

GONE GOTH: FEMINISM AND THE FEMALE REVENGER
IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AND *GONE GIRL*

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in English

By
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December 2017

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

For Ron, Lorrie, Richard, and Hannah Dybas, who have given me the best life possible and continue to be outstanding role models, friends, supporters, caregivers—the four people on this earth that I love most (besides my cat, obviously).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not exist without Dr. Tony Perrello, to whom I owe my Shakespearean proclivities. It has been almost five years since I took a course on Shakespeare with Dr. Perrello, and almost five years since my love of Shakespeare began. In that time Dr. Perrello has mentored me, shared his expansive early modern knowledge and insight with me, and supported me in my thesis project and general M.A. career. He has also become a trusted friend. I cannot thank him enough, nor express my gratitude and my immense amount of respect and admiration for him.

Dr. Susan Marshall has always supported me in my endeavors, even when I come to her with outrageous ideas. She has become more than a mentor, she is my friend and confidante. Without her encouragement I may never have begun graduate school. An enormous amount of gratitude and appreciation is due to you, Dr. Marshall. For trusting me to be your assistant in a Shakespeare course, for always leaving your office door open for me, for believing in me and supporting me.

I did not have the fortune to meet and work with Dr. Molly Crumpton Winter until this very year, but in that year Dr. Crumpton Winter has also stepped into the role of mentor to me. Without her overwhelming support as Department Chair, as Thesis Committee member, as mentor, as professor, as inspiration for my own career, I may not have kept my sanity in this program. Thank you for pushing me towards all of the opportunities I have been fortunate enough to receive in my career at Stanislaus, and thank you for supporting me always.

Every professor I have come into contact with at Stanislaus has contributed to my undergraduate and graduate career. Professor Paula Barrington-Schmidt, Dr. Matthew Moberly, Dr. Scott Davis, Professor Robin Baldrige, Dr. Jesse Wolfe—you have all supported me here at Stanislaus anywhere from six years to one semester, and I truly could not be more grateful. Stanislaus is my home and the English department has been nothing short of amazing thanks to your support.

My M.A. cohort, too, deserves thanks. Alexandria Montiel and Jacqueline Hollcraft get special thanks as dear friends and for their constant support. Jessica Armendarez (and Elena), Jonathan Byron, Heaven Lindsey-Burtch, Amber Youngman, Andrew Inman, Rhonda Lee Randle, Gemma Keane, Maria Torres, you have all been so supportive to me. Thank you for allowing me to complain, to talk through ideas with you, for providing me encouragement and friendship. The anxieties of this program are not manageable without you.

Jamiee Cook and Amy Kuehl are not technically part of my M.A. cohort, but have also been enormously supportive in my graduate school endeavors and as dear, dear friends. Thank you for letting me unload my anxieties onto you both and for always talking me down. Your support is so important to me.

Finally, my family, who deals with the brunt of my stress. In the last few years my family—Ron, Lorrie, Richard, and Hannah Dybas, have been the most instrumental in my success. I really could not have managed both my academic career and my personal life without the love and support of my family. Thank you for allowing me to force the *Titus* and *Gone Girl* films on you so that I could talk *at* you

about my thesis. Thank you to Richard and Hannah for coming with me to a less-than-stellar park production of *Titus Andronicus*. Thank you to Richard for helping me to flesh out my ideas and for reading this project—twice. Knowing that I have five people who care about this project and me as a person has been beyond helpful, that you have all allowed me to de-stress and talk through my project with you has been nothing short of wonderful.

Lastly, I must thank my cat, Tiger, who is the living version of a security blanket. Tiger has patiently sat upon my papers, in the crook of my arm (making it impossible to type), and rubbed her tiny, furry face on the corners of my laptop in an effort to gain my attention the entire time I have worked on this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract.....	ix
CHAPTER	
I. “She is Righteous”; Introducing the Female Revenger	1
II. “A Wilderness of Tigers”; The Queen of Goths in Early Modern England	15
III. “I’m It, Baby”; Amy as a Product of Mainstream Feminism	26
IV. “Be Won at Last”; Tamora’s Legacy in Amy.....	38
V. “ We Are All Working from the Same Dog-Eared Script”; <i>Gone Girl</i> Perception and Problems.....	67
References.....	78

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this project is to examine the female revenger in William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*. The female revenger often signifies cultural attitudes about a given society, as she exhibits behaviors that indicate male anxieties over what women are capable of. The female revenger is thus an apt vehicle in understanding the shifting status of women through history. *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* are central to this examination. The early modern era is credited with the popularization of the revenger character, and *Titus Andronicus* presents one of the first developed and central female revengers in an Elizabethan drama. *Gone Girl* is one of the more recent representations of the female revenger. Both texts rely on similar character tropes as Tamora and Amy utilize motherhood, aggressive sexuality, subjectivity, and several other facets of stereotypical femininity. The differences between the two texts indicate the shift in female subjectivity that allows for success. This examination necessitates a gloss of feminist movements that led to an increase in female agency and subjectivity. Without cultural shifts in attitudes towards women, Gillian Flynn could not have expanded on the female revenger trope popularized by William Shakespeare.

CHAPTER I

“SHE IS RIGHTEOUS”; INTRODUCING THE FEMALE REVENGER

“Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe: and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. And these notable faultes have men in all ages espied in that kinde...” -John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*

Medea feigns forgiveness for Jason’s adultery when she gives Glauce a poison-laced dress to wear and then murders her children by Jason. Cersei Lannister of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* poisons Tyene Sand and forces her mother, Ellaria, to watch her die and decompose as revenge for killing Cersei’s own daughter. Judith uses her sexual appeal to overpower the Assyrian army leader, Holofernes, and decapitates him for his crimes against the Israelites in the Hebrew *Book of Judith*. Jessica Lange’s character in FX anthology series *American Horror Story: Coven* decapitates a minotaur and sends the head to the minotaur’s lover—the leader of a rival group of magic-practicing women. Female revenge illuminates the dominating cultural attitudes towards women in the historical period in which we find female revengers. Tamora of William Shakespeare’s 1593 *Titus Andronicus* illustrates exactly how vengeful women are perceived by early modern audiences, and how women who subvert cultural norms are punished for their bad behavior. Tamora’s inability to subvert femininity as a tool of revenge stems from these cultural attitudes; she is only able to subvert patriarchal order as long as she is ultimately destroyed as a means of reaffirming that patriarchal order. The extent of the destruction she causes is

allowed only because she becomes a signifier of the containment of femininity at the behest of patriarchal control. Patriarchal control is even empowered by Tamora and other similar characters, as she gives male rulers a problem over which they may exert that control. Tamora and female revengers like her help to establish the boundaries of feminine agency and containment in culturally and historically situated texts. A Jacobean influx of misogynist pamphlets and higher rates of accused witchcraft in women follow *Titus Andronicus*. Tamora represents, then, the uncontrollable femininity that began to threaten patriarchal forces under Queen Elizabeth I and that led to King James I's actively seeking patriarchal affirmation.

After periods of rising female subjectivity, agency, and concurrent feminist movements, a character like Tamora would have been more likely to succeed in a twenty-first century arena than she was in Elizabethan England. Gillian Flynn's 2012 novel *Gone Girl* features an updated Tamora who does just that: main character Amy undermines the patriarchal control represented by her husband to the extent that the novel ends with the suggestion that a matriarchy is the only solution to male dominance. Amy uses feminist advancements and female subjectivity to dominate her husband, whom Amy feels has made her into a woman she did not choose to be. Nick's adultery and his refusal to accept Amy's complicated personality makes Amy feel as though she is not in control of her own narrative—her ability to exert personhood is interrupted by patriarchal forces.

Tamora fails at destroying Titus because of the limitations of the early modern era. Amy is strengthened by her superior ability to control the language surrounding

the perception of her life. Amy champions Tamora by not only destroying Nick, but refashioning him into the man she wants him to be. Tamora and Amy reflect the status of women in the early modern era and the twenty-first century, occupying spaces typically reserved for male characters and signifying the limitations or expansive agency afforded women in their respective time periods. An examination of the feminist movements that led to the change in female status between Tamora and Amy and narrative elements reveal that *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* are literary case studies in how female revenger characters have been molded by cultural attitudes of women.

Amy's success looks not like equality, which twenty-first century social movements tend to espouse, but a complete reversal of patriarchal order—a forced matriarchy that serves the needs of Amy totally. In 1971, Joanna Russ wrote “What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write” in an effort to call for literary representations like Amy. Russ believes that “...it is impossible to write a conventional success story with a heroine, for success in male terms is failure for a woman, a ‘fact’ movies, books, and television plays have been earnestly proving to us for decades” (83). The interiority and complexity of *Gone Girl* is a necessary development in the production of literature written by and about women. As symbols of male anxiety, female revengers typically represent current attitudes towards women, making Tamora and Amy not only studies in early modern revenger conventions and how they have evolved, but studies in how feminist movements have evolved and gained control over media representation of women and subjective

narrative in recent decades. Tamora and Amy are both situated in the female revenger character trope that was developed in the early modern era and are looming signposts for attitudes of women in their respective time periods. That they follow such similar narrative trajectories makes them a prime case study in character trope and feminist study.

One of the more problematic issues to contend with in the development of Tamora's character is that she is nearly erased or supplanted by Aaron in the last act of the play. Lucius attributes the events of the play to Aaron and spares few words for Tamora; Aaron is "Chief architect and plotter of these woes" (5.3.121).¹ Mutius removes agency and purpose from Tamora by assigning her revenge plot solely to Aaron. With the proliferation of anti-heroes or loveable villains in recent film franchises and in television,² there is a notable cultural reverence for villainous characters. For this upward tick in beloved male villain characters, female villains face more uphill battles in being unapologetically *bad* and still retaining the loved status that their male counterparts enjoy unencumbered. For that reason it is interesting to examine the roots of female revenge as evidenced in Tamora and to trace the development of feminist movements and narrative histories to understand where Amy has improved on Tamora's germinal female vengeance. That is, if

¹ It is true that Aaron devises most of the revenge plots—Bassianus' death, Lavinia's rape, Titus' sons taking the blame for Bassianus' death, *et cetera*. Aaron is only allowed agency because of Tamora's rise in power through Saturninus, and Aaron targets the Andronici for her sake.

² Loki of the Marvel Universe, Frank and Claire Underwood of *House of Cards*, any Jessica Lange character in any *American Horror Story* season, nearly every main character of *Suicide Squad*, Hannibal Lecter both in the original films [*The Silence of the Lambs*, *Red Dragon*, *Hannibal*] and the more recent television reboot *Hannibal*, The Joker in the Batman film franchise, and so on.

Tamora was given free reign and allowed to be unapologetically villainous and unapologetically *female*, what would her success look like? How could she use her femininity to her advantage in the twenty-first century when her femininity is unacceptable and unsuccessful in *Titus*?

Tamora as female revenger has gained traction in recent scholarship on *Titus Andronicus*, though she seems to have been excluded from discussion of the Shakespearean greats like Iago, Macbeth, or Richard III. Tamora's legacy in the play is not as enduring as the legacy of Aaron or Titus; the harshest punishment is reserved for Aaron while Tamora is specifically left to rot into nonexistence; "But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey:/Her life was beast-like, and devoid of pity;/And, being so, shall have like want of pity (5.3.197-99). If Aaron is given the treatment reserved for the antagonist, Tamora is left in the lurch.

Amy, too, promised to be a champion of female revenge as the rave reviews poured in for Gillian Flynn's novel. David Fincher's 2014 film continued to receive positive reviews from critics, but *Gone Girl* caught the ire of major feminist groups and critics who took issue with Amy's using false rape accusations to further her machinations and her entrapment of husband Nick Dunne.³ Feminist critics of the novel and film appropriately question how Amy could be a feminist character if she spends so much energy on a man instead of leaving the relationship. In the novel, Nick notes this disparity in Amy's personal feminist ideology: "It's not stand by your man anymore, it's divorce the fucker" (393). Amy is problematic to be sure, but, like

³ See p. 31 for continued discussion of this issue.

Tamora, seems to have been excluded as feminist by those outside the niche study of the anti-hero in media and literature. A literary case study of female revengers and their quest for agency from the early modern era to the twenty-first century will necessarily include the problems still inherent in the female revenger trope.

Ultimately, strides have been made in how allowable female revenge is in popular culture, although the character has not changed much. Instead, it is the shift toward female subjectivity that has changed the sociological climate surrounding *Gone Girl*.

Classically, a revenger is something of an anti-hero character who has a specific injustice on which to focus their vengeance. One of the more famous revengers in the early modern era is Hieronimo of Thomas Kyd's 1587 *The Spanish Tragedy*.⁴ Hieronimo as revenger is different from the typical villain, like Macbeth of the eponymous play, because Hieronimo focuses on a specific injustice; his son's suspicious death at the hands of a state official. A revenger, too, typically elicits more sympathy than a standard villain, as there is some justification for his actions. Titus himself can be classified as a revenger. He brutally murders his son Mutius and Chiron, Demetrius, his daughter Lavinia, and Tamora, but as the play focuses on his justified search for revenge, his actions are forgivable to a certain extent. He has been forced to retaliate with violence as Tamora shows no signs of relenting. The revenger typically goes mad in his quest for revenge and ultimately destroys himself in his attempt to right social wrongs, as is the case with Hieronimo and Titus. Male revengers are unique, too, because they behave badly but are technically the heroes of

⁴ Bel-Imperia acts as a prototypical female revenger to a lesser extent (but is more successful, argues Liberty Star Stanavage).

their own stories. Stevie Simkin in *Early Modern Tragedy and the Cinema of Violence* notes that there are conflicting attitudes about how an early modern audience would receive male revengers. Simkin says that the reception of male revengers is complicated because “they are on the one hand evil, and on the other positioned as the protagonists of their respective dramas. The frequent use of asides and soliloquies... identifies them as the audience’s most likely point of entry into the world of the play” (67). Revengers are bad, but they are sympathetic; they are the heroes of their own stories, if not morally heroic characters. The subversion of powerful figures and institutions (but ultimate reification) is part of the *catharsis* of revenge tragedies. Audiences participate in institutional subversion and find a sense of pleasure in that participation.

Tamora occupies a unique position as female revenger because she is not only villainous, she also experiences an injustice that she is unable to rectify through proper channels. Typically a revenger of any gender subverts law or state institutions as those institutions fail to serve their purpose. Simkin says that “the revenger becomes a powerful projection of society’s frustration at times when it sees... spiralling crime and a weak or incompetent effort on the part of the government to enforce law and order” (65). In Hieronimo’s case, he is unable to seek state-sanctioned justice because the state itself is directly involved in the murder of his son. Titus is unable to seek redress not only because he does not know who is behind the plot to destroy his family, but because that person, Tamora, is also married to the king and highly influential in state decision-making. Tamora is unable to seek proper

justice for the ritual slaughter of her son because the killing presumably falls under traditional ritual-slaughter: state-sanctioned and, at the time, appropriate.

The female revenger is a distinct category of the revenger because of the typical tropes involved in constructing a feminized version of revenge. Liberty Star Stanavage in her dissertation *Domesticating Vengeance: The Female Revenger in Early Modern English Drama, 1566 – 1700* argues that female revengers are *more* capable of carrying out revenge than their male counterparts. Stanavage discusses the typical outcome of male revengers, noting the proclivity for male revengers to become insane or to feign madness and eventually destroy themselves in the process of seeking vengeance. Titus himself at least appears to lose his sanity; revenger Hamlet is famously wracked with guilt and indecision. Stanavage points out that

revenge overtakes [the revenger's] reason by inflaming the passions. He is driven mad by his inability to reconcile his desire for vengeance and social identity he has always performed. Only by establishing a new identity, fully focused on revenge, and rejecting his social connections can the revenger perform effectively. The Senecan rhetoric of the danger of uncontrolled passion is demonstrated by the indiscriminate behavior of the revenger, whose revenge becomes inherently excessive. (71)

Stanavage finds a link between the excess of passion elicited by revenge and the early modern belief in the leaky body of the female, who is never driven to excess but *is* excessive by nature of her femininity. The concept of the leaky body refers to menstrual blood, as “menstrual blood in early modern society was one of a series of

signifiers that apparently ‘proved’ that women were naturally predisposed to ‘leak’. ...women did not have control over the workings of their own bodies” (Simkin 103). Unable to contain their bodily humours, women were similarly unable to control their emotions. That women are irrational and full of excess emotion that had to find an outlet in their overall behavior is a direct consequence of the permeable boundaries of the female body. In many revenge narratives, however, the leaky body and depiction of femaleness as inherently close to insanity as its base operating mode can be considered an advantage. Capable of handling the excess of passion that a revenge plot entails, “the female revenger possesses a fundamentally different relationship with revenge than the male revenger, one based in her unfixed Galenic body and its increased vulnerability to the passions” (Stanavage 63). The female revenger thus has an advantage in carrying out revenge as she is capable of focusing her energy and identity on vengeance without despairing, without going mad, and perhaps without the stipulation that she *must* be destroyed.

Revenge, rather than destroying the female revenger, gives her an appropriate channel through which to focus her already excessive passions. Tamora is capable of acting under threat and mayhem and is easily able to calm Saturninus after Titus threatens the state. Even in the midst of complicated revenge plots—both on hers and Titus’ parts—Tamora speaks to Saturninus soothingly: “Why should you fear? Is not your city strong?/...King, be thy thoughts imperious like thy name” (4.4.77, 80). Tamora is thus capable of working within intense passion and hatred—excess—because of her leaky early modern body and her status as woman. The stereotype of

women as changeable or fickle, quick to excessive emotion, and overly emotional is the very facet of femininity that makes them more capable of revenge plots in the classic sense. Stanavage says that Tamora's "willingness to model different positions and actions, her ability to shift from mother... to lover to wronged revenger, without being trapped in any of these roles, allows her to pursue revenge in continually shifting forms" (100). Stereotypes of the female body and its changeability reinforce Tamora's vengeful capabilities, although they are also the impetus for her destruction.

Tamora has every reason to crave revenge against Titus after the ritual slaughter of her son, but she is a product of 1593. Whatever justification she has as revenger is overshadowed by her status as Goth and woman, and therefore Other. Her ability to assert subjectivity is undermined by Titus' inherent ability to self-fashion in relation to Tamora. Marked as barbarous Goth from the outset, Tamora has no chance of dominance. No oversexualized, brutal, sex-traitor of a woman could thrive in an early modern play. Tamora succeeds in murdering or raping and mutilating by proxy Bassianus and Lavinia and assigning blame to two of Titus' sons, but ultimately she is destroyed. Chiron and Demetrius are slaughtered and Tamora unknowingly cannibalizes them before she herself is murdered. There is justification for Tamora's vengeance, and she succeeds to a certain extent, but as an early modern female revenger she is not able to dominate the narrative of the play.

Four-hundred years later a twenty-first century audience enjoys a similar character who *does* champion over the object of her revenge. *Gone Girl's* Amy is a woman with the inherent capability to carry out meticulous revenge plots according to

Stanavage. Amy obsessively makes checklists, double and triple checks them, creates a detailed calendar for her revenge plot, spends over a year working out her revenge, and ultimately retains if not entirely fortifies her identity. Stanavage believes that women's literary vengeance "[is] a different model of revenge, one specifically gendered, in which revenge could be imagined to empower a woman where it overwhelmed a man" (3-4). A few centuries after Tamora's creation, she is vindicated by representations of female vengeance in characters like Amy. Amy and Tamora share a core as vengeful, powerful female characters, but the allowance of time, shifting gender stereotypes, and extensive feminist theory have given rise to new female characters and female revengers who do not face inherent destruction merely for their use of gender for morally ambiguous or downright evil deeds.

Tamora was created in a period that experienced a growing understanding of personhood which Stephen Greenblatt calls "self-fashioning:" a sense that individuals have an active role in the perception of their character and do actively manipulate the narrative that their life presents. As it was a fledgling concept in the early modern era, self-fashioning or subjectivity was a practice of those with agency; elite, upper-class, and male. Tamora is unable to self-fashion or exert subjectivity because she is both woman and Goth, hopelessly othered by the dominant male forces in the play. That the play is named for and centers on Titus as loathed and respected revenger signifies his ability to self-fashion at the expense of Tamora's subjectivity. The two compete for narrative control as Tamora covertly destroys Titus' family and Titus pushes back in reaction. In categorizing the typical elements of self-fashioning in Renaissance

literature, Greenblatt proposes that “self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed” (9). Self-fashioning is intrinsically linked to otherness and therefore limited to dominant groups within binaries. If self-fashioning and the subsequent subjectivity of its agent is established, it must come at the expense of women, people of color, or similarly disadvantaged groups. Tamora and Aaron are subsequently the perfect Others against whom Titus can reestablish his narrative as dominant Roman war-hero after losing ground to Tamora and Aaron’s machinations.

As soon as women are afforded subjectivity of experience in literature or social culture, Postmodern theories of literary and cultural analysis eschew the subjective. Feminist theory and theories that rest on lived experiences—queer theory, race theory—are discarded by postmodern rejection of the subjective. Thus women are now afforded subjectivity, but subjectivity has also been rejected as a definitive or appropriate praxis to employ in establishing academically appropriate sociological theories. That is, the postmodern rejection of subjective experience is another mechanism employed to discount gender, queer, and race theories. Edit Zsadányi refers to the postmodern proclivity for eschewing subjectivity, which is inherently at odds with feminist criticism. As subjectivity relies heavily on the ability to speak as a means of asserting that subjectivity, Zsadányi says that “to speak as a woman or speak for women is inseparable from the issues and politics of identity... just as the subject position comes to be occupied by women, postmodern theoretical

systems reach the stage of questioning the concept of the subject itself” (19). In a theory of subjectivity or self-fashioning, women’s agency came about only as a result of their ability to assert their subjectivity over dominant masculine narratives. The shift in subjective experiences between *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* is the impetus for Amy’s success; she is written by a woman, and as a character she successfully rewrites or re-fashions her identity. Unfortunately Amy is afforded subjectivity in the midst of a rejection of subjectivity as a valid and authoritative voice in theoretical communities.

Stanavage notes that although female revengers use revenge as a tool of empowerment for a self already inclined to excess of passion, female revengers of the early modern era actually exist as symbols of male anxiety about women. The representation of female revengers tends to revolve around their existing as an embodiment of male anxiety. Tamora confirms early modern patriarchy’s worst fears about women: she uses her sexuality for material gain, she subverts motherhood as a tool of control over men, and she acts morally evil. In *The Deed's Creature: Masque, Execution, and the Female Villain on the Renaissance Stage*, Amy Perkins and Maurice Charney find that “the relentless Renaissance preoccupation with the nature of ‘woman’ is a result of a desire to control by representation the puzzling, alluring, and therefore frightening Other” (11). By creating a character who represents early modern fears over what women are capable of (and as Stanavage argues, they are capable of plenty), Tamora reaffirms patriarchal need for order over the destructive, excessive female Other. In Greenblatt’s terms, the self-fashioning patriarchal figures

in Rome's state institution rely on the failure of the othered Tamora to craft the narrative of a patriarchy in control. Amy's use of false rape accusations, her apparent lack of moral conscience, her ability to deceive, and her own subversion of motherhood and femininity represent the issues that patriarchal forces still attempt to control. Amy, like Tamora, is still representative of male anxieties, but does not serve as patriarchal affirmation as a result of this status.

The female revenger represents the extent to which women can upset patriarchal order. In the early modern era, the female revenger is presented in order to reaffirm male control, so a character like Tamora is not able to succeed and is inevitably destroyed as a means of containing the female Other. Amy still represents male anxieties. She, however, uses her capability for vengeance to empower herself and overwhelm her male counterpart. Stanavage addresses this, noting that "the figure of the female revenger is fundamentally not about women at all, but instead expresses anxiety about the stability of masculine identity in the early modern world" (2). The female revenger uses male anxieties as tools of counter-oppression, making Amy's representation as female revenger and fearful femininity more nuanced, but ultimately successful. Amy does what Tamora is unable to do and appropriates tools of patriarchal control as tools of patriarchal destruction. Masculinity is no longer a stable construct.

CHAPTER II

“A WILDERNESS OF TIGERS”; THE QUEEN OF GOTHS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

It is difficult but not impossible to make assumptions about early modern perceptions of gender in literature, as the cultural milieu has changed drastically in even the last few decades. It is made more difficult by the lack of first-hand accounts of Elizabethan theater productions. Examining female cultural figures and the attitudes towards them is one of the most accurate ways of examining characters like Tamora, as the virgin/whore dichotomy present in early modern cultural attitudes makes most female public figures either a foil or a complementary figure. The reaction to Queen Elizabeth I as a public figurehead indicates cultural attitudes towards women, as does the reaction towards French Queen Mother Catherine de Medici. Similarly, social issues such as infanticide or witchcraft and hysteria were tools of control used to demonize women's actions that contradict heavily ingrained gender roles. Tamora is thus illuminated from an early modern lens as she is a literary foil to Queen Elizabeth I and complement of real and literary Catherine de Medici. She also participates in a failed infanticide, a rising problem in the early modern era as a result of lack of birth control and inability to afford children. Likewise, Tamora's behavior is inherently “hysterical,” a catchall medical term used to describe deviant female behavior. Hysteria is intrinsically linked to witchcraft as well, as the term was born out of a scientific revolution that sought to create scientific explanations for

witchcraft. Witchcraft and hysteria accusations were sometimes applied to real disorders that had inexplicable symptoms. More often, the medical terms were applied to women who merely exhibited deviant behaviors. Public figures and common women's social issues of the early modern era illuminate Tamora as female revenger and as representative of male anxiety—male anxiety which could only be present if Tamora exhibits hysterical and therefore undesirable feminine traits.

Tamora cannot be separated from her status as mother. Tamora's impassioned plea for first-born son Alarbus' life is the catalyst for every subsequent event in the play. She positions herself as mother to Saturninus, too, as "If Saturnine advance the Queen of Goths/She will a handmaid be to his desires,/A loving nurse, a mother to his youth" (1.1.130-32). Parenthood is an important concept in *Titus Andronicus* beyond Tamora; Titus is introduced as having lost sons, eventually kills his own son, and feels deeply the dishonor that accompanies the rape of Lavinia. Aaron, too, is only redeemed through his love for the child Tamora would just as soon see destroyed. Queen Elizabeth I remained unmarried and therefore childless throughout her life, citing a loyalty to her country. Her subjects may have had a wavering belief in her capacity to rule in the first place; had she married and had children, her loyalties would have been split in several different directions. Margarita Stocker says that "should female rulers marry, their subordinate role as wives contradicted their authoritative role as queens. Inevitably, their husbands would rule them, and hence their nations" (73). Elizabeth's ability to rule was predicated on her remaining

unmarried, occupying a liminal space in which a woman could be her own person without father or husband or male heir to take precedent.

Queen Elizabeth I is often seen as sexless, a necessary reputation to have in order to maintain effective rule as a Queen standing alone. In her famous Tilbury Speech, Elizabeth I remarks, “I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king...” (qtd. in Neale 309). Elizabeth had to distance herself from her sex as femininity is often synonymous with uncontrollable passion, indecision, and deceitfulness. Gail Kern Paster says that the early modern era ascribed strange significance to the womb, suggesting that

the womb seems to function as a kind of quasi-independent force in the female body, like an agent within. Such a characterization, while it elevates the womb to a potentially threatening importance, offers the counteradvantage of representing the womb as a political entity, a potentially disorderly force needing pacification and colonization but capable of negotiating terms of external control and regulation. (175)

Clearly, Elizabeth had to eschew all links between herself and an uncontrollable womb with its own agency.

Concepts of the body politic also become difficult when a female ruler is in place. Traditional belief held that “man was the head of womankind, woman merely the body, [so] female sovereignty placed the body over the head. Consequently the national body itself became female: weak, passive and impotent” (Stocker 73). Elizabeth as woman was already a threat to the national body. Marrying, becoming

pregnant, and giving birth thus had even more dangerous implications for the country. Pregnancy and childbirth are precarious situations in which women become changeable, their bodies expanding and becoming host to children; Paster says that there is “a conventional construction of the female body as dangerously open” (181) and subject to changeability. Furthermore, “even normal, survivable pregnancy was conceptualized as a disease state. ‘The greatest disease that women can have,’ wrote Guillemeau, ‘is that of the nine Moneths...’” (qtd. in Paster 182). Such a drastic change in Elizabeth’s body in pregnancy would be evidence of disease, an inconstant mind, and a country in upheaval. Pregnancy would almost certainly destroy her carefully constructed authority. It would come as no surprise to an English audience that Tamora could not effectively rule because she is married and has children, not to mention that as Queen to Saturninus’ King, she should not be allowed to make authorial decisions in the first place. It could be argued that Tamora is able to dissemble in speech and countenance because pregnancies have opened her up to changeability.

Queen Elizabeth I would be a real-life foil to Tamora, a way for a woman to rule effectively and transparently. Queen Elizabeth I tried to distance herself from her sex and the implications of her femininity in order to rule without being undermined by her gender, or a husband and children. Tamora would also remind English audiences of how dangerous a female ruler could be, and would call to mind Catherine de Medici. Christopher Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris* was first performed around 1593, shortly after or around the time that *Titus Andronicus* was

first performed between 1588-1593. Catherine de Medici is not central to *Massacre*, but Jo Carney writes in her dissertation *I'll Find a Day to Massacre Them All': Tamora in Titus Andronicus and Catherine De Médici* of the similarities between the two characters. Catherine was an especially potent French Queen Mother, often making herself a part of her sons' rule. Carney quotes Job Throckmorton, who felt that "the French queen's female reproductive body... is especially threatening: not only is she a beast herself but her 'loins' produce yet more monsters, a 'litter' and a 'brood' who perpetuate her evil designs" (420). Unlike the sexless Queen Elizabeth I, Catherine is the most direct historical precedent for Tamora's character. Both women are bound to their children and are made monstrous by their ability to breed monsters. Tamora is not only involved in her sons' murder of Bassianus and rape and mutilation of Lavinia, she encourages them by demanding that their mother-son relationships rest on their actions; she says that "The worse to her, the better loved of me" (2.3.167). Tamora is inseparable from the deeds of her children, as her children are often the agents of her capability for evil. Tamora is contextualized by how she performs motherhood as monstrous, like Catherine, and an early modern audience may have understood her in like terms.

In understanding Tamora as mother, it is important to examine the rise of infanticide in the Renaissance. Parenthood is a major theme in *Titus Andronicus* and links Tamora with both Aaron and Titus, all three of whom face the prospect of losing a child and proclaim an intense love and devotion to their children. Aaron is the only exemplary parent, as both Tamora and Titus facilitate (or perpetrate) the deaths of at

least one of their children. Tamora's asking Aaron to dispose of their newborn son would have been a particularly prescient image in the Elizabethan mind, as infanticide became an overwhelming English problem among women who could not afford more children or otherwise did not wish to expand their family. According to Margaret L. King, infanticide "was just about the only licit means of family limitation in an era when the poor faced the rigid limits of scarce resources and the wealthy adhered to equally rigid laws of inheritance" (King 10). Poor women could not afford children, and wealthy women were subject to primogeniture laws and therefore expected to bear sons. Wealthier women were perhaps less inclined to have multiple children as large estates could not provide for them when only first-born sons would inherit the estate. Tamora, then, not only uses her sexuality for political and social gain, she also engages in a practice that became increasingly dangerous and visible. Indeed, infanticide was linked to the occult, as King says that "the rage against infanticides recalls and is linked to the simultaneous rage against witches. Infanticide was the major cause after witchcraft for the execution of early modern women, and many prosecuted witches were charged with infanticide" (10). This cultural phenomenon makes Tamora even more dangerous than simply her willingness to murder and have sex—she is not only breaking every social code of womanhood, she is also linked to the occult.

The link between infanticide and witchcraft is more clearly illustrated in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth directly links infanticide with an invocation of spirits:

...Come, you spirits
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
 And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
 Of direst cruelty. (1.5.39-42)

Later, Lady Macbeth equates her bravery to her willingness to commit infanticide, as she chides Macbeth's cowardice by claiming she

[has] given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
 And dashed the brains out... (1.7.54-58)

Lady Macbeth asks that spirits fortify her with cruelty, and her cruelty translates to infanticide. Tamora and Lady Macbeth were created as the discourse surrounding uncontrollable femininity shifted from demonological explanations to a medical diagnosis called the Mother, later hysteria. Edward Jorden's 1603 *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* "fixed a new category within medical literature, one that offered unruly sexual desire and corrupted maternity as a rational answer to—and extension of—traditional demonology" (Levin 25).

Witchcraft and hysteria became central diagnoses of disorderly women of the early modern era, both issues assigned to any woman who displayed behaviors out of sync with patriarchal expectations. Symptoms included fainting, odd behavior, and aggressive sexual desire, but Joanna Levin finds that

far from being a benign “ailing nurturer,” the early modern hysteric replayed the contradictions of her satanic predecessors: she was both disorderly and passive; she was a “disturbing threat to phallic power” and (largely) a paternalistic construct; she was and was not a mother; she was deceptive yet utterly somatized; and she both confounded patriarchal authority and provided the occasion for its legitimation. (25)

Witchcraft and hysteria became terms to classify women’s behavior in order to dismiss their health issues as well as to constrain women to their typical roles—women’s fear of falling ill from demonic possession or pacts with the devil or hysteria was a means of controlling women’s behavior. Tamora demands to be seen as a mother both to her children and to her lovers, and her extramarital relationship to Aaron is considered aggressive sexuality. As witchcraft is linked to infanticide and hysteria is linked to witchcraft as well as the womb, Tamora’s motherhood and her unruly behavior immediately call to mind descriptions of demonic and hysterical early modern women. Already othered by her status as Goth and woman, Tamora elicits fearful femininity through her relationship to the occult and to hysteria. Her perversion of femininity and refusal to be controlled by patriarchal forces is indicative of the witch or hysteric.

An early modern audience might have understood Tamora’s actions as appropriating masculinity, which Lavinia confirms: although Tamora “bear’st a woman’s face” (2.3.136), she has “no womanhood” and is a “bestly creature” (2.3.182). Lavinia’s judgment as well as other attempts to liken Tamora to beasts—

her sons are “bear-whelps” (4.1.95), and she is a “ravenous tiger” (5.3.194)—are attempts to separate her from her femininity. Stanavage argues, however, that “it is not despite their unstable female bodies but precisely because of them that the female revengers in these plays can employ revenge as a rhetoric to assert their identities and violently mutable emotions” (15). Stanavage finds that female revengers are the more successful *because* they are women. Tamora may have been received as appropriating masculinity and sexlessness because of her relation to the occult, but it is specifically her womanhood and her ability to control her femininity that allows her success in destroying the Andronici one-by-one. Tamora does enact early modern gender performativity, but she exhibits *excess* femininity, as Stanavage notes that

critics such as Alison Findlay have noted the feminine and “effeminizing” nature of revenge in classical texts that suggest that pursuing revenge emasculates the revenger... if revenge is “effeminizing,” then it would make women more female, thus ironically empowering them in enabling them to avoid the fragmented identities of their male counterparts. (80-81)

Tamora’s actions are all inherent problems found in early modern women: Her motherhood, her duplicity, her proposed infanticide, her overt sexuality.

Alternatively, witchcraft is considered sexless—Banquo jests that the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* “should be women,/And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so” (1.3.45-47). If Tamora is linked to the occult, she might exhibit some form of sexlessness. Alison Findlay sees Tamora’s use of rape towards Lavinia as a tool of *patriarchal* control. If rape is “the gatekeeper for the gender

hierarchy” (Howard and Rackin qtd. in Simkin 91), then Tamora is not excessively feminine so much as she appropriates masculine tools in order to upset the gender binary. True, rape is a tool of the oppressive male, but Tamora is a sum of all parts rather than definitively understood by this one moment. Tamora’s hysteric association, though diagnosed by patriarchy as a means of explaining deviant female behavior, is still indicative of early modern femininity. Witchcraft and demonic possession are inherently female problems; indeed the very passivity Tamora exhibits in matters of revenge—only personally participating in an active position in Act 5 when she attempts to beguile Titus—indicates the passive role women were expected to inhabit in early modern hierarchies. Exhibiting these behaviors, Tamora is not expressing the opposite of femininity (masculinity); she instead fully embodies cultural stereotypes of femininity as deviant and uncontrollable. Tamora is excessively feminine rather than feminizing masculinity, adopting behaviors of the deviant female in order to gain control.

From a proto-feminist view, as there were pockets of early modern women devoted to elevating the status of women, that Tamora is more capable of enacting revenge than classic male revengers makes sense because early modern proto-feminists were operating under theories of hierarchical binaries. Entrenched binaric logic held “that all relationships, including those between men and women, could only be hierarchical... proto-feminists had to choose either to invert the ranking of the sexes and to consider women as the superior sex or to argue for equality and mutuality” (Harvey 39). Because systems of hierarchies prohibited equal binaries in any system,

early modern proto-feminists tend to find women superior to men (47). Tamora is fearsome precisely because she takes models of early modern femininity and molds them into tools that appear masculine in their aggressiveness, but are inherently feminine tactics based on reigning cultural attitudes towards witchcraft, infanticide, and deviant femininity. By prefiguring herself as intrinsically linked to feminine seduction and motherhood, Tamora is a construction of excess femininity that must be destroyed in order to contain a woman who destroys gender ideals. Tamora is allowed to succeed in her vengeful endeavors only so far before she is destroyed as a means of affirming patriarchal control. There is no early modern reality where Tamora is *not* dangerous and disruptive to the natural social order of male/female dichotomy, and she is ultimately destroyed for daring to transcend her role as feminine Other. Tamora's success would probably hinge on her completely dominating patriarchal figures like Titus and Saturninus and creating a matriarchy, as a matriarchal upset is the only possible way of completely destroying a patriarchal hierarchy within the cultural binary. In *Gone Girl*, Amy fulfills Tamora's desire to destroy the Andronici, stand-in members of patriarchal dominance, by destroying and reforging her husband. Amy exerts matriarchal control over Nick and is able to transcend deviant femininity through the various feminist movements that led to her ability to exert subjectivity.

CHAPTER III

“I’M IT, BABY”; AMY AS A PRODUCT OF MAINSTREAM FEMINISM

Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* is entirely a product of third wave, mainstream feminist ideology and indicates the infighting and lack of theoretical base that defines twenty-first century feminist politics. Amy defies common feminist ideals by ridiculing and perpetuating stereotypes of women as well as adhering to what Nick refers to as “stand by your man” (393) solutions. Critics suggest that Amy spends too much energy and too much of herself on Nick, an unworthy partner,⁵ rather than on a fruitful endeavor to maintain her marriage, which for Amy is the only successful outcome of Nick’s adulterous liaison. These issues complicate how Amy is contextualized in feminist history—how can feminists claim her if she eschews standard feminist behavior? Part of understanding how Amy fits into the annals of feminist anti-heroes is identifying her indicates third wave inconsistencies and as a character that is only possible through the cultural paradigm shifts brought on by feminist movements. Third wave feminists often struggle to justify women’s behavior that is incongruous with loosely defined feminist ideals. Segmented factions of feminists disagree over praxis. Someone like Amy who does not necessarily feel kinship with *every* woman solely because they are women, who does not have maternal or familial instincts, and who, of course, has sociopathic tendencies and a

⁵ See p. 74 for continued discussion of criticism on *Gone Girl*. This particular issue arises from the “Woman Scorned” trope, referenced by critic Emma Teitel.

tenuous grasp of morality is not an ideal woman for any version of feminism, save perhaps power feminism.

Most third wave feminists tend to agree that DIY Feminism, or Do-It-Yourself,⁶ is the most appropriate feminist lifestyle as it suggests that any woman's choices and lifestyle are compatible with feminism. Instead of behaving according to strict doctrines or even guidelines, DIY Feminism theorizes that the best way to be feminist is to be yourself; DIY Feminism typically purports an image of women that is indefinable—an un-ideal. By campaigning for varied depictions of different types of women in media, however, DIY Feminism demands a character like Amy. There is a never-ending list of male villains in media that are simultaneously admired and reviled, and DIY Feminism would suggest that similar film and television roles be created for women. Russ decries female characters that are one-dimensional, that “do not really exist at all—at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play, but they are the public roles and not the private women; at their worst they are gorgeous, cloud-cuckooland fantasies about what women want, or hate, or fear” (81). Amy represents what feminists purportedly want in media representation, but she is not without problems. *Gone Girl* has, of course, received rave reviews both for the novel and David Fincher's 2014 film of the same name, but there are feminist groups who find fault with Amy and disavow *Gone Girl* as a triumph of female representation in media. In exploring third wave feminist ideology and its various splits and tentative theoretical work, it is clear that Amy can

⁶ DIY Feminism appears to be the type of feminist praxis that has survived in the current cultural milieu.

only exist because of feminist movements; that is, Amy embodies third wave feminism and the fledgling fourth wave in all its contradictions.

The most fruitful way of discussing third wave feminism is to examine it as a fractured community. Several different kinds or brands of feminism arose out of the 1980s, and oftentimes different factions not only disagree with one another, but reject their second wave predecessors and are in direct opposition with other factions. Susan Archer Mann describes the issue:

Having come to feminism in this conservative political climate [80s], third wavers have described themselves as members of a generation that “have no utopias” and who live in the midst of “backlash” and the “media demonization of ‘sisterhood.’” Given this absence of “utopias” it is, perhaps, not surprising that there are few statements of the collective aims or goals of the third wave... the absence of a collective voice and a more individualistic approach to feminism appears to be the *modus operandi* of most third wavers... (Mann 260)

Without a collective aim, third wave feminism began to branch off into dissenting factions in the 1980s. Some groups stressed sexual liberation while others decried patriarchal forms of sex, and argued over “pornography, sexwork, censorship, sadomasochism, and other erotic practices in terms of what constituted nonpatriarchal forms of sex or whether there should even be such a notion” (Mann 98). As scholars attempt to define a newly emerging fourth wave of feminism, feminist theorists still argue over the remnants of the 80s sex wars. The character of Amy was created in a

pivotal moment for feminism and exemplifies the contradictions with which the movement continues to struggle.

Feminist scholars cannot agree on the best way to discuss sex and seemingly aberrant sexual practices in relation to women. There are those who differentiate between sexual practices of men and women, creating a new binary with the intent of demonizing male sexual practices. Robin Morgan says that “the emphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional non-involvement, and, of course, invulnerability was the male style, and that we, as women, placed greater trust in love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, commitment” (qtd. in Mann 100). Similarly, theorists found this differentiation important in defining violent sexual practices, as “second wave radical feminists who undertook to delineate what types of sex were violent and/or patriarchal were motivated by their desire to end unequal power relations and violence against women” (99). On the other hand, “the pro-sex side of this debate rejected any form of censorship or restrictions on sexual practices in the interests of more openness and freedom” (98). The sex wars of the second wave of feminism sought to define a feminine sexuality while keeping that sexuality safe from male violence. Unfortunately, a feminine sexuality is inherently defined by male violence—the vast numbers of female sexual assault survivors is reason enough to raise young women to be fearful rather than expressive. This attitude is appropriate, to be sure, as long as male-dominated rape culture exists, but is incredibly limiting. It propagates the virgin/whore dichotomy, still present today in the way rape culture is addressed in criminal court cases of rapists and the court of public opinion.

The unnamed victim of a Stanford student's rape in 2015 wrote an infamous open letter to her abuser and the court, where she described the defense as bringing undue attention to her behavior, asking her: "Did you drink in college? You said you were a party animal? How many times did you black out? Are you serious with your boyfriend? Are you sexually active with him? Would you ever cheat?" (qtd. in Bever). The questions were meant to lay blame on her behavior rather than the perpetrator of the assault. The man's 6-month sentence was a shock and outrage to many within feminist communities as well as to the general population, signifying a shift in popular opinion, but one that has yet to reach legal courts. Emma Watson's 2017 semi-nude *Vanity Fair* photoshoot caused an outrage as well, as women and men alike find her incapable of speaking for the United Nations as an advocate for feminism if she dares to pose topless in a magazine. Watson was prompted to defend the photos, arguing that "feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women with. It's about freedom, it's about liberation, it's about equality. I really don't know what my tits have to do with it. It's very confusing" (qtd. in Reuters 2017).⁷ The controversy over Watson's persona as spokesperson for feminism and her ability to participate in typical fashion shoots indicates the divisive stance feminism takes on sexual politics. While feminism decries sexual assault court cases in which the defense mentions the victim's sexuality or sexual appeal, there is hypocrisy in their approach to feminist role models.

⁷ It is necessary to incorporate popular culture controversies to examine rape culture in 2017. As fourth wave feminism is newly emerging, it has not yet received much academic attention. Brock Turner's rape trial and Emma Watson's dual roles as feminist and film actor accurately express the current cultural attitude towards rape and sexuality.

Third wave feminism still disagrees as to the best way to represent oneself as a woman—whether a woman can expect to be believed if she is sexually assaulted depends on whether the woman takes the necessary precautions in all areas of her life *not* to be raped—victim-blaming rather than assigning blame to the perpetrator. All this is to say that “victim feminism” (Mann 98), as the stress on violent male sexuality is often called, is justified if not the best way to approach violence against women. Part of the issue people have with Amy’s sexual behavior in *Gone Girl*, then, stems from these issues. If sex-theorists of the past see male sexuality as aggressive, dominating, and violent, Amy is uses patriarchal forms of sex to serve her own interests. Amy poses a challenge to feminist groups seeking to define women as softer in their sexual practices. Is it appropriate for her to be a sexual aggressor? Amy uses sex as a means of inhabiting a new identity, but also as a weapon, as seen in the murder of Desi and her past false rape accusation against former boyfriend Tommy. There are countless articles, opinion pieces, and social media comments attempting to decode, translate, figure out, or apologize for how rape culture is used and reinforced in *Gone Girl*.⁸ It is important to address that people are uncomfortable with Amy in part because she occupies a space that is often attributed to men—she is the sexual aggressor, she is a *femme fatale* who uses sex to get what she wants. She literally murders a man *in flagrante delicto*, a scene made infinitely memorable by David Fincher’s 2014 film accompaniment. Amy calmly washes the blood off of her body in the aftermath of the murder, betraying nary an emotion. Nor does she express

⁸ See p. 62, 71.

emotion when she violently penetrates herself with a wine bottle to simulate injuries that correspond to rape. Her aggressive sexuality manifests in disturbing ways and is irreconcilable with current contradictory models of femininity. The different ways this behavior is examined in Amy is entirely a product of and indicates the contradiction among feminist theorists in both the second and third waves. Without a definitive way of classifying female sexuality—whether there should be no restrictions on sexual practice or whether there should be restrictions based on the frequency with which women are assaulted or subjected to violent forms of sexual behavior—it is difficult to figure Amy out. It appears that critics and laymen alike either love her or hate her instead of finding some sort of middle ground, an area where many use the term “problematic fave” (User “Merger” 2015) in order to describe favorite characters or people while acknowledging their faults.

Using *false* rape accusations while inhabiting the role of sexual aggressor seems to be the crux of arguments against Amy as worthy of feminist revenger status. Part of the effort to dismantle rape culture is to expose as injurious falsehood the widely held belief that many or most rape accusations are false, that women will change their minds about a consensual sexual partner and later accuse him of rape, or that women use rape accusations specifically as a tool of revenge against men. Evidence shows that roughly 2-8% of all sexual assault allegations that are reported are deemed false (Lisak 1318). Amy’s false accusations are then exceedingly problematic because she engages in consensual sex only to afterwards call it rape as a tool of revenge. She certainly helps to reaffirm this common belief, one that

undermines the effort to end rape culture.⁹ It is a serious accusation and one that should not be taken lightly or excused. Alternatively, it is important to ask what tools female villains or revengers *can* use. Amy can be understood as a woman operating within the bounds of patriarchy and thus capitulating to patriarchal fears of women, or as someone who, like anyone in Western culture, is unable to act outside the world of patriarchy because that *is* the world she lives in. What better way of exacting revenge than by appropriating sexual violence as a means of destroying those who wrong her? Third wave power feminism advocates appropriating tools of oppression used against women into tools that empower women:

Power feminists within the third wave explicitly support wielding the weapons previously used against women—especially their sexual power—to enhance women’s roles as active, powerful subjects. Take, for example, Elizabeth Wurtzel, who argues... “these days putting out one’s pretty power, one’s pussy power, one’s sexual energy for popular consumption no longer makes you a bimbo. It makes you smart.” (Mann 265)

It is difficult to say whether Amy appropriates rape, a violent act typically perpetrated on women, in order to resist oppressive forces, or whether her use of false rape accusations is uncalled for, harmful toward innocent people, and detrimental to fourth wave feminism’s emphasis on deconstructing rape culture. Problematic, sure, but as we have seen with Tamora, it seems that rape and sexual assault are a common tool

⁹ Rape culture refers to the pervasive culture that women experience rape or sexual assault in all aspects of their lives; from cat-calling on the street, undue attention to sexual appeal, to literal rape. Furthermore, the onus of rape culture is often attributed to women’s behavior.

for female revengers because they are unable to create tools outside of patriarchal tools of oppression. Tommy and Desi are technically innocent in their relationships to Amy, but Amy's subjective experience is that she is slighted by Tommy and held hostage by Desi. Her personhood is at stake in these relationships much like Tamora's identity when she is Titus' prisoner. In feminizing revenge, real or feigned sexual assault is a tool reappropriated against patriarchal forces rather than a tool propagated by patriarchy.

There are several passages in *Gone Girl* that are definitively feminist positions, social issues that fall under feminism and that Amy seems to understand as feminist endeavors. One of the more famous passages from both the film and novel is the Cool Girl speech. In the text, Amy spends several pages discussing the illusion of the Cool Girl, a version of the stock film character called the "Manic Pixie Dream Girl." The term was coined by Nathan Rabin as "that bubbly, shallow cinematic creature that exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures" (2007). In Flynn's text, Amy puts the impetus on Nick for assuming that she would always play this part, and she

waited patiently—years—for the pendulum to swing the other way, for men to start reading Jane Austen, learn how to knit, pretend to love cosmos, organize scrapbook parties, and make out with each other while we leer. And then we'd say, Yeah, he's a Cool Guy. But it never happened. Instead, women across the nation colluded in our degradation! Pretty soon Cool Girl became the standard

girl. Men believed she existed—she wasn't just a dreamgirl one in a million. Every girl was supposed to be this girl, and if you weren't, then there was something wrong with you. (233)

In David Fincher's 2014 film of the same title, Amy is shown driving away from Carthage and from her illusory marriage. Amy eats a burger, throws things out of the window, seeming to transform on screen into a woman with zero cares other than executing her master plan and *enjoying* herself. The film uses text from the novel to make the Cool Girl speech more succinct, more film-appropriate:

Men always use that as the defining compliment, right? She's a Cool Girl. Being Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker and dirty jokes, who plays videogames and chugs beer—loves threesomes and anal sex and jams chilidogs into my mouth like I'm hosting the world's biggest culinary gang-bang—while remaining a size 2, because cool girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool girls never get angry at their men, they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner. Go ahead! Shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl. (Fincher 2014)

Amy's concern for what women represent to men is informed by media representations of women as singularly created for male-fantasy consumption. Laura Mulvey famously addresses media representation of femininity, arguing that women then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and

obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning. (433)

Women are represented as agents for male consumption because media is still dominated by male directors and writers. By deconstructing a typical character trope as a shallow way of representing an ideal woman, Amy overwrites dominant male subjectivity.

By exposing and deconstructing the Cool Girl, Amy is then able to assert female subjectivity. Amy attempts to destroy the representation of woman as signifier, speaking for herself and identifying the proclivity for men to assign personality and meaning to a woman without understanding female subjectivity—assuming that their interiority is subject to change or devoid of meaning without man as signifier. The moments where Amy deconstructs this fantasy are the more definitively feminist moments in the novel and film. One of the more distinct goals or concerns for third and fledgling fourth wave feminism is media representation, especially where violence against women is concerned. Media images tend to shape social understanding of everything from gender, sexuality, to race. Amy's concern with the performance of the Cool Girl and how that affects real women is a salient feminist issue. Media images of women both indicate and reinscribe gender roles—they reflect current social attitudes, but they also legitimize those attitudes when characters or narratives are not created thoughtfully.

Amy addresses and attempts to deconstruct typical media representations of women, using male anxiety to subvert patriarchal authority and exert her subjectivity.

In self-fashioning in such an extreme way—faking her own murder, pinning it on her husband, only to murder her old high school boyfriend and return to Nick—Amy calls attention to the extreme lengths women must go in order to earn some measure of control over dominant patriarchal forces. Tamora never stood a chance in the face of Titus' male authority. It has taken 400 years for Amy to expand and champion the seeds of female revenge in Tamora. The narrative structures of *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* are linked by several elements that illuminate how Amy was able to take *Titus Andronicus* and turn it into a twenty-first century success narrative for feminist advancement.

CHAPTER IV

“BE WON AT LAST”; TAMORA’S LEGACY IN AMY

Titus Andronicus was written by a male author over 400 years ago when constructions of gender, sexuality, class, subjectivity, and society were based on religion and strict hierarchies. Any conception of womanhood in William Shakespeare’s time is almost inaccessible in its entirety for a twenty-first century critic. Examining how women (and men) are portrayed in literature and theater provides cultural context as popular literature tends to reflect the current social attitudes. Early modern women were the inferior of the two available genders and were treated as such through Biblical precedent as well as the necessary Other in dominant male self-fashioning. There are still echoes of acceptable societal behavior born out of religious belief in the twenty-first century, but Western cultures typically do not see the same level of female subjugation based entirely on religious belief. Understanding where Amy comes from, how she was created, how she was *able* to be created, and how she operates under patriarchal constraints stems from the representational seeds of early modern patriarchal hierarchical understanding. In turn, early modern constructions of gender as they relate to Tamora and Amy are necessary for understanding the complicated conception of gender in the female revenger in *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl*.

Titus is typically mined as precedent for other Shakespeare works as it is his earliest attempt at the tragic form. Titus is obsessed with honor and tradition to the

point of hubris; older, war-wizened, and proud of but destructive toward his family, he is precedent for King Lear. Aaron the Moor's famous line in Act 4 Scene 2—"Is black so base a hue?" (4.2.71)—reveals an interiority that will serve Shakespeare in his conception of race in *Othello*. Interestingly, Aaron is also precedent for Iago, as his atheistic motivations for villainy are never explained satisfactorily beyond his claiming, "I curse the day... /Wherein I did not some notorious ill" (5.1.125, 127). Tamora is often relegated to a one-dimensional prototype for that famous Shakespearean Female Villain, Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth does not seek revenge as Tamora does, although Lady Macbeth, like Tamora, underwhelmingly disappears by Act 5. What makes these characters so rich in value is that they rely on character tropes that Shakespeare would continue to use throughout his oeuvre. *Titus Andronicus* also relies on narrative structure that Shakespeare would continue to use. There are revenge and *hamartia*, two of the basic elements of revenger tragedies long before Shakespeare employed them, as well as the five-act tragic structure. *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear* feature titular character missteps in Act 1 and catastrophe by Act 5. There is an intense loyalty to family seen in both Tamora, Aaron, and Titus (though Tamora and Titus' family loyalty is somewhat questionable), which is used in *King Lear*. The unsettling and deeply searching speeches of Aaron are the beginning of Hamlet's lauded interiority. As the play is important in setting precedent for Shakespeare's work, it is also important in setting a precedent for the female revenger trope in *Gone Girl*.

Gone Girl shares other similarities with *Titus Andronicus*, but they are more closely linked through the female revenger. Nick Dunne is more loyal to Margot, his blood-sister, than to his wife, and ultimately stays with the murderous and calculating Amy out of loyalty to his own son. Nick and Margot are *twins*, even, which Shakespeare would have appreciated.¹⁰ There is revenge, obviously, as Amy's actions hinge on her need for vengeance on her adulterous husband. Amy is *the* female revenger of the twenty-first century, manipulating the media and using her immense intellect and resources to best an entire country as well as her husband. *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* may be separated by four centuries, but much as *Titus* is mined for precedent in Shakespeare's own work, it is also partly responsible for a character trope that gave rise to Amy. Both narrative points and character elements are similar between the two works, but Shakespeare, as a product of his time, had to make do with limited early modern constructions of gender. Tamora is not able to gloat over her machinations, nor is she able to take credit for them or to even outlive the structure of the play. The differences in how Flynn approaches Amy's character development could not be conceptualized without feminist movements that lead to Amy's ability to operate as revenger and get away with it.

Tamora passionately begs Titus to forgo tradition and spare her first-born son after leading the Goth army into war with the Romans. Having failed, she takes Titus' actions as a personal slight against her ability to plea for compassion, her identity as a mother, and her humanity. Tamora has cause to pursue revenge against Titus, which

¹⁰ *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and Shakespeare's own twin children, Judith and Hamnet.

is further exacerbated by her quick ascension to Queen consort to Roman ruler Saturninus. Titus' devolution begins before Tamora ever dreams of gaining power through Saturninus. Carolyn Asp observes the "excessive rigidity of Titus's adherence to ancient family customs, i.e., human sacrifice to the dead. Any religious ritual which demands the brutal human sacrifice of Alarbus is bound to be perceived as mindless adherence to an outmoded code" (335). It is Titus' own strict adherence to outdated tradition that is his downfall rather than Tamora's behavior. He begins to unravel for the very act of having defied Tamora's pleas to forgo a rigid and unnecessary tradition. Furthermore, he agrees to allow Saturninus to marry his only daughter, Lavinia, knowing that she is contracted to Saturninus' brother, Bassianus. Titus' sons defy him in order to uphold the relationship between Lavinia and Bassianus, and Titus kills one of his own sons in the ensuing scuffle. All this leads to Saturninus humiliating Titus by naming Tamora, slave of Titus given as gift to Saturninus, as his betrothed. The family that Titus seeks to honor and defend throughout the play is secondary to his loyalty to outdated Roman custom. Had Titus not rigidly defended tradition, the events of the first act might not have transpired, and Tamora might not have been Saturninus' choice of Queen—although there would be no play without Titus' *hamartia*, and it is Tamora who sets the wheel in motion for the rest of the play's action. Tamora and Titus are bound by his refusal to allow Tamora personhood. In order to transcend the moment when they set themselves at odds with one another, they both embark on a journey of self-fashioning—centering themselves based on the other's alien-ness. Titus does not identify Tamora as worthy

of compassion or reprieve in the face of tradition and so finds himself at the mercy of her vengeance. Titus' ceremoniously disemboweling her first-born is a war tradition beyond Titus' personal interests and anachronistic even at the opening of the play. Titus justifies the impetus if not the mechanisms of Tamora's revenge.

Interestingly, the justification for revenge in Tamora and Amy is one of the only elements of both texts that suggests a step backward in terms of feminist representation. Both are intrinsically bound to male counterparts, but Tamora's need for revenge stems from the murder of her son, while Amy's vengeance is directed at an adulterous husband. Nick Dunne expects perfection of Amy in an indirect and perhaps unconscious way—he is slovenly and unappreciative, diminishes her feelings, and has an affair with a younger woman. The construction of narrative in *Gone Girl* is such that the reader is beholden to the whims of the narrators, who are alternatively Nick Dunne and Amy Dunne. Nick presents a vision of himself that is less than honest. Nick perceives their marriage in a completely different way from how Amy perceives it:

Over just a few years, the old Amy, the girl of the big laugh and the easy ways, literally shed herself, a pile of skin and soul on the floor, and out stepped this new, brittle, bitter Amy... She'd sigh and turn to her secret mental notebook on which she tallied all my deficiencies, forever noting disappointments, frailties, shortcomings. (49)

We are not privy to Amy's version of events until just before midway through the novel, when she explains that

if you can't take care of me while I'm alive, you have made me dead anyway. Just like Nick, who destroyed and rejected the real me a piece at a time... He took away chunks of me with blasé swipes: my independence, my pride, my esteem. I gave, and he took and took. ...He killed my soul, which should be a crime. Actually, it is a crime. According to me, at least. (238)

The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle, in which case Amy's perception of their relationship still justifies her actions for *her*, a crucial distinction. Amy's subjectivity is now, in the twenty-first century, able to contend with Nick's subjectivity. Amy and Nick describe each other in similar terms, Nick feeling that Amy mentally lists his shortcomings, and Amy feeling that Nick denies her personhood. When she describes Nick's actions as a literal crime against her—"according to me" (238)—she begins to assert her own subjectivity as a means of justifying her revenge. It is not a proportional reaction to frame your husband for your own murder because of his adultery and his inability to accept you as a person, but Amy feels similarly to how Tamora must have felt. Having bared her soul to Titus in an impassioned speech for Alarbus' life and for mercy on her as a person and mother, Titus rejects Tamora and denies her selfhood. That rejection of identity is crucial.

Nick is perhaps justified in rejecting Amy's sociopathic personality, but Amy, too, feels justified in her actions. Her subjective experience of their relationship is the narrative that ultimately prevails. Nick rejects Amy's identity when he discovers that she is not the Cool Girl he fell in love with. Nick's acceptance of Amy does not extend beyond their courtship, after which Nick begins to understand and reject the

complicated nature of another human being's personality. Amy recognizes that "framing your husband for murder is beyond the pale of what an average woman might do" (235), but righteously if not misguidedly believes that

Nick must be taught a lesson. He's never been taught a lesson! He glides through life with that charming-Nicky grin, his beloved-child entitlement, his fibs and shirkings, his short-comings and selfishness, and no one calls him out on anything. I think this experience will make him a better person. Or at least a sorrier one. (235)

Nick morally wrongs Amy by having an extramarital relationship, but Amy points to Nick's general behavior as further justification for her actions. The adultery is just the physical manifestation of the way Nick has treated Amy throughout their relationship. As with Tamora, one may not *agree* with Amy's vengeance, but there is plenty of justification for her perception of events as soul-killing, meriting extreme action on her part.

The first 219 pages of *Gone Girl* are written from Nick's point-of-view, interspersed with Amy's falsified diary entries from the previous five years. The diary entries are written by Amy, but are a fabrication of events that ultimately leads readers of the fake diary to suspect Nick's involvement in her disappearance and probable death. The second half of the novel is written from the Real Amy's point-of-view, replete with scathing observations on the plight of women in marriage and a serious remove from feeling and empathy. All three narrators—Nick, Diary Amy, and Amy, are unreliable, and any claim to definitive understanding of the events that

transpire in the novel is tenuous at best as a result. The power of Amy's subjectivity is such that, flawed perception and all, her narrative prevails. Amy is thus lauded for her rhetorical abilities—the diary she produces to mislead readers is an exercise in patience as she straddles a fine line between preposterous and probable. Amy describes her intention by breaking the postmodern fourth wall within the novel, an homage to the early modern soliloquy:

I hope you liked Diary Amy. She was meant to be likable. Meant for someone like you to like her... I thought the entries turned out nicely, and it wasn't simple. I had to maintain an affable if somewhat naïve persona, a woman who loved her husband and could see some of his flaws (otherwise she'd be too much of a sap) but was sincerely devoted to him—all the while leading the reader (in this case, the cops, I am so eager for them to find it) toward the conclusion that Nick was indeed planning to kill me. (237)

Both Nick and Amy are New York writers, writers for magazines in various capacities, and the loss of their jobs during a recession (following the actual 2008 U.S. financial crisis) is an important point made in the novel. Amy's parents, too, wrote a children's book series based on Amy's life. In the series, "Amazing Amy," as the character was called, never failed at anything the Real Amy might have. Amy credits her parents' cashing in on her life rights to write children's books based on her as part of why she feels the need to fabricate a persona, to craft her life as if it is a novel itself: "once again they are squatting on my psyche, earning money for themselves" (399). Rhetorical ability, the ability to narrate a particular instance and

its context, in this case Amy's disappearance, is an important facet of *Gone Girl* and an essential aspect of self-fashioning. Stephen Greenblatt includes rhetoric or language in his list of essential components of self-fashioning, as "self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (9). Rhetorical ability is essential in creating selfhood, and it is essential in the characterization of both Amy and Tamora.

Tamora's introduction is all rhetoric, an attempt to beg mercy of Titus in order to save her son. Tamora's character relies on her ability to persuade others to carry out the action of her revenge. After her failed attempt at swaying Titus against tradition, she continues to exercise her rhetorical prowess on Saturninus. Tamora is able to quench Saturninus' rage against Bassianus, Lavinia, and the Andronici after Bassianus has taken Lavinia from him, and she leads him in action against the Andronici. Tamora deftly persuades Saturninus to relent, asking him "sweet emperor, we must all be friends./The tribune and his nephews kneel for grace;/I will not be denied; sweet heart, look back (1.1.479-81). Tamora's success hinges on her control over Saturninus, which will further her agenda. She is also able to craft alternative narratives to objective truth. When Lavinia and Bassianus happen upon Tamora and Aaron in Act 2, Lavinia and Bassianus taunt Tamora for her adulterous relationship to Aaron and threaten to tell Saturninus. Chiron and Demetrius enter the scene in the middle of this encounter, and Tamora claims that Bassianus and Lavinia threaten her life in one of Tamora's best speeches:

These two have 'ticed me hither to this place:

A barren detested vale, you see it is;

...

They told me here at dead time of the night
 A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
 Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
 Would make such fearful and confused cries
 As any mortal body hearing it
 Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly.
 No sooner had they told this hellish tale
 But straight they told me they would bind me here

...

And leave me to this miserable death.
 And then they called me foul adulteress,
 Lascivious Goth, and all the bitterest terms
 That ever ear did hear to such effect.

...

Revenge it, as you love your mother's life,
 Or be ye not henceforth called my children. (2.2.92-115)

She references demonic creatures as an attempt to link Bassianus and Lavinia with the occult, and leads Chiron and Demetrius to believe that she herself has been lead to a secret place for evil deeds. Tamora also accuses Lavinia and Bassianus of accusing her of adultery. Their fictional actions towards her are a means of heightening Chiron and Demetrius' anger and sense of protection. Tamora's speech indicates her great

command of language and persuasion, placing her in the realm of Shakespeare's most rhetorically gifted characters. Tamora only fails as a means of containing the female Other. When crafting a tale intended to beguile the seeming mad Titus, Tamora's story of Revenge, Murder, and Rapine as spectral agents intent on supporting Titus is unconvincing. First she assumes that Titus *is* mad. Whether he is or not, Tamora's story creation is not powerful enough to convince Titus of its probability. Tamora's conjuring of personified Revenge, Murder, and Rapine is presumptuous. Her *hubris* and lapse in rhetorical ability spells out the end of her covert reign of Andronici terror. Tamora forgoes her typical rhetorical strength for a literal disguise and fails.

By the time Amy returns to Nick towards the end of the novel, only Nick, Margot, and police officer Rhonda are unconvinced by her stories: the hastily cleaned-up blood, the burned diary, the credit card debt, Desi's central role. Having murdered Desi Collings, Amy's innocence hinges on her ability to explain her disappearance and the subsequent events without error, simultaneously producing physical evidence to corroborate. Nick, Margot, and Rhonda never do believe her, but the rest of the police department of Carthage and national media outlets hardly question her story. Desi's mother attempts to produce evidence of her son's innocence to no avail. Amy literally writes the best-selling book on what happened to her after the fact. Part of Amy's success is that a shift towards feminine subjectivity and self-fashioning is available through several different channels—social media, a diary, physical evidence, speech—all of which Amy manipulates in order to contribute to a sound argument in favor of her subjective reality as objective truth.

Tamora's final display of rhetoric is an utter failure and is frankly odd and out of place even in the context of the play. Her ability to persuade others is flawed and limited to her speech as she is unable to manipulate the narrative that her visage presents. Amy's ability to persuade others, however, is ingenious.

The conventions of a revenge tragedy are such that Tamora and Aaron are never meant to succeed in their endeavors, but part of Tamora's failure is rectification for what Carolyn Asp describes as a break in a Symbolic Order. Tamora loses force and ability to control others through rhetoric because "she rules in the gap of a strange fracture in this Order. . . . it cannot tolerate her and must eventually cast her out. As Cynthia Marshall states: 'women are violently punished whether they are dependent or powerful'" (208). Characters like Amy are allowed to hold onto what makes them a terrifying Other because of an increase in female agency and subjectivity after several feminist movements. Unlike Shakespeare, Flynn does not feel pressure to soften Amy as the novel moves forward in order to make her character more palatable. If anything, Amy becomes more and more frightening as each chapter passes. Amy and Tamora's abilities to craft stories and persuade others to trust in them, to believe in them, to act for them, are an important part of their character development that is fully realized in Amy. Even Lady Macbeth must be subsumed by guilt, a more powerful force than her desire for power. Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew* could never have done anything but come when called. Such is the fate of early modern female characters on the stage.

Titus Andronicus and *Gone Girl* are more strongly linked through character elements than through form, literary movement, or genre. The texts share almost nothing in common in this respect, but there is a link between them in terms of publicity. *Titus Andronicus* is inherently public because it is a play, and was probably created for performance rather than publication. Tamora's revenge happens on stage accordingly, publicizing her private griefs and involving an audience in her machinations. When she or Aaron soliloquize their inner thoughts and ruminate over future plans, the audience becomes complicit in the violence enacted on the Andronici. Elizabethan theaters were constructed to be large enough for thousands of spectators, but arranged in such a way that lent themselves to intimacy. Theater blurs the lines between reality and stage, life and art. The very first scene of the play invites the audience into the action, as Saturninus address "Noble patricians, patrons of my right/...countrymen..." (1.1.1, 3) in his pleas for the emperorship. *Titus Andronicus* does not go out of its way to incorporate publicity, but the very nature of theater is public, and the first lines address that public audience.

Gone Girl is not theater, but Amy consciously and carefully constructs her life as a production. She considers how a media audience will react to elements of the story she crafts surrounding her disappearance, noting that the media will make much of Nick's disaffected attitude, her pregnancy, and the fabricated details in her diary. Flynn documents the typical media outrage over missing women so carefully that it is overtly familiar. The national media response to the disappearance of pregnant California resident Laci Peterson in 2002 parallels the fictional media response to

Amy's disappearance.¹¹ Laci's husband, Scott, was eviscerated by the media for his lack of passionate response. News outlets picked up on details such as his asking for burgers during a police questioning procedure, a fishing trip he took on the day of Laci's disappearance, which happened to be Christmas Eve, and his lack of visible emotion. Scott was eventually convicted of Laci's murder, but some believe that he was not given a fair trial because of the media attention (Wakeman 2017). The dawn of mass media and its effects on criminal cases opened a dialogue during the highly publicized trial of O. J. Simpson and featured widely in public opinion in the outcome of Scott Peterson's trial. Juror panels are no longer a fair system of judgment as media affects the public mindset before perpetrators are even brought to trial.

The novel reflects the twenty-first century reality that media has become a means of manipulation, requiring players to *act* their roles instead of report. Nick Dunne has to practice answering interview questions about Amy's disappearance because his organic responses lack the kind of emotion that an audience would expect, much like Scott Peterson's attitude after Laci Peterson's disappearance. Nick's lawyer, Tanner Bolt, reminds Nick that "the media has turned on you, the public has turned on you" (209) and that they have "got to fix [his] image, because should this go to trial, it will influence your juror pool. Change of venue doesn't mean anything anymore—twenty-four-hour cable, Internet, the whole world is your

¹¹ Laci Peterson's story is eerily similar to Amy Dunne's narrative concoction. Laci was near her due-date at the time of her disappearance; Scott's subsequent demeanor, and his infidelity and plans to leave Laci for a long-time girlfriend are evident in *Gone Girl*. Amy fabricates a pregnancy, and Nick's earlier narratives center around his inability to act according to what others expected of him as well as his efforts to hide an extramarital relationship with another woman. The world of *Gone Girl* is one in which Amy clearly did her homework on disappeared and murdered women.

venue” (210). Flynn’s novel acknowledges the 24-hour news cycle and its treatment of missing women, as well as the nuances of identity-construction on social media outlets. The inherent publicity of *Titus Andronicus* on stage and the media awareness of *Gone Girl* make audience an integral element of the play-going or reading experience. Tamora, like Amy, knows the importance of maintaining a carefully constructed public persona. To Saturninus she is devoted wife and empress, director of revenge against Titus. To Aaron she is the lusty and violent Queen of Goths. To her sons, a leader and mother. The scene in Act 1 where Titus sues for forgiveness from Saturninus best showcases her ability to manipulate her audience, capitulating to Titus and welcoming him back into the emperor's good graces, while slyly signifying her continued search for revenge in an aside to Saturninus. Tamora presents herself as merciful in order to lull Titus into a sense of security before she sets in motion her meticulous machinations. Amy, too, changes according to her audience. To Nick she is perhaps her most true self. For Desi she is doting lover, to her parents she is Amazing Amy—affable, charming, intelligent—in the Ozarks she’s an entirely new person, pulling from elements of Southern culture. Amy is a media darling.

Motherhood is an important aspect of womanhood in its preeminence in a woman’s life as well as its ability to both create and hinder social roles of women. Pregnancy is often seen as either the ultimate goal of every woman, the base argument for why women are naturally more sensitive or nurturing, or a means of keeping women contained to the domestic sphere. Tamora and Amy subvert this stereotype by using motherhood as a weapon. Tamora’s role is intrinsically bound to

her role as mother as it is her plea for Alarbus' life that is the catalyst for the play's action. Furthermore, she speaks to Saturninus in explicit statements of mothering and relies on her two remaining sons to take active roles in her revenge plots. There is no Tamora without her motherhood. Her violent nature and lack of regard for human life, including her son by Aaron, force viewers or readers to link violence with motherhood. She takes a comforting role and turns it into something barbarous by refusing to act the nurturing mother, instead weaponizing the role by playing on others' expectations of her motherliness.

Amy weaponizes motherhood as well. She shows no strong attachment to the idea of children or pregnancy; she says "it baffles me that these self-righteous, self-enthralled waddlers get such special treatment. As if it's so hard to spread your legs and let a man ejaculate between them" (258). Amy instead uses her ability to have children as a means of controlling those around her. She understands that leaving a pregnancy trail in the wake of her disappearance will not only implicate Nick further, but cause an exacerbated media storm of affection for her. Faking a pregnancy helps the police to cement a motive for Nick. Nick having a long-term affair with a young woman for whom he intends to leave Amy, only to find out that Amy is pregnant with his child, suggests that Nick did not want an anchor, so to speak, to Amy. Amy also manipulates the media after her disappearance, knowing that "the key to big-time coverage, round-the-clock, frantic, bloodlust never-ending Ellen Abbott coverage, would be the pregnancy. Amazing Amy is tempting as is. Amazing Amy knocked up is irresistible" (258). Instead of motherhood as rite of passage as a woman, Amy uses

her ability to have children as a means of control, again subverting what motherhood tends to elicit as a stereotype. Nick notes her inherent ability to become pregnant with some reverence (and dismay)—“I created a manuscript” he says, “and she created a life” (411). After all that Amy puts Nick through, Nick is unable to leave Amy solely because she uses his bank-stored sperm to become pregnant, Nick having believed the store destroyed. Nick feels, “I was a prisoner after all. Amy had me forever, or as long as she wanted, because I needed to save my son, to try to unhook, unlatch, debarb, undo everything that Amy did” (411). It is primarily their child that keeps Nick anchored to Amy.

Amy perhaps perverts motherhood more than Tamora, as Tamora seems to have genuine affection for her children, excluding her child by Aaron. She stoops to beg Titus for Alarbus’ life, an action that could not have been easy for a queen. Titus knows, too, that the murder of Chiron and Demetrius is perhaps the worst punishment he can serve Tamora, save his forcing Tamora to literally eat their flesh after death. This action itself is a subversion of motherhood—Tamora makes motherhood monstrous by her refusal to be nurturing or especially sensitive, ultimately consuming that which she begat in a grand show of destructive motherhood. Alternatively, Amy has no maternal instincts, no interest in motherhood or children, and uses motherhood only as a shallow but effective means of eliciting sympathy and tying Nick to her.

One of the most overt differences in success between Tamora and Amy are the different conclusions for their extramarital lovers. Tamora uses Aaron to help her plot against Titus and the Andronici, and both characters seem to vie for power over

the revenge plot in *Titus Andronicus*. Tamora has few lines in the last few scenes of the play, and even Mutius assigns more conclusionary lines and blame to Aaron than for Tamora. It is Tamora who seeks revenge against Titus, but Aaron who takes over the revenge plot towards the end of the play. Aaron becomes a wild card as his atheistic and misanthropic or antisocial behavior is the one driving force behind his causing destruction. His actions take precedent over Tamora's plots, and Aemilius asks Lucius to "Give sentence on this execrable wretch,/That hath been breeder of these dire events" (5.3.177-78), again attributing the deeds of the play to Aaron alone. Aaron is given more lines in the last act of the play while Tamora's one last hurrah is her failed and clumsy attempt to confuse Titus with sons Chiron and Demetrius. Shakespeare understandably assassinates Tamora's character to make way for Aaron's potential as villain. Aaron's dark skin makes him a more acceptable villain than a female revenger and Tamora's identity is overshadowed by his revelry.

Amy does not let an extramarital lover threaten her central role in the text. Instead, she uses former boyfriend Desi Collings as a means of failing better. Desi is wealthy and immediately saves Amy from destitution when he brings her to his opulent lake house. Masquerading as her savior, Desi actually holds Amy hostage. She is unable to leave the lake house; she has no keys to a car or access to money. Amy feels that she is "literally a prisoner—the gate is fifteen feet high, and there are no ladders in the house" (360). Desi controls the food she eats and the clothing she wears; he asks her to use the lake house gym to lose weight she has gained and to dye her hair back to blonde. Just at the moment when Amy seems to have failed—her

money is stolen and her former boyfriend is controlling her every waking moment—she uses her extramarital lover to fail *better*. Amy uses a wine bottle to penetrate herself in order to mimic rape injuries; she utilizes the lake house’s extensive security camera system to fake video evidence of sexual assault and injury. Instead of allowing Desi’s subjectivity to overwhelm her own, Amy uses him to make her narrative better. When she returns to Nick, she blames the entire disappearance on Desi, thereby allowing her to avoid suspicion and return to a Nick who is now forced to follow Amy’s demands for fear that *he* will be blamed for her disappearance. Twenty-first century Amy is able to destroy Desi when he threatens to take over her own narrative.

Both female revengers embody patriarchal fears over what women are capable of. Tamora and Amy are womanhood in its worst-case scenario, enacting rhetorical ability, motherhood, internalized misogyny towards other women, rape, and countless other tools as means of dominating over men. Characters Lavinia and Andie of *Titus Andronicus* and *Gone Girl* serve as the appropriate foils to Tamora and Amy. Where the latter are womanhood perverted, Lavinia and Andie are traditionally ideal femininity. Lavinia is a model daughter, capitulating to Titus despite his decision to accept Saturninus’ undesirable marriage proposal. Saturninus expresses interest in a sexual relationship with Tamora even as he proposes to marry Lavinia, to which Lavinia must reply that she is not bothered; “Not I, my lord, sith true nobility/Warrants these words in princely courtesy” (1.1.271-72). She pays Titus the proper respect and is quietly pliant to the whims of the various men in her life—she

moves from Titus' daughter, to Bassianus' fiancée, Saturninus' betrothed, to the stolen property of Bassianus, to Bassianus' wife, to rape victim of Chiron, Demetrius, and Tamora, to mutilated daughter of Titus—all without her consent or complaint.

Carolyn Asp finds that

instead of having power herself, Lavinia functions as an object to be used by powerful males within the Symbolic Order to cement alliances and maintain a surface order... Visually she enacts the fate of woman in the Symbolic Order: she is a pawn in a power struggle between men, objectified as "Rome's rich ornament" to be seized by the strongest contestant. Of her own desires we hear nothing. (336)

When Chiron and Demetrius mutilate Lavinia by removing her tongue and hands, they remove her agency. These actions signify the preferred model of femininity. A woman who cannot gesture or speak is essentially helpless and lacks personal subjectivity. Lavinia is thus preferable to Tamora, who seeks autonomy and subjectivity. Lavinia becomes a literal signpost as well as an example for how early modern women should behave. All of her gestures and behaviors must be decoded and analyzed by her male family members after her mutilation, highlighting her role as model woman. Dorothea Kehler says that Tamora's

vengeance is to turn Lavinia into a grotesque epitome of the paragon. For who would be more chaste than a violated woman, haunted by remembrance of having been, as Jane Marcus aptly puts it, "gang-raped" (80)? Who more silent than a woman without a tongue? Who more obedient than a woman

compelled to rely on men for her every need? By abetting Lavinia's vicious refashioning, Tamora mocks the complacent, self-serving expectations of her male masters; here, she seems to say, is your ideal of womanhood in full flower. (326)

Tamora's role as embodiment of male anxiety and her subversion of womanhood as a tool of domination must be contrasted by Lavinia's silent existence. Lavinia's existence rests entirely in her relationship to male figures. In Blanche McIntyre's 2017 Royal Shakespeare Company production, Lavinia nods in consent as Titus silently signifies his intent to mercy-kill her. She gives her life to her father.

Andie serves a similar purpose in *Gone Girl*. There is a clearer contrast between Amy and Andie, since Andie is Nick's extramarital lover. Andie is young and impressionable, paying Nick the kind of attention he misses from the early stages of his relationship to Amy. Andie admires Nick and respects him, asks nothing of him, is sexually available and easy-going. Nick thinks of Andie "as an escape, an opportunity," believing that "Andie was a nice, pretty, bosomy Irish girl from my hometown, unassuming and jolly" (146, 147). Nick consistently describes Andie as someone who is *easy* to be around in contrast to Amy's complicated personality. Andie is more willing to embody the Cool Girl persona that Amy eschews, providing a model of femininity that is insupportable but nevertheless dominates media representation of women. Andie is a necessary contrast to Amy.

One of Tamora's most disturbing actions is when she not only allows but encourages her two sons to brutally defile Lavinia instead of murdering her outright.

Tamora encourages Chiron and Demetrius by making the action a test of their love; "be ye not henceforth called my children" (2.3.115). Lavinia begs to be murdered rather than subject to gang rape, but Tamora infamously refuses. In Julie Taymor's 1999 film, Chiron and Demetrius rip open Lavinia's clothing, after which Lavinia escapes their clutches to beg Tamora for mercy on bended knee. Lavinia is wild-eyed and there is a notable terror in her voice. Tamora's refusal to allow Lavinia to die unravished is brutal. Lange closes her eyes and takes a breath as if she is mustering the courage to follow through with allowing her sons to rape and mutilate Lavinia, but is ultimately unrelenting. The rape and mutilation happen offstage in the film, but Lavinia reenters the screen in another powerful cinematic moment where she is perched on a tree stump, hands cut off with branches shoved into her stumps, mouth full of blood from her ripped-out tongue. In Blanche McIntyre's 2017 Royal Shakespeare Company adaptation, Chiron and Demetrius begin to sexually assault Lavinia on stage. She is covered in blood when she reappears after the assault. In the most disturbing image of the scene, her pants and underwear are pulled down, to be adjusted by Marcus.

These two scenes are perhaps the most violent and disturbing of the entire play—and it is Tamora and Lavinia, woman versus woman. What is so disturbing about these images for a twenty-first century reader or viewer is Tamora's absolute refusal to have mercy on a fellow woman. Feminist critics often lament the vitriol with which women treat one another and deem it especially damaging to the social positions of women. Discussing male villains is rarely so complicated. Their hatred or

violence toward other men is normalized within the context of bad versus good; crimes against humanity rather than specifically gendered crimes. Tamora is more misanthropic than misogynist, but the violence she sanctions against Lavinia through Chiron and Demetrius is particularly jarring. It is a central issue in championing Tamora as a character worth study in a feminist context. How does one justify the importance of and respect for a female character who enacts by proxy a gang-rape on a hapless female victim? The torture of Lavinia is almost gratuitous, too, as Tamora admits that it is to injure Titus that she mutilates Lavinia; “Hadst thou in person ne’er offended me,/Even for [Titus’s] sake am I pitiless” (2.3. 159-60). Tamora embodies the concept of the problematic fave—a great character with irreconcilable flaws.

Early modern audiences might have been especially offended by Tamora’s treatment of Lavinia. Kehler says that

Tamora’s rejection of a bond with women is another alien behavior.

Notwithstanding that Elizabethan men were wary of female friendships (who knew what domestic insurrections women planned among their gossips?),

Tamora’s autonomy is yet more threatening. Denying mercy to Lavinia,

constructed as her opposite in the binarism of virgin widow/widowed whore,

Tamora unhesitatingly rejects a repressive gender role that enjoined women to

“be chaste, silent, obedient” (Hull 142), accordingly inhibiting sexuality,

assertiveness, and power. (326)

In order to upset the hierarchical nature of gender, Tamora must use typical patriarchal tools in order to enter an arena dominated by masculinity. While she is

still excessively feminine in her revenge, the rape of Lavinia is one moment of patriarchal reappropriation that Tamora uses as it has been used against her. It is a troubled reading of Tamora's behavior, but one that can be understood in the context of early modern gender hierarchy. To upset that binary, one might adopt some elements of the dominant group.

In seeking to define a general trope for female revengers, sexual violence seems to be an appropriate tool because it is an appropriation of the pervasive rape culture that permeates basic social interactions and settings. According to feminist theories, Tamora uses it incorrectly and in a decidedly unfeminist way because she uses it as a tool against a patriarch, but destroys a fellow woman in the process. This tends to be the most egregious wrong Tamora commits, although this action may be no worse than Tamora's other crimes. Indeed, it is the most fascinating and complicated action. Early modern rape is defined as taking or stealing a person away from their home or father, to whom a woman belongs. Saturninus refers to Bassianus' taking of Lavinia as a rape (1.1.404). In these terms, Tamora has been raped by Titus as she was taken prisoner after warring with Rome. Tamora is not merciful towards Lavinia because she may feel that she herself was violated by Titus. Furthermore, Tamora sees Lavinia as Titus' property, as does Titus and every other male connected to Lavinia. Lavinia is only ever positioned in relation to various male characters. She is shifted around like chattel. Tamora is perceiving Lavinia only as male characters have themselves envisioned her. Tamora is the chief instigator of the rape of Lavinia as an attempt to injure Titus.

Amy's use of rape as a tool of revenge is directed at the most frequent perpetrators of rape *without* destroying another woman in the process. Amy confirms suspicions that women will falsely accuse men of rape as a revenge tactic and that all rape accusations are suspect accordingly. Unfortunately, women revengers tend to appropriate rape and sexual violence because it is so often used against them to contain women and control their social behaviors with the mere threat of rape. The difference of 400 years is that Tamora uses rape as a tool of patriarchal subversion *through* another woman, and Amy appropriates rape against men and only men, who are the most frequent perpetrators of rape. Amy feels vindicated in that both former boyfriends whom she accuses of rape have slighted her in some way. Tommy began seeing another woman, and Desi—perhaps more deserving than Tommy—controlled Amy's appearance and behavior to the point of chipping away at Amy's newfound sense of control over her selfhood. Eliana Dockterman writing for *Time* notes that despite and perhaps because of the use of sexual violence and her manipulation of men, Amy's "vengeance is utterly feminine" (2017). Dockterman does not further this analysis, but she is circling around an important truth—the manipulation of Saturninus, Aaron, Nick, and Desi, the appropriation of sexual violence as a weapon, as well as weaponizing motherhood are wholly feminized machinations of Tamora and Amy.

Alison Findlay discusses the problem of Tamora's appropriating rape as appropriating masculinity. By urging the rape of Lavinia, Tamora uses rape as men use rape; "Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin describe rape as 'the gatekeeper for the

gender hierarchy” (qtd. in Simkin 91). