovered on the bier' (4.1.111), being carried through the churchyard with a congregation of mourners following. But the body is evidently

troubling, as the camera remains at a deliberate distance and films the action in long shot. From this position, Juliet's dull, pale dress begins to merge with her pallid flesh, and with her hands clasped together as if in prayer, her body resembles both a corpse and a statue. In the next sequence, the body has vanished from our sight: it has been replaced by a stony, closed tomb, and as Capulet speaks his line, 'Death lies on her like an untimely frost' (4.4.61), the camera denies us the opportunity to look on Juliet's body for ourselves.

When Romeo hastens towards the tomb to 'lie' with Juliet, he literally unearths a corpse. His entrance of the church is deliberately slow and painful, an ironic signifier of the visual repressions that Castellani's film lays down on this apparently threatening body. After prising a stone lid from the vault, Romeo descends into an underground tomb, and the non-diegetic music reaches its horrific climax when he discovers Juliet's 'corpse': but he is unable to bear the sight. As the camera remains fixed on Romeo, Castellani also prevents *us* from looking on Juliet's body, and our gaze is instead directed toward Romeo's reaction of horror; we see him turn away dramatically and sink to his knees, shielding his face from the terrible sight. As



4.2. 'This object kills me': Laurence Harvey's Romeo cowers from Juliet's 'corpse' (1954)

he slowly approaches Juliet and begins to speak, her body is again kept at a distance in long shot, and Romeo begins to back away, pressing himself against a wall where long shadows threaten to consume him.

This is not a tragedy but a horror film at this point, where Juliet's body is filmed in the same fashion as Tybalt's corpse, coded as too horrific to be approached by the camera. When the camera does begin to move closer for Romeo's farewell kiss, Juliet's eyes and part of her face remain concealed in shadow, further absenting her subjectivity and ominously blacking out the capacity for her gaze. Areas of light and dark cut into her objectified body that appears as stone, not 'yet so fair' but cold and statuesque, the net pattern and dim colour of her dress merging the outline of her body with the stone bier beneath it.

From this point onwards, Juliet's body loses all significance in the tomb. Harvey's Romeo does not commit suicide with poison; instead, Castellani cuts Romeo's dialogue with the apothecary. In the tomb scene, Romeo unsheathes his dagger and, speaking his line 'Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide' (5.3.120), he turns its point towards his chest and stabs himself. By altering Romeo's suicide weapon, Castellani's film disrupts the symbolic play of Shakespeare's tomb scene by attributing the control over the phallus to Romeo's death and erasing its sexual meaning from Juliet's. Due to the absence of the poison, Juliet's final speech is dramatically cut. Silently she caresses Romeo's face, kisses him, and stabs herself. Her final line is all that remains: 'This is thy sheath: there rust, and let me die' (5.3.179); there is no mention of the 'happy dagger' (5.3.178), which somehow further robs this Juliet of her autonomy in death. Rather, her act of suicide has been transformed from a visual representation of her erotic power or 'endless' pleasure in dying to an insignificant act, one that is given neither dramatic emphasis nor adequate screen-time. Once Juliet has finished speaking, the camera immediately dissolves the shot of her face into the film's closing scene where the Prince is delivering his final speech; as a result, Juliet's death is quickly written over, forgotten, erased. In this adaptation, her final moments in the tomb and the transitional phase of her liminal body are of no importance: if Shentall's Juliet does act with agency in the tomb, Castellani's camera ignores it.

## *A Symbolic Rebirth*

Castellani's film represses the assertiveness of Shakespeare's desiring heroine. Juliet's liminal body is treated as a corpse, and her rigidity is employed as a strategy to repress, contain, and subsequently control the feminine. Alternatively, the emphasis that Shakespeare's play-text places on the heroine's sexual *rites de passage* is something that is explored, rather than repressed, in the spatial and bodily signifiers of Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)<sup>68</sup>. Overturning the strategies of Castellani's film, Zeffirelli constructs spaces that emphasise Juliet's sexual autonomy, associating images of ripeness, growth and sexual awakening with Olivia Hussey's Juliet. While the 'Gallop apace' speech has also been cut from Zeffirelli's film-text, its verbalisation of Juliet's sexual longing is replaced visually by the many female coded spaces that mark her self-development and the awakening of carnal desire. Zeffirelli's construction of the Capulet ball scene, with its rich, colourful and lavish visual excess, is an early example of how the film illustrates Juliet's sexual awakening and her self-progression from adolescence to womanhood. The *mise-en-scène* – with its excessive displays of fruit and wine, warmly lit archways, rich fabrics, and Juliet's red dress as the central focus – connotes a feminine softness and the ripeness of impending sexuality. Their presence anticipates the sexual imagery that will dominate in Zeffirelli's tomb scene.

Unlike Castellani, Zeffirelli privileges Juliet's first experiences of desire rather than Romeo's. In the dance sequence, alternating camera shots of the lovers are carefully balanced to connote reciprocal feelings and a sense of harmony in their first meeting. However, elsewhere in this scene, the camera favours Juliet. As Romeo begins the line, 'My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand' (1.4.215), the camera cuts to an intense close-up shot of her face; her eyes close slowly, and the 'ineffable, almost drugged quality of her gaze' connotes awakened desire and 'the surprise of adolescent sexual discovery'.<sup>69</sup> The close-up also marks the attachment of the viewer's gaze and Juliet's internal thoughts: it is not Romeo who is looking at Juliet and registering her desiring look at this point, but the spectator.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Italy/UK. 1968.

<sup>69</sup> Celia Daileader, 'Nude Shakespeare in Film and Nineties Popular Feminism', in *Shakespeare and Sexuality*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 183-200 (p. 188).

<sup>70</sup> The intensity of this close-up, with Hussey's wide eyes staring out to camera and then closing as she succumbs to her feelings of desire, recalls the extreme close-up shot of Skobesteva's Desdemona in the

Ultimately, we are not encouraged to share in Romeo's experience of this first meeting as intimately as we are with Juliet's, as the shots that follow indicate a gaze that initiates from *her* perspective – a gaze that Romeo reciprocates – as she turns to face him behind the curtain. The alignments of the gaze seem to suggest a balance between gender roles in terms of object and bearer of the look; as Peter S. Donaldson observes, Zeffirelli's camera addresses us as 'watchers of male as well as female beauty' in order to 'underscore Shakespeare's treatment of Juliet as an active, desiring subject'.<sup>71</sup> However, I would also suggest that, in this particular sequence, the perspective of Zeffirelli's camera transgresses the conventions of the traditional cinematic male gaze, visually coding Juliet as bearer of the look and providing a unique space for a 'feminine' gaze.<sup>72</sup> While the film's opportunities for a female gaze may not be frequent enough to indicate a reversal of cinema's conventional patriarchal structures of seeing (as Donaldson suggests), a denial of these unique spaces seems equally inadequate in light of Zeffirelli's treatment of Juliet as the film's active subject, and the audience's identification with her desiring look.<sup>73</sup>

Zeffirelli's constructions of the gaze are by no means the extent of the film's visual indications of Juliet's agency. Images of her body, and body parts, are used repeatedly to connote strength, growth and sexual maturity, indicating a *process* that echoes Turner's explorations of the liminal phase. Close-ups of hands are first used to symbolise the meeting of the lovers, as in Shakespeare's play-text, but elsewhere in the film, the image of the hand most frequently belongs to Hussey's Juliet: she moves her hand to her lips in remembrance of Romeo's kiss; she once again initiates the joining of hands in the balcony scene to signal her return of 'love's faithful vow' (2.1.

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prelude to Yutkevich's *Othello*. In Yutkevich's engagement with Desdemona's desiring look, the spectator is then permitted to share the visual images of her 'fantasy' about Othello.

<sup>71</sup> Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 165.

<sup>72</sup> For further commentary on the cinematic male gaze, see Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6-18.

<sup>73</sup> Donaldson writes that 'it is not enough to say that Zeffirelli offers a feminine gaze for our identification that is analogous to the customary male look at the female as object of sexual desire'. He argues that the gaze, in these particular moments, 'is and is not Juliet's'; the viewer's gaze is not entirely in line with Juliet's as 'what we see, though anchored in and representative of her experience of Romeo, is also partly independent of her'. Donaldson, p. 169.



#### 4.3. 'What hands do': Symbolising Juliet's 'rebirth' in Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)

178); and the film's final and most significant hand gesture, filmed in tight close-up, is reserved for her waking in the tomb. Here the camera first shows her hand begin to move, then clench tightly into a fist, before climbing along her body to touch her veil and finally her cheek. The movement signals not only her remembrance of herself; 'I do remember well where I should be, / And there I am' (5.3.158-9), but also symbolically suggests a 'rebirth' of new-found strength since distancing herself from the protection of others and taking responsibility for her own course of action.

Hussey's hand gestures not only suggest Juliet's growth as a character; they also suggest Juliet's ability to *internalise* emotion, and thus control it. In contrast to this suggestion of control, Romeo's emotions are frequently signalled to the viewer not through the immediate use of the body, but with external objects that symbolise feeling. First shown carrying a flower to indicate his romantic and melancholy mood, and later taking up the blood-stained handkerchief to express his anger over Mercutio's death and his own 'reputation stained' (3.1.97), Leonard Whiting's Romeo does not express himself in the same 'internalised' fashion as Hussey's Juliet. Whether it is a mask to hide behind, or a phallic sword with which to assert his masculinity and thus remove his 'effeminate' weakness, Romeo's display of emotion remains externally displayed through objects rather than the body. As a result of this, the 'internal' signifiers of Juliet's progression into womanhood are pitched against the 'external' signifiers of Romeo's perpetual state of adolescence. Contrasting again



with Ribner's claim about Shakespeare's focus on Romeo, Zeffirelli's interpretation of the play-text favours Juliet as the major character who grows and develops through her experiences.<sup>74</sup>

Such visual symbolism can be seen as an extension of the language of Shakespeare's play-text. Juliet's character often uses language boldly and unconventionally, with rhythms and phrases that can disrupt the rather dense Petrarchan rhetoric of the play. Her interruption and rejection of Romeo's over-romanticised vow of love in the balcony scene, 'swear not by the moon' (2.1.158), and the directness of her line 'Dost thou love me?' (2.1.139), not only break the flow of speech but demand a truth that rejects any form of romantic idealism. Romeo's Petrarchan expressions of love are rigid, constrained and stagnant. Just as Othello speaks his line 'If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy' (*Othello*, 2.1.193-4) before the consummation of his marriage (although this line is spoken *after* the consummation in Welles's film), Romeo's praise of Juliet's beauty is relentlessly tied to her chastity. Both men reveal an idealised perception of love that not only avoids an acknowledgement of female desire but that also simultaneously rejects a realistic view of love's growth. This is something that both women are capable of acknowledging: Desdemona's response to Othello, 'The heavens forbid / But that our loves and comforts should increase, / Even as our days do grow' (*Othello*, 2.1.198-200), is a far more realistic assessment of the future course of their relationship; similarly, Juliet's responses to Romeo in the balcony scene suggest a rejection of romantic idealism. Her healthy desire to consummate her marriage is not unlike Desdemona's: 'O, I have bought the mansion of a love, / But not possessed it, and though I am sold, / Not yet enjoyed' (3.2.26-8). Both Desdemona and Juliet experience love as something more than imagined perfection, and neither character denies the importance of that love's essential growth. Such verbal expressions, like their bodies that refuse to 'play dead', refute the constraints imposed upon them by male discourse and male bodies.

In Zeffirelli's film, it is not only Juliet's gestures but also the *movement* of the body that further indicates a denial of patriarchal constraint. In the ball scene, rather than simply refuting the ideals of Petrarchan imagery, Juliet's body symbolically breaks the cycle of the feud itself. The use of the circle in both the dance sequence

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<sup>74</sup> Ribner, p. 276.

and the later duel between Tybalt and Romeo causes these two scenes to conflate and overlap, producing another liminal space of symbolic purpose. Jack J Jorgens discusses the appearance of the circle in these sequences as linking scenes of love and hate, suggesting that the dance itself is ‘choreographed as a symbolic feud’.<sup>75</sup> The circle in the dance is undoubtedly overpowering for the lovers: its movement seems to possess a stronger force; bodies are pulled to and fro in a fast-moving blur of colour, faces and chaotic juxtapositions. As the two circles move against each other, Romeo and Juliet are pulled in opposite directions with more and more vigour. However before this visual chaos is permitted to reach its climax, Juliet breaks the circle and frees herself from the dance. The impending threat of the moment passes; both the camera movement and the music settle to the calm of the boy singer’s melancholy song.

Symbolically, Juliet is able to remove herself from the controlling force of the feud, where Romeo is not. The full meaning of the circle is completed in the duel scene. It is here that Romeo is pulled into the circle and subsequently into its violent ends. At first he attempts to distance himself from the feud and Tybalt’s advances, but after Mercutio’s murder, he finds himself at its centre with rapier in hand. Zeffirelli carefully establishes the phallogocentric nature of the violence within the circle, thus deliberately calling into question the moral rectitude of Verona’s patriarchal order.<sup>76</sup> As Donaldson observes, Zeffirelli’s most phallic-centred shot of Romeo occurs in this scene when he is finally drawn into the feud and takes swords to fight with Tybalt.<sup>77</sup> Therefore the image of the circle not only connects scenes of love and hate, but also spaces visually coded as male and female – a feminine space primarily associated with Juliet’s impending sexuality, and a masculine space that essentially characterises the phallic nature of the feud. Thus, the circle indicates both Juliet’s ability to break free from the restrictions of the social order, and in direct contrast, Romeo’s tragic potential to conform to them.

During the liminal phase of Juliet’s body, Zeffirelli ensures that Hussey’s Juliet remains as a constant presence in the film, rather than an absence. Before drinking the potion, Juliet draws the transparent veil curtains around her bed, thus

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<sup>75</sup> Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977), p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> William Van Watson, ‘Shakespeare, Zeffirelli, and the Homosexual Gaze’ in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 235-62 (p. 248).

<sup>77</sup> A point also discussed by Donaldson: ‘with rapier and phallus tightly framed in one shot’. See Donaldson, p. 156.

echoing the dual exposure *and* concealment of her body. After her collapse at the close of this scene, we are still permitted to look on her several times before Romeo approaches her body in the Capulet vault. There is an extended camera shot of her unconscious body after the family discover her, lying on the bed in her nightdress, with her arm extended outwards and her hand curled towards her face. In a juxtaposition of shot and dialogue that entirely reverses Castellani's, we now hear Capulet's line: 'Death lies on her like an untimely frost'.



4.4. A 'living corpse': Hussey's Juliet on the bier in Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)

Significantly, *this* Juliet's 'living corpse' never resembles a corpse. Zeffirelli also constructs a brief funeral scene that allows the spectator to gaze on Juliet's body as she is carried out for the funeral procession and taken into the tomb. The scene, although short, contains *nine* additional shots of Juliet – several are close-ups of her face and upper body, as the mourners scatter red roses over her and cover her with a thin white shroud that recalls the bed-curtains. This gauzy fabric also becomes a symbolic association for Juliet's liminal body, as Romeo will remove her veil in the tomb just prior to her waking, completing the metaphoric associations of a chrysalis or *pupa* case that shrouds her changing body.

The tomb scene holds Juliet's liminal body as its central focus, despite Romeo's mobility and her rigidity. Zeffirelli constructs the Capulet vault as an inherently feminine domain, focusing on images that signify the reproductive female:

the first shot of Romeo and Balthasar arriving outside the tomb is dominated by the dark arches of the entrance gates, followed by a lingering shot of the tomb's arched doorway; the statue of the mother holding her child is frequently in shot as Romeo breaks open the doors, and seems to guard this space. After Romeo 'descends' into the vault, with its pillars and dark passages, and stands over Juliet's body in long-shot, the archway behind her body fills the space of the frame and draws the viewer's eye towards another female statue at the centre of its dark tunnel. The centrality of her body is signalled further to the viewer by the camera remaining on her face, while Romeo repeatedly speaks his lines out of shot. At times, the camera alternates between shots of Romeo and close-up shots of Juliet, as if a conversation were taking place between them.

A further image implies a subjective camera shot from Romeo's perspective: he stands at Juliet's feet and looks up at the entire length of her body from what appears to be a submissive viewpoint, due to the camera's low position. Similarly when Romeo kills himself, he again assumes the submissive stance. Rather than dying by Juliet's side on the bier, he departs from her body to drink the poison; then, after reaching out to kiss her hand, he collapses on the floor beneath her. By contrast, after Juliet wakes and discovers Romeo's body, her body assumes the dominant position. Her actions receive such an extended amount of screen-time that her final moments overshadow Romeo's. Romeo is barely visible at the bottom of the frame and, at times, his face is virtually erased by Juliet's hands, face, and hair as she cradles him in her arms.

The tomb's interior is not unlike Romeo's metaphor of the 'womb of death'. However, Zeffirelli's 'womblike vault surrounded with pillars' is a gendered space that to some extent removes the abhorrence of female sexuality that can be found in the language of Shakespeare's play-text.<sup>78</sup> There are numerous verbal and visual elements within the subtext of Shakespeare's tomb scene that imply a male anxiety about female sexuality. In Romeo's metaphor, the womb is the all-devouring tomb, a fearful site that must necessarily be 'gorged' with 'more food' and threatens to take back that to which it once gave life (5.3.46-8).<sup>79</sup> The vagina itself is the monstrous

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<sup>78</sup> Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p. 44.

<sup>79</sup> Coppélia Kahn writes: 'The birth that takes place in this "womb" is perversely a birth into death, a stifling return to the tomb of the fathers, not the second birth of adolescence, the birth of an adult self, which the lovers strove for'. My own reading of Juliet's liminal body both in the play and in Zeffirelli's film challenges this perspective. See Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*

space of the tomb's opening – a 'detestable maw' with 'rotten jaws', gaping, due to the absence of the penis (5.3.45-7). Romeo's 'entrance' of the tomb is verbally constructed as a violent and bloody metaphorical rape: 'Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open' (5.3.47). Similarly, Romeo and Paris must assert their phallic weapons before Romeo enters the tomb, and Paris's blood will 'stain[ ] / The stony entrance of this sepulchre' (5.3.149-50). Not only is the additional presence of the phallus a symbolic means for controlling the feminine but, by drawing attention to aspects such as the toothed entrance and the bloodstained passage, female erotic power is simultaneously abhorred and recuperated through the play's imagery.

However, Zeffirelli decentralises the patriarchal strategies at work in Shakespeare's tomb scene. Romeo's metaphor of the 'womb of death' is omitted from the script, and the duel sequence with Paris is also removed as a means of deliberately excluding the presence of the phallus. This not only presents Zeffirelli's Romeo as more innocent than Shakespeare's, but it also implies his impotence in the space of the tomb, due to the absence of his phallic weapon.<sup>80</sup> In symbolic terms, the erotic nature of Juliet's act of suicide with the dagger is elevated due to her sole manipulation of the phallic image.

Zeffirelli's spatial representation of the 'womb-like' tomb can also be understood as marginalizing the patriarchal discourse of Romeo's language. In a discussion that refers to the unconscious treatment of female reproductive imagery on screen, Barbara Creed suggests that 'unlike the female genitalia, the womb cannot be constructed as a "lack" in relation to the penis ... rather, the womb signifies "fullness" or "emptiness", but always it is its own point of reference'.<sup>81</sup> While the abhorred image of Romeo's speech is the 'detestable maw' (the toothed vagina that castrates and devours), Zeffirelli's visual strategies focus on the womb: the 'lack' of the vagina is not a point of fearful or monstrous representation. Thus Zeffirelli's tomb scene allows for 'a notion of the feminine which does not depend for its definition on a

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(Berkeley: U of California P, 1981), p. 101. Marion Wynne-Davies also observes how such associations between female sexuality and death occur elsewhere in Shakespeare's tragedies, referring to the 'sulphurous pit' in *King Lear* (4.5.134) and, specifically, to 'detested, dark, blood-drinking pit' of *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.224). See Marion Wynne-Davies, "'The Swallowing Womb': Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*", in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 129-51 (p. 135).

<sup>80</sup> Cartmell notes that 'Romeo is made less guilty through the film's deletion of his exploitation of the apothecary (v.ii) and his slaying of Paris'. See Cartmell, p. 44.

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Creed, 'Alien and the Monstrous Feminine', in *Alien Zone*, ed. by Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990), pp. 128-41 (p. 136).

concept of the masculine'.<sup>82</sup> By positing a more archaic dimension to this representation of the womb – 'the mother who gives birth all by herself' – Zeffirelli's tomb scene provides a space that enhances the significance of Juliet's 'rebirth', and the sexual agency of her suicide with the dagger.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Lost in the Tomb***

After considering such a reading of Zeffirelli's film, it seems ironic that the most recent screen adaptation of Shakespeare's play to be discussed here, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), should offer audiences a Juliet who is oddly lacking in desire and agency.<sup>84</sup> What is perhaps most unexpected, given 'the pressure put on cinema by an increasingly educated, increasingly sexually confident, and increasingly salaried female audience' of the nineties, is that, in terms of desire and agency, Claire Danes's Juliet seems to reside at the opposite end of the spectrum to Olivia Hussey's.<sup>85</sup> While critics such as Donaldson observe how Zeffirelli's film underscores 'Shakespeare's treatment of Juliet as an active, desiring subject', notably less has been said about the agency of Danes's Juliet under Luhrmann's direction.<sup>86</sup> The film's postmodern visual splendour, which generated 'almost as much passion and violence of expression as the action of the play itself', proved to be so distracting that it became the focal point of both positive and negative

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<sup>82</sup> Creed, p. 136.

<sup>83</sup> Creed, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. USA. 1996.

<sup>85</sup> Daileader, p. 187. The two films are often compared: Samuel Crowl writes, 'In a wonderful twist of cultural irony, Franco Zeffirelli's film (also now a high-school staple), once attacked for its heady excess when released in 1968, now came to be regarded, in the face of Luhrmann's end-of-the-century dynamic assault, as the "classic" or "real" version of the play'. See Crowl, *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: the Kenneth Branagh Era* (Ohio: Ohio UP, 2003), pp. 119-20. James N. Loehlin comments that Luhrmann's frequent borrowings from Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* tend to be 'simple replications rather than pointed reworkings', although he also remarks that the balcony scene 'begins as a witty parody of Zeffirelli, playing on the audience's conventional expectations for the scene', only to overturn them later. See Loehlin, "'These Violent Delights Have Violent Ends": Baz Luhrmann's Millennial Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 121-36 (p. 127). Like Zeffirelli before him, Luhrmann cast young, attractive actors in the roles of Romeo and Juliet; as Elsie Walker comments, this reflects how each director saw 'the ability of a wide audience to identify with their protagonists as crucial'. See Elsie Walker, 'Pop Goes the Shakespeare: Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 28 (2000), 132-39 (p. 134).

<sup>86</sup> Donaldson, p. 165. Comparisons of Danes and Hussey as Juliet tend to be limited to brief comments on their acting abilities. Crowl remarks that Hussey's Juliet 'supplied all the power and breathless energy' in Zeffirelli's film, while Danes's Juliet 'does not have Hussey's dark-eyed beauty or passion'. See Crowl, p. 130. Alternatively, and with notably more approval of Danes in the role, José Arroyo writes: 'Danes brings a quiet resolution to her part, a maturity and pragmatism evoked by her face and figure as much as by her acting, while still looking like an adolescent'. See Arroyo, 'Kiss Kiss Bang Bang', *Sight and Sound*, 7 (1997), 6-9 (p. 9).

criticism, leaving critics with considerably less to say about the film's gender politics.<sup>87</sup>

For Danes's Juliet, only ironic comments that describe her as 'the film's still centre', or recount how she 'brings a quiet resolution to her part', touch on the silencing and immobilization of her body in this adaptation.<sup>88</sup> Michael Anderegg describes her as 'an ideal Victorian Juliet', who is 'neither a contemporary teenager nor a Shakespearean heroine'; he also suggests that Luhrmann's focus on Romeo is, 'in a sense, a reversal of the dynamics of Shakespeare's play, where Juliet is clearly the one who articulates much of the play's emotional texture'.<sup>89</sup> Several reviews of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* also reflect how the film centres on DiCaprio's Romeo, who is obviously 'a more complexly drawn character than Claire Danes's Juliet'.<sup>90</sup> For instance, José Arroyo comments that it is Romeo who 'bears the brunt of feeling' in a 'superb performance'.<sup>91</sup> However, given the fact that it is Romeo, not Juliet, who is the focus of Luhrmann's film, it is hardly surprising that critical discussions of *Romeo + Juliet* found so very little to say about her character.

Like Luhrmann's film, Danes as a young actress has many qualities, commanding a huge teen fan-base; however, Luhrmann's camera, somewhat surprisingly, frequently transforms her into a still, objectified body and, at moments where Shakespeare's play demands passion and energy, she is virtually erased from the spectator's gaze. In her first appearance, the garish colours, whirling operatic music and numerous pans and zooms through the Capulet mansion overwhelm the brief image of a young girl's face underwater. Lost in the apparent chaos of the Capulet household, Juliet is overshadowed by the impact of her mother's dramatic entrance: Gloria Capulet breezes into her daughter's bedroom on speeded-up camera; she talks emphatically about Paris and squeezes into her Cleopatra corset with all servants attending to her. With her daughter's gaze remaining fixed upon her – as well

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<sup>87</sup> Lucy Hamilton, 'Baz vs. the Bardolaters, Or Why William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* Deserves Another Look', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 28 (2000), 118-23 (p. 118).

<sup>88</sup> Observations from Carol Rutter, 'Shakespeare's Women on Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson, pp. 241-60 (p. 258); and Arroyo, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Anderegg, 'James Dean Meets the Pirate's Daughter: Passion and Parody in William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* and *Shakespeare in Love*', in *Shakespeare, the Movie II: Popularising the Plays on Film, TV, Video and DVD*, ed. by Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 56-71 (pp. 62 and 71). Anderegg makes a crucial point here, although it is an observation that only features in the endnotes of his argument.

<sup>90</sup> Anderegg, p. 61.

<sup>91</sup> Arroyo, p. 9.

as our own – Lady Capulet instructs Juliet to ‘Speak briefly’ (1.3.77), and indeed she does, for the remainder of the film.

Danes’s Juliet is not only still: she is also frequently silent. Her character suffers most from Luhrmann’s textual omissions, and her verbal expressions of passion and agency are often weakened by the apparent denial of her screen presence. At moments where Shakespeare’s Juliet is able to take control of the language, Danes is ignored by Luhrmann’s camera as it repeatedly searches for Romeo. As she speaks her first lines of the shared sonnet in the ball scene, the camera does not rest on her face but instead focuses on Romeo’s in an extreme close-up, thus privileging his reaction over her expression of desire. As a result of her body’s absence from the spectator’s gaze at this point, Juliet’s first lines in the sonnet lose their emphasis.

Although there are obvious similarities between Zeffirelli’s film and Luhrmann’s in the set-up and organisation of the ball scene, structures of seeing and spatial connotations are dramatically overturned in the latter. While Zeffirelli constructs a gendered space visually to signify Juliet’s sexual awakening, Luhrmann’s film concentrates on male actions – and male *reactions* – as we enter the party scene through the skewed perspective of ‘Romeo’s “acid”-addled gaze’.<sup>92</sup> After Romeo takes an ecstasy tablet, his hallucinogenic state is signalled to the viewer by the slowed images, noises, and bizarre subjective camera shots of the Capulet ball. After he enters past the guards, several extreme close-ups of his eye, eyes, eyes behind mask, are accompanied by the displacement of the line ‘Thy drugs are quick’ (5.3.111). The camera then reveals the excesses of the party from Romeo’s perspective: Mercutio, in the bright lights of his drag performance, comes uncomfortably close to the camera with red-painted lips; Tybalt, dressed in devil horns, kisses Lady Capulet; and Lord Capulet, with sweating painted cheeks and his toga raised to his knees, sings in girlish squeals. As if recoiling from them, Romeo appears to fall backwards, and the scene cuts to an underwater shot of him soaking his head in a basin to recover from his hallucinations. Luhrmann’s film not only privileges Romeo’s perspective here – as opposed to Zeffirelli’s treatment of a desiring female gaze – but the drug-induced visions also imply a rejection of feminised or weakened masculinity; homoeroticism takes the form of bizarre and grotesque hallucinations in the visual construction of the protagonist’s gaze. When he

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<sup>92</sup> Hamilton, p. 120.





4.5. ‘Did my heart love till now?’: focusing on Leonardo DiCaprio’s Romeo in Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996)

discards his mask into the water, indicating the end of his drugged, or ‘distorted’, gaze, Romeo also abandons the ‘abnormal’ visions of his bad trip that subsequently pose a threat to his masculinity. The camera view normalises, and Romeo beholds Juliet through the water of an aquarium, now with fresh eyes, recalling his line, ‘Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptised’ (2.1.98).<sup>93</sup> In a subconscious fashion, heterosexual love is ‘normalised’ through the film’s coded structures of seeing.

