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CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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AN EXPLORATION INTO THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE DEATH IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH

NOVEMBER 2021

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the representation of female death in contemporary performance of Shakespearean tragedy, with particular attention paid to Blanche McIntyre's directorial decisions in *Titus Andronicus* for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 2017. I will assess the symbolic, tropic representation of femininity through history, the aesthetic encoding of the female form in death, and psycho-sociological theories which determine humanity as indebted to this image. By noting the ways in which McIntyre represents Lavinia as the object of desire and site of tragedy, I will be at liberty to assess the patriarchal structure of narrative inherent in Shakespeare's tragedies, as well as the progression of tropes which incline directors toward the beautiful aesthetics of tragic females' deaths. Noting the ways in which Shakespeare's plays were originally performed, I will be able to see the tendencies of contemporary performance toward heightening the aesthetic encoding of the female corpse.

Introduction

Yet, sister woman, though I cannot consent to find a Mozart or Michael Angelo in your sex, cheerfully, and with the love that burns in depths of admiration, I acknowledge that you can do one thing as well as the best of us men - a greater thing than even Milton is known to have done, or Michael Angelo: you can die grandly, and as goddesses would die, were goddesses mortal.

Thomas De Quincey *The English Mail-Coach and Joan of Arc (1847)*

The above quotation, written by Thomas De Quincey in C.19th, currently resides in the fore pages of Elisabeth Bronfen's book *Over Her Dead Body* (1992), a theoretical discussion of the representation of female¹ death within art culture as incessantly tropic. This quotation from Quincey highlighting the ethereal and beautiful themes often tied to representations of female death, now also opens my exploration in the subject of theatrical representation as it encapsulates the state of confusion I find myself in: how can the simple fact of being a woman result in her death holding this grand or beautiful weight? By this, I mean the emotional resonance which the spectacle of female death seems to incite, and the conveyance of psychological, physical and social tropes around femininity into art culture. These mostly consist of a female's youth and fairness as aesthetic devices in depictions of death, and

¹ I am aware of the term 'females' as a point for contention in recent times – being that not all 'women' are 'female' in the traditional sense, and gender studies have begun vast critical discussion about this. See Norris, M. 2019 in my bibliography for interesting, related reading. However, since this discussion does not fall within the scope of this research, I would like to point out that any reference to 'women' in this thesis will be synonymous with 'females' and vice versa.

tenderness or innocence as character defining traits, both of which emphasise the touching sadness or morbid curiosity transferred onto audiences.

Bronfen's use of the term tropic, which stems from the Latin term '*Tropus*' meaning 'a figure of speech' and the Greek term '*Trópos*' meaning 'a figurative expression', points toward the recurrent themes or devices which appear in the literary or aesthetic depiction of the female form. Her book confirms, by virtue of Woman's position of inferiority and tenor, she comes pre-prepared, pre-assigned the layers of meaning her body represents, and in many ways cannot escape the solidity of these tropes which span centuries. From as early as Ancient Greek theatre, the female body has stood in for concepts much broader than its physical state alone – often representative of new life, ethereality, sexuality, and pleasure in terms of her ability to reproduce and be the site of reproduction. It seems this symbolic reading of the female body provides the ideal vessel for representations of death, in its emotionally elevated position for audiences. In her book, Bronfen determines the consistency of the representation of femininity with ties to death is owing to humanity's psychological enmeshment with aesthetics. Since we are subconsciously indebted to our fear of death and long for beauty as its antithesis, this encourages the ethereal themes and beauty which surrounds deathbed scenes in art and literature. Bronfen's discussion has widely informed the discourse of this research, owing to her vast array of examples which point toward the female form as highly symbolic and therefore any representation of her death as tropic and loaded with psychological meaning.

My first experience of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (live as was intended, as opposed to reading the play in English Literature classes) was Leeds Playhouse (FKA West Yorkshire Playhouse)'s 2017 run by associate director, Amy Leach. Though this performance was perceived as an energetic, contemporary take on the old tale (Hickling. 2017), Juliet's death scene troubled me. Not only because, now older than the characters, I struggled to put myself mentally in their position (falling in love at

first sight, marrying after a day and so on), but because Juliet went so willingly into the unknown and into death, Leach's aesthetics seemingly romanticising and emotionally heightening this moment. Juliet wore a white gown, the stage flooded with dry-ice - not a smear of blood from her deceased husband's corpse, nor the knife she plunges into her own stomach. The moment was slowed, heightened dramatically, and drawn out for the audience, seemingly to absorb the weight of the tragedy. The script itself leans into sibilance and literary devices to exacerbate this, but the director's aesthetic approach to the death seemed to cater to this archetype of female death as beautiful. The aesthetic decisions Leach made seem to align with traditional attitudes toward female reception, and the apparently consistent tendency toward representations of female death as aesthetically pleasing and semiotically encoded. The structure of the piece, in that its conflict resides on Juliet as the object of Romeo's desire, and her death as the point of resolution toward traditional patriarchal society, gave her an emblematic position centre stage; she is no longer an individual self, but a cog in the working of traditional patriarchal narrative, the purist, ethereal aesthetics of which confirm the tropic nature of her body.

Juliet's objectification can be paralleled with other tragic women, who seem to represent some liminality between death and life at the site of the female form. I have experienced this perspective of female death as grand or beautiful in other forms than Shakespearean tragedy, identifying the passive beauty of the female body in fine art and literature as well. I vividly remember museums, hanging gigantic pictures of pure-white, ethereal females, fair, flowing locks with the smooth curvature of silk caressing their perky breasts. One notable example of this style within fine art is John Everett Millas's *Ophelia* (c.1851/2), in the Tate Britain collection, London. The image is one of isolation, with her corpse floating in the dark, shallow water. She is surrounded by foliage and the odd bright flower, no doubt calling toward the waste of her body as the potential site for new life. She is also pale and rounded with an almost ethereal, goddess-like appearance, her face relaxed and without pain as

she is captured in the liminal space between life and death – her beauty, and the beauty of the image, the standalone reassurance against each viewer’s fear of demise. Ophelia, as one of Shakespeare’s most referenced characters in literature and fine art, is “merely what Lacan calls “the object Ophelia”—that is, the object of Hamlet’s male desire” (Showalter. 1986, p.77). She is, by virtue of her womanhood, the same object or cog within patriarchal narrative as Juliet, which serves to articulate the tropic structure of woman in death as this becomes their final purpose. Lacan and Freudian psychoanalytic discussion on the representation of femininity and death will be more thoroughly mapped out in due course. For now, what is plain to see is the construction of female characters as passive objects - the objects of male-focal desire. I will endeavour to trace this tropic nature of female death in arts representation with Bronfen as this portion’s spearhead. There are notable ways in which the form of tragedy has shaped the constellation of symbolism around the dead female in its focus on the female body as the site of desire and death. Athenian tragedy through to Shakespeare’s positions women as objects of the male’s theatrical journey - a help or hinderance to their cause - or the opposing force against traditional patriarchal societal structures. Bronfen’s discussion of a variety of representation in fine art and literature will assist in mapping out this emblematic state of the tragic woman, her as the site for psychological and social exploration, and ultimately the beautiful image of a return to patriarchal mimesis in death. In the same way Bronfen points toward this kind of representation as owing to humanity’s psychological fear of death and beauty as its antithesis, I will trace this notion into contemporary, live performance of Shakespeare’s tragedies.

This research has spanned widely - from Shakespeare’s theatre in the Elizabethan era in C.17th, Edgar Allan Poe and his contemporaries in the early C.19th, and further - the development of sociological and psychological theories by the likes of Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse relative to artistic representation of death. I was struck, upon reading Poe’s *Philosophy of Composition* (1846), with the consistently innate link femininity seems to have with death (which I will further discuss in Part One).

This thesis will act as my encounter with the phenomenon of the representation of female death as beautiful in socio-psychological terms and map out a small portion of the consistencies that can be seen in the representation of female death as grand or beautiful in artistic cultures. With an understanding of the cognitive processes which guide artistic representation of female death toward the beautiful, toward aesthetics which create a sentiment of melancholy, I will be at liberty to examine the translation of these concepts into contemporary theatre and more specifically, the contemporary director's approach to female death as beautiful.

This will be apparent through my examination of Shakespeare's plays in both a literary and performative sense, with particular focus on Blanche McIntyre's rendition of *Titus Andronicus* (2017), Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy. What will be interesting to note is the transcendence of Shakespeare's plays into contemporary society and the perpetuation of tropes around femininity as pure and ethereal, which preserve the long-standing dichotomy between males and females. While Shakespeare's female deaths were often, though not exclusively, hidden from the Elizabethan and Jacobean audience's eyes, happening off stage, narrated by their male counterparts in the case of Ophelia, Desdemona and Juliet's corpses become a signifying object, a symbol of a return to patriarchal mimesis. Contemporary directors specifically seem to exploit the clash of semiotic resonance from representations of femininity and death and seek an emotional reaction to this aesthetic form, similar to the voyeuristic philosophies of Gothic and Romantic literature in C.19th. In a society reaching its fourth wave of feminism as of 2012, our understanding of the patriarchal society of Western cultures has plainly proven the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity, physically, socially, and psychologically. And yet, Shakespeare's plays remain, although adapted for contemporary performance through conceptual changes of costume or set, as an emblem of femininity and death in representations as beautiful, grand and tropic, even today. Directors' exploitation of the semiotics afforded to contemporary theatre including realistic gore, lighting effects

and sound, allows for some of the same aesthetic coding of the female form as an object, as the site for new life with the potential for destruction, the ethereal, pure, ideal, which can be found consistently in historical contemplations of female death in artistic cultures.

Part One

*Like the ephemeron, she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die.*²

Eleanora (Poe. 2011;1842, p.651)

My first academic interaction with the symbolic, beautiful nature of female death came with finding Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* (1846). His work has been critical to my own understanding of the emblematic position of the dead female in art culture since the start of my research, and here we will start aligning some of the concepts of Poe's literature with the representation of femininity and death throughout the last two-hundred years. His statement that "the death of a beautiful woman is [...] the most poetical topic in the world" (1846, p.165) began my exploration into the subject, as I questioned the meaning of beauty and the passive role of women in this creative context.

Firstly, to understand the concept of beauty, in its highly faceted structure, I will discuss Crispin Startwell's *Six Names of Beauty* (2004), an anthology of cultural conceptions of beauty across the globe. Though, admittedly there could be thousands of definitions of beauty due to its subjectivity, Startwell succeeds in contextualising each chapter under the cultural umbrellas of language: English, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Japanese and Navajo. He notably points out the English 'beauty' is derived from the Old French "*bealte*" and the Latin "*bellum*", which in its earliest uses in English literature,

² Please note that any references to Poe's writing (bar the *Philosophy of Composition* (1845)) will be taken from *The Penguin complete tales and poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (2011). See bibliography.

dated from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. (2004, p.3) It did refer almost exclusively to women, which is still most commonplace today when 'beauty' is used as a noun. Startwell suggests beauty, as "the object of longing" (2004, p.3), is apparent throughout the history of Western art, in that the female nude is one of its most frequent subjects, and this image indeed penetrates through to today. Lacan's earlier comment on the character of Ophelia as the object of Hamlet's desire stands as support here, since Startwell suggests eroticism does play a key part in beauty as the object of longing. Many artists and playwrights conceptualise this longing of the individual in the representation of an image, not necessarily in *explicit* sexuality, but in the appreciation of the *concept* of the image:

In that sense, art that depicts the powerful might express the desire for power; art that depicts Jesus might express spiritual seeking; art that depicts food might express an appreciation of the pleasures of dining; art that depicts nature might express a yearning toward the world. (Startwell. 2004, p.3)

Startwell maintains therefore that the experience of beauty is always in some ways erotic since it spans from the longing or desires of individuals. However, this does not have to return to a purely sexual arena of the mind. Since we, as humans, are all longing for pleasure and satisfaction, "beauty is a universal object of human experience. But to the extent that different epochs, cultures, groups, or individuals have different longings, their experiences of beauty will have different objects." (2004, p.4) Undoubtedly, we could all have vastly different ideals in our formation of beauty; however this subjectivity can be denounced with the knowledge that objects of longing come in all forms, and the aligning of beauty to these images is based on the artist/subject relationship. In this sense, as I begin to delve into the representation of female death in Poe and Shakespeare's literature, I will not only analyse the role of the subject - in our case our dead or dying women as characters - but will also contemplate the nature of the writers' longing, and the longing of their beholders, both contextually

and in contemporary representations. In this way, the following definition will serve as a guide to the traditionally English term 'beauty':

Beauty is a feature of the situation that includes the beholder and the subject, the situation in which longing is made that in turn makes us move or cry or love or come. The beautiful thing is not the retinal image of the sunset or the firing of neurons in the brain in response to that image, or even exactly the transport of the soul that is induced. We experience the beauty of the sunset itself. We give beauty to objects and they give beauty to us; beauty is something we make in cooperation with the world. (Startwell. 2004, p.5)

Startwell here represents the formal understanding of the representation of femininity in arts and culture as incessantly phenomenological and argues that beauty is derived from our sensuous view of the world around us. In the case of literature and drama, beauty is determined through the longing' of the piece's creators and viewers towards the image presented and therefore becomes tropic in its layered representation of psycho-sociological concepts. Freud and Marcuse, in my later section, will help to support this notion of the tropic representation of the deceased female, as well as determine the psychological and sociological theories which have indebted humanity to this image. However, what is clear here, is beauty plays an important part in the formation of art in its ability to elevate the piece's viewers emotionally and physically. As we begin to discuss Poe's philosophies, Startwell will allow for some grounding of our concept of beauty in the idea of this as an individuals' 'object of longing'. What will be clear, is the inevitable use of beautiful *female* death as a trope; in the creative's venture toward highlighting the emotional weight of their work, they choose feminine beauty in direct contrast to morbidity for its faceted meaning, its call toward greater concepts within the human psyche.

Returning to Poe's essay and my own introduction to this concept, he begins by presenting the development of a plot from idea to conception as vital to the readers' ability to decode the intention of the piece. He suggests the writer should select their intention prior to writing to maintain the concept's prevalence throughout. Writers must maintain the *tone* of the piece to tend to its intention. Poe's exploration of the aesthetic representation of death is rooted in his desire to ignite the emotional responses of his readers. He must maintain his readers' interest, touch upon their own sense of self and perpetuate an emotional response. In her chapter, Bronfen asserts that death must, from the start, be integral to Poe's notion of poetics as he constructs a beautiful female form to contrast this devastating subject. The incidents he describes, the tone used to describe them, all draw this poetic power and legitimacy from "a predetermined, inevitable return to the inanimate" (1992, p.61) which are directly contrasted by the aesthetics he assigns to the dying female form. Poe himself deconstructs his process of creating *The Raven* (1845) by virtue of this symbiotic methodology:

That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect — they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul — not of intellect, or of heart — upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful."
(1846, p.164)

In his drive to satisfy what seems to be an innate craving for excitement, Poe looks to beauty as his muse, simply because beauty is the only "legitimate province of the poem" (1846, p.164). Aesthetics, or the semiotics afforded to arts representations, according to Poe, are what allow us to engage with

poetry and see the effect its writers aim for, thus “rendering the work universally appreciable” (1846, p.164). To Bronfen, the coupling of death and beautiful women in the aesthetics of his poetic format, offers Poe the unconditional, universally acknowledged highest degree, the superlative of his basic principles of *melancholy*, and *beauty* (1992, p.61). The beautiful woman destined for death is the image which Poe defines as inciting the degree of excitement he “deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical taste” (1846, p.164), an image which stimulates emotional responses across all sectors of society.

At this point, it is important to recognise the physical appearance attributed to beautiful dead women, to analyse the consistency of this trope and the elements we will trace through to contemporary performance of Shakespearean tragedy. Poe’s writings have been a flagship for the representation of female death as beautiful, and this trope appeared consistently through his work for the entirety of his literary career. Here we will look specifically at the aesthetics he attributes to his dying females in his short stories and poems, to generate what he deemed the most ‘poetical’ image, and create an emotional, melancholic response from his audience.

In each representation of beautiful female death that Poe assigns as part of his poetic principles, there are a series of aesthetic similarities which seem to define this trope. Perhaps most notably are the ethereal and saintly connotations he assigns to his dead or dying women. In his *Lenore* (1843), which describes the loss of a young woman from the perspective of her surviving betrothed, Poe describes her as “the queenliest dead that ever died so young” (Poe. 2011;1843, p.946) suggesting her death has elevated her above the hierarchy of the mortal world and transformed her into an idol of femininity. This representation of the dead Lenore as ethereal and otherworldly continues into *The Raven* (1845) where the narrator’s dead love of the same name is described as “a sainted maiden” and “radiant” (p.945). Under the assumption this is the same character Poe describes, it seems that

her youth, beauty, and untimely death have placed her in the position of Startwell's "object of longing" (Startwell. 2004, p.3) for the narrator. Her femininity, which holds the traditionally attractive traits of youth and 'radiant' beauty, places her in the position of an object to be viewed, and her death seems only to have heightened this experience in her distance from the living narrator. While we are never told of her intellect or empathy, the description of her in this saintly manner allows Poe's audience to feel a similar sense of longing to that of the narrator. The image of this woman presented to the reader aligns her with a goddess-like ethereality, simply because of the aesthetics assigned to her which serve to heighten an emotional reaction and preserve a morbid curiosity toward the beautiful aesthetics of death.

