

DEJONGHE, NATALIE MARIE, M.A. The Penalty of Patriarchy: How Misogyny Motivates Female Violence and Rebellion in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. (2008) Directed by Dr. Catherine Loomis. 24 pp.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between misogyny and the actions of Tamora and Lavinia in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. The argument being that Tamora and Lavinia rebel against their society because of the misogyny and oppression that they suffer. The primary document is the play and secondary sources include criticism and Early Modern texts on women.

The paper argues that *Titus Andronicus* is a difficult play for modern audiences to enjoy because of the violence and the apparent lack of positive female figures. By carefully examining the actions of Tamora and Lavinia and looking at recent criticism I place these two characters in a more positive and feminist-friendly position. In relation to Lavinia the paper argues that beneath her passivity lies a strong and active female character who asserts herself verbally and physically throughout the play. The second part of the paper examines how Tamora's actions can be viewed in a less negative light by looking at them in relation to Titus' actions and by taking her circumstances into consideration.

This paper acts as a new reading of the play which will help modern audiences enjoy the play with less guilt in relation to the female characters, the violence and oppression that they suffer, and their ultimate deaths.

DEJONGHE, NATALIE MARIE, M.A. *Womanly Weapons: How Female Characters Act as Effective Avengers in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy*. (2008)
Directed by Dr. Catherine Loomis. 24 pp.

This paper examines four Early Modern revenge dramas – *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Tragedy of Miriam* – which feature female avengers. The paper argues that the way the female avengers in these plays use certain tools and skills enables them to not only be effective avengers, but in some cases to be more effective than the male avengers in the plays. The tools the women use are their sexuality, their linguistic skills both written and verbal, their manipulation of a proxy, and the creation of a masque or masque-like persona.

By examining the plays and feminist criticism, it is possible to view these female avengers as positive and effective characters in their genre. In addition, this allows women in revenge tragedy to serve as active instead of passive characters. The paper examines each play individually and the way that the female avenger or avengers use the various tools to achieve their vengeance. The conclusion to the paper argues that it is important to examine these plays from this viewpoint to promote alternative readings and to help modern readers approach femininity and womanhood during the Early Modern period in a more positive manner. The readings proposed in this paper encourage readers and future editors to look more closely at these plays and to become more aware of female characters as primary literary protagonists instead of secondary characters who act only to motivate the male characters.

THE PENALTY OF PATRIARCHY: HOW MISOGYNY MOTIVATES FEMALE
VIOLENCE AND REBELLION IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TITUS ANDRONICUS*
AND
WOMANLY WEAPONS: HOW FEMALE CHARACTERS ACT AS EFFECTIVE
AVENGERS IN EARLY MODERN REVENGE TRAGEDY

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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INTRODUCTION

The Penalty of Patriarchy: How Misogyny Motivates Female Violence and Rebellion in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is an examination of the actions of Lavinia and Tamora throughout the play and how these actions are motivated by the misogyny and oppression of their society. Before examining these two characters it is necessary to understand how Shakespeare's society viewed women because this would have influenced the characters that Shakespeare created.

The paper begins by looking at various pamphlets and books related to the treatment and position of women in Early Modern society. The second part of the paper focuses on Lavinia's motivations and actions, while the third section of the paper focuses on Tamora. The purpose of examining these two women in this particular play is to allow modern audiences a reading of the play that rises above the surface reading and presents the audience with two female characters that can be sympathized with and admired. This reading will make it possible for modern feminist viewers and readers to enjoy the play without the guilt that has previously attached itself to the play due to the extreme violence perpetrated against a seemingly passive Lavinia and by a seemingly immoral Tamora.

Womanly Weapons: How Female Characters Act as Effective Avengers in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy examines female characters from four popular Early Modern revenge tragedies. The paper focuses on how these women use certain tools available to

them to become active avengers throughout the plays. In addition, the paper argues that these women often act as more effective avengers than the males in the plays.

The paper opens with a discussion of how women were viewed and treated during the Early Modern period and how this determined what tools they had available to them for vengeance. The paper then looks at each play separately and discusses how the female avengers use these tools in pursuit of their vengeance. The paper closes with a brief discussion of the importance of acknowledging these female avengers in order to allow new readings of the plays.

THE PENALTY OF PATRIARCHY: HOW MISOGYNY MOTIVATES
FEMALE VIOLENCE AND REBELLION IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TITUS*
ANDRONICUS

Centuries of societies and civilizations, such as classical Rome and ancient Greece, have been built upon patriarchal power structures that have maintained their control through various forms of oppression of women. This oppression and misogyny can sometimes push women towards violence and rebellion when the society attempts to limit the possibilities of their existence. This is shown throughout Shakespeare's plays, but is especially noticeable in *Titus Andronicus*. The actions of Tamora and Lavinia within this play are strongly motivated by the restrictions set upon them by the extreme patriarchy of their society; these actions are in turn punished by further oppression. The ultimate deaths of these two women prove the futility of any resistance against the patriarchal order.

The society that Tamora and Lavinia live in establishes a clear pattern of misogyny through Titus' ability and right to sacrifice Tamora's son, his power to choose whom Lavinia marries, and his decision to kill Lavinia to dispose of his family's shame. This patriarchy is also seen through the male-dominated army and the exclusively male government of Rome. Tamora and Lavinia rebel against the misogynistic society in which they live and with which they interact. Their rebellions are most typically verbal or seemingly passive physical acts since their "power is less social or political than emotional," (Sprengnether 594), but both women commit intensely violent and

aggressive acts including unauthorized marriages and encouraging the rape, mutilation, and death of an innocent woman. These women are very different characters. Lavinia is seen as the jewel of Rome and as an ideal of femininity for her respectful adoration and devotion to her father. Lavinia's rebellious actions in the play are less pronounced and obvious than Tamora's; many of Lavinia's rebellions could go unnoticed by both her Roman society and by the play's audience. Tamora is a barbaric other who exudes a raw sexuality and passion that is seen as unseemly by some members of the upper class; Lavinia criticizes Tamora in the woods because of Tamora's affair with Aaron. Tamora's rebellions in the play are often more obvious and violent than Lavinia's, and it is the context of these actions that provides audiences the opportunity to view Tamora sympathetically. Despite these differences, the women are united by the misogyny and oppression that they face, and by their unexpectedly subversive acts in response to that misogyny and oppression.

In order to understand why Lavinia and Tamora's actions are subversive and to understand the reactions of the male characters in *Titus Andronicus* it is important to understand the status of women in Shakespeare's society. Even though Shakespeare set *Titus Andronicus* in ancient Rome, his portrayal of women would have been influenced by and would have reflected the opinions of his society. During the early modern period women were considered second-class citizens. Numerous pamphlets and writings of the time, such as *The Schoolhouse of Women* published circa 1541, described women as "frail...lewd...shrewd...light of condition" and it was considered "impossible to let them of their own self will" (*Here* 151). Even the law was designed to show the husband

maintained the control and responsibility in the marriage. 1632 collection of laws relating to women, *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights*, reveals that, while after a certain age women had some say in the timing of their marriage, much of the decision was still in the hands of the parents. In addition, the woman might bring a dowry to the marriage, but once she married the control of the money and property passes to the husband. Women could not even be tried of a felony without her husband and “[i]f a man and wife commit felony jointly, it seemth the wife is no felon, but it shall be wholly judged the husband’s fact” (*Law’s* 49). If a woman could not be held responsible for her own actions or control her own money and property, how could she be expected to maintain anything other than a second-class status?

The second-class status of women was apparent in the medieval period. Women’s inability to perform the required feudal service during this time impacted their ability to achieve the same level of power and importance that men possessed. Since only men could perform this important service it was necessary for a woman of the upper class to have a male guardian at all times in her life. As the feudal system in Europe disappeared, women’s rights continued to be restricted through marriage. Any woman who was married or might become married in the future was expected to obey her husband in all things and allow him to make all decisions in situations such as property matters, monetary matters, and any civil or criminal matters. This expectation is illustrated by laws stating “[t]hat which a husband hath is his own” and “[t]hat which the wife hath is the husband’s” (*Law’s* 46-47). This precedent was also established through the Biblical story of Eve’s punishment that stated that a woman’s “desire shall be for [her] husband,

and he shall rule over [her]" (*New Oxford*, Gen. 3.16). For some time a number of women were able to maintain a certain amount of independence, but, due to increasing concern over this, early modern jurists began to turn back to classical Roman law. Roman law was useful at this point because it based its claims of women's inferiority on their physical, mental, and emotional weaknesses. These claims were established by Aristotle and Galen (Maclean 30). This is important to keep in mind when considering *Titus Andronicus* because it helps explain why Alarabus, Tamora's eldest son, was killed instead of Tamora.