As Romeo rejects one way of seeing, he immediately takes up another for the viewer to occupy. Just as the water of the aquarium distorts Juliet’s features, Romeo’s gaze distorts and manipulates our own. His meeting with Juliet becomes another part of *his* experience of the events of the ball scene, so that what we often find in Luhrmann’s manipulations of the gaze is the viewer watching Romeo, watching Juliet. Although there are shots of Danes’s Juliet returning Romeo’s gaze, the moment of reciprocal looking does not develop in the same way that it does in Zeffirelli’s film: in Luhrmann’s film, we enter the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet *with Romeo*, not with Juliet. The objectification of Juliet under Romeo’s gaze in this scene is emphasised by the extended length of time in which Romeo acts, speaks, and persistently follows, while Juliet remains still, silent, and is manoeuvred like a puppet by the other characters around her: the nurse twice pulls her away from Romeo’s

<sup>93</sup> See Crystal Downing, “‘Misshapen Chaos of Well-Seeming Form’: Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*”, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 28 (2000), 125-31 (p. 128).

advances; Juliet's mother orchestrates her dance with Paris; Paris leads her triumphantly in the dance; and Romeo takes her hand when no one is looking and pulls her away from the crowd. Costumed perfectly in a white gown with angel's wings and often motionless, Juliet's body is a visual replica of the many porcelain figures of angels and cherubs that adorn her dressing room table. In the postmodern frenzy of Luhrmann's film, where images are devoid of depth or truth and 'Christian symbols stripped of meaning and translated into designer ornaments', Juliet's religious statues are empty signifiers: still and porcelain-like, they are merely empty extensions of herself.<sup>94</sup>

Interestingly, Luhrmann builds on the tragic irony of Shakespeare's tomb scene by having Juliet wake before Romeo's death and allowing the spectator alone to see this. When Romeo first enters the church, we see him approaching Juliet's body, and a subjective camera shot reveals her high on the bier, surrounded by statues and candles. However, when Romeo sits beside her on the bier for his farewell, Luhrmann's camera begins to look on Juliet's body when Romeo does not: we see her fingers begin to move when Romeo kisses her; we see her head move when Romeo places a ring on her finger; when Romeo looks away to search for the poison, we see an extreme close-up of Juliet's eyes as they open and look directly to camera; finally, as Romeo raises the poison and makes his pledge to 'engrossing death', we see Juliet smile and raise her hand to Romeo's cheek. But it is too late: Romeo has already taken the poison. Ironically, because Romeo fails to really *look* on Juliet's liminal body, he fails to see her waking up. He is so consumed by his own grief that he does not see her body begin to move.

Luhrmann's alterations in the tomb scene repress the sexual overtones of Juliet's suicide, and represent her death as an act of helplessness rather than control. When Romeo dies, everything ends momentarily in Luhrmann's film. All musical accompaniment ceases at this point, and an extreme close-up of his face appears for several moments, as if lamenting the end of *his* story. When Romeo takes his last breath, he also takes the last line of the scene: 'Thus with a kiss I die' (5.3.111), leaving Juliet to act out her final moments in an oppressive silence. Luhrmann's alteration simultaneously removes her capacity for agency in death: her lines are cut after Romeo dies; there is no entrance from the Friar, which also negates the agency

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<sup>94</sup> Patricia Tatspaugh, 'The Tragedies of Love on Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. by Russell Jackson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 135-59 (p. 142).

of her refusal to leave the tomb. Instead, Juliet sobs helplessly like a child and, seeing Romeo's gun, she picks it up and slowly raises it to her temple. We now see her face in close-up; her expression is not one of certainty, or defiance, like Hussey's: instead, she only looks afraid. Luhrmann's camera is dramatically distanced when Juliet's lifeless body collapses on the bier to the sound of the gunshot that echoes eerily around the church. Instead of confirming her development from adolescence to womanhood, Luhrmann's tomb scene only seems to confirm the reverse: this Juliet remains as a child, and her sexual agency is never fully explored. For Luhrmann, it would seem that Shakespeare's 'story' of 'woe' is very much one of *Romeo*, and *his Juliet* (5.3.319-20).



4.6. 'Alas, she has no speech': Danes's Juliet in Luhrmann's tomb scene (1996)

The replacement of the penetrative dagger with a fatal gunshot also, in a sense, erases the sexual agency of Juliet's suicide, as the phallic nature of the object does not have any material bearing on the final act of suicide. In contrast to Zeffirelli's exclusion of Romeo's use of his sword in the tomb, Luhrmann returns the phallic power of Juliet's suicide weapon to Romeo: the scene begins with a dramatic car and helicopter chase to mark Romeo's 'entrance' of the tomb, in which Romeo's gun is the central threatening object. Its phallic presence precedes Romeo's as he gazes voyeuristically through a small opening in the doors of the vault and opens them with the gun in an extreme close-up.



**4.7. 'The rest is silence': Danes's Juliet in Luhrmann's tomb scene (1996)**

In Luhrmann's film, the gun not only symbolises patriarchal violence – it glamorises it. It represents the acts of male aggression that occur with increasing violence throughout the film's narrative (the pistol duel between Capulets and Montagues; Mercutio's 'gunplay' at Verona Beach; Tybalt's murder) and culminates with the silencing of Juliet's body. While Castellani's representation of Juliet's death removes her sexual autonomy through a lack of subjectivity, Luhrmann's substitution of the gun for Juliet's suicide weapon not only absents her erotic power but also simultaneously places her body at the centre of the film's violence. The gun represents both the phallic nature of patriarchal violence and Juliet's eventual submission to its destructive power. Captured in numerous close-ups that stylistically define both its personalised status in the 'Capulet' and 'Montague' households and a defiance of religion through its designer symbols of crosses and the Virgin Mary, the gun is emblematically far more powerful than the rapier in Zeffirelli's film.

After reading the spatial and bodily representations of Juliet in Luhrmann's film, we might be left asking: what forms of 'identification' do they allow for a female spectator? What spaces are provided to promote Juliet's story, Juliet's voice, and to connote her body's agency? How are we to interpret her silencing within this final scene and the repression of her sexual desire? These are questions that have, so far, not troubled critical responses to this popular adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy. Neither did they seem to trouble the film's teen audiences: the inclusion of

DiCaprio's Romeo no doubt provided an incentive for the young teenage girls who flocked to cinemas and viewers were happy to award Danes with the title of 'Best Female Performance' at the MTV Movie Awards. Perhaps this reflects more on the popularity of Danes than on Luhrmann's handling of Juliet's role? While critics have often questioned Danes's acting abilities, the purpose of my own discussion is not to assert that Danes gives a bad performance on film; neither is it to assert that Luhrmann gives a bad performance for Shakespeare on film. Rather, it is intended to raise further questions about the significance of Juliet's liminal body.

Despite the spatial strategies of Shakespeare's stage that allow for Juliet's liminal body to have a centrality in the final scenes of *Romeo and Juliet*, this can become problematic in the play's transition from theatre to film. While physical spaces merge and conflate on the Elizabethan stage, overlapping birth and death, dying and erotic pleasure, the visual handling of space on film can pull these confluences apart. The sexual overtones of the tomb scene are lost in the final spatial transitions of Luhrmann's film, where the lovers' deaths are displaced onto another depthless media image of a news bulletin.<sup>95</sup> In Shakespeare's play, it is ultimately Juliet's liminal body that connects the spaces of chamber and tomb on the stage, an association that creates a threshold of interchangeability that is neither resolutely one signified place nor another. If an acknowledgement of Juliet's liminal body is ultimately dependent on the representation of such spaces, then the dynamics of *filmic* space may threaten to fragment the thresholds that portray Juliet's 'death' as 'endless'.<sup>96</sup>

Juliet's liminal body overturns the gendered strategies that seek to represent the female body as 'nothing' (as corpse), and the male subject as 'something' (as survivor). If we now turn to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, we find that Macbeth himself confronts the loss of his own subjectivity through an image of the body that connotes absence rather than presence: 'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more. It is a tale / Told by an

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<sup>95</sup> Loehlin writes that the film's 'unresolved ending, with the lovers' timeless idyll reduced to a grim TV news item, is an honest response to the culture of the new millennium. The nostalgia with which Luhrmann enshrouds his *Romeo and Juliet* inevitably gives way to the violent and media-crazed culture of which they are, necessarily, already a part'. See Loehlin, "These Violent Delights", p. 133.

<sup>96</sup> Holderness also comments that developments in theatrical and film technologies may have 'detracted from the union of physical and verbal power' that *Romeo and Juliet* possessed in its original staged performances. See Holderness, p. 65.

idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing' (*Macbeth*, 5.5.24-8). But just as Juliet's 'living corpse' tragically and ironically leads Romeo to his own empty 'bargain' with death, Macbeth begins his own end with the fatal realisation that those 'juggling fiends', the Witches, have paltered with him 'in a double sense' (5.7.57-8). With the play's male protagonist becoming no more than a 'walking shadow' after committing himself to the empty prophecies of the three Witches, the following chapter contemplates their representation in Roman Polanski's film adaptation, *Macbeth* (1971), to explore how images of violence and nakedness can transform our reading of the film's central women, and also, how they can deepen our understanding of the director's own 'naked frailties' (2.3.133).

## ‘Naked Frailties’:

### Nakedness and Violence in Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth*

For as far back as I can remember,  
the line between fantasy and reality has been hopelessly blurred.<sup>1</sup>

[I]n *Macbeth*, Polanski chose to show *all* –  
including violence and nudity absent from the play.<sup>2</sup>

How should we interpret the presence of the woman’s naked body in Roman Polanski’s film adaptation of *Macbeth* (1971)?<sup>3</sup> When Jon Finch’s Macbeth enters the Witches’ cave in order to ‘know / By the worst means’ (3.4.155-6) what the future holds for him, the ‘secret, black and midnight hags’ (4.1.47) who greet him are naked. Macbeth is welcomed not by three, but by ‘a whole coven’ of naked women; clearly disturbed by their unified appearance, their laughter, and their chanting around the bubbling cauldron, he demands answers of their ‘unknown power’ (4.1.74): ‘I conjure you, by that which you profess – / Howe’er you come to know it – answer me’ (4.1.50-51).<sup>4</sup> After his request to know more, Macbeth drinks the Witches’ brew and then staggers forward, suddenly losing his balance; dozens of pairs of arms from naked bodies stretch out to support him as the women guide him toward the cauldron for the ‘visions’ that will show him his future: ‘none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth’ (4.1.86-7). What Macbeth *sees* in the Witches’ cauldron will inevitably prove to be his undoing. As he continues to pursue a future foretold to him by their prophecies, Finch’s Macbeth begins to identify less and less with his former self, until ‘All causes [...] give way’ (3.4.157) and life becomes no more than a ‘walking shadow ... / Signifying nothing’ (5.5.24, 28).

There are a number of possibilities for interpreting the nakedness of the Weird Sisters in this crucial scene from Polanski’s *Macbeth*. First, the scene appears to associate the presence of the naked female body with the absence that eventually consumes Macbeth’s identity. As Per Serritslev Petersen observes, the ‘dark non-human or sub-human power that controls Macbeth’s destiny is here epitomised by the

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An earlier version of this chapter, “‘There’s No Such Thing’: Nothing and Nakedness in Polanski’s *Macbeth*”, can be found in *Shakespeare Survey*, 61 (2008), 104-15.

<sup>1</sup> Roman Polanski, *Roman* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Leaming, *Polanski: His Life and Films* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Macbeth*. Dir. Roman Polanski. UK. 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Polanski, p. 336.

shocking nudity of the ugly hags around the steaming cauldron'.<sup>5</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, for the male to look on the naked female body and its external lack may provoke a sense of absence in the male himself, as the power of the incomprehensible female 'nothing' subsequently threatens to become everything: 'a yawning abyss within which man can lose his virile identity'.<sup>6</sup> In seeking to know more from these 'midnight hags', Finch's *Macbeth* is reduced to less than a man, a 'walking shadow', while the unknown female power of the Witches appears to operate in reverse; from nothing, they can perform 'A deed without a name' (4.1.49), and in the closure of Polanski's film, there is no indication of their punishment, or indeed of their end.<sup>7</sup> Such a reading implies that the naked female body in Polanski's film signifies moments of heightened chaos or disorder, the overturning of nature's established processes, thus promoting the argument that Shakespeare's play emphasises male anxieties regarding the power of the female body and 'the helplessness of its central male figure before that power'.<sup>8</sup>

When the film was first released, the presence of the naked female body prompted other critical responses, particularly due to the fact that Francesca Annis, the twenty-five year old actress who plays Lady Macbeth, also appears naked while washing her hands in a catatonic trance during her sleepwalking scene. Given the source of the film's sponsorship – Playboy subsidised the film's production costs – the decision to include scenes of female 'nudity' hardly surprised the film's critics: from the beginning, in fact, it was rumoured that 'the film's use of nudity was to please its backers'.<sup>9</sup> The film premiered in January 1971 at Hugh Hefner's Playboy Theatre on West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, and as Hefner had also subsidised the film, many reviewers 'had connected Lady Macbeth's nudity in the sleepwalking scene to

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<sup>5</sup> Per Serritslev Petersen, 'The "Bloody Business" of Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*: A Case Study of the Dynamics of Modern Shakespeare Appropriation', in *Screen Shakespeare*, ed. by Michael Skovmand (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 38-53 (p. 51).

<sup>6</sup> Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), pp. 64-5.

<sup>7</sup> This can also be said of Shakespeare's play-text. David G. Hale writes that the present tense which is used in *Macbeth*'s final reference to the Witches suggests that they 'remain alive and presumably capable of further words of promise'. He also observes that Malcolm's closing speech fails to mention the Witches or indicate any future punishment for their actions, thus concluding that the new king 'may not know of their existence'. David G. Hale, 'Order and Disorder in *Macbeth*, Act V: Film and Television', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 29 (2001), 101-106 (p. 103).

<sup>8</sup> Janet Adelman, "'Born of Woman": Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*', in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. by Marjorie Garber (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987), pp. 90-121 (p111).

<sup>9</sup> Leaming, p. 79. In this chapter, *Playboy*, when appearing in italics, refers to the magazine; elsewhere, it refers to the Playboy Empire itself.



the Playboy financing'.<sup>10</sup> As Deanne Williams observes, Playboy 'underwrites the film in more than just the financial sense', and the nakedness of Annis's Lady Macbeth in her sleepwalking scene no doubt contributed to the opinion that her character was 'a perfect blend of the contradictions inherent in the *Playboy mythos*: the smiling acquiescence of the sex symbol, the persistent acceptance of helpful domesticity, and the transparent emotional manipulations of the *femme fatale*'.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the fact that, wherever possible, 'words were realised in concrete cinematic images' in Polanski's appropriation of the play-text, the naked female body has no relevance in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.<sup>12</sup> There are only two references in the language of the play-text that relate directly to the concept of nakedness – the 'naked, new-born babe, / Striding the blast' that represents 'pity' (1.7.21-2), and Banquo's talk of men's 'naked frailties' after Duncan's murder (2.3.133) – and both descriptions appear to exclude the female. After the discovery of the murdered Duncan, Banquo addresses those men present on the stage and advises that their 'naked frailties', which 'suffer in exposure', must be hidden in order to question 'this most bloody piece of work' (2.3.133-5). As Paul Jorgensen suggests, we can either take Banquo's words literally, as 'those present are hastily clad', or determine that "'naked frailties" well expresses the exposed feelings of all present'.<sup>13</sup> However, there is undeniably more to be perceived in Banquo's reference to nakedness, particularly after considering Macbeth's later instruction to 'put on manly readiness' (2.3.142). For Cleanth Brooks, 'manly readiness' is, in fact, 'a hypocrite's garment', as Macbeth 'can only pretend to be the loyal, grief-stricken liege who is almost unstrung by the horror of Duncan's murder'.<sup>14</sup> While nakedness here suggests men's frailty, innocence and exposure, the clothed body indicates pretence, disguise and concealment, the cloak that hides Macbeth's inhuman act with a show of 'manly readiness'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Petersen, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Deanne Williams, 'Mick Jagger Macbeth', *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004), 145-58 (p. 153).

<sup>12</sup> Leaming, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Paul A. Jorgensen, *Our Naked Frailties: Sensational Art and Meaning in 'Macbeth'* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1971), p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> Cleanth Brooks, 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness', in *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of 'Macbeth': A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Terrence Hawkes (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977), pp. 34-53 (p. 45).

<sup>15</sup> For an extensive range of examples of clothing imagery from the play-text, see Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1935) pp. 324-35.

The presence of the naked female body in Polanski's film becomes more significant when we acknowledge its very *absence* from Shakespeare's play-text. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, any verbal suggestions of nakedness are not directly associated with Lady Macbeth and the three Weird Sisters. Instead, their words and actions more readily identify them with the clothed body and the cloak of disguise: the Witches travel 'through the fog and filthy air' (1.1.13) concealed by mist; they are so 'wild in their attire' (1.3.41) that Banquo must question whether they are 'fantastical or that indeed / Which outwardly [they] show' (1.3.55-6). Lady Macbeth also assumes the cloak of disguise. Her call to the spirits that 'tend on mortal thoughts' (1.5.39) is full of images that indicate her desire to hide her 'fell purpose' (1.5.44), for the 'blanket of the dark' to cover Heaven in 'the dunnest smoke of hell' (1.5.49-51). Such references from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* only prompt us to return to the question: why *does* the woman's naked body have a significant presence in Polanski's film? How do representations of nakedness affect our interpretation of the film's women?

Despite obvious assumptions about the physical presence of the naked female body in a film sponsored by Hugh Hefner, representations of nakedness in Polanski's *Macbeth* are undoubtedly complex; instead of allowing for a relatively straightforward interpretation of their meaning, they in fact question and unsettle our presumptions about the director, *Playboy*, and the theme of nakedness. As Helena Goscilo observes, when it comes to discussing the director's film projects, 'criticism has largely ignored Polanski's complex handling of the human body as a marker of identity and alienation', and she goes on to argue that few directors match his 'intricate reliance on the body to articulate his works' dominant preoccupations'.<sup>16</sup> Polanski's treatment of the naked body in *Macbeth* proves to be no exception. To begin with, Polanski deliberately complicates any audience preconceptions by visually displaying nakedness, not exclusively through the woman's body, but also through *other* exposed and vulnerable bodies, such as Duncan's body in the murder sequence; the bodies of the Macduff children; and the naked babe that Macbeth sees 'Untimely ripped' from its 'mother's womb' (5.7.53-4) during the prophetic 'visions' of the cave scene.

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<sup>16</sup> Helena Goscilo, 'Polanski's Existential Body – As Somebody, Nobody and Anybody', in *The Cinema of Roman Polanski: Dark Spaces of the World*, ed. by John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska (London: Wallflower P, 2006), pp. 22-37 (p. 23).

The naked body in Polanski's *Macbeth* remains as an undoubtedly complex and ambiguous signifier, despite critical attempts to pinpoint its specific meaning. For instance, in her reading of the film, Bernice Kliman rejects the *Playboy* associations to offer a rather different interpretation of the film's representations of nakedness, arguing that those 'without power lack voice; those without power appear nude'.<sup>17</sup> The director's own intentions for Lady Macbeth's nakedness in her sleepwalking scene would seem to confirm this viewpoint: as Goscilo observes, 'whether on account of Playboy's financial backing or Polanski's notorious attraction to nubile flesh', while Lady Macbeth's nakedness 'irritated some critics and viewers as superfluous titillation, Polanski reportedly intended it as a visual sign of vulnerability'.<sup>18</sup> In his autobiography, Polanski comments that he and his co-screenwriter, Kenneth Tynan, were in agreement that Lady Macbeth's nakedness would 'render her more vulnerable and human'.<sup>19</sup> However, it appears to be somewhat difficult to apply Kliman's reading to the nakedness of the Witches in Polanski's cave scene. Given the fact that they are capable of predicting much about future events, and that they are unified not just through their nakedness but also through their laughter when Macbeth first enters their domain, it would seem somewhat inadequate to think of them as either vulnerable or 'without power'.

In response to such readings, this chapter seeks to offer a more in-depth exploration of the concept of nakedness in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*, examining the naked female body in a much wider context that not only extends to other representations of nakedness throughout the film, but which also considers the director's own *personal* history and its relationship to his unique interpretation of Shakespeare's play. As a director of Polish and Jewish origins who views his own life history as blurring 'the line between fantasy and reality', Roman Polanski's personal experiences have much to add to a project that explores the concept of liminality. Perhaps significantly, his early thoughts on nakedness during his traumatic upbringing in Second World War Poland appear to lie somewhere between an understanding of a

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<sup>17</sup> Bernice W. Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Macbeth'* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1992), p. 139. It is interesting that Kliman here uses the term 'nude', rather than 'naked', particularly as art critic Kenneth Clark makes the distinction between the two by describing the naked body as unclothed and 'defenceless'. It is important to note here that, for the purposes of my own argument, I am referring to all unclothed bodies within Polanski's *Macbeth* as 'naked' bodies. See Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Goscilo, p. 25. See also Leaming, *Polanski: A Biography. The Filmmaker as Voyeur* (New York: Touchstone, 1981), p. 136.

<sup>19</sup> Polanski, p. 336.

comfortable and natural exposure – for instance, he recalls his mother’s ‘naturalness’ when, as a young child, he ‘once walked into the bedroom and saw her naked’ – and a deep-seated sense of fear and vulnerability through exposure: in his autobiography, Polanski remembers how, when hiding with a Catholic family during the Nazi Holocaust, he would ‘duly retire with [his] pitcher and basin’ to wash, ‘careful never to expose [himself]’ as, in Poland, ‘only Jews were circumcised’.<sup>20</sup>

Like Banquo’s metaphor in Shakespeare’s play, ‘naked frailties’ has a *dual* meaning in this chapter, as I explore the literal presence of the naked body in Polanski’s *Macbeth* alongside the director’s own tragic life experiences, those ‘naked frailties’ that he had, perhaps naïvely, hoped to conceal by choosing Shakespeare for his first major film project after the murder of his pregnant wife, Sharon Tate, by the Manson ‘family’ in the late summer of 1969. While many critics and reporters revisited every detail of the awful events that took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> August at Cielo Drive, in his autobiography, Polanski refrains from discussing the nature of the killings, or any details about the Manson ‘family’. While this appears as an unmistakable absence from the director’s own account of his life history, violence itself becomes a magnified presence in his version of *Macbeth*. Unavoidably, perhaps, the film projects ‘a much darker view of human nature than does the play’, offering the spectator ‘a naturalistic portrait of meaningless violence acted out in a wasteland’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, many of Polanski’s reviewers ‘expressed horror at the gory violence and twisted morbidity of the film’ and relentlessly associated its content with the horrific events of the director’s personal life.<sup>22</sup> However, in terms of what the film’s audiences were to find most ‘shocking’ in Polanski’s appropriation of Shakespeare’s play, violence, nakedness, and the recent events of the director’s past *all* played a significant part; for instance, while it was repeatedly argued that the spectator ‘sees the Manson murders in this *Macbeth* because the director has put them there’, it was, in fact, the nakedness of Annis’s Lady Macbeth, ‘as much as the endless violence’, that ‘instigated the film’s “X” rating’.<sup>23</sup> By placing images of nakedness against a ruthless exploration of the play’s violence, Polanski the filmmaker – *and* Polanski himself – exposes all and demands that we re-evaluate the meaning of ‘naked frailties’ in his appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

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<sup>20</sup> Polanski, pp. 7 and 35.

<sup>21</sup> Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977), p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> Petersen, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Leaming, p. 87; Williams, p. 153.

## *Manly Readiness*

Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* opens with a scene that focuses on what is beyond the 'fog and filthy air' (1.1.13) and, in doing so, introduces the Witches *and* the violence that lies beyond man's own 'vaulting ambition' (1.7.27). The scene begins with the Weird Sisters on a murky and deserted beach, a space that is both natural and 'unnatural' for their first meeting. Sounds of thunder and lightning have been replaced by the natural sounds of seagulls and crashing waves, and while the verse structure and undefined location of Shakespeare's opening scene 'instantly construct a supernatural space', Polanski's film shows the Witches as far more human than fantastical.<sup>24</sup> The domain they inhabit is unearthly, a liminal space 'between ebb and flow, land and sea', which is 'neither landscape nor seascape', but their dress and appearance show them to be ordinary women.<sup>25</sup> Tellingly, these women are of all ages; one young, one middle-aged, and the other elderly, thus representing the coming and passing of time in their physical appearance. Although the elderly Sister is without human sight, she predicts that the battle will end 'ere the set of sun' (1.1.5), and as the three depart across the sand with their backs turned toward us, their bodies part to form two dark shapes in the mist, like a pair of eyes that continue to see all.



5.1. 'Through the fog and filthy air': the Witches in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)

<sup>24</sup> Evelyn Tribble, "'When Every Noise Appalls Me': Sound and Fear in *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*", *Shakespeare*, 1 (2005), 75-90 (p. 77).

<sup>25</sup> Petersen, p. 46.

As they fade from our sight, the title ‘Macbeth’ appears on the screen, and the filthy air that consumed the Witches now turns blood red to the sounds and screams of battle. It is only once the titles have ended that the mist clears and we are finally permitted to see what lies beyond it. The location has not changed (we are still on the beach where the Weird Sisters left us), only it has now become a battle graveyard of bloody victors and dead bodies. The first image to appear is that of an injured rebel survivor, facedown in the sand, being slaughtered. Quickly, then, we learn that enemies of Scotland’s ruling power are defeated with savagery, where even the feeblest of survivors are murdered with brutal vengeance. ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’ (1.1.12) becomes the opening chant in Polanski’s film, and the ‘foulness’ of man’s violence is the first thing to take shape out of the ‘fog and filthy air’.<sup>26</sup>



5.2. ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’: Duncan’s Scotland in Polanski’s *Macbeth* (1971)

In this bloody and exceedingly violent portrayal of *Macbeth*, Scotland already appears as a ‘grave’, where ‘sighs and groans and shrieks’ fall on the air and ‘violent sorrow seems / A modern ecstasy’ (4.3.188-90). A tracking shot of the King and his royal followers shows them riding on horseback before a grey sky across a bleak and desolate land. Society under Duncan’s rule promotes masculine values where violence

<sup>26</sup> If the link between the battle and the Witches remains ambiguous in Polanski’s film, then Adrian Noble’s RSC production of *Macbeth* (1986) makes it all the more clear, as the Witches begin their chant amidst the bodies of the dead on a smoke-filled battleground. Here, the bloody violence under Duncan’s ‘saintly’ rule has already taken place. See *Macbeth*. Dir. Adrian Noble. UK. 1986

is second nature and men laugh callously at the bleeding Captain's story of how Macbeth's sword 'smoked with bloody execution' (1.2.20) and 'unseamed' Macdonwald's body 'from the nave to th'chops' (1.2.24). The chain that belonged to the Thane of Cawdor is removed quickly from his imprisoned, treacherous body; this 'emblem of rank and title' that will 'greet Macbeth' (1.2.71) is 'not an invitation to abide by proper degree but a chain of power which breeds ambition rather than reverence'.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the metaphors of Duncan's speeches that suggest nature, growth, and harvest in Shakespeare's play – to 'plant' his loyal subjects and 'labour' to make them 'full of growing' (1.4.31-2) – nothing grows or thrives in Polanski's Scotland, except man's lust for power.

For Polanski, the violence of Shakespeare's play had to be addressed: '*Macbeth* is a violent play, and I've never believed in cop-outs'.<sup>28</sup> However, Polanski also 'adds to the violence that already exists in the play, actualising events that are implicit in the text, but are either not part of its action or not explicitly mentioned'.<sup>29</sup> In this film, we *see* the bloody and unrelenting violence that preserves Duncan's 'saintly' rule; we also see the disgraced Thane of Cawdor, imprisoned in chains, leap to his own death at his execution. Duncan's murder, which, of course, takes place off-stage in Shakespeare's play, is played out in gruesome detail here, as is the beheading of Macbeth himself, so that the spectator is made 'complicit in the film's violence'.<sup>30</sup> Bodies are repeatedly exposed *and* violated in Polanski's *Macbeth*, so that the film's intense emphasis on bodily presence often 'translates into a terrible, hovering anxiety concerning how prone these bodies are to injury'.<sup>31</sup>

For many critics, this deliberate 'exposure' of the play's violence was Polanski's attempt to exorcise his demons, recalling, and perhaps purging himself of, the violence he had encountered in his own private tragedy, as though Shakespeare's play had 'provided Polanski with some strange opportunity to act out his own complicated feelings'.<sup>32</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1969, Sharon Tate, Jay Sebring, Wojtek Frykowski and Abigail Folger were found dead at the Polanski home in Los Angeles; Polanski himself was working away in London at the time. His wife, Sharon, who was

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<sup>27</sup> Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare Observed: Studies in Performance on Stage and Screen* (Ohio: Ohio UP, 1992), p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Polanski, p. 343.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> James Morrison, *Roman Polanski* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2007), p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> Leaming, p. 87.

eight and a half months pregnant, had received ‘sixteen stab wounds, in the chest and back, piercing heart, lungs and liver’.<sup>33</sup> Her body was found dressed only in her underwear, with ‘a rope looped around her neck and strung across a rafter on the ceiling’.<sup>34</sup> Of the other victims, Frykowski’s body was found with an astonishing ‘fifty-one stab wounds and two gunshot wounds’; his head had also been ‘bashed thirteen times with a blunt object, later revealed to be the gun handle’.<sup>35</sup> Folger’s body ‘had twenty-eight stab wounds’, while Sebring, whose body had been found ‘sprawled on the floor before the fireplace’, had been ‘shot once and stabbed seven times’.<sup>36</sup> When working on the set of *Macbeth* only a year later, Tynan apparently questioned the amount of blood that Polanski deemed necessary for the injured and dying bodies in the film; Polanski is quoted as responding: ‘You didn’t see my house last summer. I know about bleeding’.<sup>37</sup>

A lengthy police investigation later revealed that the murders had been committed by four members of the Manson ‘family’; however, for a short time, even Polanski was considered to be a possible suspect. Many unfavourable media reports also proceeded to ‘put the blame fairly and squarely on the victims’, claiming that the Polanskis had brought this tragedy on themselves ‘by pursuing a kinky, dissolute, drug-oriented life-style’.<sup>38</sup> It was later revealed that the murderers in fact knew nothing about their victims, or about Roman Polanski. However, the focus continued to remain on the director, particularly as, in his version of *Macbeth*, ‘violence generally unseen in more typical Shakespearean productions is shown in gory detail’.<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that Polanski chose to film the adaptation because he had thought that ‘Shakespeare, at least, would preserve [his] motives from suspicion’, the relentless violence of the film made the Manson murders ‘an unavoidable subtext of Polanski’s *Macbeth*’.<sup>40</sup>

However, the film’s violence also, interestingly, transforms the spectator’s understanding of the evil forces at work in this interpretation of Shakespeare’s play. Polanski repeatedly downplays *Macbeth*’s supernatural aspects, filling the absence of

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<sup>33</sup> Leaming, p. 67.

<sup>34</sup> Leaming, p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Leaming, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Leaming, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> John Parker, *Polanski* (London: Gollancz, 1995), p. 178; quoted in Williams, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> Polanski, p. 312.

<sup>39</sup> Leaming, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Williams, p. 156.



witchcraft with the ‘naturalism’ of society’s violence. As Kliman observes, it is ‘the society, rather than the supernatural’ which ‘determines the outcome’ in Polanski’s *Macbeth*, and his chosen representation for the Witches allows him to ‘centre the paradox of fair and foul within the warrior society’.<sup>41</sup> From the film’s first stark contrast between the Witches and Duncan’s men, we quickly learn that the play’s equivocal ‘fair is foul, and foul is fair’ has a far more integrated meaning in Polanski’s film. In every drafted version of the screenplay, Polanski makes it clear that he intended for his Witches to ‘appear foul in contrast to the warriors who look, in the main, fair’.<sup>42</sup> The three women who appear before us on the beach are filthy and haggard: their clothes and shawls are shabby; their skin blistered or wrinkled. The youngest sister is also silent and only seems capable of communicating with the others by mouthing words or grunting. They do not belong to the realm of ‘proper’ Scottish society, but instead form their own sisterly community outside it. By contrast, the words and actions of Scotland’s ruling men undermine the nature of their seemingly noble and valiant outward appearance. In Polanski’s film, Duncan’s inability to ‘find the mind’s construction in the face’ (1.4.14) is a defect of a society as a whole, one that will extend beyond the world of the film to unsettle and challenge the viewer’s own conceptions of ‘foul’ and ‘fair’.

When we first encounter Jon Finch’s *Macbeth*, he seems, as Kliman suggests, capable of having ‘black and deep desires’ (1.4.56) without any ‘supernatural soliciting’ (1.3.140) from the Witches: ‘The *Macbeth* encountered by *these* Witches can make his decision for regicide without them’.<sup>43</sup> *Macbeth*’s first appearance in Polanski’s film is one of many instances that simultaneously promotes and rejects the preferred notion that *Macbeth*’s path of destruction commences with the influence of demonic female powers.<sup>44</sup> Finch’s *Macbeth* appears in close up shot before a line of hanged men – an image that extends the remorseless aftermath of battle and simultaneously ties *Macbeth* to his own fate. The ominous beating of a drum at the

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<sup>41</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: ‘Macbeth’*, p. 120; Kliman, ‘Gleanings: The Residue of Difference in Scripts: The Case of Polanski’s *Macbeth*’, in *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*, ed. by Jay L. Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1998) pp. 131-46 (p. 135).

<sup>42</sup> Kliman, ‘Gleanings’, p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance*, p. 130.

<sup>44</sup> In complete contrast to my own argument, Brian Reynolds argues that Finch’s *Macbeth* seems ‘totally out of control’ in Polanski’s film, ‘while the witches seem to have total control’. See Reynolds, ‘Untimely Ripped: Mediating Witchcraft in Polanski and Shakespeare’, in *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. by Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002), pp. 143-64 (p. 158).

hanging plays on the Witches' prophetic greeting (– 'A drum, a drum: / Macbeth doth come' (1.3.31-2)), only in Polanski's film, we first encounter Macbeth alone rather than in the company of Banquo. No words are spoken in this brief establishing scene, and Macbeth stands apart from the crowd of onlookers, staring sombrely into the distance before riding off with Banquo silently following him. He seems as much affected by his own society's violence as he does later by any prophetic greeting. Even prior to his initial meeting with the Witches, he appears distracted, as though his thoughts turn inward to his black desires from the very beginning. Most of his soliloquies are spoken as internal monologue, and a substantial amount of dialogue spoken before other characters in the play is reworked as private thought. As Lorne Buchman observes, Polanski's voiceover technique is here accompanied by several close-up shots of Finch's Macbeth, offering the spectator access to 'a performing space *where secrets live*, the isolated realm that gives expression to the clandestine, the undisclosed, and the cryptic actions of the plot'.<sup>45</sup>

In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth often speaks aside in early scenes, moving away from the other characters or occupying a removed space to voice his thoughts out of earshot. Macbeth is described by other characters as having a 'personal venture in the rebels' fight' (1.3.94) while showing in his movements that he desires to exist outside it, to occupy a space beyond the realm of constraint and the 'precise bonds of hierarchical allegiance'.<sup>46</sup> Polanski's portrayal of Macbeth seems to enlarge this point, drawing on the play's tensions between language and spatial representation and emphasising the protagonist's desire to remove himself from the mortal sphere of his fellow countrymen, whose primary purpose is the 'kingdom's great defence' (1.3.102). Perhaps the 'imperial theme' already occupies his thoughts (1.3.139). Either way, Finch's Macbeth is portrayed as dissatisfied with his current function, and his lack of interest in the company of his own kind implies that he seeks to occupy a 'supernatural' space of power that exceeds his own natural bonds of allegiance, one that is, perhaps, not unlike the Witches' own. Tellingly, it is not the Witches who 'stop' Macbeth's path with 'prophetic greeting' in this film (1.3.79-80) but the curiosity of the men themselves that leads them further to investigate the place 'Upon the heath' (1.1.7).

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<sup>45</sup> Lorne M. Buchman, *Still in Movement: Shakespeare on Screen* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), p. 68; my emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> Eagleton, p. 3.

Macbeth's first encounter with the weird women introduces the theme of nakedness for the spectator, but with rather unexpected connotations for a film that announces itself as 'A Playboy Production' in its opening credits.<sup>47</sup> While taking shelter from the rain, Macbeth and Banquo are suddenly intrigued by the strange sounds of the Witches' song and proceed towards their cave. It is as though the men intrude upon the women's privacy, even though the meeting with Macbeth – the time, and 'the place' (1.1.1-7) – was prophesied earlier by the Witches. The youngest of the three has her shoulders and upper back exposed, and the eldest Sister, although unable to see, appears to be washing her. They sit together and sing their songs beside a dirty well, scarcely sheltered from the rain under a propped-up thatch cover. Given the demonic or 'fantastical' powers that Shakespeare's Witches possess, this initial image of female nurturing seems unusual. The intimacy of the three women also gives further emphasis to the apparent lack of closeness between Banquo and Macbeth, and the simple act of nurturing and caring for the body also presents a sharp contrast to the bloody violation of the male bodies that we have just witnessed on Duncan's battlefield.



**5.3. 'Stay, you imperfect speakers': the Witches' prophecy in Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)**

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<sup>47</sup> It could also be argued that the first image of the film that alludes to nakedness is that of the first Thane of Cawdor, his body exposed to the waist and chained before Duncan on the battlefield. Although traitorous, his nakedness still connotes vulnerability, particularly as we predict that his punishment under Scotland's bloody rule will be severe.

As the women begin to depart, Macbeth eagerly demands that they tell him more; he proceeds to follow them toward their cave, and he calls to the youngest Sister, 'Speak, I charge you' (1.3.80), to which she responds by grunting in her usual manner and then, in an entirely uneroticised image, by raising her skirts up to her waist and flashing at Macbeth. In describing this moment in the film, Kliman notes that only Macbeth, not Banquo, 'follows them, only he sees the young one lift her skirts in an obscene gesture, only he sees them disappear into their cave with a bang of a door'.<sup>48</sup> However, the gesture is not coded as 'obscene'; rather, it visually demonstrates the Witches' silent, though undoubtedly forceful, response to Macbeth's own attempted 'intrusion' into their world. The young woman's gesture is followed by her departure into the cave and by her closing of the door that forbids Macbeth's entrance. Williams also interprets this moment as obscene or repulsive, describing it as evidence that, for Macbeth, things 'can go wrong very quickly'.<sup>49</sup> However, there is something unshameful about this bodily exposure that simultaneously draws attention to Macbeth's own shameful behaviour in this scene. When Banquo asks Macbeth where the women have gone, Macbeth simply tells him that they have vanished 'Into the air' (1.3.83). In lying to Banquo about the Witches' whereabouts, Macbeth not only exposes his 'readiness to deceive'; he also reveals his own selfish desire to use their knowledge for his own gain through his attempt to conceal the existence of the cave from Banquo.<sup>50</sup> Ironically, then, this representation of nakedness overturns our assumptions about the Witches: by deliberately *exposing* the female body, they associate the capacity for concealment and deceit not directly with the women, but rather with Macbeth himself.

After introducing images of the naked female body in Macbeth's first encounter with the Witches, the film moves quickly towards a representation of the naked male body in Duncan's murder scene. Here, violence and nakedness collide to present a powerful image of the vulnerable male body – and not for the first in the film. Ironically, we earlier saw Duncan in a position of power, standing over the imprisoned Thane of Cawdor; the Thane's imprisoned body, with his shirt removed and his chest exposed in mid close-up, appeared to be exceedingly vulnerable to the blade of Duncan's sword. Now, in a visual depiction that both mirrors and distorts

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<sup>48</sup> Bernice W. Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance*, p. 130.

<sup>49</sup> Williams, p. 155.

<sup>50</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Macbeth'*, p. 130.

Shakespeare's description of the 'bloody business' (2.1.55), it is Duncan's naked body that is left exposed and vulnerable, as we see his murderer enter his private sleeping chamber, slowly pull back the bedcovers, and stab him repeatedly with a dagger.

From the beginning of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, women are presented as dangerously powerful, while men in power seem to be under threat or failing to maintain their rule; Duncan's inability to secure his kingdom and keep enemies and traitors at bay has prompted many critics to refer to him as the 'feminised' or androgynous king.<sup>51</sup> Alongside the images of nurturance and growth that partly illustrate Duncan's rule, Macbeth's language prior to the murder implies 'a display of male sexual aggression against a passive female victim', as Macbeth imagines himself moving towards Duncan with 'Tarquin's ravishing strides' (2.1.62).<sup>52</sup> Implications of nakedness also convey Duncan's natural state of vulnerability: Duncan's exposed 'silver skin' is 'laced with his golden blood'; his open wounds appear like 'a breach in nature' (2.3.116-7); prior to the murder his 'faculties' are 'meek' (1.7.17); his body 'unguarded' (1.7.76); and 'wicked dreams abuse / The curtained sleep' (2.1.57-8), threatening to violate both Duncan's unguarded body and the innocent state of unconsciousness. While Duncan's body is left vulnerable and exposed, the 'blanket of the dark' (1.5.51) conceals evil deeds and ill thoughts of 'black and deep desires' (1.4.56). Although the quality of naked vulnerability appears to evade the central women in the descriptions of Shakespeare's play, it remains as a feminine attribute in the figure of the androgynous king.

If the image of the murdered Duncan, stripped of his royal robes, epitomizes the play's conception of the vulnerable feminised male body, Polanski's *Macbeth* increases this sense of vulnerability by filming the murder itself for the spectator to see. Unlike other major film adaptations by Orson Welles (*Macbeth*, 1948) and Akira Kurosawa (*Throne of Blood*, 1957), Polanski's *Macbeth* allows the spectator's gaze to penetrate the space of Duncan's chamber during the murder: 'the door closes on Macbeth as it does on the viewer; we, too, are now trapped and made culpable by our

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example: Harry Berger, Jr., 'The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation', *ELH* 47 (1980), 26-8; Adelman, pp. 93-6; Dennis Biggins, 'Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 8 (1975), 255-77.

<sup>52</sup> Adelman specifically notes Duncan's 'womanish softness', pointing out that the images surrounding his death, such as Macbeth's configuration of himself as the murderous figure of Tarquin in *The Rape of Lucrece*, transform Duncan into an emblem of feminine vulnerability. See Adelman, p. 95.

silent witness of the crime'.<sup>53</sup> This not only demonstrates the director's wish to exploit the play's violence, but it also shows the now culpable spectator Duncan's loss of power and the violation of his exposed body.



5.4. 'Naked frailties': screening murder with Selby's Duncan in Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)

Polanski's representation of Duncan prior to the murder is far from weak or vulnerable: Nicolas Selby is a 'strong and pitiless' king, and any textual indications of his meekness have been removed in order to maintain a powerful masculine image.<sup>54</sup> We first see him riding out onto the battlefield where he looks down at the disgraced Thane of Cawdor and callously removes the chain of honour from his neck with the point of his sword; in a following scene, he watches the traitor's brutal hanging – the first Thane is not remorseful or full of 'deep repentance' (1.4.8) but bitter, defiant and, like Macbeth, seems prepared to 'try the last' (5.7.71). Prior to the murder scene, Duncan's body is distinctly covered or protected by his clothing: on arrival at Inverness, he is heavily shrouded in fur skins and thick robes; on the battlefield, he is covered from head to toe in armour, making the exposure of his body and his vulnerability in the murder sequence a far more unsettling representation of nakedness for the spectator.

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<sup>53</sup> Cowl, p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Kliman, 'Gleanings', p. 137.

Macbeth's murder of Duncan is 'shown in terms of sexual perversity'.<sup>55</sup> Polanski choreographs the murder almost as a rape scene, with its violation of Duncan's private chamber, its emphasis on voyeurism, and the representation of the act of murder itself. The film establishes Duncan's killing as sexual violation through several visual signifiers. The sequence begins with a voyeuristic camera shot through a window frame, which shows Duncan asleep in his chamber, as his groomsmen remove his royal garments. The audience shares this view with Macbeth and his wife until one of the groomsmen closes the shutters, preventing any continuation of a penetrative gaze. After Lady Macbeth delivers the drugged liquor to the servants' chamber and rings the bell to signal her husband, she is removed from the action that follows. While she waits anxiously in the courtyard and does not reappear until the after the murder, the spectator is permitted to accompany Macbeth into the private space of Duncan's chambers, reintroducing the voyeuristic gaze that was earlier established. Once inside, Macbeth drags the unconscious bodies of the groomsmen from the doorway of Duncan's bedchamber and, in a momentary error, begins to proceed with his own dagger drawn. Realising his mistake, he returns the blade to his belt-strap, and collects the daggers from the sleeping groomsmen before entering the bedchamber. Macbeth then watches his sleeping guest, to whom he should 'against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife' himself (1.7.15-16), and, hesitantly, begins to pull back the bedcovers. Polanski has Duncan wake to see his attacker, and whisper 'Macbeth?' in bewilderment, just prior to the murder: what should have been 'done quickly' (1.7.2) becomes a desperate and disturbingly frenzied attack to silence a victim. Placing a hand over Duncan's mouth, Macbeth then straddles him, and stabs his body repeatedly.

While the language of Shakespeare's play-text already suggests 'a display of male sexual aggression against a passive female victim', when we explore Duncan's murder further in terms of the director's own construction of the scene, we discover other more personal elements that filter through its representation.<sup>56</sup> For instance, Petersen reads the murder through its recalling of Polanski's own tragic experiences: 'it is difficult to ignore the close resemblance between Sharon Tate's death and Polanski's choreography of Duncan's murder'.<sup>57</sup> Such associations add another layer

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<sup>55</sup> Virginia Wright Wexman, *Roman Polanski* (London: Columbus, 1987), p. 82.

<sup>56</sup> Adelman, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> Petersen, p. 43.

of interpretive meaning to Duncan's body as 'feminised' in this sequence. They also may provide an explanation for the empathy that we are encouraged to feel for Duncan in this scene, whereas elsewhere in the film we are encouraged to view him as pitiless and unjust.

Polanski's own recollections of choreographing the scene with Kenneth Tynan add a further interpretive layer that relates specifically to the naked male body and to the social and cultural climate in which the film was made. In his autobiography, Polanski recalls how, on 'a very hot day' in the study of his London home, he and Tynan were 'both working stripped to the waist', with Tynan playing Duncan and Polanski acting out the part of Macbeth.<sup>58</sup> While Tynan lay stretched out on a bed, Polanski 'crept up with a paper knife' and started stabbing him; Tynan then grabbed his attacker's wrist and wrestled with him to the floor.<sup>59</sup> Apparently the scene was practised several times before Tynan noticed that some 'middle-aged Belgravia residents' on the balcony of the house across the street were watching them.<sup>60</sup> The open-mouthed spectators 'doubtless assumed that [their] antics were all part of the swinging London scene'.<sup>61</sup> While it has been argued that, unlike Shakespeare's play, Polanski's *Macbeth* 'is not about liminal spaces, border states, the blurred line between waking or sleeping, or any other such readings that have attached themselves to the play', in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.<sup>62</sup> Not only was the film made within its own 'liminal' time, a time on the cusp of 1960s freedom and liberation and violence and conspiracy, but it is also a film that appears to be perpetually caught between fantasy and reality, and like the spectators watching the scene through Polanski's window, we can never be completely sure what we're looking at.<sup>63</sup>

The sexual connotations of the attack are further emphasised by the spatial set-up of this scene. As Jorgens observes, the spectator is made aware of 'the perverted sexuality between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth which permeates the film' through 'her breathless invitation to murder while lying on a bed' and 'Macbeth's repeated

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<sup>58</sup> Polanski, p. 337.

<sup>59</sup> Polanski, p. 337.

<sup>60</sup> Polanski, p. 337.

<sup>61</sup> Polanski, p. 337.

<sup>62</sup> Morrison, p. 115.

<sup>63</sup> For an in-depth discussion of how Polanski's film offers 'a wide-ranging meditation upon the larger political and social events of the sixties', see Williams (p. 146).



plunging of the knife into Duncan on that same bed'.<sup>64</sup> Polanski has already drawn the viewer's attention to the fact that Macbeth and his wife have provided their own sleeping quarters for their royal guest; an earlier scene shows the servants clearing the room of its garments and Lady Macbeth strewing the newly-made bed with herbs and petals. The fact that Duncan's murder takes place in the marital bed of the castle visually adds weight to critical arguments that imagine the murder itself as a sexual act, through which the union of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is consummated.<sup>65</sup>

However, unlike in Shakespeare's play, Duncan in Polanski's film is not the androgynous parent who is both authoritative and nurturing, after whose death the 'wine of life is drawn' (2.3.96); rather, he is merely another perpetrator of male violence, himself an unjust king. His nakedness is not an image of sacred 'silver skin', but is instead another slaughtered body that recalls the worthless corpses being looted on his battlefield. In the context of his own violent rule, his murder does not register with the audience as a cruel injustice, but simply as another brutal exchange of power. Duncan's fallen crown does not signify the desecration of the 'life o'th'building' (2.3.65), or that 'renown and grace, is dead' (2.3.95); instead, it spins uncontrollably until the murderous struggle is over, until one form of male greed for power has succeeded the other. The crown continues to balance awkwardly on its side, indicating perhaps that a suitable ruler is yet to come to Scotland's throne. This signifier also reveals Macbeth's own fate: he has 'traded his allegiance for the ring of a hollow crown'.<sup>66</sup> We then see Finch's Macbeth brutally stab Duncan through the neck, even though he has already wounded his victim countless times and watched the king's lifeless body fall to the floor. In Polanski's *Macbeth*, violence only breeds *more* violence.

In Shakespeare's play, part of Macduff's strength resides in his understanding that he should not only 'dispute' but also 'feel' things 'as a man' (4.3.253-5). However, in Polanski's adaptation, Banquo's talk of men's 'naked frailties' is deliberately removed from his speech when the body of Duncan's naked corpse is being washed. To fill its absence, Banquo inherits the line from Macbeth: 'Let's briefly put on manly readiness' (2.3.142). It seems that Polanski had his own desires to put on 'manly readiness' during the making of this film; before setting to work with

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<sup>64</sup> Jorgens, p. 164.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Biggins, 'Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*', 255-77, and James J. Greene, 'Macbeth: Masculinity as Murder', *American Imago*, 41 (1984), 155-80, for such arguments.

<sup>66</sup> Crowl, p. 27.

his collaborator, he and Tynan had ‘agreed not to discuss the recent tragedy’ of Sharon’s death – and the death of his unborn child.<sup>67</sup> But despite the director’s best efforts to keep his private affairs from affecting his work on *Macbeth*, the whole cast was only too aware of his own ‘naked frailties’, particularly as the securing of the film’s financing with Playboy also ‘coincided with the opening of the Manson trial’.<sup>68</sup> Terence Bayler, playing Macduff, was conscious of Polanski’s personal tragedy when filming the scene in which Macduff hears the news that his wife and babes have been ‘savagely slaughtered’ (4.3.235) because of ‘its obvious allusion to Polanski’s own reaction to the news of Tate’s death’.<sup>69</sup> Polanski was a notorious perfectionist, and the scene was pre-rehearsed several times before filming, with Bayler asking Polanski how he should perform his reaction to the news of the murder. Bayler’s technique of continuously ‘walking in a daze’ recalls Polanski’s own account of how he reacted to the news of Sharon’s death: ‘I began walking around and around in small circles, my hands clenched tightly behind my back’.<sup>70</sup> The denial that Macduff experiences – ‘All my pretty ones? / Did you say all?’ (4.3.249-50) – is also evident in Polanski’s own recollection: ‘all the time I had the feeling that Sharon wasn’t dead, that I was in the middle of a bad dream’.<sup>71</sup> This four-minute scene with Macduff, unlike many other scenes where Polanski demanded numerous takes, was done in only one take ‘on the last day on location’, with Polanski behind the camera.<sup>72</sup> It would appear that, for Polanski, there is no space for frailty in ruling men.

Representations of nakedness in Polanski’s film continue to allow us to explore the vulnerability that lies just beneath the surface both for the director and in this violent warrior society. Scenes of nakedness extend to representations of frailty, innocence, vulnerability, perversion, violence, humanity or truth.<sup>73</sup> In the scene where Macbeth’s men kill Macduff’s children, Polanski again combines images of violence and nakedness to increase the dramatic impact for the spectator. When the Macduff castle is ‘surprised’ (4.3.234), the slaughtered bodies of Macduff’s children are discovered by Lady Macduff. Lying naked and covered in blood in the straw of their

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<sup>67</sup> Leaming, p. 77.

<sup>68</sup> Polanski, p. 338.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Sandford, *Polanski* (London: Century, 2007), p. 216.

<sup>70</sup> Sandford, p. 215; Polanski, p. 309.

<sup>71</sup> Polanski, p. 310.

<sup>72</sup> Sandford, p. 216.

<sup>73</sup> Bruna Gushurst argues that the film indicates powerlessness through nakedness. See Gushurst, ‘Polanski’s Determining of Power in *Macbeth*’, *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*, 13 (1989), 7.

sleeping quarters, they look like slaughtered lambs. There is also the implication of ‘fragility and vulnerability’ through nakedness in the murder of Macduff’s eldest son, as Lady Macduff is shown bathing him just prior to the murderers’ forced entrance.<sup>74</sup> Of the small children who worked on the set, Christopher Sandford observes how one of them, a ‘sweet-looking young blonde girl’ who had to ‘lie down and pretend to be dead’ was, Polanski discovered on the day of filming, called Sharon.<sup>75</sup> While Polanski uses images of nakedness to represent the violated innocence of children in his version of *Macbeth*, it comes as no surprise – given the recent events of the director’s personal life – that he also uses his most sympathetic representation of the vulnerable naked body to illustrate the deterioration of the film’s central female character: Lady Macbeth.

### ***Naked Frailties***

Francesca Annis’s Lady Macbeth is portrayed with a soft femininity that is devoid of the ‘direst cruelty’ (1.5.41) of Shakespeare’s central female character. As she watches Duncan and the royal party approaching from her standpoint on the castle battlements, her call to the evil spirits that ‘tend on mortal thoughts’ (1.5.39) seems unnatural, in that she herself is too gentle and naturally feminine to possess such ‘unwomanly’ thoughts or to demand to be unsexed. She is young and attractive, but also child-like and foolish, and often acts without the conviction and self-possession of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth. Polanski always intended for his Macbeths to be youthful rather than ‘middle-aged and doom-laden’ in order to ‘cut across long-established theatrical clichés’.<sup>76</sup> This decision also reflects his desire to speak directly to the youth culture of the time, as the Macbeths represent ‘the widespread disenchantment that took place at the end of the sixties, as idealistic hopes for personal freedom and positive collective action were answered by violence and conspiracy’.<sup>77</sup> However, there are also many aspects of Annis’s Lady Macbeth that allude to Polanski’s wife and to their relationship before her death, making Sharon Tate another undeniable ‘absent presence’ in Polanski’s *Macbeth*.

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<sup>74</sup> Williams, p. 149.

<sup>75</sup> Sandford, p. 218.

<sup>76</sup> Polanski, p. 336.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, p. 156.

Polanski began dating Sharon while filming *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967) in which Sharon played Sarah, a character embodying ‘essential childishness and passivity’; these were also qualities that ‘drew [Polanski] to Sharon’.<sup>78</sup> As well as noting the ‘serenity in her beautiful face’, Polanski also recalls Sharon’s ‘childish, incongruous habit of now and then nibbling at her nails’, her innocence and her enthusiasm for everything.<sup>79</sup> This essential childishness can also be detected in Annis’s portrayal of Lady Macbeth. On interviewing Annis for the part, Polanski was immediately drawn to her ‘childish quality’ and malleability: it was decided that this ‘would be the way Polanski’s Lady Macbeth would manipulate her husband’.<sup>80</sup>

Sharon was also what Polanski affectionately describes as ‘a homebody – a superb cook and a dedicated housewife’, and such traditional feminine domesticity is also evident in Polanski’s chosen representation for his Lady Macbeth.<sup>81</sup> Typically associated with Lady Macbeth’s ‘evil’ work and her part in Duncan’s murder, the domestic realm of the Macbeth castle has been interpreted as a space where traditional feminine values have been perverted, as Lady Macbeth transforms her expected role of ‘Fair and noble hostess’ (1.6.28) into one of deceiving accomplice to murder. Klein describes Lady Macbeth’s preparations for and clearing up after Duncan’s murder as ‘a frightening perversion of Renaissance woman’s domestic activity’.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, French observes that Lady Macbeth ‘violates her social role’ with devastating consequences, arguing that it is this failure that inevitably ‘plunges her more deeply into a pit of evil than any man can ever fall’.<sup>83</sup> However, the film’s portrayal of the castle’s natural and welcoming atmosphere – a notable contrast after the bleak hostility of the battle landscape and the stony, formal interiors of Duncan’s overtly masculine castle – is immediately associated with Lady Macbeth’s traditionally feminine presence. With its muddy but homely courtyard, its crowded domestic environment with servants, animals, the traditional festivities and the eager preparations for the king’s arrival, Polanski’s depiction of the Macbeth castle makes Duncan’s description a reality rather than solely an ironic misjudgement: the castle does indeed have ‘a pleasant seat’ (1.6.1). It is also primarily a feminine domain, as we first encounter Annis’s youthful and vibrant Lady Macbeth receiving her

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<sup>78</sup> Leaming, p. 50.

<sup>79</sup> Polanski, p. 249.

<sup>80</sup> Leaming, p. 81.

<sup>81</sup> Polanski, p. 255.

<sup>82</sup> Klein, p. 245.

<sup>83</sup> French, p. 17.

husband's letter in its sunlit courtyard. Polanski 'uses landscape and space emblematically', and the understated movements of Lady Macbeth within the castle – the hems of her gowns notably muddied, the attention she lavishes on the courtyard animals whilst reading her letter – indicate a sense of harmony with her domestic setting.<sup>84</sup> Her apparent ease also seems at odds with the play's verbal suggestions of her dissatisfaction with the 'ignorant present' and her ambitious desire for the 'future in the instant' (1.5.55-6).

Annis's false smiles and talk of murder come far too easily; it is as if she is playing a game, longing to dress up in the royal robes. She giggles like a child when she first discusses the murder with her husband, and slips the new chain of honour from his neck in a playful fashion. The cracks in her 'undaunted mettle' (1.7.80) soon begin to show as she recoils from the blood on Macbeth's hand after the murder, turning her face away into his shoulder and consoling herself as much as him when she whispers, 'A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight' (2.2.26). Her eyes widen with undisguisable terror as she embraces Macbeth and discovers the bloody daggers still in his right hand. The 'white' heart (2.2.76) that she so despises to wear is not merely her husband's but her own, and as she returns from Duncan's chamber with blood smeared down the front of her white gown, a deliberate emphasis is placed on the naivety of her words: 'A little water clears us of this deed' (2.2.78).



5.5. 'How easy is it, then': Francesca Annis's Lady Macbeth in Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)

<sup>84</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Macbeth'*, p. 123.

However, Annis's Lady Macbeth is not entirely unlike Shakespeare's. For while Polanski makes significant cuts to her soliloquies, he maintains the essential irony behind her convictions: Lady Macbeth is merely words without action. She may speak of concealing the wound that her 'keen knife' (1.5.50) makes, but as Klein observes of her character, Lady Macbeth's 'threats of violence, for all their force and cruelty, are empty fantasies'; instead it is 'Macbeth who converts them to hard reality'.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, in Polanski's film, it is 'Malcolm's smug vaunting of his power that persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan', not Lady Macbeth's goading of her husband's manhood.<sup>86</sup> Although her words may connote a desire for masculine power, Lady Macbeth remains incapable of performing its violence. Polanski's chosen representation of Duncan's murder reinforces this crucial point. Despite her faint words about how easy murder is, Lady Macbeth is deliberately distanced from the murder itself. Polanski allows the spectator to *see* Macbeth committing the bloody deed in Duncan's chamber: we do not see Lady Macbeth there. We know that she visits the chamber to return the daggers, but her body is never placed at the scene of her husband's crime. While Shakespeare's play would have given both characters an involvement in the off-stage space of the murder, Polanski clearly defines spaces of violence as masculine. Despite her call to the spirits to unsex her, Annis's Lady Macbeth is never shown to operate outside feminine domestic spaces and nor is she portrayed as unsettling the gender boundaries that seem frequently under threat in Shakespeare's play.

With no reference to her woman's milk being taken for gall or having 'given suck' (1.7.58), the film's depiction of Lady Macbeth also entirely excludes motherhood. While this decision may create, as Williams observes, the perfect *Playboy* image of femininity for Polanski's viewers, it also, far more crucially, perhaps, enables Polanski to erase those naked frailties that may have been too painful to recall or to expose.<sup>87</sup> While the film erases the subject of childbirth from Lady Macbeth's role, Sharon had 'made no secret of her strong desire to have a child'

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<sup>85</sup> Klein, p. 244.

<sup>86</sup> Jorgens, p. 167. Jorgens is here referring to the moment in the film where Finch's Macbeth is forced to fill Malcolm's goblet of wine, as Malcolm toasts him mockingly with 'Hail, Thane of Cawdor'. After this, Macbeth returns to his wife and seems ready to commit the deed. The moment is highly effective in conveying what spurs on Macbeth's own 'vaulting ambition', and the invention is entirely Polanski's.

<sup>87</sup> Williams comments that the lines of the play that refer to motherhood are suppressed in Polanski's *Macbeth* because the 'physical realities of maternity and lactation contradict the *Playboy* vision of femininity: high voice, golden tresses, slender figure'. See Williams, p. 153.

during her relationship with Polanski.<sup>88</sup> After they married and Sharon fell pregnant, the baby quickly became ‘the focal point of her life’.<sup>89</sup> While Polanski openly mourns the loss of his wife in his autobiography, he makes no further reference to the unborn child that he also lost, while many critics and reporters continue to discuss the details of this ‘double killing’ and the murderers’ heinous intentions for the baby that Sharon was carrying. The Polanskis were apparently expecting a boy, and this unborn child was also intended to be ‘untimely ripped’ from ‘his mother’s womb’ (5.7.53-4) on the night of the murders. Susan Atkins, one of the four killers who broke into the Polanski home that night, later confessed that, when stabbing Tate, the ‘macabre thought’ occurred to her to ‘cut out the unborn baby and bring it back as a trophy to Manson’.<sup>90</sup> Instead, the murderers decided to flee the house, and despite the fact that Sharon suffered multiple stab wounds to her chest and back, on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1969, her body was buried ‘with the body of her “perfectly formed” unborn son’.<sup>91</sup> In Polanski’s *Macbeth*, the image of a ‘naked, new-born babe’ being ‘untimely ripped’ from its mother’s womb flashes twice on the screen, but it is a nightmare image that is deliberately distanced from Annis’s Lady Macbeth.

The absence of motherhood in Polanski’s depiction of Lady Macbeth’s character becomes all the more potent when we consider its relevance in other adaptations of Shakespeare’s play. In Orson Welles’s film adaptation, *Macbeth* (1948), the absence of a child proves to be equally destructive for Jeanette Nolan’s Lady Macbeth after Duncan’s murder. At the start of the film, Nolan’s body is immediately sexualised. She lies on the bearskin rug on her back and screws up her husband’s letter with clenched fists, then seductively calls to the spirits and seems to command the storms with her words, and with them, Macbeth’s return. She then moves around her husband partially in shadow, and in her dark robes, gleaming pearls and severe headdress, she is the embodiment of an evil female temptress. Unlike Polanski, Welles directly places her body in the film’s spaces of violence. Specifically, the film extends the spectator’s sense of Lady Macbeth’s own part in the murder by showing her visit to Duncan’s chamber. Unlike Polanski’s representation, the murder itself remains concealed from sight – Welles chooses to play on the couple’s increasing fear and paranoia through the language of Shakespeare’s play. But

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<sup>88</sup> Polanski, p. 292.

<sup>89</sup> Polanski, p. 303.

<sup>90</sup> Sandford, p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> Leaming, p. 69.

prior to the murder, we see a threatening shadow loom over the body of the frail, sleeping Duncan; it is not the murderer, hesitating before the deed, but Lady Macbeth herself, laying the daggers. Welles's Macbeth is never shown in Duncan's chamber. By disassociating his body from its violence, and instead using that of Lady Macbeth, the film implicates her further in the act of murder itself.

Welles also places Lady Macbeth in the maternal space of the Macduff family. Here, she first watches the embraces of Lady Macduff and her child enviously, and then hears the screams of their murders with an agonised look of guilt on her face. While any evidence for Lady Macbeth's own child in Shakespeare's play is tenuous, Welles's film clearly implies that Lady Macbeth is incapable of giving her husband children.<sup>92</sup> When Macbeth rages about the prophecy that gave him 'a fruitless crown' and 'a barren sceptre' (3.1.64-5), he delivers these lines as a personal attack on his wife. In the play, the lines are delivered in soliloquy; in Welles's adaptation, Lady Macbeth sits on the bed for her husband's verbal abuse and hangs her head toward her own body in shame. When she attempts to console him and calls him 'to bed', he violently draws the bed curtain to part them and simultaneously to remove her body from his sight. Nolan's Lady Macbeth not only violates her domestic role by instigating the murder in the space of the Macbeth household, but she also violates her maternal role by playing a part in the murder of the Macduff family and by being incapable of giving her husband an heir. While Polanski decidedly omits any references to Lady Macbeth's child, Nolan's Lady Macbeth speaks of having 'given suck' with both emotion on her face and venom in her voice. There is a clear sense of absence caused by the loss of a child that Lady Macbeth attempts to fill through destructive anger in the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. Here, self-destruction takes on a new form, less in the shape of Macbeth's endless pursuit of a future through violence, and more in the shape of Lady Macbeth's maternal absence and her own attempts to compensate for it through violent action.

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<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of the ambiguities regarding Lady Macbeth's child in Shakespeare's play, see L. C. Knights, 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' in his *Explorations: Essays in Criticism, Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), pp. 1-39; see also Michael D. Bristol's more recent work, 'How many children did she have?', in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. by John J. Joughin (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 18-33; Carol Rutter, 'Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?', *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004), 38-53, and Rutter's chapter 'Precious motives, seeds of time: killing futures in *Macbeth*' in her *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 154-204.



In Polanski's *Macbeth*, Annis brings a child-like naivety to the role of the 'fiend-like queen' that is enhanced by Polanski's visual representations of nakedness. Her exposed body appears frail and brittle in the sleepwalking scene, which follows directly after the attack on the Macduff castle and thus associates the naked bodies of the murdered babes with Lady Macbeth's own naked vulnerability. Nakedness was a crucial element for the director when scripting this scene; he had originally planned to cast Tuesday Weld as Lady Macbeth, but only decided not to give her the part because she had 'declined to do the nude sleepwalking scene'.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Annis was accepted for the role, and in the much debated scene, Polanski struck an ironic balance between exposure and concealment, preserving 'at least a degree of Annis's modesty by the use of strategically positioned props', using her long hair, furniture, the bed-sheets and curtains to conceal parts of her body from the spectator's gaze.<sup>94</sup> On the day of filming, Polanski also cleared the set in order to make Annis feel more comfortable, thus again making her body, ironically, both seen and unseen.

The nakedness of this scene reveals more about Polanski and his relationship with Sharon if we consider other texts as 'intertexts' of the *Macbeth* film. For instance, in *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, Sharon also appears naked in one scene, which also 'evoked a series of injunctions against overstepping the bounds of propriety'.<sup>95</sup> In his autobiography, Polanski expresses a clear exasperation over MGM's 'prudery', as they cautioned him 'against nudity in connection with this bathing scene'.<sup>96</sup> Before this film, Sharon appeared in her first big role in Hollywood in *Valley of the Dolls* (1967), where she played 'an American starlet filmed in the buff by an exploitive European director'.<sup>97</sup> When questioned about her naked scenes in both films, Sharon 'insisted that although she was basically a shy person, posing naked for a camera was simply business'.<sup>98</sup> Another intertext that connects the nakedness of Annis's Lady Macbeth to Sharon is 'The Tate Gallery', a portfolio of six nude shots of Sharon that appeared in an issue of *Playboy* in May, 1967, 'personally photographed' by Polanski himself.<sup>99</sup> As Morrison observes, this portfolio of shots, taken on the set of *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, is 'an intertext of *Macbeth* if we

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<sup>93</sup> Polanski, p. 339.

<sup>94</sup> Sandford, p. 217.

<sup>95</sup> Polanski, p. 256.

<sup>96</sup> Polanski, p. 257.

<sup>97</sup> Leaming, p. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Leaming, p. 58.

<sup>99</sup> Morrison, p. 127.

assume that the blood so copiously shed in that film darkly commemorates Tate's killing, and if we further recall that *Macbeth* was bankrolled by the Playboy Corporation'.<sup>100</sup> Although Leaming detects Sharon's 'willingness to expose herself for the director, who is, by now, also her lover' in these photos, the pictures themselves also suggest an element of vulnerability and even discomfort, as if the unclothed, naked body were also present in the artistically posed 'nude' body.<sup>101</sup> Such 'bodily discomfort and vulnerability' also recalls the sleepwalking scene with Annis's Lady Macbeth.<sup>102</sup> The most poignant line delivered by Annis during the sleepwalking scene is: 'The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?' (5.1.31).

In Shakespeare's play, Macduff receives the news that his family has been murdered just before the sleepwalking scene, making a causal link between his sorrow and Lady Macbeth's guilt. Polanski disrupts this order to portray Annis's Lady Macbeth as another victim of the film's escalating violence. Her story begins and ends with her husband's words, as we first see her reading Macbeth's letter, and after removing it from the treasure chest where she safely keeps it, she reads it again just prior to her death. Her part in the plot's 'great business' is now over (1.5.69); she does not exist outside Macbeth's own narrative, and after his second visit to the Witches, her mental state begins to deteriorate, as if their marriage bond has now been broken and left her without function.<sup>103</sup> After another restless night's sleep – 'Macbeth shall sleep no more' (2.2.51) – Macbeth sets out at first light, leaving his wife to watch his departure from the castle battlements while he again seeks out the Witches' cave. On his arrival, the youngest of the three Weird Sisters appears before him; taking his hand, she leads him down some steps and through the smoke into an underground cave, where Macbeth is greeted by a whole 'society' of naked women. Although, as Kliman correctly infers, the nakedness of the women in this scene 'has nothing in it of prurience', there is still an irony about the fact that Sharon had known all about Polanski's 'other appetites' in his own private affairs and was apparently 'happy to accept [them] up to and perhaps even past the moment they got married'.<sup>104</sup> Sharon

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<sup>100</sup> Morrison, p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> Leaming, p. 50.

<sup>102</sup> See Morrison, p. 127.

<sup>103</sup> Polanski's portrayal of Lady Macbeth's role also seems to echo Klein's interpretation of her role in Shakespeare's play: she writes that Macbeth 'exchanges the fellowship of his badly founded marriage to Lady Macbeth for union with the weird sisters'; with her husband 'out of reach and society in shambles, Lady Macbeth no longer has any reason for being'. See Klein, pp. 243 and 247.

<sup>104</sup> Sandford, p. 154.

was aware that Polanski felt himself to be incapable of monogamy, and she was, on the whole, ‘heroically tolerant of his lapses’.<sup>105</sup> The nature of their relationship makes it difficult to watch Lady Macbeth’s helpless acceptance of her husband’s departure without noting the obvious sympathy with which Polanski treats her character.

Although the idea of a whole coven of naked Witches ‘seemed to make more dramatic sense’ to Polanski, it was an idea that simultaneously prompted contradictory interpretations.<sup>106</sup> For instance, Williams remarks that Polanski ‘had a hard time finding extras for this scene, and had to rely on cardboard dummies’.<sup>107</sup> Sandford, however, writes that many of the actresses who appeared naked ‘were recruited from the Playboy Club’ and, therefore, ‘there was no problem’ in fulfilling the director’s request.<sup>108</sup> Polanski himself never confirms this; instead, it appears that the scene can offer the spectator any number of interpretive possibilities, particularly given the source of the film’s sponsorship. Sandford is not the only one to read the nakedness of the Witches within this context: Brian Reynolds writes that Polanski’s cave scene ‘proffers a film manifestation of ... the eroticised male fantasy of centrality in an otherwise exclusively female society’.<sup>109</sup>

However, while the naked women who appear in this scene certainly do not project the ‘typical’ image of femininity that would be found in a copy of *Playboy*, this is, ironically, what they became. Polanski’s Witches, ‘like Catherine Deneuve and Sharon Tate before them’, became ‘a *Playboy* centrefold’ some time after filming *Macbeth*.<sup>110</sup> As *Playboy* sought maximum publicity for its investment, and the magazine was one of the film’s most accessible and lucrative avenues for advertising, it would appear that *Playboy* *does* filter into the film’s representations. The financial influence of the *Playboy* Empire was clear: whenever someone from *Playboy* would fly in to check on the film’s progress, a “bunny-flag” was hurriedly raised at the studio gate’, and various cast members would, ‘in their own obscure tribute’, tape ‘centrefolds from the magazine on the dressing room doors’.<sup>111</sup> As it was also Hugh Hefner’s birthday during filming, Polanski decided to impress his benefactor by

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<sup>105</sup> Sandford, p. 155.

<sup>106</sup> Polanski, p. 336.

<sup>107</sup> Williams, p. 153.

<sup>108</sup> Sandford, p. 212.

<sup>109</sup> Reynolds, p. 157.

<sup>110</sup> Sandford, p. 212.

<sup>111</sup> Sandford, p. 215.

recording 'a group of naked hags singing "Happy Birthday, Dear Hef"' and dispatching it to the Playboy mansion.<sup>112</sup>

However, while the naked Witches who literally 'bare all' in this scene seem to have become a focal point for critics, Polanski also reveals much in his chosen representation of Macbeth during the deliverance of the prophecies. After drinking the Witches' brew, Macbeth looks into their cauldron and sees the 'visions' that portray his own future, an 'elaborate series of reflections and mirrors' that will direct our gaze toward both the presence and absence of his own body.<sup>113</sup> Kliman observes that it is with 'psychological accuracy' that the first apparition to appear in the cauldron's murky surface is the reflection of Macbeth himself, 'for since he has already suspected Macduff it is reasonable that Macbeth's own image should warn him against Macduff'.<sup>114</sup> However, more significantly, this image also confirms Macbeth's place in the gloomy darkness of his own future, for when Macbeth first looks into the 'nothingness' of the Witches' cauldron, the 'horrible sight' (4.1.131) that will 'grieve his heart' and 'sear' his eyeballs (4.1.119-22) is the image of his own reflection.

As the reflection of Macbeth's face begins to dissolve in the water, the image of a spinning, severed head appears in its place, an early signifier of his own beheading by Macduff. A bloody newborn babe being ripped from its mother's womb signifies the birth of Macduff; a young boy in a suit of armour instructs Macbeth to be 'bloody, bold and resolute' (4.1.85); and the murdered Banquo directs Macbeth's gaze toward a line of kings. When the visions end and Macbeth wakes, he finds himself alone in the cave. The Witches have disappeared, just as they were required to vanish from Shakespeare's stage. These nightmare visions that transform Macbeth's own reflection into an image of horror seem to be inspired by Polanski's own experiences with drug-taking, particularly his first experience with LSD, which was 'the rage in London' during the sixties.<sup>115</sup> He recalls how he experienced a number of vile hallucinations while 'blaming others for something [he'd] done quite voluntarily': 'my face kept changing shape ... Looking at myself in the mirror, I almost screamed: my eyes had no irises, just empty black holes'.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Leaming, p. 81.

<sup>113</sup> Jorgens, p. 165.

<sup>114</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance*, p. 132.

<sup>115</sup> Polanski, p. 237.

<sup>116</sup> Polanski, pp. 238-40.



**5.6. 'Horrible sight': confronting monstrous reflections in Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)**

Of all the images used to represent Macbeth's future, the image most frequently shown in the film is that of Macbeth himself: he stabs the armoured figure he believes to be Macduff; chases the laughing Malcolm and Donalbain through the forest; and smashes Banquo's mirror with his sword. Significantly, the last thing Macbeth sees in the prophetic visions is the mirror held by the future line of kings that fails to reflect his own image. Macbeth's own body is now without substance, 'signifying nothing', and the reflection of himself that first warned him to 'beware Macduff' (4.1.77) no longer exists. The empty cave in which Macbeth wakes not only signals the Witches' ambiguity through their disappearance, but rather, the absence that Macbeth himself now represents. In the context of the scene itself, the nakedness of the women *also* implies an exposed truth: the exposure of their filthy, aged skin is far more truthful than the smooth, seemingly trustworthy, dispositions of men such as Duncan, Rosse and Macbeth. In a reversal of outward appearances, it is the women's exposed bodies that reflect back to Macbeth the apparent ugliness of Scotland's patriarchal society, and Macbeth's own place within it.

While Lady Macbeth's corpse seems of little importance to Macbeth, it is observed by Polanski's camera. After the news of her death, we see her broken and partly exposed body lying in the castle's courtyard. Her face is then covered by a blanket (hardly suitable for a queen's body), while her muddied legs and feet are left exposed. This shot recalls Macbeth's crowning at Scone and the image of his bare feet

in the sacred stones during his ‘marriage’ to the land. Here, Polanski makes a visual reference to the play’s metaphors of Macbeth as the ‘dwarfish thief’ (5.2.25) attempting to fill a giant’s garments. However, this is also the film’s ultimate perversion in terms of its representation of the naked body – not the filthy, haggard bodies of the Witches or the muddied legs and feet of Lady Macbeth’s discarded corpse, but Macbeth’s ‘sacred’ marriage to nature, to the earth, and to Scotland. Polanski’s camera directs our gaze towards Lady Macbeth’s corpse for a second time when the castle is attacked by Malcolm’s army; for Macduff, the sight recalls thoughts of his murdered wife and his resolve to take revenge on Macbeth: ‘If thou be’st slain, and with no stroke of mine, / My wife and children’s ghosts will haunt me still’ (5.7.19-20). For Polanski, the image also seems to recall thoughts of his own murdered wife: Sharon’s vulnerable and partly exposed body was not found by Polanski himself, and this seems to have affected him more greatly than if he *had* been the one to discover her body.<sup>117</sup> Creating a space for Lady Macbeth’s broken body thus associates her with *other* victims, both in the world of the film, and outside it. As a result, Polanski’s Lady Macbeth is very much ‘one of the powerless in the drama’.<sup>118</sup>



**5.7. ‘My wife and children’s ghosts will haunt me still’: Lady Macbeth’s broken corpse in Polanski’s *Macbeth* (1971)**

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<sup>117</sup> See Polanski, p. 319.

<sup>118</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: ‘Macbeth’*, p. 139.

In the final scenes of Polanski's *Macbeth*, the interior of the Macbeth castle is deserted: all servants and soldiers have fled; its courtyard and halls are filled with a vacant silence. All that remains is Macbeth himself – clinging to his crown and to the throne – and the broken body of his wife's corpse, already forgotten and fallen into the dirt. Of Shakespeare's play, Marilyn French discusses the collapse of the boundaries between its 'inner' and 'outer' worlds, noting that Scotland's society is failing due to the absence of traditional feminine values in the 'inner' sphere.<sup>119</sup> Polanski's *Macbeth* reinstates these values through the representation of Lady Macbeth. The boundaries between inner feminine domesticity and outer masculine violence are eventually devalued and violated by Macbeth's own course of action, which demands that 'blood will have blood' (3.4.142). The destroyed Macduff castle and the deserted and equally barren space of Dunsinane both become spatial representations of the yawning absence that spreads with the bloody violence of man's 'vaulting ambition'. Clinging to his crown, the last empty signifier of his power, he calls out defiantly: 'My name's Macbeth' (5.7.9). At the moment in which he verbally asserts his identity, all other signifiers within Polanski's frame deliberately erase it from our gaze.



**5.8. 'My name's Macbeth': embodying absence in Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971)**

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<sup>119</sup> French writes that although 'this inner circle is no more "natural" or "unnatural" than the outer one, the play insists that the inner world is bound in accordance with a principle of nature which is equivalent to a divine law'. See French, pp. 15-16.

Polanski's *Macbeth* explores the concept of 'naked frailties' through visual representations of exposed and violated bodies at a time when 'the most private and painful parts of his own life were lived, and scrutinised, in public'.<sup>120</sup> However, as much as the film can be understood as embodying the director's own response to his personal tragedy, Polanski's *Macbeth* does just as much to *prevent* the spectator from making any substantial connections between the film's representations and his own private experiences. As Christopher Sandford observes: 'One possible reason fans and critics alike mine his films for the slightest scraps of biographical detritus is that Polanski himself is so private'.<sup>121</sup> In exploring the concept of 'naked frailties', Polanski never fully reveals himself – the spectator, no matter how hard we try to forge the connections between life and art, will always be moving between shifting and unstable signifiers. Therefore, critics will inevitably have to confront 'how indirectly Polanski's work treats such social, historical, or "personal" materials'.<sup>122</sup> It is this unique sense of liminality that continues to make the film's message so powerful. When reading Polanski's *Macbeth*, the line between fantasy and reality will always remain 'hopelessly blurred'.

### ***Be Bloody, Bold and Resolute***

Polanski himself has often 'complained about the extent to which critics fastened upon the obvious parallels between life and art' in his adaptation of *Macbeth*.<sup>123</sup> As a final point for this chapter, I want instead to draw some parallels between Polanski's vision and Shakespeare's play. The debate about the part Macbeth plays in his own destruction has been affected by interpretations of the play's female characters and their involvement in his fate, and the struggle between these two influences is evident on film. For instance, in a discussion of Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, Anthony Dawson is left asking who exactly is responsible in a film that emphasises 'the relentless destructiveness of human agency together with the malevolence of fate'.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Neil Forsyth insists that Polanski's film remains 'caught between conflicting ideologies', arguing that the director wants the Witches to be seen 'from a political and feminist perspective as earthy and rebellious, healthily

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<sup>120</sup> Williams, p. 157.

<sup>121</sup> Sandford, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Morrison, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> Williams, p. 145.

<sup>124</sup> Dawson, pp. 168 and 173.



disrespectful of masculine and royal authority, but he cannot go very far along these lines without overbalancing the meaning of the whole film, which remains a serious and tragic engagement with evil'.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Polanski's *Macbeth* explores a 'serious and tragic engagement with evil', but its focus shifts from an interrogation of the female to a wider exploration of the play's patriarchal violence that in turn produces nothing but Macbeth's 'ravenous appetite, insatiable yet empty'.<sup>126</sup> As a result, the film succeeds in maintaining the play's intriguing elements of fate without heralding the female body as its evil and destructive space of representation. By exploring 'naked frailties', Polanski's *Macbeth* also exposes man's own undoubtedly fragile relationship to frailty and innocence in the bloody warfare of Shakespeare's play.

Polanski's film ends with Donalbain's discovery of the Witches, a rather more pessimistic ending in comparison to that of Shakespeare's play. However, on closer reading, there are many key aspects that tie the closure of Polanski's film to Shakespeare's final scene. For instance, we may begin by asking: how are we to understand the play's ending? What values and ideologies are promoted by an ending that sees the male usurper violently punished; a new male power succeeding the throne; and the fate of the Witches wholly undetermined? Janet Adelman asserts that the reimagining of 'autonomous male identity' in the play's peculiar ending is entirely dependent on 'the ruthless excision of all female presence', ultimately offering a fantasy of escape from 'a virtually absolute and destructive maternal power'.<sup>127</sup> The crowning of the usurper's successor does indeed suggest a return to the harmonious order of the 'most sainted king' (4.3.123) Duncan, and brings to the throne a purity and virtue that is significantly 'yet / Unknown to woman' (4.3.140-1) in the form of the untainted Malcolm. And yet the apparent satisfaction with the play's return to the traditional order is undoubtedly fragile, for while it is certain that the Witches have remained absent from the stage since their last puzzling disappearance, the ambiguous nature of their departure ensures that they remain somehow outside the 'ruthless excision' that Adelman describes. This sense of ambiguity also adds to the element of doubt that we may infer from the indication that Malcolm is 'yet' unknown to woman, and therefore may yet encounter the prophetic words of these 'juggling fiends' (5.7.57).

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<sup>125</sup> Forsyth, p. 282.

<sup>126</sup> Crowl, p. 29.

<sup>127</sup> Adelman, pp. 90-1.

What most crucially undermines the reverence of ‘king-becoming graces’ (4.3.103) in *Macbeth*’s closing scene is the action of man himself, not merely the actions of the ‘abhorred tyrant’ (5.7.13), but the actions of those who will govern over Scotland’s future.<sup>128</sup> Macduff’s brutal severing of the ‘th’usurper’s cursed head’ (5.7.99) and Malcolm’s praising of this act – which, ironically, symbolises the end of ‘this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen’ (5.7.114) – only serve to indicate a perpetuation of the bloody and unrelenting violence that preserved Duncan’s ‘saintly’ rule.<sup>129</sup> From the opening scene until the very end, Shakespeare’s Scotland is a place that ‘values butchery’ and bloody brutality, where ‘manhood is equated with the ability to kill’.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, locating Macbeth’s downfall entirely in the demonic power of the Witches leads to a reading that ultimately disregards the larger ethical concerns that arise throughout the play’s political theme.

The Witches themselves, though they equivocate to the very end, inhabit a space outside the immediate world of the play that persists in possessing, as Eagleton suggests, ‘its own kind of truth’.<sup>131</sup> There is no evidence in the play-text to confirm that the Witches’ words prophesy the murder of Duncan, only that Macbeth ‘shalt be king hereafter’ (1.3.52). Likewise, we can never be certain that Macbeth would have been crowned king had he not taken matters into his own hands and usurped the throne. Although the combination of an ungovernable female power and an uncompromising male violence in the play seems absolute, Macbeth is ‘bloody, bold and resolute’ (4.1.85) long before the Witches’ instruction, as the bloody Captain’s first account of how ‘brave Macbeth’ unseamed his enemy on the battlefield readily testifies. In seeking to fulfil the Witches’ prophecies, it is in fact Macbeth’s own course of violent and bloody action that builds no future at all. Ironically, as Carol Rutter remarks, ‘Macbeth wants both to possess the future – the one the Weird Sisters

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<sup>128</sup> For an exploration of the play’s representations of manhood in terms of violent action, see Robin Headlam Wells’s fourth chapter, ‘“Arms and the Man”: *Macbeth*’, in *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 117-43.

<sup>129</sup> As Carol Rutter points out, the stage directions contained in the Folio suggest that Macbeth is killed on stage, *and* that he dies off-stage, with Macduff re-entering later in the scene and carrying Macbeth’s ‘cursed head’: ‘if we turn to the Folio for direction, we discover that vestiges of two different endings are embedded in the “original” text of this play’. See Carol Rutter’s introduction in the Penguin edition of *Macbeth*, edited by George Hunter (London: Penguin Group, 2005), lxix-lxx, for further comments.

<sup>130</sup> French, p. 15. In defence of Lady Macbeth’s character, Cristina León Alfar argues that ‘Lady Macbeth is not a gross anomaly of female evil, but a woman whose actions conform to a masculinist culture of violence’. See Cristina León Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2003), pp. 111-35 (esp. p. 119).

<sup>131</sup> Eagleton, p. 2.

“gave” him – and destroy it – the one they “promised” Banquo’.<sup>132</sup> Thus the future ‘absence’ that reduces Macbeth’s life to a walking shadow is an absence of his own making.

It is man’s inevitable compulsion to violent action that ultimately determines Macbeth’s future. Similarly, by choosing to act under his wife’s persuasion and continuing to wade further into an ocean of blood, Shakespeare’s protagonist creates *and* destroys the future that the Witches offer him. If Macbeth had allowed for ‘chance’ to crown him king, then his downfall would have evolved primarily from the influence of demonic female powers. But choice plays a much greater part than chance in Shakespeare’s tragedy, and the part of the latter becomes virtually irrelevant in Polanski’s representation of events. As Kliman observes: ‘Finch’s Macbeth, like Shakespeare’s, believes in such predictions only when it suits him’.<sup>133</sup> Jan Kott famously argues that ‘a production of *Macbeth* not evoking a picture of the world flooded with blood would inevitably be false’.<sup>134</sup> As this assertion seems to have become a staple quotation for critical discussions of Polanski’s film, it is clear that the similarities between Shakespeare’s vision and Polanski’s film have not gone entirely unnoticed.<sup>135</sup> Macbeth destroys himself.

Marjorie Garber describes Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as ‘*the* play of the uncanny – the uncanniest in the canon’.<sup>136</sup> Despite the fact that Freud denies that *Macbeth*’s ghosts ‘in themselves impart to the play an aspect of the play’s uncanniness’, Garber suggests that Macbeth’s own decapitated head is also a powerful and potent image of that ‘something repressed which recurs’.<sup>137</sup> Polanski’s *Macbeth* also allows for ‘th’usurper’s cursed head’ to return and affect the spectator’s gaze for one last

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<sup>132</sup> Rutter, ‘Remind Me’, p. 39.

<sup>133</sup> Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance: ‘Macbeth’*, p. 133.

<sup>134</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>135</sup> This quotation is an important feature in Petersen’s essay, referred to on p. 38. See also: Williams, p. 149; Crowl’s remark that ‘Polanski’s countryman, Jan Kott, played an important role in the film’s conception’, pp. 23 and 30; Jorgen’s observation that the ‘other Pole, Jan Kott, is in the background’ of Polanski’s film, p. 161.

<sup>136</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), p. 107. Of course, the appearance of Macbeth’s decapitated head is dependent on whether or not this ‘ending’ is ‘selected’ from the Folio. See Rutter, ‘introduction’, lxx.

<sup>137</sup> Of Shakespeare’s play, Garber writes: ‘since there is no stage direction that indicates departure, the bloody head of the decapitated king must remain onstage throughout all of Malcolm’s healing and mollifying remarks’. Garber also offers a powerful reading of *Macbeth* through Freud’s explorations of the uncanny and the Medusa myth, arguing that ‘just as the head of the Medusa becomes a powerful talisman for good once affixed to the shield of Athena, so the head of Macbeth is in its final appearance transformed from an emblem of evil to a token of good, a sign at once minatory and monitory, threatening and warning’. See Garber, p. 115.

'haunting'. After Malcolm has been crowned King of Scotland by Rosse, the film's corrupt opportunist, the camera perspective shifts from the celebrating crowd to the still-open eyes of Macbeth's severed head: 'in a kind of surreal after-image or out-of-body experience, we share Macbeth's nightmare experience – on top of the pole – of being "baited with the rabble's curse", "the show and gaze o'th'time"'.<sup>138</sup> The moment is horribly disturbing, not least because of its implication that the murdered 'tyrant' will not be laid to rest, but more so because Polanski's surreal camera shot aligns our own gaze with the presumably unending, open-eyed stare of the ghostly head of Macbeth.