Youth is also a commonplace theme in the beautiful female deaths which Poe describes, perhaps pointing toward a concept of 'lost potential' in the way the role of females is as the site of new life, and their untimely death means their true purpose cannot be fulfilled. A notable example of this theme can be seen in Poe's poem, *Annabel Lee* (1849). In this example, Poe sets up the character of Annabel as one of nurturing and tenderness, as "she lived with no other thought, Than to love and be loved by me." (p.957). The sibilance and rhythm of each verse in this poem exaggerate the tender tone of the piece, and though "she was a child" (p.957), there is a real sense of the longing from the narrator, his recollection of beautiful past events luring his audience into the same longing for serenity. Again, Annabel's youth and beauty are consistently pointed toward to generate sympathy and melancholy from Poe's readership. As the narrator ends with a present-day summation, we are reminded of the potential for love and new life lost by her demise:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams,
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes,

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by my side,
Of my darling – my darling – my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea, In her tomb by the sounding sea.
(p.958)

Since here we are reminded of our narrator's intention to wed, we are constantly being reminded of the potential that was lost in the death of Annabel – along with most of Poe's other dead women. We already know this was a purposeful theme to his works, as his essay on composition has mapped out, but what is interesting to see are the common aesthetics assigned to his descriptions of dead women. In reality, Annabel's tomb would by this point be a horrific sight, but in the mind of the narrator we can see her beauty through his longing for their past together. The physical attributes of the character, in particular her bright eyes reminiscent of moonlight and stars, positions her in a similar capacity to Poe's Lenore; a creature, otherworldly and unknowing, ripped away from mortal life and elevated in the mind of the narrator. Her femininity, tenderness and beauty allowing for her safe transition from reality into the longing memory of her surviving love.

The "bright eyes" of Poe's dead women are also a consistent theme throughout his poetry and short stories, which point toward this as an attractive trait the narrative adopts when reflecting the longing of the narrator onto his audience. While it could be said that bright eyes are simply an aesthetic choice to highlight the radiant beauty of his dying females, it is interesting to think of the bright eyes as a glimpse into the temperaments of the women. It is expected that bright eyes come with passion, emotional availability, and happiness, and perhaps Poe's consistent theming of bright eyes across his dying women serves to heighten the sense of loss. We are invited to picture the sparkling beauty of eyes such as *Eulalie* (1845)'s:

Ah, less – less bright,
The stars of the night,
Than the eyes of the radiant girl!
(p.969)

With eyes as a commonly recognised ‘window into the soul’, there are many things to be inferred from Poe’s description of his female characters’ eyes, not least the presence of passion and lust which the narrator remembers and is, inevitably, lost. The fact Eulalie’s eyes are presented as the narrator’s relief from a stagnant existence, a welcome bright light in his otherwise dreary life, along with the inevitability of her untimely death, again positions her, or indeed his memory of her, in an ethereal, goddess-like role. The fact she is no longer physically present, but he remembers her radiant beauty in this way, positions her as an object lost over time and therefore an object of longing for the narrator. The consistent representation of Eulalie as a dead but beautiful woman cannot deter my longing for any semblance of individuality within all of Poe’s females. The fact he so consistently uses the same or similar devices of ‘bright eyes’, ‘yellow hair’, a ‘fair’ face, ‘blushing’ and ‘smiling’ points toward his reception of beautiful women as just that. Rather than connecting emotionally with most of these dead or dying women, we are expected to reflect solely on the narrator’s narrowminded perspective of their ‘beauty’ and have this as our only motivation toward an emotional, empathetic response. Female death appears so consistently in Poe’s writing as a purely aesthetic device, possibly because of the patriarchal structure of narrative rife in C.19th. In representations made popular by a patriarchal societal structure, women occupy the space as objects, loaded with meaning, and highly tropic, especially in Poe’s literary universe.

Bronfen, in her book, goes on to discuss the art of the representation of death - its ability to stimulate its audience toward acknowledging the presence of death in life, whilst the aesthetics of the form allow for a repression of this truth, "precisely because here death occurs at someone else's body and as an image." (1992, p.x) It is the *representation* of death; in arts and culture including theatre, which directors and other creatives like Poe use to explore conceptualisations of death in the human psyche. What is attractive to audiences, is the *representation's* ability to reaffirm an individual's belief in their own immortality, that "there is death. But it is not my own." (1992, p.x) In that representations such as fine art, literature and indeed theatre articulate commonplace anxieties surrounding life and death, Bronfen asserts that they act as a substitution psychoanalytically:

In a gesture of compromise, the psychic apparatus represents this dangerous and fascinating thing by virtue of a substitution, just as the aesthetic enactment represents death, but at the body of another person and at another site; in the realm of art. (1992, p.x)

Bronfen consistently comments on the use of female death as a motif - the female body as more than itself: the represented body standing in for more concepts than femininity and body alone, "most notably the masculine artist and the community of survivors." (1992, p.xi) She maintains the representative nature of female death in art is as an image, compelling audiences to look further than the simulated death's physical attributes, and more towards the overall image's deeper meaning. What remains is often a masculine-created moment of a highly tropic nature, an image so heavily received on account of its figurative and symbolic meaning. The concepts of death and femininity, Bronfen explains, are central to our cultures and cognitive processes, but have in some way also become warped into almost totemic elements. Representations and symbols for both femininity and death in the arts have grown beyond their concrete realities (a state of non-life, a biological trait) and into something much larger, and much more loaded. And as "representations of female death

oscillate between the excessively tropic and a non-semiotic materiality”, Bronfen maintains it is this “gesture of naming only to miss the mark” (1992, p.xii) which conserves the misogynistic, hypertropic symbolism of women in artistic representation. Jeffrey N. Cox has described this theory as something like a peak phenomenon; where “a small number of great figures are seen as speaking to one another across the ages, from the rare mountaintops of dramatic [or indeed artistic] excellence” (1992, p.3). The consistency of female death as a trope, stemming mainly from the male perspective, highlights the dichotomy present in the gender divide. Returning to Bronfen and the history of our tropes, she asks and answers our query here:

Wherein does the power, the necessity, the fascination and the danger inherent in the conjunction between femininity and death lie? Issues of sight, of alterity, of the unknown and of a feminine subject position emerging out of and against the cultural construction of Woman. (1992, p.xii)

The methodology of representing female death in this ethereal, beautiful manner - based upon early nineteenth century literature of Poe and his contemporaries – seems to have penetrated and perpetuated a modern sense of storytelling, with these concepts being consistently present throughout history. Predating the romanticism and gothic genres of C.19th, Shakespeare’s plays also radiate with a sense of female death as something beautiful, something more tropic than the physical image alone. His tragedies specifically, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, though not exclusively, align with this sense of rendering the work universally appreciable; they contemplate the beautiful yet also ground it within tragedy - a warped sense of reality - which ultimately binds the audience to this superlative, the highest degree of emotional reaction to the dead or dying female. The audience are shown another world by which the sociocultural complexities of their own are challenged or exacerbated, and yet are sometimes resolved or indeed placated by the

death of a beautiful woman. These most often paralleling the aesthetic devices which Poe used, including ethereality, youth, fairness, and gentleness. As our discussion of Bronfen's book and further exploration into contemporary performance of Shakespeare's tragedies will prove, the fact remains that the dead female form has been shrouded in the complexities of its representative nature. This as the site for new life, the potential site for corruption against socially acceptable morals and indeed the site of pleasure. This has been utilised by writers, artists, and theatre makers in its dualistic commentary on the psychology of human existence, our fear of death and the contemplation of the beautiful. This beauty arguably acts as the antithesis for our fear of mortality, whilst at the same time inciting a pleasurable experience. Writers such as Poe exploit the tropic nature of woman, place her at the site of death, veil her tragic moment in beauty and await commendation for their apt reflection on lived reality. What is clear is the objectification of the female form - especially in death - and the misogyny inherent in the perpetuation of such tropes:

Owing to the question of unrepresentability, death comes to be associated on yet another level with the other unrepresentable aspect of human existence, the multiply coded feminine body, in its triple function as site of an original, prenatal dwelling place, as site of fantasies of desire and otherness, and as a site of an anticipated final resting place. Once again, Poe's seemingly antithetical coupling of death and femininity emerges as significantly logical for Western cultural mythology. (Bronfen. 1992, p.72)

The reason Bronfen remains at the forefront of my research, is she touches upon many of the avenues of psychoanalysis which attempt to diagnose the reason for the incessant presence of such images in art culture. Although these conclusions are mainly drawn around the representation of female death in fine art and literature, there are indisputable parallels between this philosophy and the philosophy of theatre and performance. She confirms that "femininity and death cause a disorder to stability,

mark moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication produces a recuperation of order, a return to stability.” (1992, p.xii) Shakespearean tragedies often follow this arc, and prove their namesake in that “the recuperation is imperfect, the regained stability not safe, the urge for order inhabited by a fascination with destruction” (Bronfen. 1992, p.xii) Female death in theatre, and specifically Shakespeare’s scripts, similarly encapsulates the denouement or meaning Poe hopes to construct – the female death acts as a representation of more than itself - the dissolving of societal structure, or the return to patriarchal normality. The mere fact Poe so strongly believed in this articulation of the human experience as enjoyable for all spheres of society, aligns with Bronfen who maintains that this imagery has been and is still consistent in artistic representation today. As we progress into a more thorough take on this form of representation in theatre and performance, Poe’s philosophies will serve to highlight the historical consistency in representations of female death as beautiful. With this being a symptom of the cognitive process of humanity, we can assume the continuation of the hypertropic nature of woman and death is somewhat inevitable. As we go on to discuss our case study, there will be scope to assess the consistency of these tropes, and their prominence even in what appears to be a more female-focal rendition of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*.

Part Two

Beauty, Eroticism, and Death in Theatre and Performance

To contextualise some of the theories Bronfen discusses, we will now venture to define some of the psychological terms central to this discussion, later with direct ties to theatre and performance practise. In her collection of essays, *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance* (2010), Karoline Gritzner supports Bronfen's tracing of the historical aestheticization of femininity and death in encouraging the notion that even "mythology tells us that love, sexual desire and death coexist as conflicting yet complementary forces in the human psyche" (2010, p.2). She introduces us to ancient theatrical representations of life, death, femininity, and masculinity, beginning with Latin writer Lucius Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (C.2nd AD). This is the Greek love story of Eros and Psyche, wherein Psyche is enslaved by Aphrodite (the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality) after she falls in love with Aphrodite's son, Eros (Cupid). Psyche becomes a signifier of the effect life influences like love or lust have on the individual, as well as an embodiment of the contradicting forces of life and death upon consciousness. Poe's poem *Ulalume* (1847) echoes this story, with the narrator assigning the name Psyche to his soul, the longing for his dead love personified:

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my soul,
Of cypress, with Psyche, my soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic,

As the scoriac rivers that roll –

(Poe. 2011;1847, p.952)

The vast array of stories, spanning from the ancient world into even Poe's literature of C.19th, which encompass humanity's consistent exploration of the forces of life versus death, have indeed informed contemporary representation in the arts. As a more recent take on the psychological topics Bronfen discusses, Gritzner will allow further analysis of the representation of female death in specifically theatre and performance and introduce Freudian and Marcusean terms of psychoanalysis. With our previous discussion of Poe and his *Philosophy of Composition* (1846), Gritzner's discussion will allow for tracing the semantic encoding on the dead female form in theatre and performance, with note on the erotic psychology inherent in these representations. Her maintaining of these representations as symptoms of the cognitive processes of humanity will further our discussion surrounding the progression of tropes around the dead or dying female form.

Gritzner states - in her introduction - "theatre and theory, from the ancient world to the present day, have explored the embodiments and conceptual constellations of sexuality, desire and death in a multitude of ways." (2010, p.2) Her collection of essays form a variety of intellectual discussions around the topic of representing femininity and death as semantically encoded. She constructs the psychoanalytic perspective of the human relationship with life and death as having strong ties to art and culture. Like Bronfen, Gritzner develops the idea of the representation of female death as beautiful with humanity's fascination with the unknowable realm of mortality. She approaches it in parallel to Bronfen's concept of beauty - that the sexuality and eroticism present (in lust and love) is similarly a symptom of humanity's longing for death's antithesis - the powers of Thanatos and Eros (the death drive and life instincts) upon the individual.

Gritzner first begins with examining Sigmund Freud's "psychoanalytic explorations of the human mind" (2010, p.2.) from the 1920s and beyond to support this point. These are used by Gritzner as a poignant and indeed recognisable starting point for her readers to understand the "two classes of instincts which exist in an opposing yet complementary relationship: the life instincts (Eros) and the death drive (Thanatos)" (2010, p.2) Thanatos and Eros were a refinement of Freud's earlier Pleasure versus Reality Principle - wherein reality represses the id - which came from his 'discovery' of the Death Drive. These Ancient Greek terms are utilised for their encompassing of the duality of humanity's cognitive processes and assist in defining the representation of female death as beautiful by virtue of the patriarchal structure of society, the semiotic resonance of the female form and the psychological need for art as *representation of* and the *antithesis to* death anxieties in its viewers. Gritzner summarises Freud's theorem here:

Eros is self-preserving and life-creating desire, and is often used as an umbrella term for sexual instincts (which create an energy known as libido). The sexual instincts are counterbalanced by the death drive, whose aim is destruction. (2010, p.2)

Freud, in acknowledging the inevitable ties between the 'drive' of man (pleasure), and the knowledge of his unfathomable and ultimately unavoidable descent to death, concludes these forces of the human psyche are present and represented within society. Bronfen's assumption of the translation of Freudian concepts into artistic representation supports Gritzner in determining a similar ideology within theatre and performance. The vast array of psychological discourse on the drive of 'man' toward pleasure in sexuality and visual stimulation, away from death, serves to suggest artistic representation follows in parallel. With the immense weight mortality has on cognitive processes, a

theatrical representation of this is somewhat inevitable. The question here remains; wherein does the female form align with these ideologies? If the representation of death in the arts is a symptom of humanity's fear of demise or longing for satisfaction (erotically or otherwise), where does the inanimate female feature in these anxieties?

Marcuse has developed his theory on the objectification of the female form across his career of socio-psychological exploration. In an essay published in the *Women's Studies* journal in 1974, Marcuse definitively stated there has been a "long historical process in which the social, mental and even physiological characteristics of women developed as different from and contrasting with those of men." (1974, p.280) Marcuse here will represent an exploration further than Freud and his counterparts, into the processes of society, politics, and individuals' psychological processes within this. Marcuse criticises the male-centric ideology of psychoanalysis up until this point, determining this is a symptom of the patriarchal society ingrained in Western culture. While socially and culturally women have been subject to many kinds of repression, in artistic representation - as Bronfen has explained - the female form becomes almost totemic, owing in some ways to some form of anxiety and the objectification and eroticisation of the female form culturally.

In fact, Marcuse argues, "over and above the obviously physiological differences between male and female, the feminine characteristics are socially conditioned" (1974, p.281) by the 'primal father' and the archetype of domination within societal structures. The patriarchal society of Western culture has been so far ingrained into the process of life that, while "beneath and beyond the male-female dichotomy is the human being, common to male and female:" (1974, p.281) the female form in its totemic nature becomes the site for artistic exploration into life and mortality. The structure of Western society has perpetuated the notion of the female as weak and the male as her protector. Marcuse furthers Freud's principles in determining the effect of this dichotomy upon individual mental

processes, and the ways in which generational teachings on masculinity versus femininity have shaped the society we occupy. Marcuse supports the notion that femininity or the feminine qualities, which are “formulated as the antithesis of the dominating masculine qualities [...] would be receptivity, sensibility, non-violence, tenderness and so on.” These characteristics appear as the direct opposites of “domination and exploitation,” (1974, p.283) - traditionally male characteristics. As we have discussed, writers like Poe exploit these traditional notions of feminine qualities to heighten the emotional resonance of their piece. The societal processes which have placed women as the site of pleasure, the tender and beautiful object on which the male ego is inscribed, supports the fact that the aesthetics prescribed to the dead or dying female form in art are a symptom of this cultural ideology. Marcuse supports this by stating on a psychological level, these contrasting characteristics of men and women pertain to the domination of Eros - “they would express the energy of the life instincts, against the death instinct and destructive energy.” (1974, p.283) He questions why these characteristics have been so far ingrained in our Western culture as feminine qualities. Why does the female seem to inherently occupy society in such a passive, objectified way? In short, he explains:

This process has a history of thousands of years, during which the defence of the established society and of its hierarchy originally depended on physical strength, and thereby reduced the role of the female who was periodically disabled by bearing and then caring for children. Male domination, once established on these grounds, spread from the originally military sphere to other social and political institutions. The woman came to be regarded as inferior, as weaker, mainly as support for, or as adjunct to man, as sexual object, as tool of reproduction. [...] Her body and her mind were reified, became objects. And just as her intellectual development was blocked, so was her erotic development. Sexuality was objectified as a means to an end, procreation or prostitution. (1974, p.283)

Further to this point, Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension (Die Permanenz der Kunst)* was published in 1978, in which he comments on how Walter Benjamin traced the representation of death as opposed to life in the arts, in the works of Poe, Baudelaire, Proust and Valery in a similar way to Bronfen above. Benjamin determined these artists "express a "consciousness of crisis" (*Krisenbewusstsein*): a pleasure in decay, in destruction, in the beauty of evil" (Marcuse. 1978, p.20). They, like Poe, have a fascination with the finality of death, its ability to resolve a story of patriarchal narrative yet also induce fear or personal reflections on life. The dead or dying woman becomes an object of reflection, representing so much more than herself, including societal politics and culture, and in this way is hypertropic in any representation. Concerning the catharsis found in these aesthetic representations of death, Marcuse states "the Beautiful represents the pleasure principle," (1978, p.62) and therefore it rebels against the prevailing reality principle, the reality wherein beauty is receding and death, inevitable. He claims it is the "sensuous force of the Beautiful [which] keeps the promise alive" (1978, p.68). It is the memory of happiness, joy, fulfilment, which seeks its return in one way or another - be that in the aesthetic form or true reality. The concept of death versus life is one which weighs heavily on the cognitive processes of humanity, and in the same way death and dying permeate the senses of the individual when confronted with their own mortality, art and culture balance carefully between aesthetic representations of such fears and the contemplation of what is real. In the case of Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* (1846), we can see the "consciousness of crisis" (Marcuse. 1978, p.20), the anxiety in decomposition urges him to compose "the death of a beautiful woman" (Poe. 1846, p.165) as the highest degree of melancholia. In placing a woman at the site of this melancholia, he aligns her with the object of beauty which cements the aesthetic moment in the mind of its viewers. As we have seen in Poe's writing, it is the memory of his women's beauty, the retrospective longing for what is gone incites the emotional reaction from the reader. It is the concept of her potential lost, the beautiful, budding nature of womanhood that tugs on the heartstrings and elevates, posthumously, the dead female to an ethereal position.