In addition to a woman's lack of rights in early modern society, honor was also vitally important, specifically sexual honor. Society expected women to remain chaste and to do nothing that might taint their honor. Juan Luis Vives' *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* was first published in Latin in 1523 and translated into English, Casilian, French, German, and Italian in the following years. In this work Vives states a "maid...hath within her a treasure without comparison, that is, the pureness both of body and mind" (103). Vives continues "[I]et her that hath lost her virginity turn her which way she will, she shall find all things sorrowful and heavy, wailing, and mourning, and angry, and displeasureful" (105). This idea of the importance of a woman's chastity was widespread, and Vives even quotes examples of women who were killed or exiled for their impure behavior. This obsession with a woman's chastity is also indicated by the fact that in most parts of Europe the only type of suit a woman could bring before a court was a defamation suit, revealing that a woman's reputation is of the utmost importance (Weisner-Hanks 233-35). These ideas and expectations of women are important to

consider when looking at *Titus Andronicus* because these ideas would have influenced Shakespeare and shaped his portrayal of Lavinia and Tamora.

The acts of oppression begin almost immediately in *Titus Andronicus*; Tamora's very entrance as a chained prisoner being paraded before the Roman public is an act of humiliation designed to ensure her submissiveness as both a woman and a barbarian. This act is followed by the execution of Tamora's eldest son Alarbus. He is killed despite the fact that he is not the most powerful prisoner and in disregard of Tamora's pleas for his life:

Stay, Roman brethren, gracious conqueror...
Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome
To beautify they triumphs, and return
Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke?
But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets?¹
(*TA* 1.1.107-115)

If Tamora had been a male, she would have been the one sacrificed since as the ruler of the Goths she is more responsible for the deaths of Titus' sons than Alarbus is. Tamora's emotional weakness as a woman would have caused Titus to view her as an unequal adversary and therefore not a valid sacrifice to avenge his sons. In addition, it seems immeasurably crueler to kill a woman's child in front of her than to kill her, especially when Tamora's sons are young, fertile, and necessary to the continuation of her

¹ All quotations from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* will be taken from *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, Third Series (The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), and will be indicated by *TA* and specific act, scene, and line numbers.

bloodline. The violence that surrounds Tamora's introduction in the play helps establish her in as a more violent character; this atmosphere of violence continues throughout the play as Tamora's actions are noticeably more violent than Lavinia's. It is easy to see how a play that begins with such misogynistic violence could be difficult for a modern audience to watch and enjoy without feeling some horror at their enjoyment. This is why it is important to re-examine Lavinia and Tamora as positive female characters; this re-examination can offer a modern audience a new look at a play that seems impossible to enjoy without a certain amount of feminist guilt.

Lavinia's entrance follows shortly after this execution; she is greeted by her father and praised for her virtue, then promptly put aside as the men deal with the important political issues. The next time Lavinia is mentioned is when Saturninus tells, rather than asks, Titus and Lavinia that he will marry Lavinia, "Lavinia will I make my empress," (*TA* 1.1.244). Lavinia is not even acknowledged during this agreement; it is not until Saturninus decides he will marry Tamora instead that Lavinia is addressed:

SATURNINUS: Lavinia, you are not displeased with this?

LAVINIA: Not I, my lord, sith true nobility

Warrants these words in princely courtesy.

(*TA* 1.1.274-276)

This is a rhetorical question because Lavinia has no real say in the matter. Even if Lavinia did object to Saturninus marrying Tamora, it is not her decision, though it is not likely that Lavinia would object since she had been planning to marry Bassianus. Saturninus' treatment of Tamora is equally dismissive; he proposes to Tamora in much the same way that he proposed to Lavinia: "Rest on my word...he comforts you /Can

make you greater than the queen of Goths” (*TA* 1.1.271-273). Again, Tamora cannot refuse Saturninus if she wishes to remain alive and free. Within the span of two hundred lines of dialogue, Tamora has been publicly humiliated and deprived of her eldest son; Lavinia has been claimed and rejected by Saturninus, then claimed by Bassianus; and Tamora has been moved from lowest of all prisoners to second most powerful person in Rome; and all of this has been caused by men without any active agreement or participation by Tamora or Lavinia. These women have such trouble submitting to the patriarchy that surrounds them because they are constantly being ordered around and dismissed as if they are no more than pieces of property or trophies to be displayed. This is why many of their actions, such as Lavinia fleeing with Bassianus and Tamora’s affair, must be committed in a less obvious manner to those in charge of them than Titus’ acts of vengeance.

At first glance, Lavinia appears to be the ideal submissive and obedient daughter; Titus even calls her “the cordial of mine age,” (*TA* 1.1.169). Throughout the play Lavinia appears to retain this images of a proper woman, yet a careful evaluation of her actions reveals an underlying sexuality and rebellious nature that might not have been considered acceptable by Shakespeare’s audience but can be admired by a modern audience.

Lavinia’s first act of rebellion occurs when she flees with Bassianus. Titus claims that Lavinia is being taken against her will, but Bassianus reveals the truth of the matter and is supported by Lavinia’s brothers:

TITUS: Treason, my lord – Lavinia is surprised.

SATURNINUS: Surprised? By whom?

BASSIANUS: By him that justly may

Bear his betrothed from all the world away.
MUTIUS: Brothers, help to convey her hence away...
 (TA 1.1.288-291)

Lavinia's lack of resistance and the assistance of her brothers indicates that this is what Lavinia truly wants. This is a direct act of rebellion against Titus; as a dutiful daughter, Lavinia should have protested and called for help, conforming to Titus's opinion of the situation that she has been "surprised." Titus is probably more shocked by Lavinia's lack of resistance than her actual "abduction." Initially, Lavinia would probably have followed the proper daughterly behavior of asking her father for permission to marry Bassianus, but Titus' insensitive act of giving Lavinia away to Saturninus has upset both Lavinia and Bassianus, as indicated by Bassianus' adamant response to Titus' accusation that Lavinia was taken by force. Bassianus specifically says that he may "justly" take Lavinia. Titus' disregard for Lavinia's desires leads to the fracture with Saturninus and the death of his son Mutius. Lavinia's willing participation in her abduction angers Saturninus because it is a direct insult to his masculinity; Lavinia has chosen his younger and supposedly less worthy brother over him. Saturninus makes it clear to Titus that Titus and his family are no longer considered his allies:

No, Titus, no, the emperor needs her not,
 Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock.
 I'll trust by leisure him that mocks me once,
 Thee never, nor they traitorous haughty sons,
 Confederates all thus to dishonor me.
 (TA 1.1.304-308)

Titus' dismissal of Lavinia as anything other than property is ultimately what leads to the near-complete destruction of his family. His misogyny leads to Lavinia's flight that in turn insults Saturninus; this makes Saturninus susceptible to Tamora's hatred and lies about Titus and his family. In addition, it is Titus' view of Tamora as a weak and unworthy opponent that leads him to sacrifice Alarbus instead of her. This underestimation of Lavinia and Tamora is Titus' tragic flaw.

Lavinia's next action of rebellion against society manifests itself in her attitude and manner. Women were expected to be respectful and to be seen instead of heard. *Vives' Instruction of a Christian Woman* states "it is no shame for a woman to hold her peace, but it is a shame for her...to lack discretion" (101). Timothy 2.12 says a woman "is to keep silent" (*New Oxford*). Lavinia's action of speaking back to both Saturninus, and later Tamora, illustrates her growing confidence in herself and her worth as an individual. It is not surprising that Lavinia chooses to assert herself with words; as Joseph Swetnam says in his pamphlet *The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, forward, and unconstant women*, "Her tongue is a woman's chief weapon" (209). For Lavinia and Tamora, the tongue/voice acts as the weapon of choice in place of the more typically male weapons of knives, swords, and other physical violence. The morning of the hunt, Saturninus makes a sexually suggestive remark to Lavinia and expects no response from her, yet Bassianus encourages her to speak:

TITUS: I promised your grace a hunter's peal.

SATURNINUS: And you have rung it lustily, my lords,
Somewhat too early for new-married ladies.

BASSIANUS: Lavinia, how say you?

LAVINIA: I say no:

I have been broad awake two hours and more.
(TA 2.1.13-18)

Saturninus is attempting to embarrass Lavinia with his sexual remark, yet instead of shying away, Lavinia answers calmly and without embarrassment. By asking her what she thought, Bassianus effectively helps to put Lavinia on a more equal footing with himself and Saturninus; Lavinia takes advantage of this opportunity and puts Saturninus in his place. Not only does she openly talk back to a man, but to the Emperor; a properly chaste and silent lady would have blushed and remained quiet. Lavinia's verbal jab at Saturninus is a non-physical method of revenge for his earlier behavior of claiming her and then rejecting her. Lavinia is refusing to be dismissed and ignored as a person. Later on, Lavinia once again asserts her attitude by pointedly antagonizing Tamora about her illicit affair with Aaron. Bassianus and Lavinia come across Tamora and Aaron in the vale, and Lavinia immediately verbally assaults Tamora:

Under your patience, gentle empress,
'Tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning,
And to be doubted that your Moor and you
Are singled forth to try experiments.
(TA 2.2.66-69)

Lavinia accuses Tamora of being a whore and of planning to cuckold Saturninus in the very vale in which they stand. A chaste and virtuous lady would never have considered speaking so rudely to anyone of such high status. Initially Tamora may have been viewed by Lavinia as an ally because of their shared gender; however, Lavinia now realizes that Tamora wields significantly more power than she ever could and is married to the man

Lavinia insulted. This makes Tamora more of an enemy than an ally to Lavinia and Lavinia is determined to stand her ground in an effort to neutralize the threat that Tamora poses as a higher ranking and more powerful woman than Lavinia. Underneath the seemingly docile persona that Lavinia presents lies an assertive woman who wants to make an equal place for herself in society.

Tamora's response to Lavinia's attitude is to engineer her demise. Lavinia's rape and mutilation are horrendous acts that are designed to destroy Lavinia in a way that simple murder cannot. During Shakespeare's life rape was considered a crime against a man's property, not a crime against the woman; thus Tamora is effectively revenging herself against both Titus and Lavinia. It was not until circa 1597 that rape became a crime against the woman and not a crime of theft against her family (Wynne-Davies 131). It is this honor and purity that Chiron and Demetrius strike out at, allowing them to harm both Lavinia and Titus in one blow. Tamora at first wishes simply to kill Lavinia; after her sons have stabbed Bassianus she says to them: "Give me the poniard. You shall know, my boys,/ Your mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong" (*TA* 2.2.120-121). It is at this point that Demetrius suggests raping Lavinia:

Stay, madam, here is more belongs to her:
 First thrash the corn, then after burn the straw.
 This minion stood upon her chastity,
 Upon her nuptial vow, her loyalty,
 And with that quaint hope braves your mightiness.
 And shall she carry this unto her grave?
 (*TA* 2.2.122-127)

Demetrius argues in this passage that Lavinia and society view her chastity as the characteristic that makes her better than Tamora: “This minion stood upon her chastity”; therefore it would be much more detrimental to Lavinia to deprive her of this chastity than her life. Even Lavinia considers rape worse than death; she begs Tamora to “keep me from their worse-than-killing lust,/ And tumble me into some loathsome pit...Do this, and be a *charitable* murderer” (*TA* 2.2.175-178, italics mine). Lavinia considers rape and the destruction of her honor and sexual purity so awful that she feels Tamora would be performing an act of charity if she killed Lavinia instead. Lavinia seems to realize that much of her standing in society is based on her value as a possession to her husband and her father. The patriarchy of her society has bred in Lavinia a belief that without her chastity she is a worthless object; Tamora also realizes this and allows her sons to rape and mutilate Lavinia as long as they prevent their victim from revealing the crime. Tamora recognizes Lavinia as a danger to herself and her sons, and specifically instructs her sons not to let “this wasp outlive, us both to sting” (*TA* 2.2.132). It is a testament to Lavinia’s strength of character that after this devastating event she lives up to Tamora’s accusations of waspishness and does “sting” both Tamora and Tamora’s sons by actively participating in the revelation and avenging of the rape and mutilation.

Once Lavinia is raped, Chiron and Demetrius cut out her tongue and cut off her hands to prevent her from revealing their crime through speech, writing, or art. This loss of her tongue and hands would seem to make Lavinia entirely dependent upon the men in her life, but she in fact manages, like Philomela, to overcome her handicaps and reveal to Marcus and Titus what has happened to her and who has committed this atrocity. Lavinia,

unable to speak or write, creates a new form of language that she expresses through what Demetrius calls her “scrawl” (*TA* 2.3.5). Lavinia’s use of her uncle’s staff as the means of creating her scrawlings is her way of taking the language and power of her male relatives and transferring it to herself; she becomes a writer, a manipulator of staff and of words. She has replaced her previous weapon, her symbolically phallic tongue, with the staff, also a phallic symbol.

At this point in the traditional myth of Philomela, it is her sister Progne who becomes the avenger. Karen Robertson’s article “Rape and the Appropriation of Progne’s Revenge in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Or, ‘Who Cooks the Thyestean Banquet?’” is an excellent discussion of the way in which Shakespeare’s society would have viewed female violence as unconventional and unacceptable, hence the reason Shakespeare must have Titus become the revenger. The only other female in the play who would be strong enough to avenge Lavinia is in fact the motivator of Lavinia’s attack. Lavinia’s refusal to become passive after her attack prompts her inclusion in the vow Marcus has the family swear once the crime is revealed:

My lord, kneel down with me; *Lavinia, kneel*;
 And kneel, sweet boy, the Roman Hector’s hope,
 And *swear with me...*
That we will prosecute by good advice
 Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths,
 And see their blood, or die with this reproach.

(*TA* 4.1.87-94, italics mine)

Though Lavinia is included in the vow she is not brought up again in the rest of the conversation as the men discuss and plan the revenge. It is as if she has only been

included as a motivation for the revenge and not as a participant. A similar event is seen in *The Revenger's Tragedy* when the corpse of Antonio's wife is shown to prompt vengeance against her rape, the crime that prompted her suicide. It is not until scene two of act five that Lavinia is included as an active participant when Titus bids her hold "tween her stumps...the basin that receives" (TA 5.2.182-183) the guilty blood of Chiron and Demetrius. This inclusion of Lavinia indicates that she has left her position as a typical woman.

Despite the lack of explicit stage directions including Lavinia in the scenes between these events, her presence on stage is a frequent occurrence in productions of the play. This allows directors the opportunity to paint the post-traumatized Lavinia in a variety of ways. Two of the most well-known performances of Lavinia are those of Vivien Leigh and Sonia Ritter in productions directed by Peter Brooks and Deborah Warner, respectively. Brooks's production presents Leigh with long red ribbons streaming from her mouth and her hands to represent the mutilations. When Leigh returns to the stage after her rape, she is silent and statuesque. The view of Lavinia in this production is her ability to behave with grace. Daniel Scuro's review of the 16 August 1955 production specifically comments on the lack of melodrama in Lavinia's actions; the review says, "Lavinia no longer chases Lucius...[she] does not hold the staff in her mouth: she manages to write with her unaided stumps" (Scuro 403). Deborah Warner's 1988 production, the first RSC production to be directed by a woman, took a significantly less stylized approach to Lavinia. James Fisher points out Sonia Ritter's "frighteningly effective transition from Titus's beautiful and favored daughter to a traumatized and

pathetic monstrosity” (Fisher 452; italics mine). In these two productions Lavinia is, respectively, cleaned up and made pathetic. Her presence is either artistic or horrifying, but not necessarily impressive or strong. Sadly, a large number of production reviews make very limited mention of Lavinia or her presence on stage indicating that she is not a focus. Many times when she is mentioned it is to describe how broken, wounded, pitiful, distressed, or otherwise ruined she has become. These stage incarnations of Lavinia serve to keep her character as the docile and abused figure that perpetuates the misogynistic identity of the play.

However, there have been some productions in which Lavinia’s presence is not only striking and inescapable because of the horror of what has been done to her, but also because the actresses playing her have imbued her with strength and vigor that proclaim her active instead of passive nature. Gale Edwards’s 2007 production and the 1995 production by Gregory Doran both present Lavinia as a highly active subject. Jennifer Woodburne plays Lavinia in Doran’s South African production. In this production Lavinia is often ignored by the other characters or left in the background of the scene. However, Woodburne continuously “manages to ‘squirm’ Lavinia’s body out of the margins of the stage and into the centrestage spotlight” (Aebischer 36). In addition, the “groans, sobs, giggles and shrieks” (Aebischer 36) that Woodburne produces, based on her research of and interviews with trauma patients and victims of mutilation, prevent the audience from ever forgetting that she is onstage and alive. Woodburne’s Lavinia is a broken one, but also one who refuses to be ignored. An even more impressive Lavinia is seen in Gale Edwards’s 2007 Washington, DC production. Colleen Delany’s Lavinia was

reviewed as “the most active and vocal portrayal” that William Proctor Williams had ever seen. He further characterizes Delany’s Lavinia “as tough as old boots” (Williams 12). In this production Lavinia actively fights back during her attack by Chiron and Demetrius and seems positively gleeful at their later deaths. One of the main differences that Williams points out between Delany’s Lavinia and those who have come before is how little the rape and mutilation seem to change Lavinia’s character. As Williams explains, “[A]lthough [the attack] slowed her down, it did not seem to change her character” (12). Lavinia begins and ends this production as a force to be reckoned with. It is to be hoped Edwards’s production is indicative of future portrayals of Lavinia that will maintain the image of her as a stronger and more positive female character.

Lavinia’s presence as a seemingly ideal Roman woman can easily mislead the reader into believing that she has submitted willingly to the patriarchy of her society. A closer examination of her actions and her words reveals a strong, intelligent, and fairly independent woman who does her best to fight against the rampant misogyny that she faces daily. Sadly, her efforts are ultimately futile when her father kills her to end her supposed shame incurred by her rape and mutilation. Regardless of Shakespeare’s original intention when he created Lavinia, he has managed to create a female character that can be viewed in a more positive light than many female characters found in early modern literature and who has achieved a definite presence on stage.

Tamora can also be viewed in a more positive light than typical characters despite her seemingly evil and cruel actions; after all she is rebelling in the only way possible for her. Tamora’s acts of rebellion against the Roman patriarchy are much more easily seen

and identified than Lavina's. Her actions of revenge against the Andronici seem easily explained by the execution of her eldest son, Alarbus, whose life Tamora pleads for in act one. As the Queen of the Goths, Tamora is used to wielding a great deal of power and having the ability to make her own decisions. Even though Saturninus does not technically demand that Tamora be his empress, if she refuses she will remain confined as a prisoner of war and forced to spend the rest of her life submissive to the Roman Empire. Being the woman that she is, when Tamora accepts the position as Empress, she immediately begins to take control of Saturninus, "My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last," (*TA* 1.1.446). Tamora is determined to use her newfound power as a way to wreak vengeance against the Andronici, but also to live her life however she pleases.

Tamora orchestrates peace between Titus and Saturninus in an attempt to lure Titus into a false sense of security so that she may "find a day to massacre them all, /And raze their faction and their family" (*TA* 1.1.455-456). This deviousness and forethought proves Tamora's intelligence and cunning. This cunning is further illustrated through Tamora's affair with Aaron. Tamora's most obvious strike against the patriarchal society is her sexual freedom. Renaissance society "viewed women as possessed of a powerful, potentially disruptive sexuality" (Henderson 55) and many men feared the shame of being cuckolded. Thus the easiest way for Tamora to wound Saturninus, and through him Rome, is to cuckold her husband the emperor. Despite the presence of Tamora's sons, no previous marriage is ever mentioned and it is impossible to know whether Tamora is a widow or has simply not been married. Aaron even claims some responsibility for raising Chiron and Demetrius when he confesses to Lucius the actions of Chiron and Demetrius:

AARON: 'Twas her two sons that murdered Bassianus;
 They cut thy sister's tongue and ravished her...
LUCIUS: O barbarous, beastly villains, like thyself!
AARON: Indeed, I was their tutor to instruct them.
 That coddling spirit had they from their mother...
 That bloody mind I think they learned of me...
 (TA 5.1.91-101)

Aaron claims to have been their tutor and says that Chiron and Demetrius learned their “bloody mind” (TA 5.1.101) from him. As Bate points out in the footnote for the next line, “Chiron and Demetrius are the products of Tamora’s nature and Aaron’s nurture” (249). In addition to his effect on Tamora’s sons, Aaron is also having an affair with her. The very day after her marriage to Saturninus she is trying to have sex with Aaron, indicating that this is a long-standing relationship: “We may, each wreathed in the other’s arms,/Our pastimes done, possess a golden slumber,” (TA 2.2.25-26). Lavinia comments on Tamora’s affair when she and Bassianus come upon Aaron and Tamora. To Bassianus Lavinia says, “I pray you, let us hence,/And let her joy her raven-coloured love” (TA 2.2.82-83). Tamora’s cuckolding of Saturninus becomes even more apparent later on when she gives birth to a child that is fathered by Aaron. The nurse describes the child, “as loathsome as a toad/Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime,” (TA 4.2.69-70) indicating the mixed ethnicity of the infant. At this point, the patriarchal society condemns Tamora:

DEMETRIUS: By this our mother is for ever shamed.
CHIRON: Rome will despise her for this foul escape.
NURSE: The emperor in his rage will doom her death.
 (TA 4.2.114-116)

Society would have looked the other way if Saturninus had taken a mistress and created a bastard son, but because it was Tamora who had the affair she will be condemned, possibly to death. Women were not allowed the sexual freedom that men had; the men of Roman society feared the power that women would wield over them if women had sexual freedom. Tamora's sexual freedom marks her as a danger to the male controlled society because her promiscuity loudly announces that no man, not even her husband, will rule her. Tamora's control over the men in her life, excluding Titus because of his existing feud with and hatred for her, is demonstrated time and again as she manipulates Saturninus, her sons, and Aaron. Her affair with Aaron is a direct attack against the oppression the Romans would attempt to force on her.

Tamora's reaction to her newborn son is an interesting example of female independence; she realizes the danger that giving birth to a mixed race bastard child will place her in and she refuses to be caught in this trap. Tamora chooses to save herself and sacrifice her child: "The empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal,/ And bids thee christen it with thy dagger's point" (*TA* 4.2.71-72); while this action seems cruel and heartless it is still an independent move. Women were expected to be wives and mothers, and a woman's children should be her most prized possession. Renaissance society viewed children as a "gift from God" (Perkins 170). Tamora should embrace his new child instead of casting it away. This demonstrates a lack of maternal affection on Tamora's part which may explain why she has little trouble participating in the destruction of Titus' children. By this point in Tamora's life she may be unwilling to welcome any new life because her despair over Alarbus' death has caused her to focus all

her energy on revenging the sons she already has. When Tamora refuses to give up her life for her child she is also refusing to be nothing more than a wife and mother. In addition to her refusal to raise her child she commands Aaron to kill him. Tamora very clearly does not care what Aaron's thoughts are feelings are in this matter and she expects him to follow her orders without question. Tamora is a woman who is used to being obeyed by the men in her life, no matter how stomach-turning the commands may be.

Tamora's cruelty and her control over her sons becomes even more apparent when she convinces Chiron and Demetrius that Lavinia and Bassianus are conspiring to kill her. In the forest she tells them: "Have I not reason, think you, to look pale? These two have 'ticed me hither to this place," (TA 2.2.91-92); suddenly the pastoral bower of her proposed tryst with Aaron has become "A barren detested vale," (TA 2.2.93). Chiron and Demetrius ask no questions and offer no arguments in response to Tamora's order; in fact, the stage direction that illustrates Bassianus' death comes immediately after Tamora's speech. Her sons do not even pause for an instant to question their mother's desire. After her sons have killed Bassianus, Tamora allows them to rape and wound Lavinia as they please, "But when ye have the honey we desire,/Let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting," (TA 2.2.131-132). This act is especially cruel because Tamora has no real quarrel with Lavinia; her anger is centered on Titus. Once Lavinia has been violated her family views her as a ruined object:

MARCUS: This *was* thy daughter. (Italics added)

TITUS: Why, Marcus, so she is.

LUCIUS: Ay me, this *object* kills me. (Italics added)

(TA 3.1.63-65)

Titus then uses Lavinia's misfortune as another reason for violent revenge and sinks himself further into an un-winnable battle.

Tamora's final act of cunning is her portrayal of Revenge in act five. Typically in early modern drama the character of Revenge was shown as a male character, as in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*; Tamora is usurping a typically male role. However, this usurpation can be seen as a reclaiming because many of the traditional Revenge figures, Nemesis, Poena, the Furies, were all female. Her personification of Revenge seems almost gleeful about the acts of violence she can commit:

No vast obscurity or misty vale
 Where bloody murder or detested rape
 Can couch for fear, but I will find them out,
 And in their ears tell them my dreadful name,
 Revenge, which makes the foul offender quake.
 (TA 5.2.36-40)

She is openly embracing the idea of being in control of the violence and punishment to be meted out to her victims; at this moment she is the very antithesis of the proper early modern woman. The adoption of this persona proclaims Tamora's strength, cunning, and intense violent hatred for Titus and his family, all of which would have been seen as inappropriate characteristics of an early modern woman.

It is important to note, as Karen Robertson argues in her article, that the early modern audience would not have found a revenge-seeking female to be an appropriate character. Robertson's article, "Rape and the Appropriation of Progne's Revenge in

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, or 'Who Cooks the Thyestean Banquet?', discusses how the appropriation of a female character's (Progne) vengeance by a male character (Titus) reflects the societal prohibitions against female anger. She presents an argument that explains how this appropriation illustrates Titus' male superiority and further isolates Lavinia as a rape victim by depriving her of a friendly female confidant and avenger. Shakespeare's refashioning of the tale presents audiences with "a Tudor configuration of masculine agency and feminine objectification" (Robertson 214). Titus can appropriate Progne's position because he is a male rightfully reclaiming the power and privilege of revenge; however, Tamora's appropriation of the identity of Revenge is a woman inappropriately stepping outside of her prescribed role. Shakespeare is able to get away with such an act of female empowerment because Tamora is so harshly punished for her crime, and her appropriation of this typically male identity brings about the downfall and punishment of her sons and thus her own downfall and punishment.

Tamora's acts against the patriarchy throughout the play are usually easy to spot. Her forms of rebellion are much more violent and obvious than any of the acts committed by Lavinia. Tamora is justly punished for stepping outside the realm of appropriate feminine behavior and thus she is a character that early modern audiences can accept. By examining Tamora's motivations and considering her lack of other options, a modern audience can view Tamora with a certain level of sympathy and view her as a positive, if horribly misguided, female presence. This allows feminist theatergoers the option of sympathizing with Tamora instead of Titus.

While it is impossible to know if Shakespeare intentionally created Lavinia and Tamora to serve as proto-feminist characters, it is impossible to ignore the fact that they do. Shakespeare may have created strong, active female characters like these two in an attempt to please Queen Elizabeth or out of a sincere admiration for her. While there are no records listing the exact number of times Shakespeare acted, it is known that he did. In addition, as a playwright he would have worked closely with the actors of his plays. The existence and success of players and playwrights was dependent on the approval and financial input of its audiences, much like many women were dependent on their husbands at the time. It is possible that Shakespeare was more sympathetic to the plight of women because these experiences allowed him to understand the difficulty of living as a marginalized subject and he chose to express this sympathy through the creation of proto-feminist characters.

Both Tamora and Lavinia act outside of the role of a “proper woman” of the times. Both have been mistreated and oppressed by the actions of their male-dominated societies. Neither woman is truly viewed as an equal by society; their actions are an attempt to gain equal footing in life. Sadly, each woman’s actions ultimately end in her untimely death proving the futility of resistance against the patriarchy. Modern day society often strongly opposes violence against women, as seen through the many organizations designed to combat domestic abuse, rape as a weapon of warfare, and female genital mutilation. Considering our society’s dislike for this type of violence it is understandable why many audiences object to this play. It is not uncommon for audience members to faint or become physically ill when presented with the vision of a raped and

mutilated Lavinia. This is why a careful consideration of these two women and the strength of will that they embody is desperately needed. This interpretation can help a modern audience view and enjoy this play without the level of guilt that would come from enjoyment at the oppression and destruction of two women, one submissive and one simply evil.

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WOMANLY WEAPONS: HOW FEMALE CHARACTERS ACT AS EFFECTIVE
AVENGERS IN EARLY MODERN REVENGE TRAGEDY

I

The socially expected attitude of women in the Early Modern period, for the most part, was one of passivity. Women were expected to be seen and not heard; they were to be meek and obedient to their husbands. This expectation for obedience and passivity was even dictated by certain Early Modern laws which claimed “[t]hat which a husband hath is his own” and “[t]hat which the wife hath is the husband’s” (*Law’s* 46-47). This precedent was further indicted through the Biblical directives stating that a woman’s “desire shall be for [her] husband, and he shall rule over [her]” (*New Oxford* 15HB). The prevalent belief within Early Modern society was that women were physically, mentally, and emotionally inferior to men. This idea was one that was based on the views of classical scholars such as Aristotle and Galens (Maclean 30). There were obvious exceptions to the rule, such as Queen Elizabeth, but most of the female population in Early Modern England was viewed in this derogatory light by much of society, as seen through numerous misogynistic pamphlets of the time. Taking this view into consideration, it is unsurprising that most literary protagonists in literature and drama were male. Within the revenge drama genre, the primary avenger was almost always a male character; examples include Hieronimo (*The Spanish Tragedy*), Vindice (*The Revenger’s Tragedy*), and Titus (*Titus Andronicus*). These avengers, and many other

male avengers in literature, are characterized by their cunning, passion, and determination. Despite the numerous female characters who are injured in some way as a frequent plot device in revenge drama, women never seem to play dominating roles as avengers. Their role is a secondary one in which they provide motive and support for the male avenger. But is this a truly accurate reading of some of these plays, or is it simply the accepted and predicted reading based on the assumption that because many women in Early Modern England lacked power it was necessary for female characters to also lack power? Also, this lack of female avengers seems odd given that many of the well-known classical figures and personifications of vengeance, such as Nemesis, Poena, and the Furies, are female. If the traditional gods that represent vengeance are female and are capable of remaining active, why is it difficult for female characters within the vengeance plays to be active pursuers of revenge? I will argue that in four well-known Early Modern revenge dramas - *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Tragedy of Miriam* - women act as effective avengers, equal to or more successfully than the male avengers in the play.

Given their limited ability because of social class to move freely within their society and their seemingly limited power, how is it possible for the women in these plays to be effective revengers? The answer to this question can be found in looking at the tools of revenge with which women work. Male avengers most typically resort to a physically violent act that they themselves perform. Titus himself slays Chiron, Demetrius, and Tamora. Vindice and Hippolito poison the Duke and later viciously stab Lussurioso. Hamlet ultimately, after much contemplation, stabs and poisons Claudius.

Women avengers, however, often lacking access to both weapons and opportunity, are forced to be significantly more creative and manipulative in their revenge. The tools we see used by women in pursuit of vengeance are their sexuality, their linguistic skills both written and verbal, their manipulation of a proxy, and the creation of a masque or masque-like persona which allows them to move more freely in their environment. The use of these tools characterize the female avengers as passionate, cunning, determined, and sexually liberated, characteristics that many members of a modern audience would view in a positive light, but many past reviewers and audience members may have considered “morally reprehensible” (Jardine 69) in relation to female characters.

Due to women’s presumed mental inferiority, they were also often viewed as much more sexual than men. As Helkiah Crooke points out in his work *Microcosmographia*, “That females are more wanton and petulant than males, we think happens because of the impotency of their minds” (56). While this uncontrollable sexuality may have been considered a negative trait in society, it could serve as a valuable weapon of manipulation and vengeance for women. Because women often required a male proxy for the execution of their vengeance, sex could be used as a lure to attract a desirable candidate. The bestowing of sexual favors upon the chosen male can induce him to action planned by the female avenger. On the other end of this spectrum, sex serves not as an enticement but as the actual revenge in two different ways. The withholding of sex from a husband can be seen as a vengeful blow against his pride and his power. A wife’s refusal to submit to her husband sexually implies that he lacks control over her actions. Also, a woman could strike a palpable blow against her husband

by cuckolding him. This action is especially painful to a man because it not only strips him of his control of his wife, but it also tarnishes his reputation and destroys his peace of mind by suggesting he is incapable of satisfying her. As Othello points out, “He that is robbed, not wanting what is stolen...he’s not robbed at all” (3.3.345-46); a woman who publicly cuckolds her husband prevents him from living in ignorant bliss. Thus a woman’s sexuality was a flexible and available tool in the pursuit for vengeance.

The next tool used by the female revenger is her language. A woman’s use of her linguistic ability could act as either a call to arms to a potential proxy or a scathing attack on the reputation of the woman’s enemy. This use of language imbues the female revenger with an air of cunning and intelligence that highlights her carefully constructed vengeance as, for example, Tamora does when she convinces Saturninus to reconcile with Titus so that she may pursue her revenge. This indicates that Tamora has already begun to plot her revenge and has enough forethought to realize her vengeance will be ruined if Saturninus banishes Titus. It also grants her the power to engineer her vengeance from afar. This tool of vengeance can take either a verbal or written form; examples include Bel-Imperia’s letter to Hieronimo and Livia’s denunciation of Isabella and Hippolito. This is a female avenger’s most flexible tool because it can be used in myriad ways, such as encouraging her proxy from afar, delivering information from a position of captivity, destroying a reputation through gossip, revealing crimes, and cursing. As Edward Bulwer-Lytton so aptly pointed out in his 1839 play *Richelieu*, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” In the case of the female avenger, the pen and the tongue

replace the more typically phallic weapons of vengeance, the knife or the sword, and endow the woman with a symbolic phallus of her own.

The third weapon of vengeance that the female revenger uses is that of a proxy. The use of a proxy is an important tool for a female revenger because it allows the woman a form of access to weapons and opportunities that she cannot reach alone. In addition, this use of a proxy reinforces the woman's dominant role within the revenge plays because it places her in the position of dominance over a more submissive male. This is the direct opposite of how Early Modern society intended the gender hierarchy to stand. According to various sources women were associated with cold and wet elements, while men's humors were hot and dry. This caused women to be "changeable, deceptive, and tricky" (Davis 147). Women were also susceptible to being overwhelmed by unsatisfied sexual lust (Davis 148) making it difficult for women to maintain control by using sexuality since they were controlled by their own sexuality and desire. However, the female avengers I will discuss invert these assumptions about sexuality to achieve their vengeance and in turn create stability out of the chaos that has been created by the crimes perpetrated against them. These plays, intentionally or not, are painting their audiences a picture of strong, intelligent, cunning women who are as determined and as capable of wreaking vengeance upon their enemies as is any male.

The final weapon of revenge that women avengers use is their ability to create a type of court masque or a masque-like persona that establishes a feminine sphere of influence in which to work. In her article on seventeenth-century court masques, Marion Wynne-Davies points out that courtly ladies in this time were "able to commission the

text they desired...[and were] able to share the planning for its performance and act in [the masque's] presentation" (81). This endowed courtly women in the seventeenth-century with an interesting form of theatrical power; granted, even when appearing in the masque, women were still not allowed to speak. However, the creative power which these women were given allowed them to create a sphere of feminine power and influence that was not easily found elsewhere. This power is seen in the actions of female avengers when they create and perform masque-like events. This adoption of a dramatic persona allows a woman an avenue through which to temporarily escape her typical sphere of influence and engineer a new sphere in which she can more freely move and act. Because many of the female characters in these four plays are not of courtly status and therefore would not have the opportunity to participate in a court masque it is important to recognize the ability of these lower class women to create a masque-like atmosphere or persona with which to work. For these lower class women, the theatrical inversion of power which they create is much like the inversions allowed during carnivals and festivities that Early Modern audiences would have been familiar with. These female avengers use their theatrical power to create an inversion of power which allows them to establish control much like participants in the carnivals and festivities used various inversions of power and gender to speak out against their social order (Davis 153-154). Only in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* do we see an actual court masque being used as a tool of revenge, but in the other plays we see the creation of fictional spheres of reality or the creation of dramatic personas that the women use. While these women are

not technically using a masque, they are employing the idea of women being allowed to create a fictional reality that suits their purposes.

These four weapons wielded by female revengers bestow upon the women a power and influence that allows them to be active pursuers of revenge instead of simple, secondary characters. The manner in which the women use these tools establishes them as intelligent, powerful characters who overcome the limitations placed upon them by society to wreak revenge as successfully as, if not more so, than any male revenger.

II

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is one of the few plays that openly embraces its use of a female revenger. The character of Revenge promises Don Andrea in the opening of the play that Don Andrea "[shall] see the author of thy death,/Don Balthazar, the Prince of Portingale,/Deprived of life by Bel-Imperia"¹ (*ST* 1.1.87-89). It is not Hieronimo, the seemingly dominant avenger within the play, who is mentioned, but Bel-Imperia, Don Andrea's lover. Unlike the active female Furies of classical fame, the male personification of Revenge within the play is a very inactive figure who even at one point takes a nap. Kyd has established a dramatic reality for his audience where they are presented with the promise of a successful female avenger.

Bel-Imperia is the main female revenger within the play, but it is important to not overlook the vengeance that Isabella seeks for the death of her son. Isabella's vengeance

¹ All quotations taken from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* will be taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen, Norton, 2002, and will be indicated by *ST* and specific act, scene, and line numbers.

is much more confined, but is characterized by a sense of ferociousness and an immediacy that causes it to seem almost god-like in its destruction. Isabella is the first character in *The Spanish Tragedy* to complete the vengeance that she seeks. And in typical revenger fashion she commits suicide after the completion of her revenge.

Isabella is understandably distraught after the murder of her son, but unlike Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, she lacks the knowledge of who has perpetrated this horrible crime. Isabella's grief drives her into a psychotic frenzy that she expends by avenging herself against the arbor where her son was killed. She commits this vengeance both physically and in a masque-like manner. Isabella "rend[s] them up,/And burn[s] the roots from whence the rest is sprung" (*ST* 4.2.8-9). She is one of the few female revengers who manages to usurp the traditionally male act of vengeance as she cuts, burns, and tears the trees in the arbor. Isabella is also using the female vengeance tool of the masque-like or dramatic environment. Isabella is aware that the arbor was not an active participant in her son's death; she explains her motives for attacking the arbor in the first five lines of the scene:

Oh, monstrous homicides!
 Since neither piety nor pity moves
 The King to justice or compassion,
 I will revenge myself upon this place
 Where thus they murdered my beloved son.
(*ST* 4.2.1-5)

Isabella is creating a fictional sphere of reality and is taking on a Demeter-like persona that allows her to enact her vengeance theatrically and find peace for her soul. Because she is unable to physically attack the men who harmed her son, she is forced to create a

proxy on which to wreak her vengeance; yet because this vengeance helps bring some sort of closure to her it still acts as a valid form of vengeance.

Bel-Imperia remains the dominant avenger in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Hieronimo is responsible for arranging the production of the Suleiman play, but it is Bel-Imperia who reveals Horatio's murderers to him. It is also Bel-Imperia who draws Horatio into the plot originally and she is one of the reasons he is killed by Balthazar and Lorenzo. Ultimately, Hieronimo's revenge for Horatio's death is a stepping-stone for Bel-Imperia to avenge herself against Balthazar for Don Andrea's death. Truly, Hieronimo and Horatio are both pawns in Bel-Imperia's plan for revenge. However, her grief for Don Andrea and her desperation to avenge him, seen through her willingness to use her own blood as ink in order to communicate with the outside world, helps to maintain her status as a sympathetic character.

Bel-Imperia begins to plot her revenge from the very beginning of the play. After she hears the story of Don Andrea's death from Horatio she decides to use Horatio to avenge herself on Balthazar: "Yes, second love shall further my revenge./I'll love Horatio...The more to spite the Prince that wrought his end" (*ST* 1.4.66-68). Bel-Imperia wastes no time in considering the possible negative ramifications of her use of Horatio, nor does she consider the morality of seducing Horatio. She is focused solely on crushing Balthazar. This lack of moral conscience would have appeared out of place in a woman who was expected to be chaste, modest, and charitable by her society, but it is fitting in a dominating vengeance figure. Bel-Imperia is using her sexuality to manipulate Horatio and is using the withholding of her sexual favors from Balthazar to cause him exceptional

By acting within the confines of the play of Suleiman, Bel-Imperia is allowed the freedom to wield a deadly weapon in close proximity to Balthazar without raising alarm; in fact his murder and her suicide are only discovered once Hieronimo informs the audience of what has occurred. Bel-Imperia, throughout the course of the play, proves herself an effective and talented avenger through her use of a variety of tools to obtain her goal and her ultimate success in bringing about the death of Balthazar. Hieronimo is also successful in avenging the death of his son, but his vengeance is not nearly as intricate or impressive as that of Bel-Imperia. Just as she is the only revenger mentioned by Revenge, she is truly the most effective and dominating revenger in the play.

II

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is a bloody and violent revenge tragedy in which nearly every character involved in the play is seeking vengeance against another character. The focal avenger in the play appears to be Titus, but upon closer examination Tamora is an equally, if not more, effective avenger. Not only is her vengeance against Titus significantly more painful as she destroys three of his children to avenge her one, but she is also forced to overcome the obstacles placed before her as both a woman and an outsider. Tamora is often viewed as a thoroughly evil character, but Titus is the initial instigator of their conflict as he holds her responsible for deaths justly committed during a time of war. Her actions are a response to his sacrifice of her son and his actions are a response to her vengeance for her son's death. This places Tamora on a slightly higher moral plane than Titus, but only briefly as they both take vengeance to dark and disturbing levels.

Tamora seems justified in her desire for revenge; Titus sacrifices her eldest son to appease the spirits of his own dead sons despite her numerous pleas:

A mother's tears in passion for her son...
 Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome...
 But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets...
 Thrice noble Titus, spare my first-born son.²
(TA 1.1.109-123)

Tamora, like Bel-Imperia, wastes no time beginning her vengeance. As soon as she has the opportunity to work her way into Saturninus' good graces she does so, enticing him with the promise of sexual gratification and loving care. She promises "[s]he will a handmaid be to his desires,/A loving nurse, a mother to his youth" (TA 1.1.336-337).

This promise not only implies a sexual relationship, but as Jonathan Bate points out in the footnote to the line, "Tamora takes over as dominator of the emperor" (Bate 149).

Tamora has successfully enlisted Saturninus as her proxy and her pawn. In addition, by slipping into the role of Empress she has created a sphere of power and influence for herself that will grant her a freedom of movement and action that she lacked as a prisoner and an outsider. Tamora uses her new power almost immediately by convincing Saturninus to reconcile with Titus after the "theft" of Lavinia. She tells him, "My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last...I'll find a day to massacre them all,/And raze their faction and their family,/The cruel father and his traitorous sons" (TA 1.1.446-457). She wields

² All quotations from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* will be taken from *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, Third Series (The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), and will be indicated by *TA* and specific act, scene, and line numbers.

her new influence and wisely finds the right words to convince Saturninus to go along with her plan. Tamora is careful to refer to Titus as cruel and his sons as traitorous because she knows she must only temporarily soothe Saturninus' anger. She promises him that the insult he received from Titus will be avenged completely as she will raze the family; the use of the word raze indicates not only death but a complete destruction that will destroy any future possibility of life or success by the Andronici. She is careful to phrase the vengeance in relation to Saturninus' anger instead of her own to ensure that Saturninus remains complacent regarding her wishes. After this point, Saturninus becomes much less of a focal figure within the play as Tamora transfers her attention and her suggestions to her sons.

Tamora's sons act as her most important proxies in seeking revenge because they cause the most emotional pain to Titus. Tamora uses them to fulfill a sexualized vengeance against Lavinia and in turn, Titus. As a woman Tamora lacks the physical means to sexually assault Lavinia, but through her sons she succeeds in destroying Lavinia's chastity as well as her physical body. This strike is not directly upon Titus by Tamora, but is still as complete and effective as Isabella's vengeance against the arbor in *The Spanish Tragedy*. This destruction and desecration of Lavinia is the most painful punishment that Tamora could inflict upon Titus and she knows it. His response to his maimed and ravished daughter is heart-wrenching: "[H]e that wounded her/ Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead" (*TA* 3.1.92-93). This act of vengeance has proved more effective than any other that Tamora could have perpetrated against Titus because it places him in a position that he cannot rectify. There is no possible means of healing or

fixing his daughter and this is another stab from Tamora to Titus. Tamora has managed to succeed in a form of vengeance that is typically only available to a male.

Tamora's final attempt at vengeance involves the creation of masque-like personas for herself and her sons. This attempt at revenge is ultimately a failure for Tamora, but it demonstrates that, despite this failure, she is still a more effective avenger than Titus. Tamora and her sons take on the personas of Revenge, Rapine, and Murder in an attempt to convince Titus to call Lucius home so Tamora can destroy him in her pursuit to destroy Titus. The stage direction indicates that Tamora and her sons enter the scene disguised. The costumes would have been vital to Tamora's plot because they allow the assumed personas to become visible to Titus and the audience. These costumes are indicative of the new reality that Tamora has created because she assumes the role of Revenge. This new reality allows Tamora to move outside her role as Empress and to approach Titus without the stigma of her marriage to Saturninus or the sacrifice of her son. However, this is the moment where Tamora's vengeance fails, because Titus is not insane, as Tamora has assumed. At this point, Titus temporarily regains his footing as the dominant revenger as he slaughters Chiron and Demetrius and then manages to feed them to Tamora. Titus then kills Tamora and Lucius kills Saturninus thus ending the cycle of vengeance.

Titus does have the final act of vengeance, but Tamora proves to be the more effective revenger overall because her revenge against Titus is more painful and longer lasting than Titus' vengeance. Titus does slaughter Tamora's children and feed them to her, but he also kills her immediately following this act. While she is capable of realizing

the full horror of what she has done, she is spared the agony of having to live with this knowledge. Titus, on the other hand, has ample time to suffer the emotional pain of the rape of his daughter and the death of his other sons through Aaron's machinations. In this case, Titus almost appears benevolent because he kills Tamora before she has time to suffer the emotional pain of what Titus has forced her to do. Tamora, despite being a woman, engineers a much more effective plan of vengeance than Titus shows himself capable of.

III

Thomas Middleton's 1622 play *Women Beware Women* implies a sense of female agency and activity from the first reading of the title, from which the reader receives the sense that women will be both the victims and the perpetrators. What comes as a surprise to the reader as the play progresses is the fact that three of the main female characters actively pursue vengeance against at least one other character in the play. Also surprising is the fact that in a play so rife with sexuality and coupling, there is a void when it comes to seeking vengeance through sexuality. It is in this play that we see the use of the masque as the focal point for the revenge of all three women. This use of the masque endows the female revengers with the ability to physically participate in their vengeance instead of using a proxy.

Unlike the vengeance in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, the vengeance in *Women Beware Women* does not become active until scene two of act four. The play begins with Leantio arriving at his mother's house with his new bride, Bianca, after their elopement. Shortly after their arrival the Duke of Florence sees Bianca and

becomes determined to possess her. Livia, a local widow, actively works on behalf of the Duke to help him seduce Bianca. Meanwhile, Livia has also convinced her niece, Isabella, that Hippolito, Isabella's uncle, is not really her uncle. Upon receiving this news Isabella consents to a secret relationship with Hippolito, which will be concealed by her marriage to the idiotic Ward. During her machinations, Livia becomes enamored with Leantio and pursues a sexual relationship with him. Hippolito kills Leantio for fornicating with Livia and harming his family's reputation. The first act of female vengeance comes from Livia in retaliation against Isabella and Hippolito because of Leantio's death. Livia chooses to reveal the information that Hippolito is actually Isabella's uncle and thus their crime is much worse than her crime of a sexual relationship out of marriage. Livia argues:

Is there a reason found for the destruction
Of our more lawful loves? And was there none
To kill the black lust 'twixt they niece and thee,
That has kept close so long?³

(WBW 4.2.65-68)

If Livia must suffer the loss of her love, she is determined to destroy the relationship between Hippolito and Isabella in return. This verbal declaration grants Livia the ability to wound both parties in an emotional manner since she is unable to physically avenge the death of Leantio.

³ All quotations taken from Middleton's *Women Beware Women* will be taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen, Norton, 2002, and will be indicated by *WBW* and specific act, scene, and line numbers.

This action in turn causes Isabella to begin seeking vengeance against Livia; she vows to “lay a snare so spitefully...Upon her life as she has upon my honor” (*WBW* 4.2.143-146). Isabella intends to move the vengeance from the verbal to the physical realm; she will destroy Livia’s life just as Livia has destroyed Isabella’s honor, which she equates with both her life and her soul; Isabella despairs, “Was ever maid so cruelly beguiled,/ To the confusion of life, soul, and honor” (*WBW* 4.2.126-7; “confusion” is glossed as “destruction”). In order for Isabella to achieve her vengeance she must work within the fantastical sphere of a court masque. This use of the court masque gives Isabella the proximity and the tools that are necessary for her vengeance; in addition it allows her to perpetrate her crime undetected. Isabella uses her role within the masque to kill Livia with poisoned smoke; her character of the nymph is not questioned for this use of incense in praying to Livia’s dramatic persona Juno; the dialogue of the masque explains away the presence of the incense: “I offer to thy powerful deity/This precious incense”(*WBW* 5.2.99-100). This textual explanation means that Livia does not question the presence of the incense that prevents her from taking steps to protect herself.

Yet Livia is not satisfied with the destruction of Isabella’s honor; she also wants to deprive Isabella of her life. Destroying Isabella’s honor serves as Livia’s vengeance against Isabella, but the death of Isabella will act as vengeance against both Isabella and Hippolito. Livia takes advantage of her role as Juno, an exceptionally powerful goddess within the Pantheon, and the fantastical realm within which the women are currently residing to kill Isabella. Juno/Livia’s response to the Nymph/Isabella’s offering of incense is to shower upon the Nymph “a sign of wealth and golden days”(*WBW* 5.2.115)

in the form of burning gold. To the audience it appears harmless. The Duke and Fabritio's response to Isabella falling down after her attack is confusion, but not suspicion, as they discuss the events:

Duke: What's the conceit of that?

Fabritio: As overjoyed, belike.

Too much prosperity overjoys us all...

(*WBW* 5.2.120-122)

Again, no action can be taken to prevent or remedy this attack because no one is aware that it has happened except Livia and Isabella. It is only after Hippolito approaches Isabella's body and after Livia proclaims her own death that the audience becomes aware that both women are dead. This dual vengeance can be seen as both effective and ineffective because while both women succeed in destroying the object of their hatred, neither lives long enough to enjoy the satisfaction.

IV

Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Miriam* is the Early Modern drama that best illustrates the effectiveness and the impressiveness of the female revenger. Salome is not only the most effective female revenger in Early Modern drama, she is one of the most effective revengers of both genders. Salome's ultimate accomplishment is that not only is she successful in her vengeance, she manages to survive and avoid punishment for her crimes. She completes her goals and enjoys the pride and satisfaction of her achievement. Salome spends the play seeking vengeance against Constabarus and Miriam. She uses all four of the tools discussed previously throughout the course of the play in the pursuit of her vengeance.

Salome is seeking vengeance against her husband Constabarus because she wishes to leave him for Silleus and she resents her husband because she lacks the ability to file a bill of divorce and he will not submit to her will in the matter. She is angry with both her husband and the law that prevents her from seeking divorce on her own:

If he to me did bear as earnest hate
 As I to him, for him there were an ease,
 A separating bill might free his fate
 From such a yoke that did so much displease.
 Why should such privilege to man be give?
 Or, given to them, why barred from women then?
 Are men than we in greater grace with heaven?⁴
(TM 1.4.41-47)

Salome's initial plan of vengeance is to destroy Constabarus' reputation by revealing that he committed treason against Herod by hiding the sons of Babas for the past twelve years. However, because Salome believes Herod to be dead, she plans to use her sexuality as her new method of wounding Constabarus and also of manipulating him into divorcing her. She will "divorce him from [her] bed"(TM 1.4.57) and through this withholding of sexual gratification cause him to hate her and then grant her a bill of divorce. In addition to wounding him emotionally, this attack on his sexual prowess could damage his reputation.

In addition to withholding sex, Salome also verbally berates Constabarus. She uses her words to wound him and push him further into his hatred of her. She continues this

⁴ All quotations from Cary's *The Tragedy of Miriam* will be taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen, Norton, 2002, and will be indicated by *TM* and specific act, scene, and line numbers.

verbal manipulation throughout the play in pursuit of her vengeance against Constabarus. Once Salome discovers that Herod is not in fact dead she arranges for her brother Pheroras to reveal Constabarus' treason. She uses her persuasive words to convince Pheroras to betray Constabarus, promising that in return she will intercede for Pheroras and his new bride Graphina. Her words seem almost like a spell as she woos him to her cause:

'Tis not so hard a task. It is no more
But tell the King that Constabarus hid
The sons of Babas, done to death before;
And 'tis no more than Constabarus did.
(TM 3.2.37-40)

She weaves her spell of words around Pheroras and successfully enlists him as her proxy. She uses this talent again later in enlisting a proxy for her vengeance against Miriam. Once Pheroras reveals what Constabarus has done, Salome's vengeance against Constabarus is complete because she manages to engineer Constabarus' execution, a more convenient outcome for her than a bill of divorce.

That main focus of Salome's desire for revenge, however, is not Constabarus, but Miriam. Salome's desire for vengeance against Constabarus has less to do with who he is personally, and more to do with his role as her husband and as an obstacle between her and Silleus. Her hatred for Miriam is very personal; Salome despises Miriam for Miriam's lack of respect towards her; she states "I scorn that she should live my birth t'upbraid,/To call me base and hungry Edomite"*(TM 3.2.61-62)*. Salome seeks vengeance

in part to restore her reputation and self-worth because, as Alison Findlay argues, “[r]evenge allows characters to...[rebuild] a damaged self” (55).

Salome plans to use whatever means necessary to achieve her revenge against Miriam. She vows to use “[f]irst, jealousy, if that avail not, fear/ Shall be my minister to work her end” (*TM* 3.2.53-54). She intends to find a proxy who will “swear that [Miriam] desires to climb,/ And seeks to poison [Herod] for his estate” (*TM* 3.2.59-60). Salome enlists the Butler to help her carry out her vengeance, showing a different use of the masque-like performance. Unlike the other female avengers, Salome does not physically participate in the performance, but she is the mind that creates and directs the Butler’s performance. The “masque” that Salome directs involves the Butler bearing a cup of poisoned wine to Herod, supposedly from Miriam. The Butler “confesses” that the poison is from Miriam and also leads Herod to think that Miriam and Sohemus are having an affair. The Butler’s convincing performance results in Herod imprisoning Miriam because Salome has managed to make Herod both fear Miriam and doubt her chastity. Salome’s vengeance is stalled at this point because Herod is too in love with Miriam to have her executed. Unlike in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Women Beware Women*, Salome’s “masque” facilitates her vengeance but does not bring about the final vengeance.

At this point, Salome forgoes the use of a proxy and takes matters into her own hands. In a lengthy discussion with Herod, Salome exhausts his numerous excuses for not executing Miriam. Herod has an argument against each method of execution, including beheading, drowning, and burning:

Her skin will ev’ry curtl’ax edge refell...

...ev'ry river turn her course
 Rather than do her beauty prejudice...
 [Miriam] nursest flame; flame will not murder thee...
 (*TM* 4.7.7-23)

Salome maintains a steely exterior against Herod's wavering and continues to offer new methods of execution to replace those that he argues against. She counters his arguments until he finally concedes to her argument that Miriam must die. As soon as he relents, Salome immediately orders Miriam's execution to prevent Herod from changing his mind again. She then keeps him distracted while Miriam is being executed so that Herod cannot interfere at the last moment. By the end of act four Miriam is dead and Salome's vengeance is complete.

In the typical revenge drama this would be the point in the play where Salome would either commit suicide or be murdered by another character. The implied rules of the revenge tragedy do not allow for Salome to live; like all good revengers she must die after her vengeance is complete. But Salome refuses to fit herself into this mold; just as earlier in the play she questioned the logic of women not being able to file for divorce she again establishes herself firmly outside the accepted womanly behavior. Salome proves herself to be intelligent and cunning enough to achieve her vengeance and she then proves herself to be unique enough to live to enjoy it. Salome manages to achieve that which the many well-known male avengers have been unable to achieve: the ability to revenge and live.

V

Women of the Early Modern period were expected to be chaste, modest, and obedient. It is not hard to understand why this portrayal of them would be so common in literature or why so many readers would choose to overlook female characters within literature and drama. Within the Early Modern revenge tragedy genre it is easy to become focused on the many male avengers and to fail to notice the numerous female characters or the important role that they play. Many of the female characters in revenge tragedies are typically passive and silent characters, such as Gloriana's skull and Antonio's dead wife in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the raped and silenced Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. However, women in Early Modern revenge tragedy were not always simply motivators or supporters for the male avengers; some female characters take on the role of active revenger. Women such as Salome, Tamora and Bel-Imperia are often as effective if not more so than male avengers. They may be less noticeable and the tools and methods of revenge that they employ may differ from male revengers, but it is important to acknowledge the presence of the female avenger within Early Modern drama because to refuse to do so is to misread the plays and to ignore the possibility of interpretations that do not focus on male characters.

It is impossible to know if these playwrights intended for their female characters to serve as proto-feminist characters. Given the nature of the choral speeches in Cary's *Tragedy of Miriam* it seems likely that Cary was using her writing to express opinions, such as women deserving the power of divorce, which would not have been considered appropriate for her to publicly discuss. As for Shakespeare, Kyd, and Middleton it is

possible that their creation of positive female characters was motivated by sympathy gained through their experiences creating female characters and dealing with the difficulty of having male actors portray these characters. Also, because actors and playwrights were often at the mercy of the crowds and the government it is possible that they gained a sense of how difficult it is to live and be dependent on the goodwill of others, much like women were dependent on the goodwill of their husbands. However, it is equally plausible to assume that these women were not created to be viewed in a positive manner and it is only now that they may be viewed this way.

Many of the powerful female characters can be characterized as vocal, determined, cunning, and sexually liberated, which, as Lisa Jardine explains, made them “unacceptable [and] emasculating” (104). Continuing to ignore the important role of these women is to continue to perpetrate dangerous and incorrect stereotypes about both Early Modern and Modern women. These women allow the modern reader to approach femininity and womanhood during the Early Modern period in a different manner and it offers the opportunity to explore avenues of interpretation in relation to both Early Modern women and Early Modern drama. Too often reviews and introductions to works focus primarily or solely on the male characters and their actions. By continuing to allow this narrow view of such great works of dramatic literature and continuing to ignore alternate interpretations to these works is insulting and damaging to both the works and their audiences.

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