Although not one that Garber discusses at length, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is also a play eminently concerned not only with ghosts, but also with that 'something repressed which recurs'. If the presence of Macbeth's removed head has some potency here – in both Shakespeare's play, and Polanski's film – through its ability to affect the spectator, then what of the fragmented body parts in *Titus Andronicus*? How should we, as spectators, read their own 'hauntings' of the play's central characters? If Polanski's *Macbeth* allows us to read the male body as no more than a 'walking shadow' by its end due to the director's exploitation of the play's violence, then Julie Taymor's adaptation of *Titus* (1999) takes its representations of violence much further. Rather than emphasising Lavinia's 'lack' – the absence of her hands, tongue, and chastity – Taymor instead explores signifiers of fragmentation through images of the *male* body and of violated masculinity. In a reading of Laura Fraser's Lavinia and the 'ghosts' of Taymor's *Titus*, the next chapter reveals how the losses of Rome that are typically associated with Lavinia's fragmented body are here associated, rather, with Titus's own.

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<sup>138</sup> Petersen, p. 40.

## **‘Groaning Shadows that are Gone’: the Ghosts of Julie Taymor’s *Titus***

Talk of ghosts in Shakespeare’s tragedies typically evokes the image of Hamlet’s father or Banquo’s apparition in *Macbeth*.<sup>1</sup> Such ghosts remain potent for both the audience and the protagonist as they have an actual *presence*: in both plays, the ghost makes a stage appearance. During the banquet scene in *Macbeth*, Banquo’s ghost enters and ‘sits in Macbeth’s place’ at the dinner table.<sup>2</sup> In *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet’s father has a stronger physical manifestation, appearing on the stage in four scenes and delivering an extensive amount of dialogue in his third appearance.<sup>3</sup> In these plays, male subjectivity – self, mind and body – is tested by the ‘questionable shape’ of the ghost (*Hamlet*, 1.4.24); while Lady Macbeth’s words imply that she looks only ‘on a stool’ (*Macbeth*, 3.4.78), for Macbeth, the ghost of Banquo is horribly real, and he weighs the existence of its image against his own physicality: ‘If I stand here, I saw him’ (3.4.85). In *Hamlet*, the ‘form’ and existence of the apparition is again measured through the physical evidence of the male body, as Horatio declares: ‘I knew your father: / These hands are not more like’ (1.2.214-15). Similarly, in *Julius Caesar*, a more terrifying challenge not only of bodily potency but of male subjectivity occurs when the ‘monstrous apparition’ of Caesar’s ghost responds to Brutus’s questioning of its shape with: ‘Thy evil spirit, Brutus’ (4.2.367-

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<sup>1</sup> For comprehensive work on the ghost of Hamlet’s father, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2001). Greenblatt explores ‘the middle space of the realm of the dead’ primarily through ‘the weird, compelling ghost in *Hamlet*’ (pp. 3-4). Greenblatt also comments on ghosts or ghostly forms in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale*, but refrains from discussing *Titus Andronicus*. For substantive readings of the ghosts in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, see Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987). For further significant readings of Banquo’s ghost in *Macbeth*, see G. John Stott, ‘The Need for Banquo’s Ghost’, *Notes and Queries*, 39 (1992), 334-6, and Paul D. Streufert, ‘Spectral Others: Theatrical Ghosts as the Negotiation of Alterity in Aeschylus and Shakespeare’, *Intertexts*, 8 (2003), 77-93. Streufert also refers to *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Cymbeline* as ‘Shakespeare’s other ghost plays’; however, while Streufert’s interpretation of ghosts focuses on ‘the resurrected, visible, and incorporeal spirits of deceased men’, my own reading of *Titus Andronicus* explores the phenomenon of ghosts in a broader context. See Streufert, pp. 87 and 78.

<sup>2</sup> In the Folio, the ghost enters after Lady Macbeth’s speech, where she reminds her husband that he must ‘give the cheer’ (3.4.35-40). Kenneth Muir, however, in the Arden edition of the play-text, defends the decision to position the ghost’s entrance immediately after Macbeth’s line: ‘Were the graced person of our Banquo present’ (3.4.46): for Muir, the ghost ‘appears when summoned’, and here it is Macbeth himself who verbally summons the ghost. See Muir’s notes in the Arden *Macbeth* (London: Methuen, 1951), xv-xvi, and p. 91, for a fuller account of this editorial decision.

<sup>3</sup> See *Hamlet*, 1.5.2-91. In Act one, scenes one and four, the ghost remains silent on the stage; in Act one scene five and Act three scene four (the closet scene), the Ghost speaks to Hamlet.

72). As Stephen Greenblatt observes, ‘the figure identifies himself not as Caesar’s ghost but rather in terms that seem to claim that he is *part of Brutus*’.<sup>4</sup> The ghost of such tragedies provides ‘a space for the playwright to investigate the construction of identity’: thus the identity that is here being *deconstructed* is inherently masculine.<sup>5</sup>

While both Lady Macbeth and Gertrude are unable to see the ghost in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, its absent presence persistently threatens male interiority: Lady Macbeth warns her husband that what he sees is in fact ‘the very painting of [his] fear’ (3.4.71); in a strikingly similar fashion, Gertrude tells Hamlet in the closet scene that the sight he looks upon is ‘the very coinage of [his] brain’ (*Hamlet*, 3.4.142).<sup>6</sup> Through their observations, the ghost comes to represent the tragic flaw that threatens to ‘undo’ each protagonist: Macbeth’s fear, and Hamlet’s madness. Although Lady Macbeth and Gertrude claim to see ‘nothing’, while Macbeth and Hamlet – and the Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences – undoubtedly see ‘something’, that something as an apparition remains questionable throughout the structures of both play-texts and furthermore leaves us questioning the stability of male interiority and bodily potency. While Banquo’s ghost makes Macbeth a stranger to his own ‘disposition’ (3.4.130) and disavows his manhood – ‘being gone, / I am a man again’ (3.4.123-4) – the ghost of Hamlet’s father threatens to draw his son’s ‘noble mind’ into ‘madness’ (*Hamlet*, 3.1.148/1.4.58).

Ghosts, although they may not actually appear on the stage, have an immediate ‘presence’ in *Titus Andronicus*. On his return to Rome after ‘weary wars against the barbarous Goths’ (1.1.28), Titus expresses his anguish over the bodies of his dead sons who, not yet laid to rest, ‘hover on the dreadful shore of Styx’ (1.1.88).<sup>7</sup> For the classical dead, a burial would not suffice: ‘there had to be a public, ritual acknowledgement’ of their passing and, if this was not done properly, ‘the ghost might return to remind his friends or kin of their negligence’.<sup>8</sup> Although not often

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<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt, p. 182; my emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> Streufert, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> If it is possible to argue that Lady Macbeth cannot see the murdered Banquo because she is ‘innocent of the knowledge’ of Macbeth’s plot to have him killed (3.2.50), then it is also possible to argue that Gertrude does not see her first husband’s ghost because she herself is innocent of the knowledge of his murder by Claudius.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Neill also points out that ‘scanted or interrupted funerals, unburied corpses and disinterred skeletons, violated sepulchres and neglected tombs’ also feature heavily in revenge tragedies such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*. See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> R. C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformation* (New York: Prometheus, 1996), p. 10.

speculated on in discussions of the play, the ghosts of Titus's sons play a crucial part in setting the tragedy in motion: in order for them to be appeased, the Romans demand that Alarbus, 'the proudest prisoner of the Goths' (1.1.96), must be sacrificed, a bloody killing that necessarily recapitulates 'through the lopping of limbs and hewing of flesh the conditions of death on the battlefield'.<sup>9</sup> It is this 'sacrifice' (1.1.124), a ritual killing that Alarbus's mother, Tamora, will describe as 'cruel, irreligious piety' (1.1.130), which will prompt her 'sharp revenge' (1.1.137) on the Andronici family and turn tragedy into revenge tragedy.

As in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, these 'hauntings' in the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus* are described and finally appeased through the potency and subjectivity of the male body: it is Titus and Lucius whose thoughts are most affected by ghosts; and it is Alarbus's body that must become the site of the ghosts' appeasement. After Titus's opening speech, Lucius wastes no further time in requesting the sacrifice, so that 'the shadows be not unappeased' (1.1.100). Shortly after escorting Alarbus off-stage, Lucius and his brothers return to report that Alarbus's limbs have been 'lopped', and his entrails removed to 'feed the sacrificing fire' (1.1.143-4). The sacrifice is performed '*Ad manus fratrum*' – as an offering to the spirits of Lucius's dead brothers (1.1.98). Thus the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus* not only alludes to the presence of ghosts; it also confirms that they have a crucial role to play in the interrogation of 'Roman rites' (1.1.143) and the male characters who define those rites as part of a 'civilised' culture.

The presence of these ghosts in *Titus Andronicus* is, ironically, marked by absence: no actual voice or visible body represents their subjectivity. However, my own talk of ghosts endeavours to offer them a more potent existence through a reading of Julie Taymor's film adaptation, *Titus* (1999). In the opening sequence of

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<sup>9</sup> Deborah Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53 (2002), 21-52 (p. 35). Willis is one of the few critics to acknowledge the agency of the play's ghosts, discussing the events of the play through the framework of trauma theory and viewing their 'presence' in this opening scene as an integral part of the traumatic legacy of war for those present on the stage. However, such a reading is also anachronistic, as Willis describes the ghosts of Titus's sons as 'the play's first revengers'; in the play's Roman setting, it is not revenge that the classical dead require, but appeasement. See Willis, pp. 35-6, in particular. For a reading that applies the phenomenon of the 'phantom limb' to the amputations that occur throughout the play, see Shawn Huffman, 'Amputation, Phantom Limbs, and Spectral Agency in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Normand Charette's *Les Reines*', *Modern Drama*, 47 (2004), 66-81. While Huffman's reading focuses specifically on how Titus and Lavinia take action through the 'spectral agency' of their absent limbs, I am approaching such suggestions through a wider consideration of the play's hauntings, reading ghosts, as Greenblatt does, 'in a variety of guises and from shifting perspectives'. See Greenblatt, p. 157.

Taymor's film, the spectators in the coliseum of Rome are *spectres*: as the director explains, we hear 'only the sound of their cheering, as if ghosts of the past centuries were being awakened'.<sup>10</sup> In Taymor's representation of this 'archetypal theatre of cruelty', Rome is a space that is haunted by spectres of the past.<sup>11</sup> But what is their purpose? What do these ghosts signify?

Ghosts take on many different forms in *Titus Andronicus*. As Marjorie Garber explains, a ghost is not merely an apparition of the body after death; it is also 'an embodiment of the disembodied, a re-membling of the dismembered, an articulation of the disarticulated and inarticulate'.<sup>12</sup> *Titus Andronicus* is a play concerned with bloody deaths, bodily dismemberments and other 'unspeakable' acts, which, under the framework of the revenge tragedy, refuse to be forgotten. What is 'lost' from the body is always, in effect, present in *Titus Andronicus*, haunting the characters of the play in the form of apparitions not yet laid to rest, severed body parts that return to the space of the stage, and language itself that, however inarticulate or 'unspeakable' the act (5.3.126), continues to remind us of what was present before: 'O, handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none' (3.2.29-30). Metaphor here 'strains to keep the excruciating images of mutilation ever before our imaginations even when the visual spectacle is no longer before us', thus saturating the play with '*remembered* or foreshadowed horror'.<sup>13</sup> This 'uncanny' return of what has been lost or severed from the body is epitomised by the character of Aaron and the descriptions of his 'heinous deeds' (5.1.124) in the closing act of the play:

Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves  
And set them upright at their dear friends' door,  
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,  
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,  
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,  
'Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead'  
(5.1.136-41).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Julie Taymor, Eileen Blumenthal and Antonio Monda, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York: Abrams, 1999), p. 236.

<sup>11</sup> Taymor, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, p. 230.

<sup>12</sup> Garber, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*', in *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies: 'Richard III', 'Titus Andronicus', 'Romeo and Juliet': A Casebook*, ed. by Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey (London: MacMillan, 1990), pp. 99-113 (p. 100; my emphasis). For the article's original source, see *Shakespeare Survey*, 27 (1974), 11-19.

<sup>14</sup> Freud describes the uncanny as 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar'. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 124.



In turning to a reading of Julie Taymor's film adaptation, this chapter serves to explore further the relationship between *Titus's* ghosts and the male/female body. As a film that 'plays on the boundary in between, focusing on the borderline of that which is and is not', ghosts have a crucial presence in Taymor's *Titus*.<sup>15</sup> From the very beginning, Rome is a space that is haunted by spectres of the past, but in Taymor's postmodern vision, collisions of past and present, absence and presence, wholeness and fragmentation, seep further into spatial and bodily representations. What are the ghosts of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*? How do the various spatial and bodily permutations of loss translate to film? It is the ways in which the losses of the past return to haunt the present that will inform the central focus of this chapter. Spatial and bodily representations within Taymor's film reveal that the play's relationship between gender and the losses of the body has been expanded; most significantly, the play's depiction of the losses of Rome that focus on Lavinia for their bodily representation are overturned in the postmodern fragmentation of Taymor's film, so that what is lost is re-examined and represented through the male body. By broadening an understanding of the play's ghosts through the representations of Taymor's film, it comes to light that, of all the characters in Shakespeare's tragedy, it is Titus himself who is most haunted by 'groaning shadows that are gone' (1.1.126).

While the hauntings of *Titus Andronicus* often relate to the male body, it is the female body – Lavinia's body – that is most frequently used to signify Titus's loss and the losses of Rome. As Douglas Green observes, it is 'largely through and on the female characters that Titus is constructed and his tragedy inscribed'.<sup>16</sup> Lavinia's mutilated body "'articulates" Titus's own suffering and victimization' as his speech 're-presents Lavinia as both the occasion and the expression of his madness, *his* inner state'.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, while *Titus's* ghosts persistently seek out *male* bodies to affect, these *effects* must necessarily be displaced onto the female body. At the tomb, Lavinia respectfully renders her 'tributary tears' for her 'brethren's obsequies' (1.1.159-60), but her opening greeting to her father, delivered 'with tears of joy' (1.1.161), looks forward to Titus's future and to the future of Rome: 'In peace and honour live Lord Titus long: / My noble lord and father, live in fame!' (1.1.157-8). Her entrance and

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<sup>15</sup> Lisa S. Starks, 'Cinema of Cruelty: Powers of Horror in Julie Taymor's *Titus*', in *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. by Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002), pp. 121-42 (p. 122).

<sup>16</sup> Douglas E. Green, 'Interpreting "Her Martyr'd Signs": Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 317-26 (p. 319).

<sup>17</sup> Green, p. 322.

her instruction to her father to 'live', occurring immediately after Alarbus's bloody sacrifice and the laying of her brethren in the tomb, is in stark contrast to the dark 'shadows' of the underworld that manipulate this opening scene and is instead a reminder of the life that is to come.

The other woman of the play, Tamora, whilst driven by revenge for her 'dear son's life' (1.1.456), is never affected openly by any experience of his ghost as she suffers his loss. Deborah Willis suggests that Tamora 'reads the trauma of loss primarily as a wound to her own identity'; for Tamora, it is 'as if the loss of Alarbus will be too painful to recall directly', and thus she will 'not even experience his presence as a ghost'.<sup>18</sup> However, within the context of Titus's and Lucius's comments about ghosts in the play's opening scene, Tamora's inability to 'experience' Alarbus's ghost could also be due to the fact that she herself experiences no guilt over his death.<sup>19</sup> As Titus's prisoner at the time of Alarbus's killing, Tamora can only plead helplessly for her son's life: she cannot suffer guilt in suffering his loss. Titus, 'unkind and careless of [his] own' (1.1.86), returns from 'weary wars' on the battlefield under a heavy burden of guilt over the delayed burial of his sons. To appease the dead, Tamora must also suffer the loss of her eldest son, and it is Lavinia's body that becomes inevitably doomed to signify what that loss pertains to, as Chiron and Demetrius rape her, cut off her hands and remove her tongue to leave her as fragmented and broken as Rome itself, the emblem of her father's grief.

The relationship between gender, the body, and the signified losses of the past is undoubtedly complicated by the action of the play, which is often taken by critics 'to be structured around the spectacular display of the female body'.<sup>20</sup> Although it is the men of the play who are the 'haunted' characters, it is the female body that must be used either to signify their loss, or to instigate it. If Lavinia's body represents

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<sup>18</sup> Willis, pp. 37-8.

<sup>19</sup> Consider confessions of guilt, for instance, in Hamlet's words to his father's ghost in the closet scene: 'Do you not come your tardy son to chide, / That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by / Th'important acting of your dread command?' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.109-11), and in Macduff's words after Macbeth has had his family murdered: 'Tyrant, show thy face. / If thou be'st slain, and with no stroke of mine, / My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still' (*Macbeth*, 5.7.18-20).

<sup>20</sup> Willis here argues that, due to the fact that feminist criticism has made a substantial contribution to the body of work on *Titus Andronicus* over the last few decades, the violence of this play tends to be explored through the violence committed against the female body – Lavinia's – whilst 'violence against the male body is ignored'. Willis's reading of *Titus Andronicus* reveals how 'the play invites us to see how characters of both sexes turn to revenge in the aftermath of trauma to find relief from terrible pain'. My own reading of the play, although still offered primarily from a feminist perspective, aims to incorporate a consideration of the violence committed against both the male and the female body by arguing that the play's 'hauntings' work on many levels. See Willis, pp. 22 and 26.

Titus's loss and the violation of Rome, then Tamora's body, as both sexual and maternal threat, is positioned as the instigator of that violation, instructing her sons to 'use' Lavinia as they please and staging the fall of the Andronici around the 'detested, dark, blood-drinking pit' of the woods (2.3.224).<sup>21</sup> *Titus's* final scene also implies that, like Marcus's desire to 'knit' Rome's 'broken limbs again into one body' (5.3.70-2), the play must re-enact a sense of wholeness within the male subject, while what is removed from the female body – namely, Lavinia's hands and tongue – is kept absent. However, my own discussion of the play's ghosts discovers, like Green's own reading of gender in the play, that 'contradictions beset this enterprise'.<sup>22</sup> For in the representation of masculine 'Roman rites' (1.1.143), ironically, "wholeness" is achieved only through acts of foreclosure and self-mutilation', and thus 'the perverse therapy of revenge eventually consumes the self it tries to save'.<sup>23</sup> In reading the play's ghosts, it is in fact the men of the play who are haunted by their own violent deeds, whose bodies and minds must be tested and also punished.

### ***Strange Prodigies***

While Marjorie Garber describes Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as 'the play of the uncanny', *Titus Andronicus*, as a play that has for so long been 'dismembered' from Shakespeare's other works in criticism, has itself returned to enact its own haunting of the canon.<sup>24</sup> As Jonathan Bate observes, many 'have been anxious to find grounds for devaluing its place in Shakespeare's career or even dismissing it from the canon of his works altogether'; but as Bate's argument readily testifies, certain scholars now recognise not only that the play 'was wholly by Shakespeare', but also that *Titus Andronicus* is 'an important play and a living one'.<sup>25</sup> While there are no 'resurrected, visible, and incorporeal spirits of deceased men' in this early tragedy, the play's opening reveals how Shakespeare's ideas about the effects of ghosts were already at

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<sup>21</sup> In a reading of the play's women, Marion Wynne-Davies observes that the imagery in *Titus's* second act is 'blatant, the cave being the vagina, the all-consuming sexual mouth of the feminine earth, which remains outside the patriarchal order of Rome'. This 'swallowing womb' thus 'links female sexuality to death and damnation': consuming only male bodies, its 'power is to castrate'. See Marion Wynne-Davies, "'The Swallowing Womb": Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*', in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 129-51 (pp. 135-6).

<sup>22</sup> Green, p. 319.

<sup>23</sup> Willis, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Garber, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction' in *Titus Andronicus*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3. For a fuller debate about the play's authorship, see pp. 79-83.

work.<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the play, characters seem caught between the past and the present, absence and presence, as bodies on stage are used to represent both the living and the dead. The play's action begins with the announcement of a deceased emperor whose passing has left the future government of Rome uncertain. As Saturninus and Bassianus enter the stage with their followers, Saturninus declares himself as the 'first-born son that was the last / That wore the imperial diadem of Rome' (1.1.5-6) and says to his followers, 'let my father's honours live in me' (1.1.7); his brother, Bassianus, declares himself as the more suited successor to the 'imperial seat' (1.1.14), while Marcus will announce that the people of Rome have, 'by common voice' (1.1.21), chosen Titus in election. Caught between past 'honours' that have not yet been forgotten and the question of Rome's future government, the opening of *Titus Andronicus* serves to emphasise the ineffectuality of the present.

Signifiers of the past continue to weigh heavily on those present. In Marcus's opening speech, we hear the news that Titus has returned to Rome, 'bearing his valiant sons / In coffins from the field' (1.1.33-5). This prepares the audience for the entrance of the procession and illustrates how living bodies on the stage will simultaneously represent celebration and funeral, presence and absence, life and death. Those who have survived and 'brought to yoke, the enemies of Rome' (1.1.69) can only be described *and seen* alongside those who have perished: 'Behold the poor remains, alive and dead!' (1.1.81). In this dramatic processional entry of 'captive Goths, victorious Romans, and the bearers of an unspecified number of coffins', bodies of the deceased and the living share the space of the stage.<sup>27</sup> As the procession enters, 'the third level' of the performance space, 'the darkness below the stage which figures the underworld', comes into focus.<sup>28</sup> Rome will reward its heroes both 'with love' and 'with burial' (1.1.82-4), and the impact of the dead on the living will set the tragedy in motion.

This remorse over past 'weary wars' clouds the triumphant heralding of Titus's return: Rome is victorious 'in thy mourning weeds' (1.1.70), and joy is expressed through 'tears' (1.1.76).<sup>29</sup> Willis describes this moment as first making

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<sup>26</sup> Streufert, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare: the Tragedies* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Bate, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Naomi Conn Liebler points out that, although it is the Romans who are victorious, 'nothing in the play indicates who started the war or who invaded whose territories'. Such ambiguities also detract from a sense of victory in the play's opening scene. See Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Getting It All Right: *Titus Andronicus* and Roman History', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 263-78 (p. 272).

*Titus* something of a “‘coming home” story’, where Titus and his son Lucius ‘return as combat survivors, carrying coffins and haunted by ghosts’.<sup>30</sup> As Titus expresses his torment over the bodies of his dead sons who, not yet laid to rest, wait to cross the river Styx and enter the underworld, his words proceed quickly to thoughts of the tomb and to the burial that will allow his sons to ‘sleep in peace’ (1.1.91). As the survivors open the tomb and prepare to lay the dead ‘by their brethren’ (1.1.89), Titus laments, ‘How many sons hast thou of mine in store, / That thou wilt never render to me more’ (1.1.94-5). However, this moment of remorse turns quickly to Lucius’s request that ‘the proudest prisoner of the Goths’ (1.1.96) be brought forward: before Titus’s sons may ‘sleep in peace’, Alarbus’s ‘flesh’ must be sacrificed.<sup>31</sup>

Paradoxically, then, the ‘Roman rites’ (1.1.143) mark both kindness and cruelty, repose and torture, peace and violence, bodily preservation and defilement: the ‘silence and eternal sleep’ (1.1.155) of Titus’s sons, *and* the barbarous death of Alarbus, whose ‘entrails feed the sacrificing fire’ and ‘perfume’ the sky (1.1.144-5). This scene of bloody sacrifice to appease the ghosts finds its later parallel in *Cymbeline*, where, in the play’s closing scene, Cymbeline reports that the kinsmen of the slain have ‘made suit’ that ‘their good souls may be appeased’ with the slaughter of their Roman captives (5.4.83-4). In Shakespeare’s later play, however, the sacrifice never takes place: Cymbeline forgives all the prisoners. In *Titus*, it is the necessity to appease the ghosts, not forgiveness, which prevails.<sup>32</sup>

What is ‘past’ is always, in effect, present in *Titus Andronicus*, haunting the words, actions and bodies of the play’s characters and threatening to dictate the events of the future. It is the necessity of appeasing the ‘groaning shadows that are gone’ which sets the brutal and violent actions of the play in motion. Later in this opening scene, of which ‘the impact is inescapable’, Tamora asks her new husband,

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<sup>30</sup> Willis, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> While it has been argued that the sacrifice of Alarbus may not have been an intended inclusion for the First Quarto and that, without it, Titus’s speech ‘runs straight on’, my own argument seeks to consider the play’s collisions of mourning, loss and violent action within a wider thematic context, thus embracing rather than questioning such alterations in style and tone. See *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by J. Dover Wilson, *The New Shakespeare* (Cambridge: CUP, 1948), p. xxxv. See also Eugene M. Waith, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), p. 39, and notes on pp. 85 and 88 for additional comments on these lines.

<sup>32</sup> For further comparisons between *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline* and Shakespeare’s representations of Rome, see Paul A. Centor, ‘*Cymbeline*: Beyond Rome’, in *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays*, ed. by Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Andrew Murphy (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 169-84 (pp. 180-82).

Saturninus, to ‘pardon what is past’ (1.1.434).<sup>33</sup> Tamora speaks these words falsely as she pleads for Titus’s cause, the Roman general who ordered that her eldest son be slaughtered in the name of religious sacrifice. When Saturninus mocks her request to ‘basely put it up without revenge’ (1.1.436), she assures him that revenge will be her motive, that she will ‘find a day to massacre them all’ (1.1.453). While Tamora’s future actions will be dictated by the loss of her son and the ‘irreligious piety’ of his murder (1.1.130), Titus’s actions are also commanded by ghosts of the past: ‘so the shadows be not unappeased’ (1.1.100), and men are not disturbed by strange ‘prodigies on earth’ (1.1.101).

The ghosts of Titus’s sons and the barbarous death of Alarbus configure the play’s unsettling explorations of violence and loss, and this configuration undoubtedly takes the body as its site of representation. As Stevie Simkin asserts: ‘Nowhere is the fragility of the body more evident than in revenge tragedy’.<sup>34</sup> While the play’s excessive violence has become an ongoing part of its own ‘afterlife’ with readers and spectators, what undoubtedly surrounds *Titus*’s acts of violence is this overwhelming sense of loss that manifests itself through allusions to the past and the dual presence/absence of the body. More than any other of Shakespeare’s plays, *Titus Andronicus* ‘violates the integrity of the human body’.<sup>35</sup> While theatre performance has the power to make viewers ‘aware of their own physical existence in the presence of other highly marked bodies on the stage’, the acts of violation and dismemberment in *Titus Andronicus* challenge viewers to think further about bodily autonomy and wholeness, to question their own ‘fundamental ideas of bodily presence and totality’.<sup>36</sup> Its violence concentrates specifically on acts of bodily fracturing and dismemberment: the ‘hewing’ of Alarbus’s limbs and the removal of his entrails; the mutilation of Lavinia through the removal of her hands and tongue; the severing of Titus’s hand; the beheadings of Quintus and Martius; and, of course, the baking of Chiron and Demetrius in the pie that Titus will serve to Tamora and the emperor.

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Stevie Simkin, ‘Introduction’, in *Revenge Tragedy*, ed. by Stevie Simkin (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1-23 (p. 9).

<sup>35</sup> Pascale Aebischer, ‘Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence: Negotiating Masculinities in Branagh’s *Henry V* and Taymor’s *Titus*’, in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. by Diana E. Henderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 112-32 (p. 122).

<sup>36</sup> Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2002), pp. 108 and 113.

The fragmentation and loss that looks to the dismembered body for its physical manifestation is also a reflection on the state of Rome itself, illustrating how the events of the past have ruptured a sense of wholeness ‘within the city walls’ (1.1.26). Titus’s metaphor for Rome’s future empery, ‘A better head her glorious body fits / Than his that shakes for age and feebleness’ (1.1.187-8), relates both to the political fracturing of Roman society that demands a suitable *head* or leader, and to the physical acts of dismemberment that will be represented on the stage. Such early metaphors illustrate the figurative nature of the play’s language and, as Pascale Aebischer comments, ‘how easily metaphors of dismemberment can punningly slip into literal mutilation’.<sup>37</sup>

However, such metaphors also allude to the power and presence of *Titus’s* ghosts, their existence ‘within the city walls’ and within the body’s representation. Marcus’s words, ‘help to set a head on headless Rome’ (1.1.186), cannot fail to suggest an image of the body that, although marked by a crucial absence, is still understood through the suggestion of wholeness. Rome, although described as ‘headless’, is still a ‘body’ in existence, a truncated body that can only be comprehended in terms of the existence of its severed head. In this image of the body politic, the absent ‘head’ is, of course, the last emperor, Caesar. Similarly, the country and its people still exist despite the absence of a ruler; Rome is therefore, perhaps, neither living nor dead in Marcus’s description, caught between its need for a new ruler and he ‘that held it last’ (1.1.200). In the transfer of power that occurs in royal succession, the deceased monarch ‘transfers governance to a younger version of him or herself *as if that ruler were there*’; thus ‘the natural body of the ruler dies, but the mystical body lives in the successor’.<sup>38</sup> The ‘head’ that headless Rome seeks is therefore simultaneously an allusion to an emperor of the future and to a spectre of the past. It is a ghostly head to which our imaginations give a presence, a presence that can restore the body to its former completeness. Thus the influence of ghosts here is two-fold, as Alarbus’s sacrifice to appease the ‘groaning shadows’ takes place ‘in a

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<sup>37</sup> Aebischer, ‘Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence’, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Sid Ray, “‘Rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy’: The Politics of Consent in *Titus Andronicus*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49 (1998), 22-39 (p. 27; my emphasis).

“headless” Rome, where combatants are still arguing about succession to the emperorship’.<sup>39</sup>

The burial of Titus’s sons in the tomb also conjures up another ghostly presence: that of the absent mother. Marcus reports to the people of Rome that Titus has fought their enemies in five wars, each time ‘bearing his valiant sons / In coffins from the field’; ‘five and twenty valiant sons’ (1.1.79), both ‘alive and dead’, are counted, giving Titus twenty-six children with the inclusion of his daughter, Lavinia. The Andronici mother, however, is ‘conspicuously absent from the funeral rites’.<sup>40</sup> But the entrance of Tamora gives this absence potency, as she sheds a ‘mother’s tears in passion for her son’ (1.1.106) and, ironically, becomes the only mother to shed tears before the tomb of the Andronici. As Coppélia Kahn observes, the play’s first scene ‘locates the initiating mechanism of the revenge play not in an injury done to the hero through his kin as in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Hamlet*, but in the hero’s injury to a mother’.<sup>41</sup> It is possible to argue that it is the play’s attempt to repress the maternal, emphasised by Titus’s unkind treatment of Tamora, which not only haunts the beginning of the play but also leads ultimately to the unleashing of monstrous motherhood. From the beginning, then, ghosts have an immediate presence in *Titus Andronicus*. It is a presence that would receive a stronger physical manifestation in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* but that is here alluded to by the hold that the past possesses over the present, the feared ‘prodigies’ or ominous happenings, and how this threatening return of the past translates to Rome, and to the body itself.

Shakespeare’s metaphor of ‘headless Rome’ uses ‘the image of the body politic to portray a Rome no less fragmented than the bodies of the various Andronici become’.<sup>42</sup> However the metaphor also provides a nexus between space and the body that centres on the feminine for its dual representation. Not only is the ‘glorious body’ of Rome feminised here; the descriptions of Lavinia throughout the play also repeatedly associate the territory of her body with the territory of Rome itself. For many critics, the connections between Lavinia’s body and Rome’s body politic are

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<sup>39</sup> Molly Easo Smith, ‘Spectacles of Torment in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), 315-31 (p. 320). Interestingly, Smith here argues that Alarbus’s death becomes ‘not an illustration of monarchical power, but an exposition of its *hollowness*’. Smith, p. 120; my emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Kahn, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Gillian Murray Kendall, “‘Lend Me Thy Hand’: Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*”, *Shakespeare Survey* 40 (1989), 299-316 (p. 300).



essential for an understanding of the play.<sup>43</sup> As Aebischer comments, the play ‘only begins to make sense if the reader/spectator learns to interpret a body like Lavinia’s both as that of an individual sufferer, the mutilated rape victim, *and* as a representative of “headless Rome”, the seat of civilization that has come under attack’.<sup>44</sup>

Although many of the play’s central male characters are victims of bodily dismemberment, it is the woman’s body – Lavinia’s body – that is used throughout to signify the ‘defilement’ of Rome. As Molly Easo Smith observes, ‘the silenced and mutilated Lavinia, a figure who retains much of our attention despite her silence, best represents the plight of Rome’.<sup>45</sup> When Titus gives Rome to Saturninus by announcing that he should be crowned emperor, he also ‘gives’ him Lavinia; as ‘the crown of the empire’, possession of her also signifies power.<sup>46</sup> In particular, Lavinia’s chastity is linked with the desired preservation of Rome. In choosing to ‘identify Lavinia’s violation with the violation of Rome and of all civilized value’, Shakespeare not only overcomes the ‘unavoidable limits in *Titus Andronicus* to dramatic spectacle’, but he also draws a picture of Rome as unbound, failing, defiled, which uses the female body as its site of representation.<sup>47</sup> For Titus, Lavinia’s rape and mutilation in the woods is ‘that which gives [his] soul the greatest spurn’ (3.1.101); her ‘spotless chastity’ is ‘more dear / Than hands or tongue’ (5.2.175-6).

It is Titus’s careless treatment of Rome, and his daughter, which will lead to their defilement, making the overlapping of their emblematic significance even more crucial. It is only after his discovery of her violation that he expresses – again, through an image of bodily dismemberment – the loss of Rome and the loss of his own autonomy: ‘Give me a sword, I’ll chop off my hands too, / For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain’ (3.1.72-3). After this violation, Lavinia’s body, and Rome

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<sup>43</sup> Sid Ray, for instance, examines how Shakespeare’s play ‘associates the right of a woman to consent to marriage with the ancient right of the social body to consent to the ruling power of the monarch’. He argues that if we acknowledge Lavinia as a symbol of Rome, ‘it becomes apparent that themes of political consent, the right of the people to consent to the authority of the monarch, find expression in the same ravished and mutilated body’. Ray’s argument has a bearing on my own, for it also associates Titus’s failing of his daughter with his failing of Rome: ‘the father’s tyrannical intervention in his daughter’s marriage parallels his intervention in the election of the emperor’. See Ray, pp. 22-4. Wynne-Davies draws a similar argument in the associations between Rome and Lavinia: ‘if Marcus was right in suggesting self-determinism for the state, and indeed it seems he was, then the female body, human rather than civic, also has a valid right to independent choice’. Wynne-Davies, p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> Pascale Aebischer, ‘Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence’, p. 124.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, p. 327.

<sup>46</sup> Bernice Harris, ‘Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*’, *Criticism*, 38 (1996), 383-406 (p. 391).

<sup>47</sup> Tricomi, p. 109.

itself, is now broken into pieces, ‘enforced, stained’, ‘deflowered’ (5.3.38). However, there are allusions to the past that continue to make their presence felt on the stage, and what is lost from the body is at odds with a feminine representation. To imagine Lavinia’s violated body as merely a representative of Rome’s violation is not only to over-simplify the play’s frequently shifting and unstable examinations of Roman values, but is also to undervalue the meanings we may interpret from Lavinia’s mutilated body and how we, as ‘readers’, may interpret her ‘martyr’d signs’ (3.2.36). If, as D. J. Palmer suggests, the raped, mutilated daughter of Rome ‘is, and is not, Lavinia’, then the visual spectacle of her body gives a form to absence that allows her to return to haunt and ‘consume’ the father who failed her.<sup>48</sup>

Lavinia herself becomes a kind of ghost for the men who behold her body after her mutilation and rape, ‘an unfamiliar, unknown presence’.<sup>49</sup> Before Chiron and Demetrius drag her body from the space of the stage, Lavinia begs Tamora for her own burial: she pleads for a ‘present death’ (2.3.173), to be tumbled into ‘some loathsome pit / Where never man’s eye may behold [her] body’ (2.3.176-7).<sup>50</sup> But this burial is refused, and instead Lavinia must linger as some restless spirit, left by her attackers to her ‘silent walks’ (2.4.8). Her uncle describes her as a body caught between absence and presence, life and death: on discovering her ‘ravished’, Marcus’s speech dwells on those absent body parts, her ‘pretty fingers’ that trembled ‘like aspen-leaves upon a lute’ (2.4.42-5) and the ‘heavenly harmony’ of her ‘sweet tongue’ that would have lulled the murderer to sleep (2.4.48-50); when he presents her to Titus, saying, ‘This *was* thy daughter’ (3.1.62, emphasis added), he speaks of her as one who no longer lives. For Marcus, Lavinia is ‘both familiar and strange, fair and hideous, living body and object: *this is, and is not, Lavinia*’.<sup>51</sup>

However, as a kind of ghost, Lavinia is also powerful: like Juliet on the bier, she is a liminal body, caught between signifiers of life and death, and in this form she

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<sup>48</sup> D. J. Palmer, ‘The Unspeakable in Pursuit of the Uneatable: Language and Action in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Critical Quarterly*, 14 (1972), 320-39 (p. 321).

<sup>49</sup> Harris, p. 393.

<sup>50</sup> The pit is another space that signifies the return of the dead. In an attempt to be saved by his brother, Martius’s hands reach out from the ‘devouring receptacle’ (2.3.235) of the earth that is already Bassianus’s grave, in an image that equates living hands with some ghostly return. The bodies of Quintus and Martius are then brought out of this ‘gaping hollow of the earth’ (2.3.249) later to receive a ‘worse end than death’ (2.3.302).

<sup>51</sup> Palmer, p. 321. Similarly, in the final scene of the play when Tamora asks Titus why he has ‘slain [his] only daughter’ (5.3.55), Titus responds: ‘Not I, ’twas Chiron and Demetrius: / They ravished her and cut away her tongue, / And they, ’twas they, that did her all this wrong’ (5.3.56-8). As Liebler’s reading implies, Titus here ‘completes Lavinia’s definition as “dead”’. See Liebler, p. 276.

also makes her ghostly return: ‘transferred by Titus to Saturninus, subsequently snatched by Bassianus, Demetrius, and Chiron in succession, and then *left to wander in the woods* until picked up by Marcus and *returned to her father*’.<sup>52</sup> If Lavinia is no longer Lavinia in the eyes of Marcus or her brother, Lucius – ‘this *object* kills me’ (3.1.64, emphasis added) – then she returns to haunt her male relatives and will become the spectacle that will incite the Andronici revenge. Marcus now enters the stage with Lavinia and warns Titus that he brings ‘consuming sorrow’ (3.1.60). Before looking upon her, Titus replies: ‘Will it consume me? Let me see it then’ (3.1.61). Unlike the ghosts of Titus’s sons, Lavinia is a *visible* body for both her father and the audience. She returns here silently to torment him for his ‘unkind’ and ‘careless’ deeds, and if Titus does not hear her, he certainly sees her: ‘Why, Marcus, so she is’ (3.1.63).

For Titus, Lavinia’s body is very much a presence, a ‘lively body’ (3.1.105). However, what remains to be seen in the presence of that body – her absent hands and tongue, and the violation of her chastity – will haunt him, and like some consuming tide with an ‘envious surge’, ‘swallow him’ (3.1.96-7). Her sexual violation, as the most unseen of her injuries, gives Titus’s soul ‘the greatest spurn’ (3.1.101); more precious than hands or tongue, it cannot be forgotten, despite his attempts to repress it.<sup>53</sup> Through the act of self-mutilation in instructing Aaron to remove his hand, Titus ‘exempts himself from Lavinia’s hidden injuries, the tongue severing and the rape’; eventually, he must remove her living body from his sight: ‘Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die’ (5.3.46-7).<sup>54</sup> While it is the barbarous Moor, Aaron, who will give up his life for his only child, Titus, by contrast, gives up the life of his only daughter to end her ‘shame’ and his ‘sorrow’; it is a killing that seems, to our own modern sensibilities, even more brutal and unjust.

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<sup>52</sup> Smith, p. 327.

<sup>53</sup> Tricomi writes: ‘For all the severed heads, for all the poignance of Lavinia’s mutilated beauty, the one horror the dramatist could not depict upon the stage was the fact of Lavinia’s violated chastity’. However, as a ghost, Lavinia’s violation is also hauntingly present. See Tricomi, p. 109. In terms of the injuries she suffers, Lavinia’s rape is the play’s most disturbing absent presence; as Pascale Aebischer explains, ‘the actual rape, while contained in the body of the play, takes place off-stage, is figuratively concealed within the body of Titus and literally hidden inside that of Lavinia’. Whilst rape and the physical pain it causes ‘are both invisible and inarticulable’, the spectacle of Lavinia’s body is a visible presence that cannot be ignored, therefore becoming simultaneously a ‘lively body’ that embodies ‘the invisible and inarticulable’. See Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 26-7. Sara Eaton also suggests that Lavinia’s ‘missing hands and tongue’ do, in their absence, ‘signify the loss of her chastity’. See Sara Eaton, ‘A Woman of Letters: Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*’, in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), pp. 54-74 (p. 66).

<sup>54</sup> Ray, p. 37.

Interestingly, the other woman of Shakespeare's play, Tamora, personifies Revenge: as Aebischer observes, evil deeds in the play 'may be as black as Aaron's face, but Revenge is a woman'.<sup>55</sup> In reading the effects of the presence of Lavinia's body for Titus, her revenge extends beyond her involvement in the punishment of her rapists also to punish the father who gave her away unlawfully and whose 'stubborn adherence to the most conservative ideologies initiates the tragic action of the play'.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the ghosts of Titus's sons, Lavinia must be *seen* by her father: 'Speak, Lavinia, what accursèd hand / Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?' (3.1.66-7), and unlike their unappeased shadows, her presence demands revenge. Her return to her father as a kind of ghost also brings to mind Cordelia's return to her narcissistic father in *King Lear*; lost in madness after his ill treatment of her, Lear looks upon his only loving daughter and says: 'You are a spirit, I know: where did you die?' (4.6.50). Like Lavinia's own suffering which resulted partly from her father's careless treatment of her, Cordelia has also 'in some sense been destroyed and made into a ghost by Lear himself'.<sup>57</sup> However, Lavinia's mutilated body, as an image of life-in-death, is far more terrifying and powerful.<sup>58</sup> As a ghost, Lavinia cannot be contained by language, or by representation, or by the physical body that the men of the play look upon.<sup>59</sup>

Although the mutilated bodies of Titus and Lavinia both reveal 'terrifying indistinctions that pollute by their very failure to separate the living from the dead', we should not equate the dismemberment of Titus's hand with the loss of Lavinia's hands.<sup>60</sup> Although we may read the body politic of Rome through Lavinia's fragmented and violated body, we should not validate Titus's desire to reflect his own grief by parodying the bodily condition of his daughter: 'shall we cut away our hands

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<sup>55</sup> Aebischer, *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, p. 56.

<sup>56</sup> Wynne-Davies, p. 144. Wynne-Davies also reads Lavinia's agency through an acknowledgement of her role in her own revenge. She suggests that by the end of the play, Lavinia is no longer 'the idealised feminine beauty possessed by a patriarchal Rome; instead she becomes an active participant in the revenge'. In doing so, Lavinia 'seems to evade containment within the sign of property and lays claim to an independent self, unrestricted by gender conventions'. See Wynne-Davies, pp. 132-3.

<sup>57</sup> Greenblatt, p. 186.

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Lavinia's writing of the rape is also ghostly; appearing in the 'sandy plot' (4.1.71), her words are both present and absent, a shifting mark in the dust that may not remain visible, but will be remembered. In Huffman's reading, Lavinia must 'make others comprehend the haunted signs that she makes with her invisible and untouchable hands'; however, such a reading limits Lavinia's agency to the interpretive abilities of other characters. By reading Lavinia herself as a ghost, her 'haunted signs' extend to the very presence of her body. See Huffman, p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> To read Lavinia as a ghost is not to undermine the power that her present body on the stage can generate for the spectator; rather, it is a vehicle for imagining her 'invisible' crimes as a ghostly presence that returns to haunt her father, despite their absence from the external 'evidence' of her body.

<sup>60</sup> Liebler, p. 276.

like thine? / Or shall we bite our tongues and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hateful days?’ (3.1.130-2). Although much criticism has ‘assimilated Lavinia’s plight to Titus’s tragedy’, the meanings that unfold within the return of Titus’s severed hand provide another reason to view their tragedies separately.<sup>61</sup> While Lavinia’s dismemberment ‘is eventually understood, by means of its Ovidian parallel, as a secondary result of the rape’, Titus’s dismemberment represents his own ineffectuality in Rome.<sup>62</sup> Albert Tricomi argues that ‘the hands of the Andronici are, in the aftermath of the Gothic war, rendered useless’.<sup>63</sup> However, as a signifier of his attempts to shield Rome from its enemies, there is more to be understood in the ghastly *return* of Titus’s hand to the stage.<sup>64</sup>

Bodies are not only mutilated in *Titus Andronicus*, but the dismembered *body parts* also persistently return to the space of the stage to enact their own ‘haunting’ of the play’s protagonist. For Titus, the reappearance of his severed hand is accompanied by the return of the severed heads of his two sons, Quintus and Martius. The losses of the body thus return in morbid and unsettling images, both as physical properties of stage performance *and* through the literalness of the play’s language, which verbally illustrates the inability to separate from thought what has been separated from the body. Thus, removed body parts themselves obtain a kind of ‘afterlife’ through the ‘talk of hands’ (3.2.29), and through their reappearances as stage prop. Katherine Rowe asks, ‘how should the return of Titus’s hand to the stage – as a property passed from one player to another – be understood?’<sup>65</sup> The relationship between language and acts of violence in *Titus Andronicus* has been well documented, with critics such as Albert Tricomi defining the play’s ‘peculiar literary importance’ as its ‘spectacularly self-conscious images’ and ‘the prophetic literalness of its metaphors’.<sup>66</sup> Incidentally, it is the gulf between the *descriptions* of language and the

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<sup>61</sup> Marshall, p. 128.

<sup>62</sup> Marshall, p. 131.

<sup>63</sup> Tricomi, pp. 103-104.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Neill writes: ‘for Titus it is the shield-hand, the sign of his role as Rome’s defender’. In the first banquet scene, Titus also confirms that he has given Aaron his left hand: ‘This poor right hand of mine / Is left to tyrannize upon my breast’ (3.2.7-8). See Michael Neill, ‘“Amphitheatres in the Body”: Playing With Hands on the Shakespearean Stage’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 48 (1995), 23-50 (p. 24).

<sup>65</sup> Katherine A. Rowe, ‘Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 279-303 (p. 280). Rowe also explains Titus’s returned hand as ‘a kind of dramatic mortmain, the grasp of past experience reappearing in the present’, but offers a different understanding of its ghostly purpose: ‘it plays the role that ghosts typically inhabit in the revenge tradition, an unforgettable reminder *of his purpose*’. See Rowe, pp. 290-91; my emphasis.

<sup>66</sup> Tricomi, p. 99. For further essays on hands and dismemberment, see: Murray Kendall, pp. 299-316; Rowe, pp. 279-303; and Neill, pp. 38-43 in particular.

reality of events – in other words, the way in which the play ‘turns its back on metaphor’ or reality ‘begins to take vengeance on metaphor’ – that has become a significant focus for discussions concerning mutilation.<sup>67</sup>

To offer a further possible answer to Rowe’s question, both language and stage prop here serve to heighten a sense of what is described in medical terms as phantom limb sensation: although the severed limb is absent from the body, ‘for many, not only is the preoperative pain still felt, but the full limb seems still to be present’.<sup>68</sup> Here, the fragmented body is not Lavinia’s, but Titus’s own – the severed body parts of the Andronici family that have now been broken and scattered. When these severed body parts return to the space of the stage, their ghostly presence is ‘felt’ by Titus: ‘these two heads do seem to speak to me / And threat me I shall never come to bliss / Till all these mischiefs be returned again’ (3.1.272-4). He is so traumatised by the sight that he is, at first, ‘still’ (3.1.264): ‘the violation of bodily integrity that Titus confronts in these heads without bodies suggests the fragmentation of his emotional integrity’.<sup>69</sup> By the end of the third act, repressed wrongs committed in the past have returned under so many guises that Titus will take ‘false shadows for true substances’ (3.2.80).

If, as Ray suggests, Titus’s hands have indeed become ineffectual in Rome, and his remaining hand is nothing more than ‘a tyrannising limb’, left to thump down his beating heart in the ‘hollow prison’ of his body (3.2.10), then the return of his *removed* hand is equally tyrannous.<sup>70</sup> Michael Neill argues that Titus’s own ‘heroic identity becomes embodied in his severed hand’; if this is the case, then it is the failure of that heroic identity which returns to haunt him.<sup>71</sup> When giving Aaron his hand, he bids him to tell the emperor that ‘it was a hand that warded him / From thousand dangers’, and then says: ‘bid him bury it’ (3.1.195-6). Like Lavinia’s body,

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<sup>67</sup> Tricomi, p. 102; Kendall, p. 299.

<sup>68</sup> Joyce M. Brown, Liz Jamieson and Cath M. McFarlane, ‘The Musculoskeletal System’, in *Nursing Practice: Hospital and Home*, ed. by Margaret F. Alexander, Josephine N. Fawcett and Phyllis J. Runciman, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 2000), pp. 393-427 (p. 412). See also M. McCaffery and A. Beebe, *Pain: Clinical Manual For Nursing Practice* (London: Mosby, 1994). Huffman also considers the phenomenon of phantom limbs in Shakespeare’s play, however his reading only interprets the actions of the amputees and excludes the return of Titus’s severed hand. He also reads significant differences in the ‘spectral agency’ of their severed hands according to gender differences: ‘Female spectral agency seems to shadow masculine sense and meaning and is inscribed as a profound lack’. However, I am positioning the idea of phantom limbs within a wider consideration of the play’s ghosts in order to demonstrate the *agency* of Lavinia herself as a ghost. See Huffman, p. 73. (p. 73).

<sup>69</sup> Willis, p. 47.

<sup>70</sup> Ray, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Neill, p. 42.

instead of being buried, Titus's hand is sent back to him 'in scorn' (3.1.238), and like the daughter passed 'as property' from one man to another, it returns to haunt its previous owner and simultaneously to call him to revenge.<sup>72</sup> Removing it offers no comfort, no peace: 'As if we should forget we had no hands / If Marcus did not name the word of hands' (3.2.32-3). If Titus's severed hand, offered up to the emperor in exchange for the release of his two sons, reveals something about Titus's own guilt, then his remaining hand, 'left to tyrannize upon [his] breast' (3.2.8) also suggests a possible tyranny of the heart. As Cynthia Marshall observes, by sharing in Lavinia's mutilation, Titus 'disavows his own guilt without forsaking the position of power that leads him to kill his daughter'.<sup>73</sup>

The ghostly hauntings of Titus's hand and his sons' two heads – the implication of the recurring repressed – is not adequately fulfilled by the play's development, as the morbid 'return' of body parts is converted into the patriarchal need for reassembling the body to reinstate a sense of 'wholeness', paradoxically through revenge and further acts of bodily fragmentation. Titus instructs his family to 'circle' about him, vowing to right each of their wrongs: 'The vow is made' (3.1.280). After the vow has been set in the image of the family as a circle, Titus instructs his family members to collect the body parts that have been returned to them from the emperor 'in scorn' (3.1.238): he instructs Marcus to take a head; Lavinia to retrieve his hand between her teeth, while he himself takes the other head.<sup>74</sup> The re-gathering of family body parts by the remaining Andronici functions like some bizarre, grotesque attempt to achieve what Marcus will later attempt to offer for the people of Rome: 'how to knit again' their 'broken limbs again into one body' (5.3.70-2).<sup>75</sup> However, as Titus's attempts to 'knit' the Andronici again into 'one body' are

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<sup>72</sup> Kahn writes that, for Titus, 'Lavinia's worth resides in her exchange value as a virgin daughter'; she is 'symbolically important to Rome's patriarchy', just as Titus's hand is symbolically important to his identity as a patriarchal hero of Rome. See Kahn, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> Marshall, p. 135.

<sup>74</sup> Rowe reads Lavinia's retrieval of Titus's hand not 'as a confirmation of her loss of the powers represented by the phallus', but instead, she argues: 'If we imagine that signs of agency can be articulated separately from interiority, as I think they are in the play, we can read Lavinia as an intending agent who deploys manual icons to powerful effect'. Thus, in taking up Titus's hand, Lavinia 'assumes the iconography of agency to herself'. See Rowe, pp. 300-301.

<sup>75</sup> Bate notes the 'visual joke' in Lavinia's retrieval of Titus's hand between her teeth, 'for it shows that she has become 'the *handmaid* of Revenge'. But such a reading also figures Lavinia's action as belonging to Titus's revenge, not to herself. Bate suggests that, if we laugh at this line, we are 'sharing in *Titus's experience*'. Kahn also observes how this act would seem to signify Lavinia's 'return to the role of patriarchal daughter', thus 'making her the handmaid of *his* revenge'. However, such readings fail to consider how agency *returns* to Lavinia here, via the dismembered hand that replaces her tongue. See Bate, Introduction, pp. 11-12; my emphasis, and Kahn, p. 60; my emphasis.

ultimately based on the fragmentation of *other* bodies – namely, Chiron and Demetrius – his patriarchal role in reasserting order and a sense of wholeness remains undoubtedly fragile.

In the play's final act, the desired restoration of 'wholeness' within Rome's city walls remains persistently undercut by further acts and implications of bodily fragmentation. As Liebler observes, "'headless Rome", split from the beginning of the play by antagonistic brothers, has already been fractured beyond any unified set of values'.<sup>76</sup> While Titus's family, made whole again by the bizarre collecting of its severed body parts, does indeed reap its revenge, Lavinia's ghost is finally laid to rest by the 'tyrannising' hand of her father; thus her own end has been converted into *his* ending, the end of the 'shame' that haunted him most. Without speech, Lavinia's part in her own death must be determined through the body's *performance*: does she consent to the killing? Do father and daughter make a silent agreement before Titus acts? However the scene is played out, Lucius, as Rome's new emperor, orders that the bodies of Titus and Lavinia will both be buried in their 'household's monument' (5.3.194) and will receive all proper burial rites; but despite this, Lavinia's corpse may be in danger of being overshadowed by the attention that is lavished on Titus's dead body in this final scene, as the remaining family members – Lucius, Marcus, and the young boy – all take their turns to offer warm kisses and 'shed obsequious tears upon this trunk' (5.3.152).

Titus receives an extended farewell on the stage after his death, and we know that he will receive a peaceful burial. However, although Titus is no longer haunted, spectators of his tragedy who are implicated in his 'unkind' acts will continue to be haunted by Tamora – a body that will not be granted peaceful burial – and Aaron's 'dismembered', ghostly head. Fastened 'in the earth' (5.3.183), with his body buried and only his head remaining visible, Aaron '*appears* to be a disembodied head' and '*his* seed, half Moor and half Roman-Goth, will eventually destroy what is left of Rome'.<sup>77</sup> A powerful absent presence, Aaron's talking, 'undead' head has a power to disrupt the final harmony of *Titus Andronicus* that is far more potent than the 'usurper's cursèd head' in the final scene of *Macbeth* (5.7.99). Recalling the events of the play's opening in 'headless Rome', the new head of order, Lucius, is now haunted

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<sup>76</sup> Liebler, p. 275.

<sup>77</sup> Liebler, p. 276. Bate also writes that 'the troubles of the Andronici began with the question of proper burial rites and the sacrifice of Alarbus; the play ends with the living burial of Aaron and the refusal of proper burial rites for Tamora'. See Bate's introduction for the Arden *Titus Andronicus*, p. 15.



not by the 'past honours' of a previous emperor, but by the ghostly head of Aaron, 'a talking head left to torment Lucius and the Roman public in general by reminding them of his past victories over the Andronici'.<sup>78</sup> If the ghosts of Lavinia and Titus will be laid to rest, then Aaron and Tamora will continue to haunt the play's spectators.

### *A Consuming Past*

Despite the ghostly signifiers that unsettle the play's ending, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, as Marion Wynne-Davies observes, 'never entirely overthrows the patriarchal values of the political system'.<sup>79</sup> In order to read further into the subversive potential of the play's ghosts, it is necessary to consider the spatial and bodily representations of Julie Taymor's film, *Titus*.<sup>80</sup> Here, signifiers of the past seep further into the world of the film to weaken and challenge the patriarchal authority of the protagonist. As Sid Ray points out, Shakespeare's Titus is a representative of patriarchy who recalls those 'original rulers in ancient communities'; in his treatment of Lavinia and his killing of Mutius, he adopts the 'ancient paradigm of the father as absolute ruler with the right to inflict capital punishment on his family'.<sup>81</sup> Taymor presents Anthony Hopkins's Titus in all his wrong-doings and misguided actions through recurring signifiers of a past that is unsettling and *consuming* in its return. When Titus's name first appears for the film's title amongst the dust of the coliseum floor and is quickly erased by the footsteps of Rome's returning soldiers, we know that it is Titus's heroic identity, not Lavinia's telling of rape, which will fade in the 'sandy plot' (4.1.71). In Taymor's *Titus*, it is the past itself that will 'consume' him.

From the beginning, Taymor's film 'plays with the make-believe or illusionist qualities of cinema', filling the spectator with a sense of unease about their own spatial environment and bodily potency.<sup>82</sup> In the film's opening shot, the half-exposed, half-concealed face of a young boy (played by Osheen Jones and later to be identified as young Lucius) stares directly at the camera (and the spectator) apparently transfixed. He wears a paper bag over his head, 'the kind of brown bag mask that

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<sup>78</sup> Molly Easo Smith argues that, in the play's final restoration of Roman order, Lucius's 'election to the emperorship remains suspect because of his complicity in central tragedies of the play'; in particular, Alarbus's sacrifice. Smith also observes how actions in the final scene thus duplicate those of the first. See Smith, pp. 321-6.

<sup>79</sup> Wynne-Davies, p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> *Titus*. Dir. Julie Taymor. US/Italy. 1999.

<sup>81</sup> Ray, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> Elsie Walker, "'Now is a time to storm': Julie Taymor's *Titus*", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 30 (2002), 194-207 (p. 194).

anybody of Taymor's vintage made for Halloween'.<sup>83</sup> Small cut out holes for his eyes and his mouth make his confrontation of our gaze more disturbing. His features are 'illuminated by the glow of an unseen television set'; but as the boy is also staring at *us*, the camera shot implies that the spectator and the television screen occupy the same 'space'.<sup>84</sup> Immediately there is something unsettling about the space we have entered: the 1950s-style kitchen does not seem 'real', with its stagy and almost oppressive atmosphere, whilst the camera sits uncomfortably close to the action. Although there are signifiers of what exists beyond the camera's gaze, these spaces are simultaneously exposed as *illusions* that play with and disrupt narrative continuity.



6.1. 'Will it consume me?': Osheen Jones in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999)

Other bodies that we look on in this opening sequence are not 'real'. The camera pans the kitchen table as though it were as vast and spatially diverse as a real battlefield, revealing 'plastic Romans, G.I. Joes, Superheroes, ketchup and mustard bottles'.<sup>85</sup> The plastic, artificial bodies of these toys are the actors in Taymor's own version of 'The Mousetrap', the 'play-within-the-play' designed to 'catch' our own

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<sup>83</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 75.

<sup>84</sup> Julie Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay, Adapted From the Play by William Shakespeare* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 19. In Taymor's postmodern vision, the boy's face is a deliberate reflection of our own as we sit transfixed by the sounds and images being projected onto the screen in front of *us*. It is a spatial conflation that collapses the boundaries between the cinematic and the real, one that will prompt the spectator to question violence as entertainment throughout the film.

<sup>85</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 19.

‘conscience’ about cycles of violence. In the transition from war games to ‘real’ war, spatial logic is severed. As the sounds of the boy’s war game become louder and more ‘real’, the space of the kitchen is literally fragmented when an explosion blows a hole through its back wall. A ‘clown’ dressed in ‘goggles, a World War I leather helmet, baggy pants, a soiled undershirt and suspenders’, takes the boy down a flight of stairs and out into the eerie darkness of the coliseum, a space that is ‘simultaneously ancient Rome and the second half of the twentieth century’.<sup>86</sup> Like Shakespeare’s ‘headless Rome’, Taymor’s film begins with a setting that is at once both past *and* present, whole and fragmented; as Elsie Walker notes, ‘Taymor presents a fragmented (diverse, and broken) but, paradoxically, “whole” world – “whole” because it is unified through the consistent use of stylistic clashes and multifarious allusions’.<sup>87</sup>



## 6.2. Invading the ‘present’: spatial confluences in Taymor’s *Titus* (1999)

In Shakespeare’s opening scene, we are surrounded by signifiers of the past. Taymor’s film also works to ‘blend and collide time’ as modern Rome, ‘built on the ruins of ancient Rome’, now appears with all its ‘ghastly, ghostly history’.<sup>88</sup> After the boy is brought out into the coliseum, the clown holds him high above his head in a

<sup>86</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>87</sup> Walker, p. 196.

<sup>88</sup> Julie Taymor, Eileen Blumenthal and Antonio Monda, *Julie Taymor: Playing With Fire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York: Abrams, 1999), p. 229. Taymor writes that although two thirds of the film ‘were shot on exterior locations in and around Rome’, the coliseum scenes were shot in Pula, Croatia (p. 230).

triumphant stance; the spectators of Rome cheer, but ‘the amphitheatre galleries are visibly empty’.<sup>89</sup> Judith Buchanan observes that Taymor specifically creates ‘a theatre populated by generations of ghosts, by the collective history of voices whose cheers have responded to, and sometimes determined, life and death for those in the amphitheatre’.<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, the boy now becomes another liminal body; appearing in Taymor’s Rome for the remainder of the film as young Lucius, he never really belongs in any time or place. As our guide through the narrative events, he occupies the contradictory positions of detached observer *and* member of the Andronici family, making his own ‘presence’ in the world of the film questionable.<sup>91</sup>



6.3. ‘Prodigies on earth’: ‘ghosting’ the coliseum in Taymor’s *Titus* (1999)

As the soldier finally sets the boy down on the ground of the coliseum floor, he turns back to behold the ruins of his home, oddly displaced in the middle of the coliseum floor.<sup>92</sup> Amongst the ruins, he finds one of his toy Roman soldiers.

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<sup>89</sup> Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (Essex: Pearson, 2005), p. 247. Buchanan also argues that the empty galleries reflect on the production’s distinction from theatre. See pp. 247-8.

<sup>90</sup> Buchanan, p. 247. The ghosted coliseum has become a powerful emblem of Taymor’s film: a panoramic image of its empty galleries bears the name of the director in the film’s opening credits; this shot also appears as a background for the film’s DVD release cover, where the ‘real’, superimposed bodies of the central characters appear to merge into the darkness of the coliseum, and into each other.

<sup>91</sup> As uncertain spectators, we may begin to wonder if any of the boy’s experiences are actually ‘real’

<sup>92</sup> The burning house is deliberately artificial in its appearance, an obvious set piece more suited to theatre production than the more naturalistic settings of conventional film. On one level, this spatial signifier may be another ‘ghost’, an intentional reminder of the director’s own stage production of the

Suddenly, the camera pans quickly from the boy's discovery of the toy to a vast army of soldiers that now approach him: the small toy soldier in the mud is 'reflected and multiplied in the "real" muddy soldiers who suddenly fill the arena'.<sup>93</sup> However, as the arena itself has spectres for spectators, can we believe that these soldiers are real?



**6.4. 'Groaning Shadows': the soldiers of Titus's army in Taymor's *Titus* (1999)**

At this moment of association between worlds, 'referentiality itself is disturbed'.<sup>94</sup> We are uncertain at this point as to whether or not the soldiers are real warriors of ancient Rome, a figment of the child's imagination, or ghosts. The movements of the troops, 'rigidly choreographed to Goldenthal's score', give the impression of 'toy soldiers come to life'.<sup>95</sup> A further shot shows them as almost metamorphosing from the stone pillars of the coliseum itself, at once representatives of the human body *and* of the architectural history of the city. The acts of violence that are carried out 'within the city walls' (1.1.26) in this archetypal theatre of cruelty also appear to lurk within the territory of the body itself. As the lines of soldiers proceed through the bowels of the coliseum, they carry with them the 'poor remains' (1.1.81) of the dead, their bodies tightly wrapped in strips of white cloth, carried above the heads of the returning survivors. The prominence of the corpses and their

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play in 1994 that demonstrates her explorations of theatrical and cinematic space. Although Taymor's production has progressed to the medium of film, all spatial boundaries remain open and undefined.

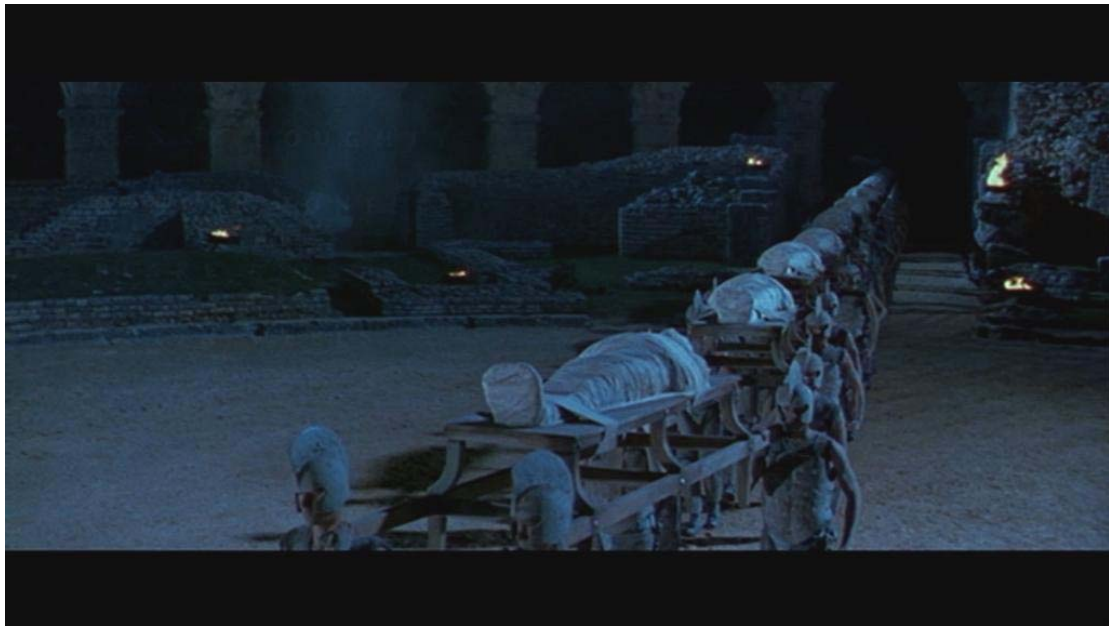
<sup>93</sup> Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence', p. 124.

<sup>94</sup> Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence', p. 124.

<sup>95</sup> Walker, p. 198.



preservation marks their impact on the living through ‘the ultimate Roman ideal of self-containment, an ideal that humans can attain in only the fixity of death’.<sup>96</sup>



6.5. ‘The poor remains, alive and dead’: the ‘endless’ line of corpses in Taymor’s *Titus* (1999)

The stark comparison of the filthy, muddied bodies of the living covered in warrior paint, and the clean, neatly preserved bodies of the dead, not only delivers a clear message about the importance of Roman ‘values’ over life itself, but it also suggests how the living and the dead have become one. These living soldiers of Rome seem more like apparitions from the dead. Their bodies are caked in clay to disguise their flesh, their movements almost robotic rather than human, as they remove their helmets to ‘acknowledge the invisible cheering crowd’.<sup>97</sup> While motorbikes are shown entering the coliseum of ancient Rome, Anthony Hopkins’s Titus arrives in a Roman chariot; it is he who is most associated with an ancient world, his appearance indicative of a patriarchal rule that is already fading. Respected by those who accompany his return, but simultaneously emasculated by his own ‘invisibility’, he delivers his valiant speech after ‘weary wars’ before a coliseum inhabited by the cries of ghosts. Although the arena is now filled with soldiers, chariots and prisoners,

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<sup>96</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, ‘Looking at the “Other” in Julie Taymor’s *Titus*’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 21 (2003), 71-80 (p. 73).

<sup>97</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 20. The living bodies of these actors allude also to the ghosts of more recent history. As Aebischer explains, Taymor ‘filmed the coliseum scenes for *Titus* in Croatia only two months before a renewed flaring-up of the Balkans conflict’ and used locally hired Croatians for the soldiers of Titus’s army. See Aebischer, *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies*, p. 46.

Taymor's camera tracks right and pans left during Titus's speech to reveal the empty galleries over his shoulder, their dark vacancy beckoning the spectator and silently mocking the hero's return. As an actor already practiced in Shakespearean verse, Hopkins delivers his lines with power and control, but it is a skill which ironically works against Titus here, as he looks up at empty bleachers to deliver his practised and perfected speech. As he sheathes his sword, Hopkins's bellowing voice falls to a



**6.6. 'My gracious lord, no tribune hears you speak': Anthony Hopkins's Titus (1999)**

whisper: 'Titus, unkind and careless of thine own' (1.1.86). Does he realise the benches are empty? As the bodies of the countrymen whom he returns to 'resalute' 'with his tears' (1.1.75) are already gone, Titus remains haunted by an absence that immediately renders his rule ineffectual; ghosts, in their very absence, have presented him as 'careless of [his] own'. Meanwhile, the wrapped bodies of the dead have been brought into the coliseum in a line that seems unending. Titus's rule is already in the dust.<sup>98</sup>

If Titus's return to Rome is marked by fading light and dust, then the bloody death of Alarbus is marked by flames and stone, hidden in the depths of the tomb and brought to light by the sacrificial fire. The ghosts of Titus's sons have a strong

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<sup>98</sup> Tellingly, the sound of the soldiers' footsteps, accompanied by the emphatic, rhythmic beating of Goldenthal's score, ceases to be heard when the title of Taymor's film – *Titus* – appears out of the sand beneath the soldiers' feet. As if self-consciously erasing Titus's subjectivity in this adaptation and here supplanting her own, Taymor has the emphatic beating of the score recommence only when *her* name appears in the screen titles.

presence here; their empty boots stretch out in a line as Titus covers them with a handful of the earth.<sup>99</sup> But it is the present order of ‘Roman rites’, not the feared ‘prodigies’ of the ghosts, which is most terrifying, as a priest begins the ritual and an impatient Lucius orders that Alarbus be sacrificed as if reciting some sacred religious text. When Titus’s sons return after the killing, their faces are marked with Alarbus’s blood. No sympathy is evoked for the Romans here, and Taymor instead positions the viewer to witness their rites as ‘irreligious piety’ (1.1.130) with Jessica Lange’s suffering Tamora.

It is the ‘groaning shadows’ of the past that dominate in Taymor’s opening sequence, and Titus’s relationship to the past becomes more prominent when we see Bassianus and Saturnine (as he is most frequently called in the film) entering the streets of Rome in a blaze of colour, modern aesthetics and jazz musical accompaniment to make their pleas for the emperorship. We find out about the death of Caesar and Titus’s return on the front page of a newspaper that young Lucius is reading and, like the deceased emperor, Titus’s return to Rome suddenly becomes yesterday’s news.<sup>100</sup> As he approaches the tribunes, he remains dressed as a soldier of ancient Rome and requests only a ‘staff of honour for [his] age’ (1.1.198). He does not belong in this world, and as an embodiment of the past, he fails to make the correct choice in electing a new emperor. Although Hopkins plays his role with obvious sympathy for Titus, Titus’s incomprehensible behaviour often distances the spectator, preventing us from identifying with his character and from empathising with his demise. Taymor’s decision to move the election speeches from the opening of Shakespeare’s play also emphasises a spatial and temporal shift that deliberately jars with Titus’s ‘past’ rule.<sup>101</sup> When Titus kills his son Mutius in a fit of rage, the

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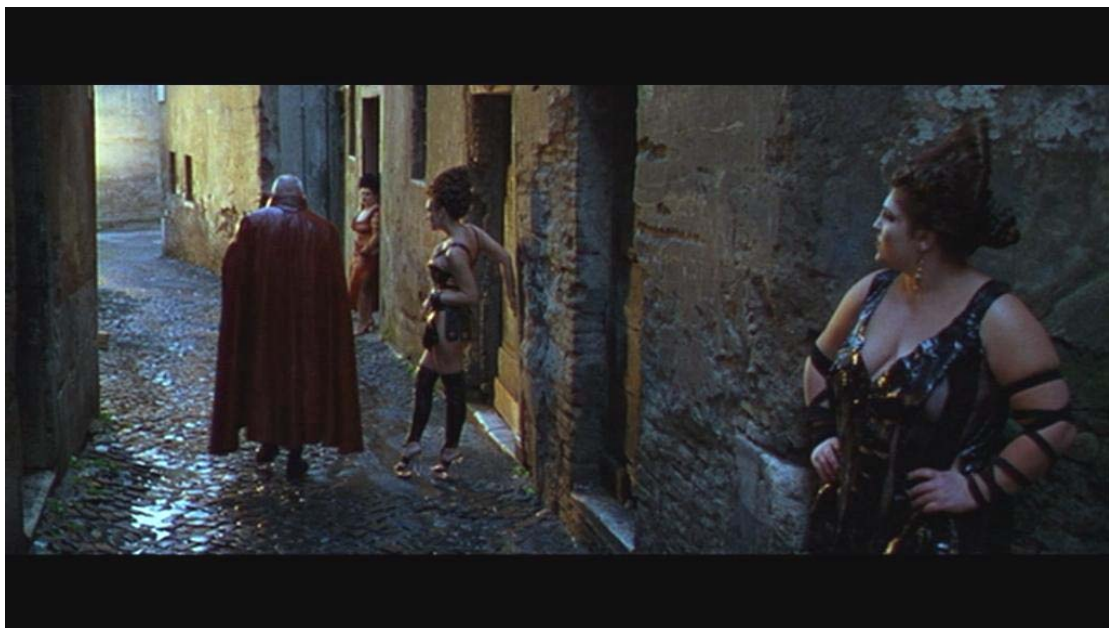
<sup>99</sup> Lisa Hopkins here detects the presence of other ghosts through ‘reminiscences of the iconography of Vietnam’, such as the ‘mummy-like body bags’ and ‘empty army boots’. See Lisa Hopkins, “‘A tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide’: Julie Taymor’s War Dances”, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 21 (2003), 61-9 (p. 63).

<sup>100</sup> In Shakespeare’s play, Saturninus draws a similar connection between Titus and Caesar by saying: ‘Thanks, noble Titus, father of my life’ (1.1.253). Although, as Harris observes, this remark is an acknowledgement of patriarchal authority, it also ironically associates Titus with Caesar’s ghost. Alan Cumming under Taymor’s direction delivers the line with appropriate sarcasm.

<sup>101</sup> Taymor’s decision mirrors Jane Howell’s revised order of the play-text in her televised production for the BBC. Ghosts are everywhere in this production, from the superimposed images of skulls and white masks that appear and fade over the dominant images of the screen, to the masked and shrouded servants of Rome who look silently on with absent faces. Skulls fixed on poles are positioned around the court to watch the action unfold from their black, vacant eyes. The production begins with the newly dead body of Caesar, ‘the last / That wore the imperial diadem of Rome’ (1.1.5-6); still ‘planted’ in his throne, his body is slowly carried out of sight by masked soldiers. Marcus announces Titus’s return, but as the crowds look to behold Rome’s warrior, only corpses appear; carried by their fellow



dark, empty windows of Rome’s towering architecture (it is Mussolini’s E.U.R., the ‘square coliseum’ with its myriad arches) fill the frame behind him: are the ghosts of the ancient coliseum watching *here*, undetected by our gaze, to witness this act of violence? He reaches for his sword, ‘but it is missing’: he has bequeathed it to Saturnine.<sup>102</sup> Instead, Titus takes the sword from Mutius, and stabs him. Now emasculated as Alan Cumming’s Saturnine leads Tamora away to ‘consummate’ their ‘spousal rites’ (1.1.339), Titus walks with his back to the camera down a sloping alleyway where only prostitutes beckon him.



6.7. ‘Titus, when wert thou wont to walk alone?’: Hopkins’s Titus in Taymor’s *Titus* (1999)

Titus now journeys once again to the tomb, where he waits in its ‘underworld’ of darkness and shadows. Against the grotesque excess of Saturnine’s rule, Taymor ‘repeatedly shoots Hopkins’s Titus against the background of the ruins and remnants of the Roman civilisation he honours’, so that what we see in Titus’s present body is literally patriarchy disintegrating before our eyes.<sup>103</sup> In the palace courtyard, he sits

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soldiers in bloody, flesh-coloured shrouds, they are a gruesome conflation of life and death, their flesh not yet rotten, their souls not yet laid to rest. After Titus makes his speech, he proceeds towards the tomb through the lines of corpses and looks upon one for several moments; the camera closes in on this face of the dead, scrutinising its features before the image fades in smoke, its present absence truly terrifying. Howell also films Anna Calder-Marshall’s Lavinia running after her nephew (4.1) in slow motion, her body passing in and out of shadow and creating an eerie, ghostlike effect. See *Titus Andronicus*. Dir. Jane Howell. BBC TV; originally transmitted UK, 1985.

<sup>102</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 49.

<sup>103</sup> Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: the Kenneth Branagh Era* (Ohio: Ohio UP, 2003), p. 209.

amongst broken statues until Saturnine enters and turns on the floodlights; the harsh light of modern technology burns out Titus's already crumbling history like a vampire in sunlight.<sup>104</sup> In the pale light, his body appears like a shadow. As Saturnine departs up the stairs, he turns the floodlights out on what has become an Andronici graveyard, leaving Titus in darkness. Titus himself is Rome's past, tied forever to the father's tomb. When he makes his plea to the tribunes, calling 'Hear me, grave fathers!' (3.1.1), they march away from him without seeing him – are they the ghosts here, or is he? They turn their backs to him – and to the camera – leaving him to 'recount [his] sorrows to a stone' (3.1.29). Titus is now an absent body, unseen and unheard among the 'grave weeds' (3.1.42) and lying 'in the dust' (3.1.12). Against the chariot wheels that turn beside his obscured face on the ground, he is powerless to 'reverse the doom of death' (3.1.24). Finally, Titus cedes his plea: 'Why, tis no matter, man: if they did hear, / They would not mark me, or if they did mark, / They would not pity me' (3.1.33-5). The tribunes cannot see him; if he were seen, his body would not entreat their pity. Instead, the 'lively body' that entreats pity in Taymor's film is Lavinia's.

In the 'meta-textual and meta-cinematic discourse' of Taymor's *Titus*, Laura Fraser's Lavinia is a body that recalls other cultural bodies for the spectator.<sup>105</sup> For the first part of the film, she is 'dressed like a Grace Kelly from the 1950s', with elegant black gloves and plaited hair complementing her chic bell-skirt dress; after her rape and mutilation, her 'bloodied and torn petticoats suggest Degas' ballerina', while her appearance in one of Taymor's 'Penny Arcade Nightmares' recalls the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe standing over a subway grate, holding her dress down.<sup>106</sup> Taymor explains that these references 'are not literal but suggestive, playing upon archetypes that have become the vocabulary of our times'.<sup>107</sup> Although these references in Taymor's film are brief and 'suggestive' rather than complexly developed, they add further possible layers of interpretation to Lavinia's vulnerability and suffering.

When we first see Fraser's Lavinia in the Andronici tomb, she is a body framed within a frame, demonstrating the director's interest behind her camera 'in

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<sup>104</sup> In his dark clothing and red cape, Hopkins's Titus is something of a Dracula figure, his costume recalling his role as Van Helsing in Francis Ford Coppola's film version of *Dracula* (1992). Only rather than being the vanquisher, he has now become the vanquished, a transgression that also ironically alludes to his loss of power.

<sup>105</sup> Rutter, p. 73. For further comments on Taymor's references to other cultural bodies for Lavinia, see Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence', p. 123.

<sup>106</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 181.

<sup>107</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 181.

looking through *other* apertures to frame, limit and direct spectators' vision'.<sup>108</sup> As Titus and the boy Lucius light candles for the dead in the darkness of the tomb, the figure of a young woman descends a flight of stairs in the left of the frame over Titus's shoulder. Here she pauses under an archway and silently watches Titus, who hasn't noticed her descend. Sunlight pours down the stairwell, turning this figure into a silhouette of elegance. While her face remains concealed by shadow, we can see the outline of her veil and a dress with a full skirt. Titus continues to perform the funeral rites, whispering 'In peace and honour rest you here, my sons' (1.1.156). Here, in her 'mystification', this woman is like some 'figure of death, crossing over a shadowy portal to bring closure to Titus's ritual of burying the dead'.<sup>109</sup>

But suddenly, the young woman's uprising voice fills the room: 'In peace and honour live Lord Titus long' (1.1.157). The camera cuts to reveal Lavinia at last; stepping out of the shadows, she appears in mid close-up with her veil pulled back from her face, 'a young woman of incredible beauty'.<sup>110</sup> She opens a vial of her 'tributary tears' (1.1.159) and sprinkles them before the altar – but Lavinia also brings 'tears of joy' (1.1.161, emphasis added). Titus watches her and smiles proudly. Their exchange has been made a private one, moved away from the other action of Shakespeare's opening scene. As Taymor's camera intercuts shots of their faces, we no longer see the boy, but we know he is still there, silently observing this intimate moment between father and daughter. At the close of this scene, Titus and Lavinia embrace, but something is unsettling. This scene will establish many important recurring patterns for Taymor's film: the framing of Lavinia's body; the involvement of the boy; and the significance of the father-daughter embrace.<sup>111</sup>

In *Titus*'s early scenes, Lavinia's body is very much an image of self-containment; her modest, formal outfits tend to keep most of her body concealed from sight, and with her dark hair always neatly tied back, her pale, exposed face becomes a mask of impenetrable beauty.<sup>112</sup> In the forest hunt, her body is concealed further by a long, black dress-coat and cape that is severely buttoned up to the neck, with matching black hat and boots. Her appearance also complies with her contained

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<sup>108</sup> Rutter, p. 74.

<sup>109</sup> David McCandless, 'A Tale of Two *Tituses*: Julie Taymor's Vision on Stage and Screen', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53 (2002), 487-511 (p. 507).

<sup>110</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> 'Taymor also aligns Lavinia's look with the look of young Lucius'. See Rutter, p. 80.

<sup>112</sup> For a more detailed reading of costume and the 'classic' Roman, self-contained body versus the grotesque Gothic body, see Mason Vaughan, pp. 73-6.

emotions: at the election, when Saturnine announces that he intends to make Lavinia his empress and Titus agrees, Lavinia looks at Bassianus with obvious devastation, but she cannot voice her objection publicly. She says nothing, and as she takes Titus's hand and is escorted past the tribunes, her face conceals her feelings from all who observe her. She is an obedient daughter. When Lavinia bows before Saturnine and kisses his hand graciously, only her eyes reveal her displeasure. When Bassianus later seizes her, she also seems to keep her emotions in check, following his lead rather than displaying any agency in their escape. However, in the forest, Fraser's Lavinia openly takes delight in verbally degrading Tamora for her 'goodly gift in horning' (2.3.67); she laughs with her husband, expressing freely her distaste for the empress's 'raven-coloured love' (2.3.83), and it is soon after this that the self-contained body is perversely unravelled. When Tamora's sons murder Lavinia's husband, we see her hat fall to the ground as she cradles his body. As Chiron and Demetrius seize her, they take great pleasure in removing her gloves one by one, and in cutting every button from the back of her dress with a knife.

In the scenes that occur immediately after the rape (the film does not show the rape itself), Taymor uses setting and special effects to aid the representation of Lavinia's violated body. David McCandless argues that, unlike the effects that Taymor achieved in her 1994 stage production of the play, the film diminishes 'the traumatising effects of [Lavinia's] violation by limiting exposure to her traumatised body'.<sup>113</sup> In the theatre, when Lavinia is onstage, the spectator may 'look upon her' (3.1.65) at any time; when watching the film, the spectator must look where Taymor's camera looks. But the traumatised body is always there, represented spatially as well as through some powerful shots of Fraser's Lavinia. An establishing shot reveals a small, distant figure dressed in white, elevated on a tree-stump above two other figures that dance about wildly in the midst of a vast swamp, the 'charred remains of a forest fire'.<sup>114</sup> We can hear crows, and unnatural sounds of laughter echoing across this desolate wasteland. The landscape is symbolic: not only is it a believable location for this terrible event, but it also acts as 'the metaphor for the unseen rape itself'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> McCandless, p. 504.

<sup>114</sup> Julie Taymor, 'Foreword', in Daniel Rosenthal, *100 Shakespeare Films: BFI Screen Guides* (London: BFI, 2007), pp. xi-xiii (p. xii).

<sup>115</sup> Taymor, 'Foreword', p. xii. McCandless argues that the landscape 'displaces Lavinia herself as an image of devastation' and effectively removes her body from view. But this is not the case. Taymor's camera does not ignore Fraser's Lavinia, and the symbolic landscape only *extends* the centrality of her

Taymor reveals Lavinia's traumatised body gradually for the spectator. The camera first cuts to a shot of her tormentors: Demetrius, in a childish and obscene gesture, takes down his trousers and 'moons' at his victim. The camera then cuts to a position behind and slightly above Lavinia; tilting down, it shows the back of her upper body in the frame's centre, Demetrius observing her from the left, Chiron from the right. Lavinia turns away from them, as if she would turn toward the camera, but behind her wild, dishevelled hair, we cannot quite make out her features. After a brief mid close-up of Demetrius, we suddenly see a close-up of Lavinia's anguished and pain-stricken face, a dried bloodstain on her lips. A second shot of her in mid close-up reveals her muddied, bloodstained petticoats and her absent hands that have been replaced by gnarly twigs.<sup>116</sup> Painfully and helplessly, she extends her arms outward toward the camera. A third, full-length shot of Lavinia is the most traumatic, not only because Lavinia's suffering body is now fully exposed for us to see, but also because the camera here adopts the perspective of Chiron. The camera moves unsteadily towards her as Chiron taunts her: 'call for sweet water, wash thy hands' (2.4.6). Lavinia reacts violently, desperately, throwing out her arms and trying to turn away from her attacker. Although the camera does not always stay with Lavinia's traumatised body, to see that body momentarily from the perspective of the rapist is a filmic technique that Taymor uses powerfully to create a traumatic effect. The scene ends with another close-up of Lavinia's face, a shot that is held for several seconds, 'bringing us inside Lavinia's horror and suffering'.<sup>117</sup>

Taymor delays the full traumatic impact of Lavinia's violated body here so that the spectator can share in the impact felt by Colm Feore's Marcus when he discovers his niece in the following scene. As Marcus makes his slow approach of the small, distant figure, she turns away from him – and from the camera – her body still elevated on her burnt-out, desecrated pedestal. When he asks why she 'dost not speak' (2.4.21), Taymor's camera moves closer, mimicking Marcus's approach in its slow tracking movement. Fraser's Lavinia now turns fully toward the camera, and in an

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traumatised body as every part of the *mise-en-scène* effectively 'speaks' of the violation that this body has endured. See McCandless, p. 504.

<sup>116</sup> Unlike the stylised ribbons that replaced Lavinia's absent hands in Peter Brook's famous RSC stage production from 1955 (starring Laurence Olivier as Titus and Vivien Leigh as Lavinia), the twigs that Taymor uses merge beauty with an image of the grotesque that is compelling rather than symbolically distancing or fetishising for the spectator's gaze. For a discussion of how Brook's 'aesthetic/symbolic staging of the raped Lavinia as an icon reinforced the fetishistic scopophilia of the viewers', see Aebischer, *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies*, pp. 37-41 (esp. p. 40).

<sup>117</sup> Crowl, p. 212.

eerily suspended moment emphasised by Goldenthal's rising score, the blood that pours forth from her mouth is her only greeting.<sup>118</sup>



**6.8. 'Speak, Lavinia': Fraser's Lavinia in a symbolic wasteland in Taymor's *Titus* (1999)**

At the moment when Lavinia opens her mouth, she does indeed 'speak', and in the ghostly absent presence of her voice, she ruptures the flow of Marcus's speech. Taymor's camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Marcus's face, his horrified expression filling the frame for several seconds. Feore's Marcus is suddenly silenced. His descriptive metaphors of the 'bubbling fountain' of Lavinia's mouth's 'crimson river of warm blood' (2.4.22-3) are cut, and instead, the film *shows* the spectator an image of Lavinia that is aesthetically beautiful *and* grotesque, 'surreal and poetic'.<sup>119</sup>

Taymor's film also reveals the desire to restore the woman's body to its former wholeness, while male bodies remain broken and 'leaking' as signifiers of

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<sup>118</sup> Walker reads this moment in the context of Brechtian theatre and describes the moment as 'gestic': 'her defilement is the culmination of a string of socially sanctioned, violent events and prefigures the bloodshed to follow – the past, present, and future are glimpsed in an instant'. See Walker, p. 200.

<sup>119</sup> Taymor, *Playing With Fire*, p. 236. By halting Marcus's description of Lavinia, Taymor's film also halts the possibility that Marcus's speech may act as a 'second rape' on the mutilated Lavinia. See Bate, p. 36. While critics such as Marshall argue that Lavinia's bleeding mouth 'figures in Marcus's apostrophe as a displaced image for the vagina', this line has been cut from Taymor's representation of the scene. See Marshall, p. 131.

Rome's fragmentation and defilement.<sup>120</sup> Only a few scenes after Lavinia's mutilation, we see the young boy Lucius entering a craft-shop filled with wooden prosthetics; from the countless delicate carvings of body parts laid out before him, he selects a pair of pale, dainty hands for his aunt. This 'acquisition of hands' offers 'an image of repair and reassembly' that the boy instigates, one that also gives Lavinia 'a fantastical, constructed quality, as though she were part statue'.<sup>121</sup> Shrouded in black, her body once again appears to be framed amongst the columns and broken pieces of statue as her nephew presents her with her 'new' hands. But the moment is fraught with ambiguity, not oversimplified: Lavinia looks down at her new hands, and then looks across at the boy, and her expression seems to imply both pain and gratitude.



**6.9. A child's gift: Jones's young Lucius gives Fraser's Lavinia her 'new' hands (*Titus*, 1999)**

Unlike Titus's claim that he understands all of Lavinia's 'martyred signs', Taymor never allows us, as spectators, to make such a claim about Fraser's Lavinia, and as a result, Titus's words appear arrogant and foolish.<sup>122</sup> During the first banquet

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<sup>120</sup> Aebischer observes that, in Taymor's film, physical pain and dismemberment are gendered and conceptualised as masculine: 'Titus' stump is insistently kept "unrepaired"'. See Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence', p. 127.

<sup>121</sup> McCandless, p. 507. Rutter also comments that, by giving Lavinia 'the gift of restoration, giving her toy hands, Lucius makes her look like a child – but also like a work of art'. See Rutter, p. 82.

<sup>122</sup> McCandless argues that 'the film Lavinia' is 'lacking in interiority and agency' because in this particular scene at the dinner table, she 'attempts to communicate something – but never succeeds in doing so'. First, this is not true: Fraser's Lavinia *does* succeed in communicating to Titus that she 'drinks no other drink but tears' (3.2.38). Second, what she cannot communicate is not represented as a



at the Andronici household, Lavinia ‘tries to communicate with Marcus using her new wooden hands’; frustrated because he cannot understand her, she ‘turns her chair away from the table’.<sup>123</sup> Titus moves his chair toward his daughter, and again, she tries to express something. He watches her closely: ‘Hark, Marcus, what she says: / I can interpret all her martyred signs – / She says she drinks no other drink but tears’ (3.2.36-8). Suddenly Lavinia’s face changes; she nods with obvious enthusiasm at being understood, and smiles with gratitude when Titus promises to ‘learn [her] thought’ (3.2.39). Eagerly, she continues to ‘talk in signs’ (3.2.12). But now Titus is lost. This time, only confusion registers on his face. Then suddenly, he is distracted by another action: young Lucius killing a fly. Titus jumps from his seat: ‘Out on thee, murderer!’ (3.2.54). The ‘practice’ of ‘wrest[ing] an alphabet’ (3.2.44-5) for Lavinia is no more. Now she must work harder to get her message across.



**6.10. ‘I can interpret all her martyred signs’: failing to understand Fraser’s Lavinia (*Titus*, 1999)**

After a wordless, interpolated scene that shows Chiron and Demetrius ‘frenetic, agitated, paranoid’, their minds effectively ‘burnt out’ by drugs and video games, we see Fraser’s Lavinia putting her mind to good use as she runs after young

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lack of interiority; rather, Taymor does not simplify Lavinia’s ‘map of woe’ (3.2.12), does not allow Titus – or the film’s spectators – to claim any authority over her ‘signs’.

<sup>123</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 112.



Lucius, her attention moving from the boy to the books he has dropped on the floor.<sup>124</sup> Now Lavinia makes noises; frantically, she turns over one of the books with her wooden hands. Her nephew begins to assist her and, as he holds the book open while Lavinia ‘quotes the leaves’ (4.1.52), several shots are used to group the boy, Lavinia, and Titus together within the frame. When Titus reads ‘the tragic tale of Philomel’ (4.1.49) and sees a picture of the gloomy woods on one of the pages, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Lavinia’s face, shot from Titus’s perspective. Lavinia looks straight to camera to confront the spectator’s look – as well as her father’s – at this moment of revelation.



**6.11. Writing revenge: empowering Fraser’s Lavinia in Taymor’s *Titus* (1999)**

When Lavinia writes her revenge defiantly in the sand, she does so in a way that rejects certain critical interpretations of this act in Shakespeare’s play-text. Shakespeare’s Lavinia uses her mouth to guide the staff that allows her to write the names of her rapists, an act that has been interpreted, by some, as fellatio and a re-enactment of her violation.<sup>125</sup> In Taymor’s film, however, after being instructed by

<sup>124</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 114.

<sup>125</sup> Such interpretations only reduce Lavinia’s agency further by reading the staff as phallus rather than as stylus and thus failing to read it as a replacement for Lavinia’s uttering tongue. For such an argument, see S. Clark Hulse, ‘Wresting the Alphabet: Oratory and Action in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Criticism*, 21 (1979), 106-18 (p. 116). For an interesting debate about critical responses to this act in Shakespeare’s play, see Harris’s response to Tricomi: ‘it is Tricomi who provides the image of a woman with a pole *inside* her mouth ... Lavinia’s rape is reproduced again and again’. See Harris, p. 397, and Tricomi, p. 107, for his original comments.

her uncle on how to use the staff, and having watched him place his own mouth awkwardly around its end, Fraser's Lavinia takes the pole between her arms, and makes as if she would use her mouth to guide its movement. But 'as her mouth opens wide', a 'bolt of electric shock seems to run through her body'; suddenly, as if overtaken by some other force, she 'violently rejects the staff from her mouth', and instead proceeds to write by guiding the staff with her arms.<sup>126</sup> Taymor seems deliberately to punish our expectations here, and while she withdraws any implication of the staff as phallus, she instead takes the spectator into Lavinia's painful recollections of the attack through one of the film's Penny Arcade Nightmares.<sup>127</sup> Lavinia imagines Chiron and Demetrius as two tigers pouncing toward her, and as her reliving of the experience comes to an end, her writing in the sand is 'represented beautifully without error or messiness', appearing with as much implied permanency as Titus's 'leaf of brass' (4.1.104).<sup>128</sup>



6.12. 'Past horrors': Lavinia's rape in Taymor's Penny Arcade Nightmares (1999)

<sup>126</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 117.

<sup>127</sup> Buchanan aptly describes these as 'fantasy sequences' designed 'to give stylised and mythologised form to the subjective realities of the characters' minds'. See Buchanan, p. 245. Throughout the course of Taymor's film, we also share these sequences from the perspectives of Tamora and Titus.

<sup>128</sup> Walker, p. 198.

In her two final scenes, Lavinia's movements recall earlier scenes in Taymor's film, seemingly replaying the moments between father and daughter that tell her story. When Titus enters to approach the now captured Chiron and Demetrius, we see Lavinia enter behind him and linger under an archway over his shoulder in the left of the frame: the shot recalls her entrance in the tomb toward the beginning of the film, and here she silently watches her father perform another ritual. This time, instead of entering with a vial from which to pour her 'tributary tears', Lavinia will enter with a white basin to collect the blood of her attackers as her father cuts their throats. The film progresses from a stylised presentation of the rape to a realistic depiction of violence for this act of revenge, and while the boy was present to assist Titus's ritual act of lighting candles for the dead in the Andronici tomb, he is not present to assist here. As Titus instructs his daughter to come forward, the camera cuts to a close-up of Lavinia, a small smile of revenge spreading across her lips. But as she collects the blood from Chiron's open wound, a second close-up of her face reveals a look of horror, not satisfaction. These two contrasting responses from Lavinia demand that we reassess our own response to this scene of violence, which is also, of course, the scene of revenge that spectators have been waiting for.

When Lavinia enters in the final banquet scene, Taymor's film again returns spectators to the beginning of her story, as Lavinia 'makes virtually the same veiled and shadowy entrance' for her own death.<sup>129</sup> In a full-length shot, she enters slowly through the doorway to approach her father; at first, her upper body is concealed by shadow, and again we see the outline of a long black veil, and now the outline of her wooden hands. This time, however, she is dressed in cream; the long, slightly transparent sleeves of her dress come down almost to the floor in a traditionally ghost-like image. Lavinia 'faces her father, lifts her veil, looks into his eyes and revolves her body so that her back leans up against his chest'.<sup>130</sup> This exact embrace recalls another scene in Taymor's film, when Titus delivered his 'I am the sea' (3.1.226) speech whilst holding Lavinia to him: 'She is the weeping welkin, I the earth: / Then must my sea be movèd with her sighs' (3.1.227-8). Thus these words are written into Lavinia's death. Titus first strokes her face; then, quickly, he breaks her neck, gently cradling her body as she falls to the floor. This was an agreement between father and daughter.

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<sup>129</sup> McCandless, p. 507.

<sup>130</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 165.

### *These Broken Limbs*

In its underlying return to patriarchal values, Shakespeare's play concludes with the people of Rome voicing their consent over their new leader: 'Lucius, our emperor, for well I know / The common voice do cry it shall be so' (5.3.139-40).<sup>131</sup> In this sense, Rome is able to become whole once more: head and body, ruler and people, with both parties united. However, this 'voiced' consent does not occur in Taymor's final scene, as audible spectres of the past are replaced by silent spectators of the present. During the bloody massacre of Titus's feast, where the horrors of his final banquet of revenge are enlarged to monstrous proportions, Lucius fires a gun at Saturnine. Suddenly the camera zooms out dramatically to reveal the banquet table standing in the middle of the coliseum where the young boy's journey as young Lucius first began. But the once empty galleries are now filled with bodies. Dumbstruck by the violence they have just witnessed, they stand wordless and motionless: 'They are *us*'.<sup>132</sup> Taymor's message here is ambiguous: if our act of looking 'has materialised the disembodied spirits evoked at the outset', then will our *failure* to look at our own culture's violence inevitably make us ghosts ourselves?<sup>133</sup>



6.13. Becoming ghosts: spectators of violence in Taymor's *Titus* (1999)

<sup>131</sup> Ray, p. 39.

<sup>132</sup> Taymor, *Playing With Fire*, p. 242; my emphasis.

<sup>133</sup> McCandless, p. 503.

There are further ghosts at the close of Taymor's film. Although Fraser's Lavinia dies by her father's hand in the film's final scene, the contemporary resonances of her death evoke images of other ghosts that exist beyond Shakespeare's play-text. When discussing the scene in interviews, Taymor 'repeatedly linked the "honour-killing" of Lavinia to the widely reported Bosnian practice of killing women who, during the war, had been raped by Serbs in a systematic campaign of rape-as-ethnic-cleansing'.<sup>134</sup> With such stories being powerfully written into Lavinia's ending, Taymor's film ensures that Lavinia's dying body becomes the site where the voices of other women's ghosts may be heard. As we hear Marcus delivering his speech to the people and promising to knit Rome's 'broken limbs again into one body', Taymor's camera instead focuses on the dead bodies of the victims in this final bloody massacre – Tamora, Titus, then Saturnine. Although they are covered quickly, their bodies can still be seen through the transparent sheets so that they are at once exposed and concealed, preserved and disposed of. But as Marcus's speech draws to its close, it is not Titus's dead body on which Taymor's camera focuses, but Lavinia's. As the clown from the film's opening steps forward to cover her body, the camera zooms in on Lavinia's 'absent present' face: Lucius's speech ceases to be heard for the duration of this shot. It is Lavinia's body, not Titus's, that must be remembered here.



6.14. '[Re]member me': focusing on Lavinia's corpse in Taymor's *Titus* (1999)

<sup>134</sup> Aebischer, 'Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence', p. 123.



While Marcus's promise (like Malcolm's speech at the close of *Macbeth*), may remain unconvincing at the end of Shakespeare's play, it does aim at providing some form of closure through its suggestion of wholeness. The close of Taymor's film, however, is far more complex, resisting the temptation to 'gloss over' the violence that we have just witnessed. We see young Lucius take Aaron's baby in his arms, and slowly walk out of the coliseum towards a distant sunrise, 'as if redemption were a possibility'.<sup>135</sup> As the wall of the coliseum ambiguously dissolves to reveal the sunrise behind it, we cannot be certain exactly where young Lucius is taking the child: does this view exist in the past, or does it represent some kind of return to a 'present' time? Rather, past and present spheres seem to co-exist in Taymor's film to offer the viewer a sense of wholeness that paradoxically evokes a sense of fragmentation at its core. While young Lucius makes his hopeful departure to an unknown destination, Rome's body politic here remains broken; the silence of its spectators in the arena refutes Marcus's talk of knitting Rome's broken limbs and with it, the desire to re-enact a sense of wholeness under patriarchal rule is also refuted.

Of Shakespeare's play, Shawn Huffman remarks that the 'spectral agency' of Lavinia's phantom limbs 'seems limited to the identification of her assailants', while it is the ghostly hand of Titus that 'appears in order to strike back': 'through Titus, Shakespeare reveals the possibility of striking out and punishing the guilty'.<sup>136</sup> However, I would argue that, if it is Titus himself who is most haunted by ghosts, before we can conceive of his 'punishing the guilty', we must first conceive that it is he who is the guilty one to be punished; before we can understand why Titus 'projects the spectre of his own loss upon his victims', we must first understand why other victims have projected the spectre of *their* own loss onto Titus.<sup>137</sup> Here, it is Taymor's vision that enables us to broaden a sense of such an understanding. As a Shakespeare film, *Titus* makes a lasting impression, and importantly so, particularly in terms of (re)membering Lavinia. As Daniel Rosenthal laments: 'There will always be new screen versions of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*; *Titus* may well never be turned into another feature film'.<sup>138</sup> If *Titus Andronicus* is indeed Shakespeare's early 'ghost' tragedy, then Taymor has ensured that we, as readers, critics, and spectators, embrace its return.

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<sup>135</sup> Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay*, p. 185.

<sup>136</sup> Huffman, pp. 71 and 73.

<sup>137</sup> Huffman, p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Rosenthal, p. 269.

## **‘Confusion Fall – ’: Moving Beyond a Fixed Point**

What would Lavinia have said if her assailants had not stopped her mouth? Before Chiron and Demetrius drag her body from sight in order to rape and mutilate her, Lavinia turns to Tamora, the woman who refused to be a ‘charitable murderer’ (2.3.178), and verbally condemns her: ‘No grace? No womanhood? Ah, beastly creature, / The blot and enemy to our general name, / Confusion fall – ’ (2.3.182-4). But when Chiron seizes her, the rest is silence: ‘Nay, then I’ll stop your mouth – ’ (2.3.84). Lavinia’s speech is no more. In Taymor’s film, Laura Fraser’s Lavinia is carried away by Chiron and Demetrius so that her body becomes small within the frame and her distant cries carry faintly across the air; lifted from the ground and no longer in possession of her own body, her last words seem to speak of the horrid fate that awaits her. Alternatively, Anna Calder-Marshall’s Lavinia in Jane Howell’s production holds her arms high above her head and stares wildly at Tamora, as if placing some terrible curse of revenge upon her. Even after Chiron places a hand over her mouth, she continues to make noises. Despite her attackers’ attempts to silence her, to ‘stop’ her mouth, to remove the agency of her hands and to conceal her body from sight, Lavinia’s absent voice will speak, her absent hands will write, and her ‘lively body’ (3.1.105) will return to claim her revenge. If Lavinia were about to pronounce some terrible curse on Tamora and her sons, then that curse would become a powerful presence, despite the absence of words.

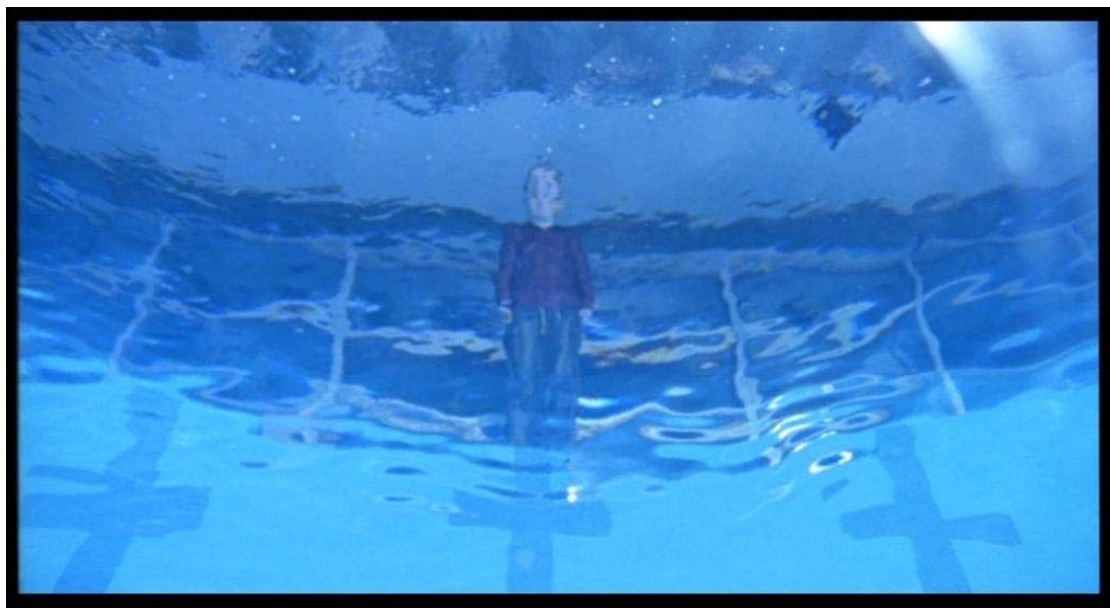
Reading the liminality of these tragic women’s bodies – as bodies essentially caught between forms of absence and presence – allows us to move them beyond a ‘fixed point’ of interpretation and to read their bodies as something far more powerful. Like Lavinia’s returning body after her assailants’ attempts to put an end to her speech, they are, as “betwixt and between” all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification’, associated with ‘the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless’.<sup>1</sup> As a woman accused of both too little and too much, Gertrude ultimately characterises unknowability and therefore leaves her own ‘mystery’ unplucked; Desdemona, as neither angel nor whore, becomes a ‘whole’ woman in the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Turner, “‘Betwixt and Between’: the Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*”, in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (London: Cornell UP, 1967), pp. 93-111 (p. 97).

exposure of *Othello*'s private parts; Juliet's 'undying' body escapes the 'ultimate fixed point' of death and instead evokes an image of the 'endlessness' of erotic pleasure. The final chapters of this thesis show how, through the unique and challenging visions of particular film directors, the concept of lack or absence can shift from the territory of the woman's body to the male body: representations of violence and nakedness in Polanski's *Macbeth* also reveal a violent society and Macbeth's own part in his destruction; and in Taymor's *Titus*, Hopkins's Titus is consumed by ghosts of the past. However, in Shakespeare's play, the 'absent presence' of Lavinia's body will haunt and 'spurn' Titus's soul forever. Despite the eventual removal of that body and its 'shame' from his sight, I read Titus's final moments with Lavinia not through his own words, but, rather, through Othello's, as he looks down on the body of the woman he has killed: 'This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven, / And fiends will snatch at it!' (*Othello*, 5.2.311-12).

To avoid my own silencing of Shakespeare's tragic women, and to avoid marking an end to the ideas about liminal bodies that I have endeavoured to bring to the surface within this thesis, I here initiate not a conclusion, but rather a brief return to the film-texts already discussed, to acknowledge other powerful moments of representation for those characters who have not been the central focus of this thesis. Julia Stiles's Ophelia, for instance, embodies several significant moments of betweenness in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*. As a young girl caught between her



7.1. Between absence and presence: Julia Stiles's Ophelia in Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)



love for Hamlet and her father's will, she stands silently by the edge of a swimming pool and gazes down into the water, while the voices of her father, Polonius, and Claudius begin to fade into the background. Almereyda's camera focuses on the reflection of Ophelia's whole body in the water. As the male talk of Hamlet's madness becomes more and more distant for both Ophelia and for the spectator, the silent stillness of the water beneath her becomes more and more potent; suddenly she falls into the swimming pool, her body submerged by the water and the silence. Here she is cocooned by another elemental existence. Does she fall in search of solitude, or in search of her own end? There is no way that the spectator can be sure.<sup>2</sup>



7.2. A body cleft 'in twain': Stiles's Ophelia in Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)

A few moments later, we see Ophelia standing on the edge of the swimming pool once more: the sounds of the other voices have returned. It is only at this point that we realise that Ophelia has in fact *imagined* herself jumping into the water, while her actual body has remained rigid on the edge of the poolside – and yet this act of agency has been filmed *for the spectator to see*. Like Desdemona's globe and her projected fantasy of Othello's voyages in Sergei Yutkevich's *Othello*, the world of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett, for instance, suggests that 'Ophelia's diving into the swimming pool is explicitly linked with Hamlet's placing of a gun next to his head in the film's editing of events'. See "'I see my father" in "my mind's eye": Surveillance and the Filmic *Hamlet*', *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), pp. 31-52 (p. 38). However, I do not read Ophelia's liminal moment through the framework of Hamlet's narrative; rather, I interpret this movement between external and internal worlds as subjectively her own.

patriarchal enclosures momentarily stops spinning for the internal desires of these women to unfold, to take shape, giving them projected spaces on film that also have the power to engulf the spectator. In the opening sequence of his *Othello*, Yutkevich allows Desdemona to occupy a space that is both internal and external, private and public, fantasy and reality. In Almercyda's *Hamlet*, Stiles's Ophelia can experience a similar liminal moment in a scene where the presence of her body is not even required on the stage in Shakespeare's play-text.

In Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet*, Anastasia Vertinskaia's Ophelia is caught between representations of Shakespeare's tragic women – sometimes Ophelia, sometimes Lavinia, sometimes Desdemona. As Gulsen Sayin Teker writes, she is also essentially 'a paradoxical character who is timid but precociously seductive, innocent but a shrew, and inexperienced but mature'.<sup>3</sup> In her madness, she is also a head strangely severed from its body: after her father's death, her serving ladies gather around her and dress her in a gown so dark that it produces the effect of erasing her body from our view. All that remains of Vertinskaia's Ophelia is the illuminated features of her pale face as her head, with her hair piled rigidly on top of it, now sits awkwardly above her shoulders.



7.3. 'Pray, love, remember': Vertinskaia's Ophelia in Kozintsev's *Hamlet* (1964)

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<sup>3</sup> Gulsen Sayin Teker, 'Empowered by Madness: Ophelia in the Films of Kozintsev, Zeffirelli, and Branagh', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 34 (2006), 113-19 (p. 115). Teker, however, describes Vertinskaia's Ophelia as 'a victim of the collision of different forces'. See p. 115.

There is something particularly haunting about Vertinskaia's performance as Ophelia, and in this particular image she powerfully embodies absence and presence and seems to resist the restraints that are being imposed on her body. Like Calder-Marshall's Lavinia in Jane Howell's *Titus Andronicus* when she pronounces 'Confusion fall', this Ophelia uses the movements of her body to suggest a repression *and* a release, a fading and a powerful return. Like Lavinia, her thoughts remain unknown to us from this point onwards: her words and the meanings behind them are undecipherable for those around her. But as Laertes detects: 'This nothing's more than matter' (4.4.179). As a body that seems to transcend all familiar boundaries, Vertinskaia's mad Ophelia ensures that we continue to 'remember' her beyond the boundaries of Kozintsev's film.

Another ambiguous moment that captures the complex nature of Lady Macbeth occurs in Roman Polanski's film. When she sees the bodies of the groomsmen that her husband has murdered, lying decapitated in a pool of blood, she looks across at Macbeth and then faints. But is it a performance, a tactical move to distract the men's attention away from her husband's blundering mistake? Or is she genuinely reduced to horror and fear by the monstrous violence lurking within her husband's heart that she never truly believed existed? As Annis's Lady Macbeth keeps her back to the camera, we can never know for certain. Lady Capulet's story of abuse also ruptures the surface through her performing body in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*; as she slowly walks away from her daughter after Capulet's violent outburst with her back to the camera, she struggles to maintain her composure in her high heels and restrictive dress once her husband has sent her reeling to the floor. Despite the fact that she tells her daughter, 'I'll not speak a word' as punishment for Juliet's refusal to marry Paris (3.5.212), her body speaks of the violence within her *own* marriage of which she herself chooses not to speak.

Bianca, the third woman character in Shakespeare's *Othello*, is often reduced to little more than a plot device in screen adaptations of the play; in Oliver Parker's *Othello*, she is shown with the incriminating 'evidence' of Desdemona's alleged affair in her hand, as Cassio leaves the handkerchief for her to find whilst she lies asleep. How should we interpret Bianca's visible possession of this token? As something or nothing? In this image, Bianca becomes, like Desdemona, both innocent and guilty – innocent of the knowledge of what she now possesses, but also guilty for possessing that which is not hers. However, in possessing the 'something, nothing' of the

handkerchief, Bianca is also bound by a powerful symbol to the play's two other women, and the imagery of Parker's film makes this connection explicit: as soon as Bianca is shown to be asleep with the handkerchief in her hand, Parker's camera cuts to Desdemona searching *her* bed for the lost handkerchief, as Emilia watches. Bianca's fate is never fully known in Parker's film; after she affectionately teases Cassio about the handkerchief, she is never seen again. But the image of her asleep in her bed also connects her to Desdemona's final scene immediately before Othello kills her. Thus Desdemona's 'end' is charged not only with recollections of Barbary, but also of Bianca; when her voice finally fades away, it then gives rise to Emilia's. Ironically, it is only by concentrating on all of these 'fragmented' moments that exist in-between *Othello's* women that we can succeed in making their story 'whole'.

Tamora in Julie Taymor's *Titus* is, intriguingly, a body that is both exposed and concealed in costume, a body that radically 'undercuts the traditional virgin-whore dichotomy'.<sup>4</sup> With her golden body armour and metallic dresses that are moulded to emphasise the feminine shape beneath them, Jessica Lange's Tamora is, in one sense, both exposed and vulnerable, and in another, powerfully impermeable. Such a collision within the body's representation neatly summarises the essential power of Taymor's film: its ability to make 'seemingly impassable boundaries remarkably permeable'.<sup>5</sup> It is this ability to surpass boundaries that gives Taymor's *Titus* its worthy place at the close of this thesis.

In citing other bodies caught between signifiers of absence and presence, wholeness and fragmentation, something and nothing, exposure and concealment, this thesis thus concludes by tracing further images on film that, like Gertrude's ambiguity or Juliet's 'living corpse', do not deny or simplify moments of betweenness for the spectator. I cite these further liminal moments for Shakespeare's tragic women not as an ending, but as an opportunity for others to read and explore the various collisions of absence and presence that occur within the representations of their bodies, both in Shakespeare, and in Shakespeare films. In doing so, this thesis also endeavours to avoid its own 'fixed point'.

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, 'Looking at the "Other" in Julie Taymor's *Titus*', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 21 (2003), 71-80 (p. 76).

<sup>5</sup> Vaughan, p. 71.

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## Selective Filmography

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*Hamlet*. Dir. Grigori Kozintsev. Facets. USSR. 1964. Innokenti Smoktunovsky (Hamlet); Anastasia Vertinskaya (Ophelia); Elsa Radzin (Gertrude); Mikhail Nazvanov (Claudius)

*Hamlet*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Universal. UK. 1990. Mel Gibson (Hamlet); Helena Bonham Carter (Ophelia); Glenn Close (Gertrude); Alan Bates (Claudius)

*Hamlet*. Dir. Kenneth Branagh. Castle Rock Entertainment. UK. 1996. Kenneth Branagh (Hamlet); Kate Winslet (Ophelia); Julie Christie (Gertrude); Derek Jacobi (Claudius)

*Hamlet*. Dir. Michael Almereyda. Miramax. USA. 2000. Ethan Hawke (Hamlet); Julia Stiles (Ophelia); Diane Venora (Gertrude); Kyle MacLachlan (Claudius)

*Macbeth*. Dir. Orson Welles. Mercury/Republic. USA. 1948. Orson Welles (Macbeth); Jeanette Nolan (Lady Macbeth); Edgar Barrier (Banquo); Erskine Sandford (Duncan)

*Macbeth*. Dir. Roman Polanski. Columbia Pictures. UK. 1971. Jon Finch (Macbeth); Francesca Annis (Lady Macbeth); Martin Shaw (Banquo); Nicholas Selby (Duncan)

*Othello*. Dir. Orson Welles. Castle Hill. Morocco/Italy. 1952. Orson Welles (Othello); Suzanne Cloutier (Desdemona); Micheál MacLiammóir (Iago); Fay Compton (Emilia)

*Othello*. Dir. Sergei Yutkevich. Mosfilm Studios/Universal. USSR. 1956. Sergei Bondarchuk (Othello); Irina Skobtseva (Desdemona); Andrei Popov (Iago); Antonina Maximova (Emilia)

*Othello*. Dir. Oliver Parker. Castle Rock Entertainment. UK. 1995. Laurence Fishburne (Othello); Irène Jacob (Desdemona); Kenneth Branagh (Iago); Anna Patrick (Emilia)

*Romeo and Juliet*. Dir. Renato Castellani. The Rank Productions. UK/Italy. 1954. Laurence Harvey (Romeo); Susan Shentall (Juliet); Aldo Zollo (Mercutio); Enzo Fiermonte (Tybalt); Flora Robson (Nurse); Mervyn Johns (Friar Laurence)

*Romeo and Juliet*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Paramount. Italy/UK. 1968. Leonard Whiting (Romeo); Olivia Hussey (Juliet); John McEnery (Mercutio); Michael York (Tybalt); Pat Heywood (Nurse); Milo O'Shea (Friar Laurence)

*Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-djo)*. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Toho/Brandon Films. Japan. 1957. Toshiro Mifune (Washizu); Isuzu Yamada (Asaji); Minoru Chiaki (Miki); Takamaru Sasaki (Tsuzuki)

*Titus*. Dir. Julie Taymor. Clear Blue Sky Productions. US/Italy. 1999. Anthony Hopkins (Titus); Jessica Lange (Tamora); Laura Fraser (Lavinia); Harry Lennix (Aaron); Alan Cumming (Saturninus)

*William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Twentieth Century Fox. USA. 1996. Leonardo DiCaprio (Romeo); Claire Danes (Juliet); Harold Perrineau (Mercutio); John Leguizamo (Tybalt); Miriam Margolyes (Nurse); Pete Postlethwaite (Father Laurence)