As Bronfen has suggested, the representation of female death is semiotically encoded, this working alongside the duality of the human consciousness, the dichotomy between men and women in Western culture and our incessant fear of death - resulting in aesthetic representation as its antithesis. Marcuse's contemplation on the structure of patriarchal society here serves to exacerbate this point - in determining the disparity between masculinity and femininity - and ultimately the representation of their deaths is owing to a society wherein the patriarchal structure is valued in lived reality and artistic representation. The fact that, in our Part One, we have been able to identify these traditionally feminine characteristics of tenderness and passivity in Poe's 'beautiful' female deaths supports this notion. Poe himself - as a figurehead for the 'philosophy of composition' - can be used to highlight the dichotomy between male and female death, and the way the female body represents much more than herself alone. This being that the dead women he describes consistently represent themes of ethereality, beauty, eroticism, life, and death. They, like Marcuse's historical women, have become objects of desire, thwarted by male agency, and reified not as individuals, but representatives of life, death, pleasure, and reality.

In our attempts to 'make sense' of Eros and death, we rely on the powers of our imagination; enter the worlds of drama, theatre and performance. (Gritzner. 2010, p.3)

Having discussed an introduction to the psychological and sociological effect death has upon the worlds of art culture, we will be at liberty to discuss the translation of these ideas into contemporary performance. For the case of theatre and performance as another site wherein the female body is objectified and semantically encoded, Gritzner discusses the historical exploration of Eros and death within ancient Greek performances. Indeed, with societies from as early as the Greeks investigating the indeterminable fate death represents, mortality has led to a consistent drive for performative exploration. "The conflict between love/life and death is dramatised as an agōn ('struggle', 'battle')

between the mortal hero or heroine and the 'Gods'" (Gritzner. 2010, p.4) Gritzner points out here that Greek theatre - or more specifically - Attic tragedy, aligns with the notion that the mortality of humanity remains a consistent theme of exploration within our theatres, that "the transgression of boundaries is a key principle of tragedy, its primary motivating force." (2010, p.4) Ancient Greek theatre consistently has themes of transgression; be that for hierarchical gain, the 'liberation of Eros' (eroticism and pleasure) or a fear of mortality. We are programmed societally and psychologically to fear death, its definitive end, and the unknowable period following it. It is only natural - according to Gritzner - that society has followed this trend in playing death in opposition to life on stage:

The form of tragedy has always attracted us precisely because it offers a glimpse of the unknowable and ultimately unrepresentable world of human desire, passion, love, sex, violence, pain and death. (2010, p.4)

From here, Gritzner's discussion turns to the works of William Shakespeare. From discussing tragedy in ancient Greece, it is also possible to draw similar conclusions from the Jacobean and Elizabethan periods (C.17th). Like its theatrical predecessors, Shakespearean dramas and tragedies align with the pleasure and reality principles and Marcuse's performative principles, all-encompassing death as focal and woman/beauty as mortal anxiety's antithesis in art. Gritzner states "death in tragedy is often the result of a perversion of the natural order or a transgression of moral and social codes," (2010, p.4) meaning the ethereal connotations surrounding the female form in Attic tragedy like *The Golden Ass* (C.2nd AD) has permeated Poe's literature and even Shakespeare's theatre centuries before. From an understanding of the psychological theories which Bronfen and Gritzner discuss as symptoms depicted in artistic representation, there is much to be said about the translation of these concepts into live performance. Specifically in our case, an exploration of these concepts in contemporary performance of Shakespearean tragedy. In 1993, Howard Barker stated:

Tragedy offends the sensibilities. It drags the unconscious into the public space [...]

It dares to be beautiful. Who talks of beauty in the theatre any more? They think it is to do with the costumes. (1993, p.19)

His book, *Arguments for a Theatre* (1989; 2nd edition: 1993), assigns Freud and Marcisian terms directly to the worlds of theatre and performance. His discussion touches upon the genre of tragedy and the apparent moments of “graphic beauty” (1993, p.55) within certain scenes. He describes an accompanying “beauty of expression, which, despite the terror of the event described, or because of it, complicate and subvert the ostensible meaning.” (1993, p.56) Directly tying to the topic of this research, Barker encourages the notion that tragedy may distort elements of gruesomeness - which we would innately fear such as death - within a beautiful image. Perhaps through the immersion of live performance, the objective spectator is “thwarted by a complexity of emotions” (1993, p.56) and their experience of the moment is clouded by tropic imagery. In one sense, Barker argues the nature of tragedy is as such, confirming the fears of the audience; “people cannot be changed, that pity is rare, that passion is always drowned in expediency” (1993, p.57). However, he also suggests that the scene’s context, one of “beauty and terror” provides a “political subversion of a more complex form” (1993, p.57) than one might originally see. Effectively, the beautiful within fear or death is what fuels the mind’s anxiety toward the image, the nature of the tragedy being ingrained into the imagination:

The conclusion, in its failure to protect the message, obliging the audience to digest the experience in an individual way, but the beauty of the scene forbidding its extinction in the memory. The frustration of the message sets up an anxiety, while the beauty of the scene locks it in the imagination. (Barker. 1993, p.57)

In a similar manner to Marcuse, Barker suggests the form of tragedy utilises the beauty of an image, in a similar way to that of Poe, to veil the image's deeper meanings. The "object of longing" which is presented, often within the physical, aesthetically pleasing form of woman, cements the image in the imagination of the viewer. This impossible veiling which Bronfen traces in Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* (1846) disunites the audience in attempting to disguise, but ultimately calling attention to, the nature of the scene. For example, "the death of a beautiful woman" (Poe. 1846, p.165) calls forth an audience's sense of their own mortality, and Barker maintains it is the beauty of the scene which *seeks* to lessen but ultimately exacerbates the anxiety present in the image. On Tragic audiences, Barker states:

It sits alone. It suffers alone.

In the endless drizzle of false collectivity, tragedy restores pain to the individual.

You emerge from tragedy equipped against lies. After the musical, you're anyone's fool.

(1993, p.19)

More recently, Barker released his work entitled *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* (2005) which explores the subject of death specifically, and its representations in drama, theatre and performance. A progression from his *Arguments for a Theatre*, which deconstructs further the concept of death and dying within the scope of theatrical representation, his discussion begins by loosely defining the psychological processes by which humanity chooses to explore death in theatre. Barker determines "nothing said about death by the living can possibly relate to death as it will be experienced by the dying. Nothing known about death by the dead can be communicated to the living." Yet, it is over this "appalling chasm" which "tragedy throws a frail bridge of imagination." (2005, p.1) While there is

indeed so much about death that is a mystery to the individual, the form of tragedy allows exploration of these unknowable elements. From Gritzner's tracing of the forces of Thanatos and Eros from Ancient Greece into contemporary art culture, we can see the consistency of this human anxiety in artistic exploration. The tragic playwright depicts the finality of death with calls to the anxiety this places on the human condition. While melodrama or comedy tends to seek to lessen this anxiety through comedy or the return of traditional morality and the natural order, tragedy throws caution to the wind and seeks to exacerbate existing anxieties around death and the human condition.

A carnival is not a revolution.

After the carnival, after the removal of the masks, you are precisely who you were before.

After the tragedy, you are not certain who you are (Barker. 1993, p.17)

Thus far, it is apparent vast critical discussion has been centred on the highly tropic devices of death and woman within the arts, most of which draws ties psychoanalytically to Ancient Greek notions of Thanatos and Eros or Freud's death drive versus life instincts. These concepts have been vastly developed and discussed throughout the years, and so in discussion of the representation of female death in contemporary performance of Shakespeare as - in Poe's philosophies – beautiful, we must consider the historical progression of these tropes. So far, these have been relatively consistent; noting the development of psychoanalytic discussion in parallel to the constant morbid eroticism, ethereality, and beauty present in the inanimate form of the females in Poe's short stories and poems. What is prudent to assess, is the ways in which these processes have transformed into performance through the ages, and the *physical* representation of such devices as opposed to an insentient image in fine art or literature. In the following section, we will trace similar ideologies from the likes of Poe in Shakespeare's writing, with particular focus on the eroticism or drive for pleasure identified in his written scripts. The form of tragedy is one which spans throughout the centuries and is vastly informed

by psychological theories – and indeed encourages further exploration of them – meaning it is likely we will see the same or similar themes throughout tragedy from the Ancient Greeks to Shakespeare and to Poe. With an understanding of the dramatic devices which Shakespeare adopts in the representation of his females as dead, dying and beautiful, we will be able to assess the perpetuation of these into contemporary physical performances of his tragedies.

Part Three

Sexualising the Female Corpse in Shakespeare

Shakespeare stands as one of the most notable figures of playwriting from British history, and due to the consistency of the appearance of his plays on our stages, serves to exemplify the many branches of the sociological and psychological discussion above. His tragic females in his playtexts, such as Ophelia, Desdemona, Juliet and indeed Lavinia are seen to perpetuate a patriarchal structure of narrative wherein the female form - as the object of male longing - becomes the site for symbolic and totemic contemplation. Shakespeare's understanding of the cognitive process of individuals has placed him in history as a figure famed for his understanding of psychological, cognitive processes. He represents and explores the deepest, most disturbing portions of lived reality in theatre - like murder, rape, and revenge. As his characters explore the most disturbing elements of human thought, they also represent the extremities of human existence, and hover in an unreal limbo between life and death. It is this unbalance which gives Shakespeare's audience the anxieties of life at the site of another. They occupy a safe space wherein the tragedy of the play cannot reach them, but the anxieties surrounding longing, life and death are still felt through empathy for his characters.

Shakespeare's women are thrust amongst the male-centred chaos of his tragedies and occupy the space as objects. This objectification often continues into the tragic woman's death, as she is representative of much more than herself - an object resulting from the socio-economic and political agency of the play - as well as embodying a final beautiful image of peace. A voyeuristic image

reminiscent of the eroticism inherently attached to the female body. Too often, the death of a female in tragedy marks the turn toward retribution and a patriarchal return to narrative. Lavinia, in *Titus Andronicus*, is the silent site of the conflict within the piece and through her death marks a beautiful return to patriarchal succession. It is the aesthetic coding of the female body which I hope to trace through McIntyre's *Titus Andronicus* (2017), and the symbolic, tropic representation of female death which articulates so much socially and psychologically. It is this which will allow me to assess the ways modern directorial decisions on the aesthetic encoding of the women as images perpetuates or indeed challenges archaic notions of femininity.

Compared to Part Two, where we have discussed the psychology of the representation of female death as beautiful, here we will be able to assess the prevalence of this concept in Shakespeare's plays, later allowing us to assess the aesthetic devices afforded to physical representations of such tropes in contemporary performance. We will use examples of the RSC's performances of Shakespearean tragedy throughout including *Antony and Cleopatra* (2017) and *Hamlet* (2016). These being the same season or similar dates of our main case study, *Titus Andronicus*, which we will discuss in greater detail in Part Four. By analysing the consistency of the tropic nature of femininity and death in these written scripts and into performances, we will be at liberty to see the perpetuation of female symbolism that bind any tragic woman to this belittled state of the object of longing. Since RSC directors remain true to Shakespeare's scripts, we will analyse the process by which they choose to aestheticize the dead or dying female since this is dependent on directorial decisions. We will note the ways contemporary directors seem to align closely with the symbolic, highly tropic format of women in her descent to death, their aesthetic coding of each moment of death supporting the theoretical framework laid out throughout this thesis.

In Chapter 2 of *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance*, Gritzner and Robert Wilcher tackle the vast array of critical discussion surrounding Shakespeare's "engagement with the theatrical aesthetics of eroticism and death" in his scripts, which Wilcher states, "come appropriately to a climax in *Anthony and Cleopatra*." (2010, p.29) He focuses on the sexual and erotic representations or semantic encoding which appear on the female form throughout Shakespeare's scripts, which collate into "an aesthetic consummation in which experiences of death and love unite in a single erotic fantasy." (2010, p.43) As we go on to assess the prevalence of the belittled form of woman in performances and physical representations, it will be essential to assess this as a translation of Shakespeare's original play text. Wilcher begins his discussion of the literary devices which indebted Shakespeare's tragedies to the concept of female death as beautiful by stating "the close association between eroticism and death was, of course, inherent in Elizabethan literary usage" (2010, p.29) This being the inherent metaphorical figures which "likened orgasm to dying" (2010, p.29) and sexualised the martyred woman prototype. While Poe's philosophies have allowed us to trace the tropic nature of women in a state of death in literary representations in C.19th, Wilcher and Gritzner will here allow some reflection on the continuity of these theories from earlier in history.

As discussed in our previous section, the form of tragedy is centred on the corruption of hierarchy and the unbalancing of social order, and so the concept of lust as central to these displacements is tractable. The female form can indeed act as this object of representation in this manner – her body so highly received by audiences on account of her symbolic and tropic meaning, her ability to be the site of conflict, as well as the physical representation of lust and love, the pleasure of man. Shakespeare's evident perpetuation of such images in a literary sense, which here we will begin to map out, could serve to suggest a tendency toward the physical and aesthetic representation of these images on stage. Wilcher and Gritzner here, now we have explored the psychology of human cognition, will represent the branch between these theories of female death as symbolic and highly

tropic, into Shakespearean theatre specifically. We will be at liberty to examine the continuation of these ideologies into contemporary performance practices by virtue of the examples Gritzner and Wilcher comment on, and our own analysis of these examples in a modern performance. Though our society has seen vast sociological and cultural advancements - especially in the reception of femininity - Shakespeare's plays are ever present in popular culture, not only as a reflection of history, but even as a reflection of the society we occupy today.

In her second chapter, Gritzner suggests there is a "conjunction of sexual dying and ultimate death" (2010, p.29) as a prominent theme throughout the span of Shakespeare's plays which serves as an exploration of human sexuality, eroticism, and desire. His characters which liken orgasm to death and vice versa represent the displacement of humanity's lust for life and fear of death. Therefore, his representation of female death as beautiful may follow the same antithetical process as Poe. For centuries, the exploration of human cognitive process and existence has been represented on stage, with Shakespeare featuring as one of the most prominent spearheads in his generation. His ability to delve empathetically into the mental processes of his characters, suggests his own heightened awareness of the human condition. Relative to this research, Shakespeare represents a branch between the contemplation of death in the arts onto stage. Specifically noting the processes by which Poe determines emotional resonance, the melancholic imagery of a beautiful dead woman being the highest emotional image is also consistent in Shakespeare's tragedies. Wilcher uses *Troilus and Cressida* as an introduction into Shakespeare's commentary on life and lust, commenting on the way the protagonist's "fevered imagination" guides his lust and longing – the concept of sexual satisfaction so prominent in his mind, his experience of life is threatened with "an overload" (Gritzner. 2010, p.29-30) which he proposes could serve to destroy him:

I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.
Th'imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense. What will it be
When that wat'ry palates taste indeed
Love's thrice repuréd nectar? Death, I fear me,
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle-potent, turned too sharp in sweetness
For the capacity of my ruder powers.
(Troilus and Cressida, III.II.16-23)

In the play, Troilus and his love of one night, Cressida, are separated during a stalemate war between the Greek army and Troy. They remain in contact through Cressida's uncle Pandarus, until it is revealed she has promised herself to the Greek Diomedes. This plunges the boy Troilus into a deep despair, and the play ends with him joining the war as Trojan champion. It is clear from the above statement from Troilus, that here, the climactic experience of love or lust is one detrimental to the boy's existence, thereby encouraging Wilcher's notion of 'sexual dying' as a central theme to Shakespeare's play. His linking of the female with the sweet taste of nectar calls toward the idea of woman as an object, as the desired 'taste' he longs for, as well as the connection between humanity and Mother Nature. What is also clear is the inherent ties between a lust for life and a lust for love in the human cognitive process. Shakespeare here explores the concept of 'some joy too fine' which could in turn suffice to kill, and the conjunction of this concept with Troilus's instinctual lust, again complies with an acknowledgement of Shakespeare's exploration of human instincts for survival and satisfaction. What will be clear, is the ways in which Shakespeare and his plays investigate certain elements of the human condition attributed to our fear of death, whilst simultaneously perpetuating the shrouding of these concepts in the representation of a beautiful image.

Along similar lines as *Troilus and Cressida* in Shakespeare's reflection on the desires of individuals, Wilcher references *Hamlet* for this play's representation of death as a final rest, away from social anguish, an event longed for in a similar way to sexual satisfaction. In the play, Hamlet returns home to attend his father, the king's funeral. His mother, the queen, has already married the late king's brother. After seeing the ghost of his father who tells him his brother had in fact murdered him, Hamlet vows revenge. He hires a troupe of actors to perform a similar story in the court of the new king and queen. Hamlet's uncle leaves, proving to him his suspicions were correct, and in the midst of this arc, Hamlet's once lover Ophelia is ridden with grief at the death of her father by Hamlet, goes mad and commits suicide in a shallow pond.

To die, to sleep -

No more, and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to... 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished

(*Hamlet*, III.I.62-6)

The heartache and natural shocks humanity is subject to, references the constellation of social, political, and economic challenges we face day to day, as well as the tumultuous events of Hamlet's arc. The attractiveness of death comes from an ability to say no more. At the end of this life, we expect silence and rest for the anguish we have endured in living. The consummation phrase in this segment clearly has sexual connotations, yet also aligns closely with religion, a kind of marriage between the animated mind and body and its final sleep.

Carolyn E Brown has commented on the vast psychological discourse centred around *Hamlet*, maintaining as a “psychopathological drama” it is most suitable to psychological interpretation because “the conflict is between consciousness and repressed impulses.” (Brown. 2015, p.12) In the same way Freud’s Ego works against the Id of individuals, Shakespeare’s characters seem to battle similar cognitive processes. The sexual connotations present in Wilcher’s selected segment of the play-text collates this inner turmoil with the experience of desire or lust, owing to humanity’s instinctual need to live a full and varied existence. While in this portion of the script, Hamlet’s lust is directed toward death as release from his anguish, the sexual connotations we have discussed could serve to suggest some contemplation of Ophelia as the initial recipient of his desire at the start of the play. By this point in the script, we have been introduced to Ophelia as hierarchically less-than but emotionally matched with the protagonist, their relationship surpassing the boundaries of societal structure into the realms of passion, pleasure, and lust. Ophelia is often warned against her ability as a woman to seduce or be taken advantage of; her brother even suggesting she attend a nunnery to ward off any unworthy desire for her. The fact Hamlet and Ophelia’s relationship does not enter a physical arena in the play, combined with Hamlet’s apparent lust for death, seems to heighten the emotional weight of Ophelia’s descent into madness and eventual death. The potential for their wholesome, emotionally connected relationship is thwarted by the patriarchal structure of narrative the tragedy adopts, forcing him to redirect this love for Ophelia back onto himself and his longing for peace in death. The patriarchal social anguish Hamlet’s story guides us through, displays outwardly the potential for an honourable relationship for him and Ophelia. The fact she is snatched away by madness after the murder of her father and her drowning, positions her as the potential site for love, lust, and new life, gone. The audience is encouraged to witness this loss of potential to heighten their emotional reaction to the moment and Ophelia’s dead body becomes the image of unjust suffering and loss.

Having recently watched the RSC's *Hamlet* (2016), starring Paapa Essiedu, it is interesting to note the instances of reference to sexuality and femininity that appear in discussion of Ophelia (Natalie Simpson). Though this Ophelia, in her physical appearance, contrasts the traditional representation of her as, in Everett Milius' painting, white and pale with flowing hair - a conscious decision in imparting Black culture on a whitewashed Shakespearean stage by Griffiths - we still see the representation of her as chaste and obedient to her male counterparts. The image Griffith uses to signal her fall from grace into death, begins with her stripping, during her final song, into a basic but flowing, red, knee-length dress. She climbs to the gallery of the stage, lit in blue, a heavenly, peaceful image, and meanders across from left to right, to her death.

We know Ophelia's death was not staged in Shakespeare's time, meaning Griffith has aligned her with the conventional notions of Ophelia as the passive sufferer, her death only reported on, not seen, making her an icon of femininity, and an object of longing, never to be seen again. This, as one example of female death in Shakespearean tragedy on the contemporary stage, seems to suggest a passiveness of directors toward the reception of femininity as anything more than an object to be viewed, used, and paraded. While Griffith leans into an alternative rendition of the events in incorporating black and African culture, he also fails to represent his Ophelia with any agency of her own. She, like so many other dead, beautiful women in literature, fine art and theatre are representative of the prevailing force of male agency and is an object of longing which serves to highlight the male characters' narrative arcs. Her position as warned against sexuality, yet desired, then dead, solidifies her place as the pawn in the greater scheme of patriarchal mimesis.

In their chapter regarding the eroticism inherent in Shakespearean tragedy, Gritzner and Wilcher go on to discuss Valerie Traub's 'powerful' reading of *Othello*, which "idealises and eroticises the corpse of the wife whose active sexuality has so overwhelmed his sense of separate selfhood in the act of consummation that he can 'safely sexualise Desdemona only posthumously, after she is permanently immobilised and sacramentally elevated'" (2010, p.30):

One more, one more.

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee

And love thee after. One more and that's the last.

He kisses her

So sweet was ne'er so fatal.

(Othello, V.II.17-20)

In Shakespeare's play, Othello is a skilled fighter and is general of the army, who secretly marries Desdemona, the daughter of a senator in Venice. In a complex story of jealousy and revenge amongst the men, Desdemona is accused of being unfaithful to Othello, who smothers her with a pillow in response. His suspicions are proven wrong and, realising his horrific mistake, Othello commits suicide over her corpse. Desdemona's beauty, even in death, and therefore her power over his lust, is enough to distract him from the matter at hand; "kissing her sleeping lips, he is almost diverted from the course of justice by her 'balmy breath'" (Gritzner. 2010, p.30) Desdemona as the sacrificial wife, literally the inanimate 'object' of his longing, serves to confirm once more Shakespeare's exploration of the ties between eroticism and death. She begins her arc as the object of Othello's desire, her fairness and beauty seemingly the only defining traits of her character, bar a few minor interjections into the patriarchal structure of policy in Shakespeare's Venice. Married, she becomes an icon of virtuous femininity, but with a tinge of righteousness, especially in her death, since she claims the

crime as her own after being asked who committed the deed. In her dying breath, protecting her husband, she speaks; “Nobody, I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell” (V.II.133–134). Having smothered her for believing her to be unfaithful, Othello has broken the conventional mimesis of their relationship. Manipulated by Iago, he thwarts their chance at a happy marriage and fulfilled life. Again, Desdemona’s dead body here represents the potential lost, resulting from Othello’s transgression of the social order. The romantic objectification of her corpse in the moment above by Shakespeare suggests creative arenas have explored the concept of life versus death through sexuality - owing to an element of the human consciousness aware of its own mortality. The female body, as the site for new life and pleasure, in death becomes the image of suffering within the tragic arena. Assigned beautiful aesthetics, the body becomes hypertropic in its representation of vast psychological theories, cementing its melancholic reception in the minds of its audience by virtue of the emotional weight the image holds. The fact this trope is not only consistent within Shakespeare’s writing, but the arts generally is indicative of psychology playing a heavy part in the reception of femininity. Shakespeare deliberately, much like Poe, assigns tumultuous tragic arcs to his women, veiling this in beautiful aesthetics or poetical language in order to heighten the emotional response from his audiences. Again, the female form becomes the site for exploration into humanity’s lust for life, living and pleasure, in direct opposition to our anxieties around mortality.

Wilcher’s final example of the sexualisation of the feminine corpse within Shakespeare’s tragedies is *Romeo and Juliet*, where this “aesthetic practise” forms the tale of “death as the only possible consummation” (2010, p.30) for the two youths’ passion. Their romance simply would not survive, “retain its purity and intensity” (2010, p.31) in a world subject to family conflicts and a ticking clock. In the play, the lovers meet when Romeo crashes a party intended for the Capulet clan. They consider themselves in love and flee to be married by a friendly monk. In order to get away with this, they hope to flee further and start a new life together by faking Juliet’s death and taking her away from her

protective family. However, the news of this plan never reaches Romeo, and finding his new wife's 'corpse', he commits suicide by poisoning. Their deaths are symbolic in many ways; they lie together as on their marriage bed, both ending their existence in a gesture of true passion. Romeo; with a "gesture of love" (2010, p.31):

O true apothecary,
Thy drugs are quick!
Thus with a kiss I die
(Romeo and Juliet V.III.119-20)

Juliet's death is more symbolic, the consummation imagery rife with a "more powerful charge of eroticism than Romeo's kiss" (Gritzner. 2010, p.31) and a gesture to match:

Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief.
She takes Romeo's dagger
O happy dagger,
This is thy sheath! There rust, and let me die.
(V.III.168-9)

The direct parallel between sex and her gesture implies a parallel between eroticism and death which Shakespeare here exploits. The youthful Juliet, at thirteen, is the youngest of Shakespeare's tragic females and yet is more obviously sexualised in death than others, albeit by herself. She has left the safe control of her family patriarch, and ventures married, the relationship not blessed by either

party's family, into her eternal rest. This appears as a kind of unsettling and unprotected fall from grace which is sexualised in order to heighten the moment's emotional resonance. Again, this kind of eroticism of the female corpse is an image consistent in tragic theatre and art culture generally, wherein the characters "survive only as names" (Gritzner. 2010, p.31), a story to be told, an object of longing long gone:

For never was there a story of more woe

Than this of Juliet and her Romeo

(V.III.308-9)

This final example of sexual dying in Shakespearean tragedy by Wilcher recalls to my earliest experience of *Romeo and Juliet* live at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2017, and again supports the notion that the representation of specifically female death is rife with tropic imagery. In this thesis' Introduction, we discussed my own interpretation of Leach's highly symbolic staging of Romeo and Juliet's final moments. Juliet wore a white gown and the stage flooded with dry ice as she spoke her final monologue, the immediately widowed bride appearing ethereal in the styling of her final moment. The eroticism present in her words only highlighted the transition our tragic heroine took from youth into marriage, and exacerbated the couple's venture into death, divided from their familial dynamic and protection by their secret wedding and unblessed consummation. She, as the disenfranchised remainder of the couple, chases her lover with the same ferocious lust of the earlier scenes, into the unknown and into death. Seemingly, her only option in a politically divided, patriarchal society where her chastity and feminine worth has been diminished by her unblessed union.

As we go onto our main case study, *Titus Andronicus*, it will be interesting to note the ways in which contemporary directors utilise modern semiotics such as blood and gore, to align death more closely to its lived reality. Directors seem to highlight the voyeurism and eroticism present in Shakespeare's representation of the women in his play texts, and therefore align their female deaths with the juxtaposing melancholic and beautiful imagery Poe uses. The women, in death, occupy the space as objects to be observed, their position as women highlighting the potential lost, and heightening them to an ethereal position. Posthumously, we admire their conviction in life, and their feminine qualities that have been wasted through death. These female deaths are hypertropic in Bronfen's sense of the word, since they represent the multi-faceted reception of femininity and, in death, become the object on which the audience's tragic reflection is focused. Directors and audience members assign beauty to the image they are left with, owing to the socio-cultural complexities of the characters' world and our own. It is clear here that beautiful female death is still relevant in contemporary art culture and performance, since directors such as Khan adopt similar strategies to the early moderns in their depictions of femininity and female death.

Serving as the antithesis for our fear of death, Shakespeare's theatre attempts the same guising Poe's literature attempts, yet the piling of one tropic theme onto another with regards to the female form undoes its own intention. As Bronfen has stated, audiences are not soothed by the substitution of a beautiful image in death's place but repelled by the image's distortion of valid cognitive anxieties. And with the beautiful aesthetics assigned to the moment, retain the image in our minds, sometimes aligning this with the concept of beauty by virtue of the faceted symbolism present in the image. With an acknowledgement of the cognitive process of the individual in the face of life versus death in artistic formats, I hope to be able to identify the dichotomy between representations of male and female death in Shakespearean tragedy. As noted above, Romeo and Juliet die in different fashions, hers more so weighted by her role as woman, the canonisation of female death as more emotionally resonant or

beautiful coming from the ideological structures underpinning conventional notions of beauty. This also being the result of thousands of years of social conditioning around the female form, which collates appropriately in Shakespearean theatre, as he seems to transcend the historical and cultural changes of society, and in his play texts, consistently represents femininity and female death in its tropic, objectified form.

As we go on to discuss the case study of Blanche McIntyre's *Titus Andronicus* (2017) for the RSC, we will be at liberty to assess the consistency of these tropes into contemporary performance of Shakespearean tragedy, especially noting the role of McIntyre as director and her female players, since they occupy the space Shakespeare and his male counterparts occupied in the play's original performance conditions (OPC). Keeping McIntyre's femininity in mind, she may approach Shakespeare's *Titus* with more feminist intentions than the play's historical performances – her directorial history suggests her awareness of the socio-political undertones which score Shakespeare's tragedies – and so, with specifically Lavinia's death in mind, we will assess her approach as catering to or usurping the traditional notions of female death as beautiful. Having discussed some contemporary incarnations of Shakespeare's tragedies in this section and observed the same aesthetic coding of the dead or dying female body which appears consistently throughout history, we will be able to analyse the role of the woman more closely in this theatrical format. Initially, it seems contemporary directors do little to distance their performances from the established tropes of female death as beautiful and highly symbolic. In our following case study, we will be able to more closely analyse the journey of our fated Lavinia to her death. As the object of longing, Lavinia is positioned as the ideal from the start of the play, while her mutilation and rape half-way through realign this beauty into an arena of reflection. Her image at the start of the play becomes the ethereal, longed-for sign of traditional, patriarchal mimesis. In discussing McIntyre's perpetuation or distancing from traditional tropes of female death as beautiful, we must chart the course our Lavinia takes. We must consider the variety of academic

discussion which determines Lavinia as the object on which this tragedy is inscribed. It is this analysis which will allow us to see the symbolic concepts which surround the character, and the ways McIntyre chooses to heighten specific moments of graphic horror or beauty to incite an emotional reaction in her audiences.

Part Four

Case Study

*Lavinia: beautiful, innocent, and greatly unfortunate.*³

A) MCINTYRE AND HER LAVINIA

Titus Andronicus - which acts as the case study for this thesis - was written by William Shakespeare around 1593 and has been shrouded in controversy since its opening at the Rose theatre on 24th January 1594. Academics have doubted Shakespeare's ability to publish the piece alone, being it was the first of its kind printed for public viewing in quarto editions; with the assumption George Peele, another writer famed for his gruesome works of the time such as *The Battle of Alcazar* (published anonymously in 1594), assisted with the work. The play relies on bloody violence and revenge as its central themes, which grew in popularity in C.16th with the threat of death and violence a constant hazard for communities. Plague epidemics swept the nation; London and the surrounding areas hit hardest with the death toll reaching close to 38,000 (1 in 5 Londoners) in 1603, and violent crime saw a dramatic increase in the 1590s (Harkup. 2021). Hangings were a social occasion held in the streets and severed heads of criminals hung from London Bridge. It is safe to say death was a much more public event in late C.16th. The socio-political undertones which fuel the action of *Titus Andronicus* (Rist. 2008) seem to stem from a penchant for risk in Elizabethan audiences. Surrounded by death, audience members seemed to appreciate the relevance of Shakespeare's worlds amongst their own.

³ See Shakespeare, W. and Campbell, T., 1863. *The Dramatic Works Of William Shakespeare*. New York: AMS Press.

Shakespeare was relatively restrained in his depictions of death, owing to limitations with special effects (though the innovation of C.16th theatres was impressive in their use of pigs' blood substituted for human's), and his "subtle references, asides, even scaffold humour" (Harkup. 2020, p.137) referencing the variety of executions and death styles of the day served their purpose. These more effective than any gruesome representation could have been in C.16th since Shakespeare's audience would have been all too familiar with its reality in any case. The fact death and dying have become a more private, rarer event than would have been for Shakespeare's contemporary audiences (due to advances in medicine and criminal prosecution), might suggest McIntyre and others' modern renditions of his tragedies are emotionally weighted by today's perspective on death. In the same way Poe constructs the beautiful woman to heighten the melancholy of death to his audience, McIntyre uses abject horror in direct contrast with beauty to intensify the reaction from her modern audience. Being that we are much more distanced from the reality of death, the use of the beautiful female and her 'potential' lost seems to be the thought behind contemporary representations of death and directors' aesthetic choices. Perhaps, as we grow societally further from death in the Western world, our representations of this reflect more of an instinctual fear of demise than would have been apparent in the Elizabethan era. And the 'beautiful' dead women prevalent in the early modern period may articulate the distancing of society from the reality of death.

Through my theoretical research, I have discovered what seems an innate connection between artistic representation of death and femininity - encapsulating a variety of sociological and psychological theories which determine the artist's interpretation of lived reality, and the effect artists aim to project onto their viewers. Startwell's definition of beauty as "the object of longing" (2004, p.3) combines and condenses the representation of femininity, lust, life, and death in the representation of an image. Freud, Marcuse and the like have contemplated artists' representation of femininity and death through a psychoanalytical lens, suggesting an innate craving in humanity for the resolution of

lived reality. While impossible and unknowing, love, lust and beauty serve as the antithesis or reward for the inevitability of human decomposition. Gritzner, Bronfen, Cox and Barker have assisted in aligning these concepts closely to theatre and performance, while Jones and Brown have mapped the translation of these ideas into Shakespearean theatre. McIntyre's contemporary rendition of *Titus Andronicus* will allow me to assess the consistency of these concepts in modern-day performances, as well as the ways in which this female director approaches Lavinia's turmoil and her highly tropic, symbolic descent to death.

In terms of exploring the representation of Lavinia's death as beautiful, or in Poe's terms, "the most poetical topic in the world" (1846, p.45), I will use moments of McIntyre's production to analyse the consistency of the representation of female death as beautiful in contemporary society. These mostly consisting of Patrice Pavis's tools of analysis from his 2008 book, *Analyzing Performance*. In Pavis's Questionnaire – developed during the 1980s in reference to Parisian and Western performance – he deliberates fourteen aspects of performance that can be analysed to determine the effectiveness of its given intention. Aspects most relative to this research include "general characteristics of the mis-en-scène" (Pavis. 2008, p.37) - including the functions of sound, the rhythm of the performance and spectatorship – the "relationship between audience space and acting space", scenography - including "spatial forms: urban, architectural, scenic, gestural", and "principles of structuring/organizing space" (2008, p.38) - as well as semiotics such as lighting, objects, costume, makeup masks and "text in the performance" (2008, p.39). He debates the purposes of such items in theatrical performance, and while an expansive discussion of his processes is out of the scope of this research, it is necessary to tie our theoretical suppositions regarding McIntyre's *Titus Andronicus* to true, reliable performance analysis theories.

It is important, before analysing the aesthetic devices which align Lavinia with the beautiful deaths laid out in this thesis, we chart her journey toward this moment. She is, at the start of the play, framed for our consumption as the traditionally beautiful, dutiful daughter of the play's protagonist, Titus, who returns from war to Rome. In the running to become emperor, he graciously declines and offers the role to Saturninus, the deceased emperor's eldest son. Lavinia is offered here as a prize to Saturninus representing the unity between Titus's family and his. However, the queen of the Goths, Tamora, is found by Saturninus to be a more desirable candidate for Empress. She and her sons are freed from Titus's prison and begin their plot of vengeance for the sacrifice of their son and brother, Alarbus. By presenting Lavinia as the desirable, preferred match for Saturninus - the Andronic branch on the throne of Rome - Shakespeare aligns her with our concept of women as the 'object of longing', and in so doing confirms her as the potential site for trauma in the patriarchal structure of narrative in the play.

In 2017, Blanche McIntyre directed *Titus Andronicus*⁴ for the RSC in London. Performed from 23rd June to 2nd September, this play received rave reviews: The Guardian called it "tremendous theatre" (Billington. 2017), with the Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald describing its gruesome "horror that transcends the theatrical" (Jeffries. 2017). McIntyre has been praised as a young, up-and-coming director who gives "an ultra-contemporary incarnation" (Mills. 2017) of Shakespeare's bloodiest play. With mutilation and death as the play's central themes, seeing all but a few of its characters murdered, it will be interesting to assess McIntyre's representation of these - not least its central female character, Lavinia (Hannah Morrish). As we will see, her death is of further support to the psychology of this type of representation – we assign beauty to aesthetic representations of death in our attempts to depict the multi-faceted dimensions of the concept. This being most interesting when directly

⁴ See Appendix A

compared with the abject horror of her mutilation - central to the play's action. The bloody mess McIntyre depicts could be said to distance the piece from any conventional notions of female death as beautiful in its disturbingly realistic portrayal. However, as a contemporary *female* director, McIntyre cannot seem to distance from the established tropes of female death as beautiful or grand, since she adopts similar techniques in assigning an ethereal, beautiful demise for our tragic female at the end of the play - subserving her gruesome display of mutilation. These are ideas which, indeed, have stemmed throughout early modern representation of female death in fine art, literature, and performance. Even in the modern world, ancient historical perceptions around femininity as beautiful - a site of desire, of conflict and trauma, and often the physical representation of 'man's' instinctual need for pleasure, away from death - are prevalent. Women are often the driving force of conflict, their bodies the battleground and/or the reward, meaning a woman's position is simultaneously a site of contention and resolution. This, especially in the case of Lavinia, positions her as both an object to be valued and a commodity to be exploited. This portion of my research will act as an exploration into the practical representation of female death in contemporary performance of Shakespearean tragedy, considering the variety of academic discussion surrounding the psychology of aesthetic portrayals already discussed in this thesis.

Specifically, I will explore the introduction of Lavinia as the ideal Roman woman, and therefore her potentiality to be the site of conflict in the patriarchal structure of the piece. Furthermore, I will be analysing McIntyre's aestheticization of Lavinia's mutilation and eventually her descent to death, calling into question the technology available to contemporary renditions, in terms of representing this struggle in a 'realistic' manner. Does the semiotics afforded to contemporary directors lessen the inherent dichotomy between masculine and female death in their ability to align them closer to lived reality? Abject horror is present throughout McIntyre's piece, with Lavinia's mutilation particularly in this realistic manner. It will be interesting to note any marked distance from this gruesome imagery in

her moment of death. It will be clear through the sway away from gruesomeness in Lavinia's final moment, that McIntyre aligns her tragic woman with the ethereal, beautiful deaths discussed in this thesis. We shall find Shakespeare's plays, in their consistent tropic representation of femininity and female death, seem unable to offer a female whose death exists for her agency, and hers alone. The patriarchal structure of narrative which Shakespeare consistently followed (of course, based upon his own era and perspective), seems to not allow for feminist retellings of Lavinia nor many of his other tragic female's stories. They are tied to this tropic and symbolic representation of their death, in the same way a murder victim's name is always attached to their murderer's.



5

Historically, the personal and physical attributes of Lavinia have been similarly interpreted. An index of characters in Campbell's 1863 publication of Shakespeare's works, states; "Lavinia, beautiful, innocent, and greatly unfortunate." (Campbell, Shakespeare. 1863, p.953) Considering the image above - by John William Wright in the 1800s - the archetypes typically catered to within this character are the virginal youth, beautiful and undeserving of her suffering. These are similar to the aesthetics assigned to Poe's beautiful dead women. As we discussed in Part One of this thesis, fairness and ethereality are common qualities Poe utilises in emphasising the melancholic tone of his writing. Wright has enforced this perspective by placing Lavinia in a sorrowful, passive position - her head low, a single tear falling down her pale cheek. The white shawl over her head and pale blue of her attire

⁵[Heroines of Shakespeare] Lavinia from Titus Andronicus by Wright, J.W. C.19th [image] Available at: <<https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~382513~133083:-Heroines-of-Shakespeare---graphic-?trs=5&qvq=mgid%3A2300&mi=1&cic=FOLGERCM1%7E6%7E6#>> [Accessed 2 September 2020].

reflects the chastity of this young woman, who Albert Tricomi described as the play's "cardinal emblem of the enduring but mutilated garden." (1976, p.89) In the above image, Lavinia appears ghost-like, her skin almost transparent against the similarly coloured backdrop. Like Poe's Eulalie and Lenore, Lavinia similarly occupies an ethereal, saintly position upon reflection of her arc. Wright here seems to posthumously elevate the character, the emotional weight of the tragedy inscribed in his mind, and the beautiful, ethereal image of the suffering Lavinia the lasting image from his experience of the play-text. With Lavinia, Shakespeare enforces this archetype of fair youths as the epitome of beauty in the early modern period, her pale hair and skin the signs of her purity and righteousness among the male dominated space of the play. Her death, which signals the return to patriarchal mimesis, is stained on the minds of his audience. The horror of her mutilation and death replaced with a celestial image, aesthetically pleasing, and psychologically reassuring of viewers' position in the real world, distanced from the tragic universe before them.

McIntyre's *Titus* featured as part of the RSC's 'Rome Season' in the summer of 2017, including performances of *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolinus* (directed by Angus Jackson) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (directed by Iqbal Khan). This quartet of plays aimed at a political tie between Shakespeare's historical fables and contemporary society. In assessing the representation of Shakespeare's tragic female deaths as beautiful, *Titus Andronicus* seems the most obvious choice because of its notoriety as the most murderous story on the British stage. Not to mention, a vast array of Shakespeare's tragedies merely speak of female death as opposed to playing it on stage, while in *Titus*, most of the deaths are performed in front of the audience - even the females'. Academics often discuss the practicalities of the actors on stage - changing scenery and moving 'corpses' - as determining whether Shakespeare staged each death. However, it is interesting to note at this early stage in Shakespeare's theatrical career, his approach to death is somewhat gung-ho in *Titus Andronicus*. Apparently, his concern for

the actors' ability to change scenes and move corpses was less apparent, as he depicts murder and sacrifice in every act.

McIntyre's *Titus Andronicus* opens with civil unrest, a contemporary mob-like scenario wherein the people have two choices for Emperor of Rome. The scene is fast paced, underscored with drums and the sounds of sirens. These "street protests which have gradually become more violent and more extreme" are representative of Rome - she is "on a knife edge" (McIntyre. 2017) of socio-political unrest. The Capitol building sits at the back of a diagonal thrust stage (designed by Robert Innes Hopkins), surrounded by seven-foot-high fences. It has large windows depicting a modern office-like building, yet its pillars, gargoyle and steps echo the piece's original setting of Ancient Rome. The audience, as in the play's OPC, surround the thrust stage on three sides, its central trap door and gallery-style raised area behind echoing the stages in C.16th England - where the raised gallery is often representative of Heaven, and the trapdoor, Hell. McIntyre chose to set the play in 2017, an alternate universe where geographically the characters are in Rome, but "in terms of its class system, its attitude to empire and its attitude to the past, its set in Britain" (McIntyre. 2017). In terms of politics and the play's attitude toward guns it is set in the US, and so there is a real sense of dragging the piece into the modern day, a dystopian style glimpse at what could be.

The costumes (designed by Innes Hopkins) are in-keeping with this theme. The military garb is like today's, structured in heavy fabric with decorations of the soldier's accolades. In an interview for the RSC, McIntyre states "people seem to get *Titus Andronicus* wrong as a play because it's so bloodthirsty and because it's so action packed and so full of butchery" (2017), but with a more thorough focus on the play's political themes, she hopes to bring further socio-political understanding to a piece famous for its bloodiness. In this way, it will be interesting to note the ways in which Lavinia's descent to death as the central tragic female cater to McIntyre's politicalized interpretation of Shakespeare's play, or

whether her attempt at bringing *Titus* into a dystopian universe undermines the female perspective - perpetuating the aesthetic enactment of female death as beautiful and hypertropic. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which McIntyre brings *Titus Andronicus* into the modern day, and the ways in which this lessens or exacerbates the psychological, emotional resonance of Lavinia's death.



In McIntyre's *Titus*, Lavinia is played by Hannah Morrish, and her first line; "In peace and honour, live Lord Titus long," (Shakespeare. 2007, p.140 (l.l.157))⁶ introduces our fated female to down stage (DS) right. She stands alone - a pillar of female strength amidst the male-central political chaos of the opening sequence. She appears like Kate Middleton, in what a contemporary audience might assume is a 'modern princess' styling. Her coat is military-like, with shoulder epaulettes and two rows of buttons. She is not decorated like the men but is linked to their 'heroism' in this way. Unable to battle physically, her loyalty to the family is shown through paralleling their styling in this first scene. Lavinia's hair and hat echo the 1940s with victory-style rolls and a jaunty cap while the calf length A-line skirt and ¾ sleeve top are again a reflection of 1940s styling, perhaps a conscious choice by Innes Hopkins in echoing the empowering of the female workforce in 1930s Britain. While historical representations of Lavinia have supported archetypes of the 'ideal' Roman woman, passive, educated and motherly, McIntyre here leans toward a somewhat female-focal concept. However, she aligns Lavinia with her

⁶ It should be noted that any references to the play itself, will be taken from the Wordsworth *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (2007) [see bibliography] edition, unless stated otherwise.

male family member's achievements while still distancing her as 'Woman'. Perhaps this is a commentary on the consistency of the belittled status of females, or an oversight by McIntyre which also confirms this.

Shirley Garner and Madelon Sprengnether have described Lavinia as a "humanist-trained and educated woman - a rarity in her day" (1996, p.61) who is obviously well-read in classic literature; "sweet poetry and Tully Orator" (IV.I.14) - Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1732). She is "chaste and obedient" (1996, p.61), someone these theorists have described as "Shakespeare's picture of the 'Roman' matron." (1996, p.62) She still, despite McIntyre's slight sway toward a feminist incarnation of Lavinia's character through costume, is representative of the social and cultural dichotomy between men and women in this universe and our own. Lavinia's makeup is plain, her doe-like eyes sparkling, she is fair and rosy, pink cheeks and lips with blonde hair, drawing upon past representations of Lavinia as an ideal portrayal of stereotypical 'beauty' - respectful, loyal and patient, educated, pure, the ideal mother. While education held a potential for masculinising women in early modern society, Garner and Sprengnether suggest humanist practise "rendered that body iconic, thus re-feminizing it as an object to be praised, an object to be observed, an object to be read" (1996, p.63). Therefore, Lavinia is framed from the start by her actions as the educated woman - she could have the potential for corruption, or as Startwell's object of longing, her picturesque image and knowledge mark her as an object in a greater scheme. The beauty on which the tragedy is inscribed and exacerbated.

Wilbern supports this notion in stating, "in this world, Lavinia is a 'changing piece' (I.I.309), her humanist education but an ornament, her only 'real' value the possession of her chaste femininity." (1978, p.64) In fact, attitudes toward women within the play generally, suggest the value of femininity in this fragmented dramatic world is as "object[s] of exchange" (1978, p.63). Titus (David Troughton), in advance of the Andronici name and his own political/economic gain, vows allegiance to Saturninus

(Martin Hutson) as Emperor and promises the hand of his daughter. 'Rome's rich ornament', 'Rome's royal mistress' (I.I.52,241), Lavinia is a prize to be won, an object whose fate is decided for her by the patriarchy. She is calm, speaks when spoken to, addresses her peers with respect, and is fair and beautiful, all the ideals Poe determines as inciting that degree of excitement in his audience; the beauty of the image (Lavinia), compared with the horror present in the tragic story and her death. The abject semiotics of which will cement her idealised form in the mind of the audience. Her physical representation seems to be the conducting factor toward her suffering, the heart-wrenching, undeserving reason for her embroilment in the tragedy.

For our modern audience, this Lavinia is striking in her youthful appearance. Throughout this opening scene, Morrish embodies the young, beautiful potential of womanhood, most likely setting up an emotional reaction from audiences upon her tragic arc and is marked for this because of her femininity and her limitations under patriarchal control. Initially, it seems McIntyre remains close to conventional notions of Lavinia as a passive site for a traditional patriarchal narrative – setting up for her predestined, perhaps inevitably beautiful death. Lavinia's loyalty to the patriarchy positions her as central to the action of the play: a character who, despite her attempts to remain inside the confines of the safe political institution, becomes a cog thrust into the progression of the plot. She is, by virtue of her singular representation of the just female, a tool to project the corruption of political lust for power, and further, the marginalised role of woman within this. In establishing Lavinia's character under this basis, being so close to the aesthetics and characterisation Poe deemed most suitable for emotional reaction in his tragic females, McIntyre does little to challenge these conventional notions of the female role; either commenting on the continuation of such notions into contemporary society, or simply another director overlooking the historical subjugation of female characters. Lavinia's role in the play has been determined from the outset as an object, so in her descent to death it will be

interesting to note the ways in which McIntyre aligns with traditional notions of female demise as beautiful.

B) PHILOMENA'S FALL

Throughout the play, Shakespeare aligns Lavinia with the story of Philomena, who, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8AD), is the youngest daughter of the King of Athens. Her older sister marries Tereus, who rapes Philomena. She is able to enact her own revenge after transforming into a Nightingale bird, making this story of Philomena one often referenced in the Western canon. The song of the Nightingale, which is commonly deemed as a sorrowful lament, has come to represent this story of loss and revenge, and again, is utilised by Shakespeare as a character-defining symbol for Lavinia. While Shakespeare and indeed McIntyre have introduced us to Lavinia as an ideal representation of the Roman woman, in Act II Scene III of Shakespeare's tragedy, some academics have claimed Lavinia seals her fate as the site of trauma by goading Tamora. Therefore, aligning her closer to the malevolence of the vengeful whore archetype, and distancing her from the undeserving sufferer within the tragedy. That is, if we do not align the story of Philomena with our fated woman, as seems most suitable based on their similar arcs. While our Philomena cannot enact her own revenge at the end of the play, she occupies a similar position to Ovid's Philomena in that her destruction is enacted by the hands of a man, and we hope for retribution for this fact. In her traditionally feminine position, words and language are her only tool for assisting her family in their conflict at this point, which some critics have determined is the action that seals Lavinia in the targeted position, ignoring the fact her femininity in the patriarchal structure of society is what has already sealed her to this fate:

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. (II.III.66-9)

In our example, Shakespeare's use of the double entendre 'horning', signalling at Tamora's sexual freedom is effectively emphasised by Morrish's stress on the word. Thus far, Lavinia has epitomised the Roman woman, remained silent until addressed, and followed the instructions handed to her through the patriarchy. However, here we see the girl exercise her intelligence, express wit and an observant eye. She is passionate, enamoured by her new husband, and confident. She here represents the consummate level of the female role – loved and loving – and imagines herself safe in the institution of marriage. As we have learned from Poe's writings, it is the disruption of this peace, the memory of what was good, which allows for such an emotionally resonant tragic arc.

Indeed, Lavinia's baiting of Tamora in this scene has incited much critical discussion. Wilbern references Arthur Symons' introduction to the *Praetorius Facsimile edition of the Quarto of 1600* (1885) where he expresses his "amazement at the folly of the author, who, requiring in the nature of things to win our sympathy for his afflicted heroine, fills her mouth with the grossest and vilest insults against Tamora - so gross, so vile, so unwomanly, that her punishment becomes something of a retribution instead of being wholly a brutality." (Griggs. 1885, p.XII) This opinion on the outwardness of Lavinia's speech is a wild overestimation which "reveals more about Victorian sensibilities generally" (Wilbern. 1978, p.168) than the character of Lavinia. The reception of this outwardness as justification for her mutilation lies in traditional perceptions of femininity as patient and just, especially in the Victorian era. While it may be true this perspective stems from an era tightly gripped by patriarchal control, it is also an important perspective to acknowledge in the representation of this character toward her death. Perhaps this revealing of a sharper side to Lavinia's personality is to be expected "in a play where ambivalence defines every major character" (1978, p.168). Wilbern maintains, through referencing Dover Wilson, that there are two Lavinias; firstly, "the sister of Viola and Desdemona', modest and womanly," and second, "the insinuating hussy' who 'railed' at Tamora"

(1978, p.168) thus further pointing toward the typical divide between virgin and whore within the maternal figure, the potentiality for female corruption and transgression of their social duties.

McIntyre's incarnation of the play clearly aligns with some of the displacement at odds in representations of femininity as good or evil, which is especially apparent in Shakespeare's tragedies. However, her representation of the baiting of Tamora seems to lean closer to *revenge* on the patriarchal system as the play's main driving force rather than the language of Lavinia in this scene. It is the actions of Titus and her brothers that bind Lavinia to Tamora's vengeance, the decisions of her patriarch which cement her into the patriarchal structure of narrative inherent in Shakespeare's tragedies, not merely her baiting in this scene. Her position as the lone female representative for the Andronici cements her as the object to be protected, and the target for the most despicable form of torturing them all by the play's villain. Lavinia's attempt toward assisting the retribution – a transgression of her duties as woman - binds her in this position; as the target for Tamora's evilness and revenge against Titus.

In McIntyre's play, it is following this baiting that Chiron (Luke MacGregor) and Demetrius (Sean Hart) appear from up stage (US) left, shrouded in darkness, enacting an animalistic prowling around their targets, Bassianus (Dharmesh Patel) and Lavinia. Instructed by their mother to avenge her capture, Demetrius stabs Bassianus in the side, dedicated to her cause for revenge and somewhat encoding the female's ability to corrupt in Tamora's agency over her sons. With blood seeping through Bassianus's shirt, Lavinia grabs him from behind and cradles his head. With blood-stained hands, she shrieks toward Tamora as Chiron stabs him three more times and slits his throat. It has been apparent from the start blood and abject horror have not been shielded away from by McIntyre in this piece; she has embraced the technology afforded to contemporary theatre and represents this death and other male deaths as highly gruesome. McIntyre stated, for an interview with the RSC, that:

Staging the violence in *Titus* was a bit of a challenge, because if you set it in 2017 you have to be naturalistic with the blood, to a certain extent, you can't use ribbons or something else symbolic. But at the same time, if you were going to be medically accurate you would have the floors awash with blood and it simply would not be possible to stage it. So in this particular case, we've gone for a bit of a mix. (McIntyre. 2017)

What is clear, is the abject horror of gushing blood and violence may not be a specific part of her directorial intention, yet the nature of the contemporary audience, and the resonance of character emotion within the piece calls for such shocking imagery. Without, perhaps the intensity of the scene, the emotional turmoil, would not affect to the same degree. The presentation of McIntyre's gruesome violence does serve to heighten the emotional response from her audience. As stated in Part A of this case study, violence and death was a common and often public event in C.16th, whereas today our perception of death is more so fuelled with anxiety due to our general distance from it. As we progress in this case study, we will assess the contrast between these gruesome deaths throughout the play and Lavinia's eventual death at the end of the tragedy. We will keep in mind the abject imagery utilised in depicting Bassianus's death, Lavinia's mutilation, and eventually, her moment of death. It will be interesting to assess the process McIntyre takes in aestheticizing Lavinia's final moments, as this will seem to contradict her contemporary representations of horror and death throughout the play, and align more closely with the ethereal, beautiful deaths Poe and his contemporaries put forth as the most melancholic image.



Following the violent and most gruesome death of Bassianus, Tamora threatens the life of Lavinia, holding her head back by her blonde hair and a knife hovering above her throat. She is stained with the blood of her deceased husband, and dishevelled from her struggle with the men. She cradles his head in a motherly fashion, her eyes wide and panicked as she stares up to Tamora. It is only with the interjection of her sons that Tamora backs away to allow for further, more violent revenge:

Demitrius: 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 painted hope she braves your mightiness:

And shall she carry this unto her grave?

Chiron: And if she do, I would I were an Eunuch.

(II.III.122-8)

The disturbingly sexual contact which Dimitrius and Chiron enact during this phrasing serves to heighten the horror of the image they describe. They stroke Lavinia's legs and shoulders, grasp her breasts, tug her crisp white shirt and jacket, and thrust against her as she struggles against their weight. The blood from Bassianus's corpse stains her light-coloured clothing, further exacerbating the

horror and danger in this image. The men's lust is palpable, and the objectification of Lavinia's body here is obvious. She has been removed from the safe institution of family and marriage, and now alone with her enemies, becomes the frightened deer staring into the lion's jaw. It is interesting to note the power Tamora's sons hold in this moment, overpowering Lavinia's small frame, their bodies become the weapon in the battle between the Goths and the Andronici, and Lavinia's, the war ground. The fact Tamora's revenge is meditated, as Lesel Dawson and Fiona McHardy argue, "not through the demonising voice of a man who has done her harm, but through the voice of her victim, another woman" (Dawson. 2019, p.225) confirms Tamora's position as the foil of our tragic heroine. She, in contrast to Lavinia, is represented as a woman who has "de-sexed herself" (2019, p.225) as, when her sons prepare to rape and mutilate Lavinia, ignoring her desperate pleas, her progression toward revenge is presented as "the antithesis of the feminine" (2019, p.225). Tamora is therefore most closely aligned with the vengeful whore archetype, while it is in this moment Lavinia is highlighted as the ideal woman, inanimately sexualised, torn down and destroyed by the power of egotistical revenge.

Lavinia's pleas become more desperate, wherein she tries to appeal to the femininity in Tamora for safe return to her family. Lavinia screams; 'thou bear'st a woman's face' (I.III.136), scrambling onto her knees toward the unrelenting Tamora. Her jacket has been ripped open as the brothers still fondle her aggressively. She battles against them, flinging their hands away from her body to no avail, attempting to cater to Tamora her obviously intellectual plea. The fact her chastity remains intact is the reason her death cannot come too soon - she must be violated to be removed from the traditional, pure image of the Roman woman. Upon learning of the brothers' plan, Lavinia's desperation increases. Her sharp tongue is now used in intellectual begging for death over their violent lust:

'Tis present death I beg; and one thing more
That womanhood denies my tongue to tell:
O, keep me from their worse than killing lust,
And tumble me into some loathsome pit,
Where never man's eye may behold my body:
Do this, and be a charitable murderer.

(II.III.173-8)

Tamora insists on allowing her sons their 'fee' - 'Let them satisfy their lust on thee' (II.III.180). Lavinia's desperation for death over this fate incites the anxieties present within both the play's historical and modern audiences. Her position as the ideal Roman woman suggests any destruction to her body would cause outrage due to the loss of the potential of womanhood, not only in C.16th but for McIntyre's audience also. And the removal of her body from the safe institution of family and marriage, by another woman, is especially disturbing.

No grace, no womanhood – ah, beastly creature,
The blot and enemy to our general name,
Confusion fall –'

(II.III.182–4)

Frances Dolan, in her exploration into early modern domestic crime, has pointed out "there is no female figure on the early modern stage representing [...] understandable revenge; loss grief and revenge are not conjoined positively in any female tragic heroine" (2019, p.234) This is poignant within *Titus Andronicus*, as Lavinia, unlike her counterpart, Ovid's Philomena, never is allowed to enact the

revenge she deserves, at least, not by her own hands - she is destined to live out her days under male-agency, her acts “subject to male control and manipulation.” (Dawson. 2019, p.234) Lavinia’s inability to enact her revenge aligns her more closely with the character of Philomena, the ‘ideal’ woman. She is in some ways intelligent enough to enact her own revenge when out of the socio-political restraints of the patriarchy, but the mutilation of her body and depletion of speech leaves her at the fate of her familial patriarchs, at the fate of physical harm. This horrific moment, the act of revenge by Tamora and her sons, in the patriarchal structure of their family unit, warrants revenge action. Yet Lavinia’s position as woman leaves her as the passive sufferer, unable to enact her own revenge and therefore reliant on her male counterpart’s agency in patriarchal societal structure. From this point on, her agency, though minimal to begin with – her body as a bartering item between her father and political institutions – is stripped entirely. Because of her isolation as the only woman in the Andronicus family, the protection of her potential is of focus. The fact this protection fails, is what heightens emotionally the following moments of loss. The beauty apparent in our first introduction to Lavinia remains stained in our memories as we observe the horror of this scene, and we long for the return of this image of peace, especially with the knowledge of what will happen next.

An hour into the performance, the gaping wound central to the action of the play, begins from DS left; Demetrius carrying Lavinia’s weak, mutilated body on stage, grunting like a fevered animal. Laying her in front of the audience, his brother crosses behind them, also blood soaked, with his trousers around his ankles. His shirt is torn open, and he holds a bloody knife between his teeth. Giddy and childlike, the men talk at her mangled form and to each other, full of pride and taunting. Lavinia is similarly dishevelled from the struggle and seems barely conscious. Her hair is down in a tangle, the bottom half of her face and her torso a waterfall of blood. Her crisp white shirt and light-coloured clothing is splattered. Her hands are gone, replaced with bloody stumps which seeps up her sleeves. Her groin is blood soaked, her knickers and trousers around her knees and ankles. The realistic nature of this image

is one which incites a lot of anxiety in its viewers. The men are drunk on power and lust, demeaning her body, and boasting. She lays inches from the audience DS left, the blood so fresh and wet it drips onto the stage and shines in the dull light. For a modern audience, this strikingly gruesome image, though not uncommon in contemporary horror productions, demands spectatorship and emotional reaction. Though not quite dead, this image parallels closely the deathbed scenes prevalent in early modern art and finds me pondering the beauty of this moment. Unlike the tragic females in Shakespeare's later plays, this display of Lavinia's mutilation and near-death is specifically presented in front of the audience. Rather than having this image hidden physically and described by another character as happens for Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare chooses to parade this horrific image in front of the spectators, a voyeuristic glimpse into the horrific arc of our heroine.



Lavinia is dramatically changed from her initial introduction at the start of the play. Her put-together, familial aligned styling is unrecognisable, and her position becomes liminal, not only between life and death, but between the safe institution of her family and her new, 'worthless' form. Her chastity and feminine charm no longer exist, and all her attractive qualities – her intelligence, fairness, and beauty – are thrown into an ungrounded area of recollection. We remember her just attitude and physical beauty from the start of the play, and long for this image's return as we are forced to endure this disturbing moment. Arguably, it is the horror felt in this display of blood and rape from an audience which will highlight the emotional resonance of Lavinia's eventual death. The fact she teeters so

closely between life and death in this moment, even having suffered so much, incites the same anxieties of mortality present in every spectator. When her death does come, and we experience the catharsis for her return to her familial fold, the relief for the end of her suffering will be reminiscent of the beautiful deaths which Poe and his contemporaries have utilised in creating 'appreciable' literature. While indeed, Lavinia's mutilation and eventual death are highly symbolic in relation to the play wholly, I will analyse the relevance of theories such as Poe's in her final moment. This being directly compared to her mutilated form in this scene since her moment of death at the end of the tragedy is enveloped in Shakespeare's projection toward catharsis and resolution. Her position as the woman scorned, the Philomena who fell at the hands of the Goths, serves to heighten the emotional resonance of her death. It will be the aesthetics of this moment which either align or distance from the established ethereal, beautiful imagery which are apparent in many historical representations of female death.

Helms suggests "twentieth-century productions have exploited this Senecan clash of verbal and visual cues to create a theatre of cruelty" (1992, p.559) which is, as Artaud recommended, "the articulation of the body [which] eludes 'the customary language of words'" (1992, p.559). Morrish's Lavinia seems to transcend communication through words, her writhing body and blood a visual sign which cannot be deciphered by her uncle but is clear to their audience. Helms states "the scene, which then becomes Lavinia's, can also unite Artaudian somatics with Brechtian estrangement," creating something that Rainer Nagelle has called Brecht's Theatre of Cruelty. This being a combination of Artaud's sensory cruelty to his audience, disrupting the relationship between performer and spectator, and Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* or Alienation, which aimed at reminding the audience of their spectatorship encouraging a critical eye on the events unfolding. Together, a director may hope, with Lavinia's loss of language and sign, to exacerbate the alienation of the character from others, to

thrust before their audience the horrific trauma of the individual, whilst maintaining its theatrical and historical roots. McIntyre's choices in the depiction of this scene tend toward this stylistic form.

Morrish enacts a realistic portrayal of her character's pain, covered in blood and mangled, she is a shocking image. The dramatic irony of the scene, in that we know the perpetrators of the crime and their intention, serves to encourage Brecht's critical eye on the action. We are encouraged to bear witness to this horror, without the slightest notion of it as reality, yet an emotional reaction is almost impossible to avoid. Lavinia's delicate state, emphasised by the drawn-out speech of Marcus, is the image of loss which perpetuates our sense of Lavinia as a woman crestfallen. In our performance she watches Marcus as he speaks, her body turned away for modesty, her legs tightly stuck together either by blood or protective instinct.



McIntyre's use of modern semiotics such as fake blood (replacing the pigs' used in the play's OPC), and the salacious imagery of her lowered undergarments create an abject and gruesome display which heightens a contemporary audience's emotional reaction. While she seems to cater her direction toward a gruesome depiction of demise in Bassianus's death and Lavinia's mutilation, her depiction of Lavinia's death in a similar manner may hold more emotional weight due to her position as woman. Poe's ideology of "the death of a beautiful woman is [...] the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe. 1846, p.45) seems to withstand the test of time, even with a female director attempting to bridge the

gap between this historical story and today's society. This is because Lavinia (as many other tragic females in Shakespeare's plays) is cemented from the start as the object on which the conflict and trauma resides. Thus, resulting in a death which holds much more meaning than of their male counterparts, a tropic female death, and a penchant towards aesthetically pleasing semiotics by directors, in their knowledge of "the death of a beautiful woman" (Poe. 1846, p.45) as inciting emotional responses in their audiences.

Kim Solga states "at this point in the play Lavinia is typically a visual negative, a body riddled with holes, emptied of signifying power" (2006, p.70). She discusses Julie Taymor's directorial debut of *Titus* (1999), a film adaptation of Shakespeare's play, wherein their Lavinia (Laura Fraser) is more so "a hysterical symbol, simultaneously sign and referent, morbidly, uncannily sufficient in herself" (2006, p.70) Her movements, perched upon the stump of a tree, are slow, "but not without elegance, a 'ruined prima ballerina.'" (2006, p.70) She is "framed for our consumption" on the screen, her hair, tree branch hands and white dress whipping in the wind: "She seems at first charming despite her obvious trauma" (Solga. 2006, p.70), a direct contrast to McIntyre's grotesque image of a wounded and fragile woman, drenched in her own blood. Taymor's Lavinia is relatively well put together, her white garment clean, a slight staining of blood on her taped wrists where her hands used to be, her hair a dark mass of tangles, echoing the once full landscape of trees now reduced to stumps as she is. Solga describes how "when her mouth opens and blood spills out in a long, slow arc, the spell breaks and Lavinia becomes the image of a Fury" (2006, p.70), yet this image is short lived. While Solga sees Lavinia's fury, the audience sees mostly the horrified face of her uncle, Marcus. She is, in contrast to McIntyre's bloody depiction, "a literal sign of (and therefore excessive to) her sorrow," (2006, p.70) an image *representative* of but not necessarily accurate to the terror of this character's experiences.

In McIntyre's performance, after Marcus asks her to speak, to expose her attackers, Lavinia looks down upon herself, breathes in deeply through her nose, leans her head back and releases a stream of fresh blood from the corners of her mouth. The stain of a frown in bright red is glossy in the dim light; an apt, grotesque portrayal of Lavinia's suffering. The grotesqueness of her mutilated form seems to hint toward McIntyre's more-so accurate depiction of Lavinia's suffering compared to Taymor's. While the film indeed aligns with the aestheticization of this moment as beautiful in a similar way to Poe's philosophies – heightening the image with beauty to incite audience reaction – McIntyre's more female-focal concept comes into play here. She seems to attempt a more abject display of Lavinia's suffering, calling attention to her as the site of trauma, the silenced female in a sea of patriarchal control, the visual cue in no way lacking a call toward the 'reality' of suffering in this way.



Solga states in the scene where Marcus enters to find the dishevelled girl, Lavinia finds herself “unable to enact the metatheatrical return; without tongue or hands she lacks the means either to show or to tell” (2006, p.63) She returns to a constant state of liminality, directly contrasting her earlier wit in the woods with Tamora, as well as her poised approach to the public reuniting of her family at the start of the play.

She is a spectacular puzzle, a cipher of loss pointing incessantly, in her terrified desperation to find a way back to language, to the gap in her mouth and the stumps on her arms [...] A body riddled with holes, a body that becomes a hole. (Solga. 2006, p.63)

In her book, *The Shattering Of The Self* (2002), which has become vitally important in my discussion of this case study, Cynthia Marshall approaches the “central issues of dismemberment and gender” (p.109) within *Titus Andronicus* and agrees this scene, wherein Lavinia appears as the mutilated sex object, is representative of the prevailing notion which sees Lavinia as the central motivation of the Andronican revenge plot. Marshall’s Chapter 4 - *The Pornographic Economy of Titus Andronicus* - frames Lavinia’s brutal rape and mutilation as the driving force toward the tragedy’s fruition, her body as the object on which the tale is inscribed. She suggests upon Lavinia’s re-entrance, Marcus “offers his niece as a sexual image for spectators’ contemplation.” (2002, p.109) She becomes the image or object viewed in this voyeuristic arena. Supporting Solga and Helms in their objectification of Lavinia’s form, Marshall further suggests this representation of her dismemberment, within the universe of the piece, grants mutilation “its own fetishistic attraction” (2002, p.109). From Aaron’s description of her as ‘trimmed’ (V.I.93) we may compound two meanings; “‘to cut off the excrescences of’ and ‘to make comely, adorn, dress up’” (2002, p.109) Thus suggesting that the mutilation of the female form here holds a fetishized position in the minds of her attackers, arguably down to the power of their Id and instinctual, animalistic lust. Marshall further suggests “by ‘lop[ping]’ (II.III.17) her limbs, the attackers have rendered Lavinia useful, appropriate, and thus in their eyes perversely attractive.” (2002, p.109) In fact, Marshall maintains such images of martyrdom in the early modern period often aligned images of eroticism with martyrdom, and in so doing have projected the mutilation and fetishized exploration of the female form as ingrained within society. She ponders:

Given the availability in our own culture of pornographic images of battered women and of amputees whose stumps or prostheses are used as sexual fetishes, it is worth wondering why the fetishizing of Lavinia's maimed body has not been generally acknowledged. (2002, p.109)

Marshall suggests that branching terms from the arena of pornography and sadomasochism projects *Titus Andronicus* as "a kind of Shakespearean 'hardcore'" (2002, p.110), conjoining images of martyrdom with those of early modern pornography. With this, Shakespeare apparently accomplishes "explicitly sexualizing Lavinia's martyrdom through the rape narrative" (2002, p.110). It is in this manner we can align the representation of Lavinia's mutilated body, and its presence before the audience and the play's characters, with the concept of pornography, since it "specifically, even formally, thematizes looking; its regime is intensely and often self-consciously scopic." (2002, p.110)

Marshall states that perversely literal metaphors – 'handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none' (III.II.29-30), 'set a head on headless Rome' (I.I.189) – are the most striking literary devices through which Shakespeare highlights the collapse of language into violent action (2002, p.112) By aligning the concept of martyrdom and violence with a sexual fantasy, there are assumptions to be made about the recourse to violence within the play. In this way, *Titus Andronicus* again bears similarities with hardcore pornography in its blurring of the lines between the real and representation, the violent imagery which McIntyre confronts us with encouraging an adverse reaction from her audience. In a formal sense this comparison does not stand, "since hardcore designates filmed actions that (supposedly) cannot be faked, and a stage performance of *Titus Andronicus* is filled with necessary representational action performed by actors [...] who do not suffer actual bodily harm." (2002, p.112) However, Marshall maintains no matter the style of representation, there is a startling difference between the pictorial or literary representation of mutilation and a live enactment. Even in this way, as we are aware of the gushing blood and violence as simply aesthetic devices in McIntyre's performance, the level of discomfiture felt by witnessing such violent imagery,

and aligning this with lived reality, does blur this line between the real and representational in the minds of the image's audience. Marshall suggests, even in the play's OPC, the graphic horror of each mutilation would be striking in its tendency towards represented violence: "by depicting on stage in *Titus Andronicus* events ordinarily relegated to fiction of the private hells of a few unfortunate individuals, Shakespeare ups the theatrical ante." (2002, p.113) The play's "insistence that viewers witness Titus losing his hand, Chiron and Demetrius having their throats cut, the heads of Quintus and Martius being bartered, and the ongoing spectacle of the mutilated Lavinia," (2002, p.113) pushes its audience toward graphic confrontation and an inevitable emotional response. In this manner, "Shakespeare challenges viewers to think about issues of bodily autonomy and wholeness, about the bounds of personhood", and while in *Titus Andronicus*, "it is insufficient just to die; explicit and often prolonged, physical suffering is required", the fragmentation of the body, and specifically here Lavinia's rape and mutilation, becomes a metaphor "for social, political, or moral undoing." (2002, p.113) The result of this kind of representation is one which produces major discomfort within the spectators – this with regards to conventional notions of humanity and wholeness, as well as socio-cultural sympathies toward the position of women. Shakespeare utilises the discomfort caused by such passive observation of these events, in so doing confirming:

The model so strikingly played out in *Titus Andronicus* is the traditional one of woman as victim whose suffering is taken up and used by men to their particular purposes. (Marshall. 2002, p.135)

Shakespeare clearly utilises the self-reflective format of observation, in aligning this scene with "classic voyeuristic images" and "trick perspective pictures designed to be viewed through a lens [which] have been a popular form since at least the seventeenth century" (2002, p.110). What is attractive to audiences, is the image's ability to incite emotional reaction through the body of another. Marshall

maintains Shakespeare aimed at interrogating his audience with this spectatorship, causing a self-conscious reflection onto themselves, as "*Titus Andronicus* contains reiterated instructions for characters to "look on" the mutilated Lavinia" (2002, p.111) (III.I.111; see also III.I.60-66. IV.I.10-15, 30-65) with these instructions deliberately transferred to the play's audience also. It is the characters' effort to "understand her signs" (III.I.144), to read her body while the audience reads over the dramatic irony of the scene, which "thematizes looking as an epistemological act" (2002, p.111). Lavinia's position within this, as the site for this contemplation, dramatic irony, physical and emotional turmoil, again projects her into the position of an object, of woman scorned, paraded amongst this patriarchal battle of revenge. She remains the object of longing, even in this perverted, voyeuristic, and fetishized sense which Marshall here puts forth. The aesthetics of Lavinia's mutilated form, even in this abject and grotesque moment, confirms once more the symbolism she holds as female. Through the gaze of spectators, her potential has been lost – her 'bright', confident, elegance has been destroyed – and yet even here, audiences are encouraged to idolise and assign beauty to her. They are aware of her theatrical journey, and through such a horrifying image, are motivated to remember the potential and goodness we identified within her at the start. Even dishevelled as she is from her mutilation, we remember the beauty we assigned her to begin with, long for its return, and in sympathy, assign beauty to the image we are left with. This being the concept of beauty in its multi-faceted structure. Though not entirely beautiful, the moment compels contemplation around Lavinia's journey to this point and ensures beauty lives on in the *concept* of Lavinia's tragedy, her undeserved suffering, her unattainable need for revenge, her potential lost. Though her body lives on, her character has been diminished. She *is* traditionally beautiful physically in that she has blonde hair, fair skin, bright eyes, a toned figure. She *is* beautiful because of her gentleness around and care for her family, her educated wit, her passion, and compassion. She *remains* beautiful even post-mutilation as we remember and long for the return of this idealised character. Yet this impossible feat becomes the reason by which audiences may assign beauty to the resulting, dishevelled Lavinia.

C) A BEAUTIFUL DEATH?



Having determined Lavinia's mutilation, while gruesome and abject, does hold a similar emotional weight Poe's dead or dying women possess – in that it articulates the longing for the return to the traditional ideals of femininity laid out in Lavinia's character at the start of the play – we are at liberty to compare McIntyre's representation of Lavinia's mutilation with her final moment of death. Currently, Lavinia occupies a position of liminality in the minds of the piece's viewer. We remember the youth, chastity, and beauty of the girl even when confronted with such violent imagery as discussed above. Her mutilation, in its gruesome aesthetics, points to an Artaudian theme of realistic cruelty and voyeuristic observation of her silenced form for its audience. Therefore, as we approach her final moments, it will be interesting to note the ways McIntyre aestheticizes these. In a play where modern semiotics allow for such abject horror, parading the deaths of characters like Bassianus, the mutilation of Lavinia, and the removal of Titus's hand in front of its audience, we are in some ways expecting the final scene of the tragedy to have the same horrific imagery. From here, we will assess the prevalence of the gruesome aesthetics McIntyre utilises throughout the play in the final scenes, allowing us to see the contrast between the abject displays of death throughout the play, and Lavinia's beautiful final moments. By aligning this female death with the ethereal and beautiful connotations we have discussed in representations of female death throughout the centuries, McIntyre will seem to perpetuate ideologies such as Poe's into contemporary performance. The female death, in its tropic nature, will hold the same psychological weight our theory has laid out by virtue of this contemporary director's sway toward traditional ideas of female death as beautiful in this rendition of Shakespeare's tragedy.

During a dream-like sequence which depicts Tamora pregnant, dancing, lit only by a deep red light washing the stage, Lavinia re-enters. This time, she is clean. The blood has been washed away but the emotional scars are still present on her face. More casually dressed than our first introduction to her character, she wears a black and white checked shirt and black draping cardigan, ¾ length black trousers and black pumps. She is wearing no makeup, her hair is brushed and smoothed into a low, loose bun. Her stumps are wrapped in medical gauze, with no evidence of bleeding, and her sleeves are pulled low only to reveal the rounded ends of her arms. First impressions of her appearance suggest this is mournful attire, genderless and childlike. McIntyre's representation of Lavinia at this point could point toward the de-sexing of her character. Following her rape and mutilation, Lavinia has had her ability to communicate, and her femininity shattered, leaving her emotionally and mentally confused and alienated from her own body. She occupies the space as a physical sign of loss, unable to reveal the perpetrators and details of her suffering. It is upon her re-entrance that the audience is invited to reflect on the calm, collected and beautiful woman we were first introduced to. In the universe of the play, she is no longer the ideal Roman woman who can represent the Andronici with grace. She is hidden physically and mentally isolated. The family are no longer publicly speaking as they were in the first scene and are instead depicted in their homes, privately planning their public response. Lavinia's inability to assist places her once more at the fate of her patriarchal family structure. While initially, she was the prized possession, the single just and perfect woman and daughter, she has become the sign for the family's suffering, and the reminder of the failure to protect which haunts the surviving men. She is the passive sufferer, and the memory of her at the start of the play becomes the object of longing which allows the audience to still assign beauty to her present form.



An interesting adaptation from the original Shakespearean production which McIntyre adopts is within the scene that Lavinia's perpetrators can finally be revealed. In the run up to this pivotal moment, Titus and Marcus once more discuss their sorrow at Lavinia's state, and their frustration at her inability to speak. In the above image, we can see the moment in which Titus has placed a knife between her teeth, suggesting she stab herself in the heart to relieve her family and herself from their suffering. Solga has stated that they cast "Lavinia's continued suffering directly in terms of her inability to act it out (to purge it by performing)" (Solga. 2006, p.66). She has become a physical sign, an object, which the other characters must read and decipher:

Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs,
When thy poor heart beats with outrageous beating,
Thou canst not strike it thus to make it still
(III.II.12-14)

Following this instruction, Titus attaches another, much more sinister:

Wound it with sighing, girl, kill it with groans,
Or get some little knife between thy teeth

And just against thy heart make thou a hole

(III.II.15-17)

McIntyre's Lavinia tries desperately, twisting and straining with the knife, trying to end her suffering, her stumps flailing as she realises the plan's futility. Her disappointment is clear, her longing for death obvious. The pain and mental anguish Lavinia feels here is frustrating to watch. Her cousin, uncle and father guessing randomly at the signs she makes, while she tries desperately to maintain her delicate, feminine movements. Even when frustrated, her body language remains reserved, pained, and closed. Young Lucius (Will Parsons) carries Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in his hands until Lavinia flings it onto the ground and begs for his assistance in turning the pages. Upon finding the story of Philomena, she points frantically at the pages. Asking again for the names of her attackers, which of course she cannot speak, she grunts in frustration, her head and stumps to the floor in anger. She is tormented by the suffering her presence puts on other characters. Her physical body, as at the start of the play, determines her worth and the attention she receives from others. Her inability to communicate lessens her agency to such an extent that she is entirely removed from the public sphere, hidden by her family as they plot their revenge, and returns to a child-like dependency on her carers. While again, we remember her as both the ideal Roman woman, and the witty, intelligent girl, here we are forced to accept the diminishing of this character's agency toward any kind of retribution. She is, once more, at the hands of the patriarchal system, a physical sign representative of their sorrow. This sign is unlimited in its multi-faceted structure; however, this also points retrospectively to the beauty we had assigned her at the start of the play. It is this memory, which allows us to assign beauty even to the mutilated, damaged woman we see here.

It is at this point Marcus pours salt onto the table the group gathers around. He takes the knife Titus offered to her and writes his name in the dust with his wrists. In the play's original conditions,

Shakespeare encouraged the use of a staff to write in the sand or dirt, held between her lips and stumps, echoing a violent, forceful, sexual act. Solga has suggested in more contemporary performances, the duality of the represented staff depicts more so Lavinia's thwarting of her incommunicable state:

Rather than embrace the tools of Marcus's conventional mimesis, Lavinia displaces signifier (staff/pen) from signified (penis/rape) and crafts the telling of a more complex story, woven through her body into a dissonant, cacophonous, violent, and raging music. (2006, p.71)

For McIntyre's Lavinia, this complex story of frustration, anger and grief culminates in a threatening life versus death moment. She takes the knife between her stumps, looking down as the blade points up towards her throat, and furiously carves "stuprum, Chiron, Demetrius" into the salt. When complete, she throws the knife down and darts backwards, gasping with perhaps both relief and fear. The fact this moment follows so closely from her own threat to her life with the same knife minutes earlier, and the ease with which it could have ended here, her fear of death and lust for revenge is palpable. We know she longs for death, her father and the rest of her family watch her with pain constantly, but she also knows they are her only chance for revenge. Martyred, she has become the vengeful victim. Solga has offered some interesting discourse surrounding the communicative aspect of this central scene. She suggests this scene, far from just a matter of reading and writing, is "a performance of writing, an active, painful, full-body gesture that rehearses Lavinia's violation, not by way of any well-worn convention, but by crudely miming the awkward, struggling contortions and oral invasiveness of forced sexual encounter." (2006, p.64) McIntyre's Lavinia follows this arc, yet is more so coaxed by the relief of death. Her veering away from the traditional staff-in-mouth image could be said to pull away from the sexualised image Shakespeare hoped to create. However, it is interesting to note the threat of death by stabbing, the threat of this self-inflicted penetration, connotes a similar

violently sexual act. The fact this will ultimately be the way she dies at the hands of her father, serves as foreshadowing by McIntyre. Perhaps, unable to enact death upon herself as seen here, she must depend on her own father to commit the deed. On reflection of this scene, Solga has offered further understanding of Lavinia's communication as deflective onto a form other than her body:

Lavinia marshals the comparative clarity of the written word and replaces the "map of woe" she had become with the image of the signifier (two names plus a deed), neatly and unequivocally summing up her suffering by folding language into image at a staff's length from her body. (2006, p.64)

Solga has discussed the hysterical nature of this journey, stating that following Lavinia's rape and mutilation, "the connection between model and copy necessary for patriarchal mimesis collapses, leaving a copy that refuses modelling" (2006, p.65) Her inability to communicate means the "hysterical performer does not act: she does not make motions that correspond to a priori meanings, let alone seamlessly ape well-worn conventions." In contrast, "she thwarts both word and gesture, signs missingness, traps her interpreters within her disorientation, her terror, her fragmentation." (Solga. 2006, p.65) Lavinia, in this sense is a sign of lack, and in Act 3, which Solga terms "Lavinia's hysterical stage" (2006, p.65), Shakespeare depicts this scene as one in which Lavinia's trauma can only be within her, only represented physically to her family, but never spoken; "she has been frozen in the moment when it is meant to become public, homosocial - the moment of show-and-tell, of the metatheatrical return - but cannot because she cannot act, cannot complete the performative transfer of patriarchal space." (2006, p.65) Lavinia's inability to enact the patriarchal transference of her suffering means, at this moment, she is isolated within herself. The traditional notion of masculinity as protective over femininity in patriarchy is at a loss in this moment, her father and uncle unable to transfer her suffering unto another. Her physical form a constant reminder of her suffering, she is unable to release herself

from this torturous chamber. Solga goes on to state, “although her mutilated appearance causes Lucius to insist ‘this object kills me’ (3.1.65), in her not-quite-fallen-state Lavinia cannot be co-opted” (2006, p.65). The appearance of such an ‘object’ (Lavinia in her dishevelled state), and the characters inability to transfer their emotional response onto another, warrants Lucius’s call for death. Lavinia is “less an emblem of castration (“such a sight will blind a father’s eye” [2.5.53]) than she is a ghost of the mythical castrated woman, suspended in the lost moment of her never-acknowledged violation, before it becomes a mirror of male subject-formation.” (Solga. 2006, p.65) Solga goes on to suggest this inability to transfer suffering from Lavinia’s mangled form, “a spectre of violence that refuses transference” is in fact “the ultimate castration terror” (2006, p.65). The unmediated violation of her body causes her to collapse into herself, the “damaged body” cannot “traverse the distance between her experience and that of her family” (2006, p.66), therefore heightening the terror and loneliness of this character. Lavinia is isolated from the strong family bonds we were initially introduced to and is destined to suffer alone in her own mind. The turmoil of this isolation is represented through flailing gestures and obscure grunts from which her family guess at wildly. It is only within Lavinia’s central scene in revealing her attackers this isolation is somewhat, though not entirely, broken down.

Lavinia’s use of language at this stage echoes her literacy and intelligence at the start of the play. Though limited, we were introduced to Lavinia as an educated woman, and the destruction of her ability to communicate vocally and with writing debilitated her. The struggling woman, at this point, finally replaces the sign of her body for the sign of the written word. Lavinia’s step backwards from the table, away from the names and deed she has finally released, perpetuates this notion. Garner has stated it is the act of writing which “differentiates Titus and his family from Tamora’s kind.” (1996, p.61) Not surprisingly directly opposing Titus as the revered grandsire, the head of the Goths, Tamora, is “perceived as ‘bestly’ in her actions by the other characters and critics alike” (1996, p.61) In fact, she is analogous to the pit in which she traps the Andronici, “a great ‘swallowing womb’ (2.3.239), a

devouring mother” (Garner. 1996, p.61). Titus and the Andronici, however, are educated and honourable toward Rome, their only female representative of a direct contrast to the vengeful actions of the Goth’s leader. Garner goes on to state, “between Titus and Tamora and what they signify, Lavinia writes - and is written on.” (1996, p.61) Lavinia becomes a silent sign of the Andronici’s suffering, as well as the tragedy her own arc follows.

Solga states the “staff-in-mouth rehearsal of Lavinia’s rape works to resuscitate Titus’s wounded mimesis”, as he is the victim of Chiron and Demetrius’s plans to rob the Andronici of “all representational power” (2006, p.67) by deflowering Lavinia, and in so doing have also displaced his mental stability. It is only when, finally, Lavinia reveals her attackers, that “relief floods the stage” (2006, p.67) and the transference of her suffering onto her father is complete. He goes on to plan the “elaborate dinner theatre which will give revenge tragedy’s fifth-act death-by-drama its due” and Lavinia becomes the “demonstration-object to the performance” (2006, p.67). Solga suggests it is by virtue of the revelation of her attackers which incites the switch back to the familiar pleasures of known narrative. Lavinia, soon to become the “Virginia to Titus’s Virginius in one last attempt to suture her damaged body” (2006, p.67) over the tragedy’s final act, has become more than the symbol of suffering, a representation of the turmoil and anguish for all the Andronici. The family’s patriarch, Titus, is left with this image of their suffering, his mangled daughter, and must guide the family to an acceptable resolution. Shakespeare, by virtue of this return to traditional narrative, perpetuates the suffering of Lavinia as effectual over the whole family. Only when her problem is transferred onto the rest of them can the revenge play resume its tit-for-tat game of patriarchal power, owing to her incommunicative state and marginalised position as a woman.



The penultimate scene of the tragedy begins as Lucius, Marcus, Saturninus and Tamora are seated at a table centre stage. A Mariachi Band announces the arrival of Titus, closely followed by Lavinia. He wears a chef coat and comically large hat, bouncing along to the rhythm of the music. She follows behind him, also stepping to the rhythm though not as lively as Titus. She pushes a trolley modified with metal cuffs to hold her stumps, on which is a giant pie and serving equipment. The modified trolley serves to depict Lavinia's uselessness, as she has no hands or tongue, her ability to host effectively is removed. She is sure with her movements but visibly pained. She wears a simplistic maid outfit; a black A-line skirt with a black long sleeved top, a crisp white collar and pinny. Mournful, but feminine, her outfit aligns her with the role of a helper or maid, guided by the agency of the men who surround her. Her hair is pulled back into a slick bun, her face pale and makeup-less. It is here we can begin to see the collected, calm beauty of the character returning from the opening scene. She parallels the same silent female Titus gave to Saturninus, her only usefulness present in her physical body. The same is apparent here, though her agency has been stripped entirely since through her mutilation. She appears mournful as she parades the pie around the table, not looking at the guests while Titus makes his greetings. Her body must remain here as the object on which the tragedy is inscribed and publicly represented, and the parallels between this scene and that of the start of the play, perpetuates the sense of longing for the return of her beauty. This being not only her image as a traditionally beautiful woman, but the image of her as whole, collected, intelligent, happy. The formalities continue as she moves to stand US right, her hands behind her back, politely acting the dutiful maid, awaiting further instructions.

As the guests dig into the meal before them; “‘Twill fill your stomachs; please you eat of it” (V.III.29), Titus is seen to give a nod in Lavinia’s direction. She approaches the table and stands dutifully opposite her father, watching him intently and rarely looking towards the guests. She appears to be in her own private moment, the publicity of this event unimportant in her own mind. Titus asks Saturninus:

My lord the emperor, resolve me this:

Was it well done of rash Virginius

To slay his daughter with his own right hand,

Because she was enforced, stain’d, and deflower’d?

(V.III.35-8)

Saturninus responds that it was; “Because the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence still renew his sorrows.” (V.III.41-2) At this moment, we see Titus gazing across the table toward his daughter. The characters play as if they knew this would be the response – the catalyst which begins their final, death-filled plan.



Lavinia looks into her father's eyes, smiles a toothless smile, her eyes sparkling with tears. She begins her confident stride toward him as the tears start to fall. They embrace, full of love and lingering. Releasing slowly with her DS arm, she smirks and nods at him, looking deeply into his eyes. They share a moment of consent as Titus looks into her eyes and nods before commanding, "Die", his knife balancing above the entry point. Exclaiming, "die" once more, he plunges the knife into her lower abdomen. Pain crosses her face for a moment as she drapes herself over her father. Solga has suggested Lavinia's death, and the "traumatic rehearsal" of the penultimate scene, "safely returns Lavinia to her father's mimetic fold, and dissolves her hysterical stage" (2006, p.64) Finally, her suffering is ended at the hands of her father. At this moment, Titus cries "and with thy shame thy father's sorrow dies" (V.III.46-7). It seems, though McIntyre leans toward this murder as a consensual act, Titus's words represent the fact Lavinia is the purpose of his shame. Her body is the sign and reminder of suffering in his family, the reason for his embroilment in the socio-political trauma of the tragedy. It was his intention to see Lavinia's safe passage from his family into the emperors', but for him, the thwarting of this plan by the body of another woman, his enemy, placed Lavinia at the site for the initial conflict. Her determination to marry Bassianus led to the death of his son at his own hands, her body and intellect became the catalyst for Tamora and her son's vengeance, her mutilation and rape caused his madness and the depletion of the Andronici name, and it is only with her death - the reabsorption of her into her familial fold - that any semblance of patriarchal normality can resume.

As Lavinia collapses in death, she falls backwards into her brother's arms. Her eyes are wide and panicked, the whites of her eyes bright in the dull light. Small specks of blood seep through her white apron until she is stained with around a palm's worth of red. She is calm, still, and lays her head back almost in relief, her face no longer contorted in anguish, but serene. Her eyes close as her breaths grow slower and deeper, a kind of sleep falling over her. On the floor, she is laid elegantly, one arm is draped above her head while the other is by her side. Her legs are neatly together, her feet tucked

into one another and at a point. The scene rages on, as Tamora is told of her son's beheading, then is shot. Saturninus shoots Titus in reaction and Lucius kills Saturninus in instant revenge.



In relation to the OPC of the play, Helms has commented that “the frenetic action of the climactic scene hurries the spectators forward with Titus to other murders, leaving the boy Lavinia to portray a corpse, that most strenuous and disagreeable of the player's tasks.” (1992, p.557) Immobilised, the young boy player endures the silence by which Elizabethan and Athenian theatre “dowers a daughter for sacrifice” (1992, p.557) Lavinia’s final role, of the silent but consenting victim, directs her toward the satisfying arc of more traditional narrative. Her silence, according to Helms, “is the key-note of Lavinia's role, marking its sacrificial trajectory from the opening scene,” (1992, p.557) in which her silence is broken only for the purpose of maintaining social and hierarchical appearances. Helms goes on to state that Lavinia’s silence is “filial, for her irregular marriage has not permitted her safe passage from her father's house” (1992, p.558). Still beholding the Andronici name, she belongs to Titus, and “her destruction repays the injuries he has inflicted: "fierce Andronicus would not relent. / Therefore away with her, and use her as you will" (2.3.165- 66)” (1992, p.558) Her trajectory away from traditional marriage places her in a position of limbo, wherein her murdered husband is absolved of his patriarchal duty of care, and this is therefore re-transferred onto Titus as her father:

Twice exchanged, to Saturninus and to Bassianus, Lavinia is forced by these inauspicious rites of passage in the two opposed directions that patriarchal marriage is intended to evade. She passes beyond the verge of exogamy when she is raped by her father's enemies; she is then led back into the incestuous marriage that a daughter's sacrifice symbolizes. The execution that removes the soil of rape is an ex post facto penalty exacted where sacrifice has not prevented exogamy. (Helms. 1992, p.558)

The incestuous marriage between Titus and his daughter can be identified through the phallic connotations surrounding his plunging of the knife into her body. The voluntary or involuntary participation of Lavinia here has been widely discussed, yet within the context of McIntyre's representation of Lavinia and her arc, we can see plainly the desperation of this character toward death. A vast number of moments support this, not least her final living moment, in which she looks into her father's eyes and opens herself for the execution. Since Lavinia "is still Titus's, she is, by precedent, lawfully vulnerable to his sword" and "her inexorable progress from raptus to rape to execution confines Lavinia within a dramatic fiction that enacts a patriarchal narrative on her body." (Helms. 1992, p.558) She is, by virtue of her disregard for the traditional notions of marriage, subject to her father's decisions post incapacitation, much as Philomena was. However, due to the play's switch back toward traditional narrative, the ending of Lavinia's struggle brings relief. The rape of her body by her father brings "her performance of the ravished heroine to its inevitable conclusion" and completes "the transfer of suffering from her body, moved beyond its misery, to his, left to the exigencies of conventional mourning." (Solga. 2006, p.66) The audience, through the massacre ensuing after her execution, are swept along with the action of the scene, but the remaining image of Lavinia's corpse on the edge of the horror, serves as the image of suffering and the rationale behind the tragedy. Though her actions as an independent woman were the cause, the image of her as the

just, good woman of the piece, dead in its final moment, perpetuates a sense of solace as something like justice has been served.

In terms of assessing the beauty of this scene, we must return to the tropes we have previously set out as those attributed to beautiful female deaths. As we discussed in Part One of this case study, the physical attributes given to Lavinia as a character have been consistent. She is the fair, blonde, chaste woman on which the tragedy of the play is written on. She consistently occupies the space as an object, her worth directly stemming from her visual appeal, or her usefulness as a mother and woman. Poe's philosophies highlight "the death of a beautiful woman [as] the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe. 1846), and these beautiful women are most described in an ethereal manner. Their eyes are the sign of life, passion, and happiness. Their yellow hair and fair skin are the signs of conventional attractiveness. Their intelligence and moral compass are rarely addressed posthumously, but it is with the narrator's articulation of his love - as is the case in Poe's literature - that we can imagine these women as being motherly and warm-hearted. Lavinia in this case study can be closely aligned with this notion, since here at her moment of death, we are encouraged to reflect on the tragic arc of the young girl. Her suffering throughout the tragedy has been out of her control, her status and duties handed down to her from her patriarch. She occupies the space but with little to no agency, and therefore we see the potentiality for womanhood, as mother, just and loving, glimpsed by the audience, and snatched away. She becomes in some ways the beautiful dead woman at the end of the tragedy - pale, elegant, and minimally stained as she lays on the edge of the massacre - a symbol of peace, of potential lost, of what goes wrong in cases of transgression. She is, in similar ways to Wright's image also referenced in Part One, posthumously elevated. As we remember her physical beauty at the start of the tragedy and witness its destruction before us - both in her gruesome mutilation and the minimal image of peace here - we are encouraged to allow her beginning image to be the one we take away with us at the end. We remember the beauty of her image, the beauty of her potential, and

remember this even after having her tragedy and death depicted in front of us. We are so repelled by the idea of this as 'reality' that even McIntyre's sway toward gruesome semiotics does not remove us from the arena of this as staged action, the death and mutilation before us at the site of another, in the realms of fiction. Still, we are emotionally affected by Lavinia's descent to death, arguably through McIntyre's engagement with the anxieties of mortality through aesthetics, which confront each spectator today, since we are further from death than ever before through history. She utilises the semiotics afforded to contemporary performance in allowing a more thorough engagement with the images Shakespeare describes, thrusting these before her modern audience to heighten the tension surrounding each tragic moment. The fact remains, however, McIntyre's lack of engagement with semiotics such as blood and 'realistic' portrayals of death – since Lavinia seems to drift into death peacefully and without physical pain – does align her with historical notions of female death as beautiful. Theoretically, Lavinia represents the return to patriarchal control and mimesis, while physically, she represents the dead woman – the site for pleasure, for new life, for patriarchal feuding, for happiness and pain. The many facets to the reception of Lavinia as a character and a woman are what allow directors to assign beautiful imagery, and allow audiences to still assign her this beauty, even in death, and following her tragic tale.

Conclusion

My research to this point has suggested an innate link between the psychology of human existence and the representation of death in aesthetic formats. Specifically, the female form in its tropic nature, and the way writers like Shakespeare utilise the image of death, in direct contrast with the beauty inherent in representations of femininity. Lavinia is a prime example of this, as her form as female is what thrusts her into the centre of the tragedy, and her mutilated silence is the reason for the men to enact revenge. Her tropic position disrupts and realigns the patriarchal form of conventional narrative in *Titus Andronicus* and her body becomes the site of contemplation surrounding concepts like life, death, femininity, and pleasure. Freud and Marcuse have suggested that the aesthetic representation of such images; including death and mutilation, are a psychological symptom of our conscious fear of death, and the safe passage of these fears in front of but not on an audience in aesthetics, acts as this fear's antithesis. Poe's contemplation on the representation of female death as "the most poetical topic in the world" (1846, p.165) seems to have transcended its roots in C.19th literature, with this concept being prevalent in representations from as early as Ancient Greek theatre. The female body has been utilised for centuries as a platform for socio-psychological contemplation, as well as the most beautiful, aesthetically pleasing format for this; a format which incites a melancholic experience, heightening the emotional weight of descriptions of death, while maintaining the idealised image which demanded emotional spectatorship in the first place.

Marshall states, an extreme audience reaction to *Titus* and similarly grotesque stagings, tells us a lot about "spectacle, identification, about what viewers can and cannot bear to witness." (2002, p.106) She comments on the sociology of such representations, suggesting again "that the Elizabethans had, like us, a penchant for gory entertainments." (2002, p.107) The reflection of this penchant into contemporary performance is tangible, since, as McIntyre has stated, contemporary performance of

mutilation in any realistic sense cannot abstractly symbolise the blood and gore of the scene. In order to engage her audience with the emotional weight of this moment, McIntyre must utilise the theatrics afforded to contemporary performance such as blood and abject horror. This being a must when theatre competes on an entertainment level with the likes of horror films and other high-budget theatrical formats. What is interesting to note on this topic, is Blanche McIntyre's hinting toward the male-female dichotomy within this universe, while at the same time perpetuating historically patriarchal narrative structure. Even as she is aware of this element of female subjugation, aestheticization and objectification within Shakespeare's universe, it is the advancement of the story inscribed on Lavinia's mutilated form that calls back to historical perceptions of femininity: Woman as the site for patriarchal feuding, the potential of womanhood destroyed as the pinnacle of vengeful malevolence.

Marshall has queried; "Why would an audience, any audience, enjoy *Titus's* reiteration of violence against the human body?" (2002, p.107) Having explored the psychological roots of the death induced doubt which violence against the human form puts forth, Howard Barker's contemplation on the beauty of such representations comes into play. He has suggested, in answer to Marshall's question, it is this death doubt, the fear of violence against the self, the "appalling chasm" of death, over which "tragedy throws a frail bridge of imagination." (Barker. 2005, p.1) He maintains it is the representation of the image, at the site of another, that enables spectators' contemplation on the concept of death in an emotionally elevating and aesthetically comforting manner. The real spectrum of character depicted in *Titus* is reflective of several archetypal notions from early modern theatre, and so in the eyes of its audience, is reflective of many often-unacknowledged elements of the human psyche - including lust and power thirst - which ordinarily are kept in check by our ego or sense of self within societal structure. Audiences can segregate the experiences of those on stage as fiction, as highly tropic, yet identify elements of the characters existence with their own, hence the discomfiture caused

by representations of mutilation and death, even despite this occurring at the site of another. Marshall summarises in the context of *Titus*:

The many anxious jokes about mutilation, both within the playtext and in the criticism it inspires, testify to the horror these images provoke. Here, the truth one reads in performance involves a challenge to fundamental ideas of bodily presence and totality. Fascination with mutilated forms is leveraged by the terrifying threat to one's own bodily form and the subjectivity mapped onto it. (2002, p.108)

Marshall has also commented on how Liberal feminist criticism might recognise Lavinia's state as the silenced victim, "and speak for the silenced woman", but because "Lavinia has already been so thoroughly spoken for, her position exposes a structural limit on feminist solidarity; a point at which the sympathetic effort to share another's pain slides into appropriation." (2002, p.109) It is in this way we may question the ability of McIntyre to portray a sympathetically feminist depiction of Lavinia's struggle. To stay true to Shakespeare's tragic script, directors adhere to the narrative structure and characterisation. As we have seen, directors such as McIntyre may adjust the setting, costume, and technology to adhere to contemporary audiences' penchant for visual stimulation, but it is the adherence to traditional notions of character, especially around the female, which consistently places her as the site for tragedy. She is, from the start, framed for the audience's consumption as a feminine object, the ideal by which any further representation of femininity is contrasted. An audience remembers this idealised form, and upon Lavinia's tragic arc, are encouraged to elevate this initial image as the retribution we hope for, the ethereal image of wholeness and beauty which we hope to retrieve. Therefore, her death becomes semiotically encoded and highly tropic by virtue of our comparison between the introduction we received, and the broken, frail image we are left with. We posthumously elevate the initial image of femininity in Lavinia, highlighting the emotional turmoil her

final form projects, and ensuring this final image's tropicity in its highly symbolic, retrospective manner. Solga summarises the feminist viewpoint in relation to Lavinia's development:

A feminist staging of *Titus Andronicus* needs not to be earnest with Lavinia, but responsive and ingenious with its reproduction of the theatrical trap into which her rape plunges her. If the rape turns Lavinia into a freak show, where is the *Titus Andronicus* that offers audiences a critical, disturbing, provocative glimpse through the peephole? (2006, p.68)

While it can be said McIntyre's rendition does much to exploit "rape as a function of its metatheatricality, as a historical and historicized act constituted by its own double edge, its notorious refusal to appear coupled with its crude, even shameless specularity" (Solga. 2006, p.68) in the context of the Artaudian, grotesque representation of Lavinia's mutilation, it is the journey mapped upon her female form into death which perpetuates the action of the play; her body is the site on which the tragedy of the piece is inscribed. While McIntyre attempts to modernise the aesthetics of the piece, the structure of Lavinia's descent to death remains paralleled with the play's OPC. Because Lavinia "occasions the political argument with which the play begins, she inspires the rapists, she motivates the revenge plot, and she incites the horror of viewers," (Marshall. 2002, p.108), Shakespeare's tragedy remains fixed on the female form as the site for corruption, loss, and betrayal. What is clear from this case study is that the representation of female death in Shakespeare is as an image, symbolic and highly tropic - as is similar across all branches of art and culture. What I would like to point toward is the perpetuation of these images into contemporary society. Even as we venture toward equality, there are elements of this patriarchal structure of narrative wherein the tragedy is inscribed onto the body of woman. This could be down to the psychology of human existence, and our exploration of the human psyche in arts. However, there is cause to continue pointing toward the dichotomy between masculine and feminine death in Shakespearean tragedy, as this continued into today perpetuates

stereotypes and limits the reception of femininity as anything other than the site for tragedy, and the return to patriarchal narrative structures. Lavinia's death in this representation specifically, perpetuates these notions of the tropicity of the female form, by her physicality so often throughout the piece acting as the plot's agency. Arguably indicative of past conceptions of femininity versus masculinity by the play being written in the Elizabethan period, it is the consistency of these themes into contemporary performances of Shakespeare which points toward the grand or beautiful representation of female death continuing into contemporary art culture, theatre, and performance.

Future work

Since the topic of this research has been focused on the singular representation of Lavinia in McIntyre's *Titus Andronicus* (2017), a further exploration into the notion of female death as semantically encoded as beautiful in alternative Shakespearean tragedy would be prudent. While the historical representation of the female has been relatively consistent in her position as an object of longing, the contemporary director's approach to tragic females as such seems to subserve the feminist ideology of modern society. Further exploration into the representation of Shakespeare's other tragic females would be able to determine closer the translation of the coded female corpse into contemporary performance in comparison to Shakespeare's OPC. What may also be interesting to explore is the translation of these concepts into performances other than Shakespearean tragedy. If we are to expect the semiotically coded female corpse to appear in literature and fine art representation throughout history, perhaps the contemporary performances representing the semiotic constellation of femininity and death are also indebted to the aesthetics which Poe, Shakespeare and the like have normalised. Continuously perpetuating the tropic form of woman in death, contemporary directors seem to utilise the semiotics afforded to the female form and reinforce a patriarchal structure of narrative, counterintuitive to the equality modern society encourages.

Appendix A – Production Details:

Titus Andronicus was filmed live by the Royal Shakespeare Company in July 2017 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-Upon-Avon for DVD and online distribution (see bibliography).

Director: Blanche McIntyre (other works include: *The Winters Tale* (2018 @ the Globe) *The Comedy of Errors* (2015 @ the Globe) and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (2016 @ RST) plus many more contemporary works)

Scenic and costume design: Robert Innes Hopkins

Lighting design: Malcolm Rippeth

Music: Tim Sutton

Sound design: Emma Laxton

Movement: Georgina Lamb

Fight choreographer: Philip d'Orléans

Cast:

Stefan Adegbola	Aaron
Joseph Adelokun	Mutius
Kristin Atherton	Nurse
Will Bliss	Clown
David Burnett	Quintus
Patrick Drury	Marcus
Nia Gwynne	Tamora
Sean Hart	Demetrius
Martin Hutson	Saturninus
Tom Lorcan	Martius
Luke MacGregor	Chiron
Tom McCall	Lucius
Hannah Morrish	Lavinia
Dharmesh Patel	Bassianus
John Tarcy	Alarbus
David Troughton	Titus

The play ran from July to September 2017 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre as part of their Rome season. Many of the cast members participated in the other shows of the series which included *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolinus* (both directed by Angus Jackson) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (directed by Iqbal Khan).

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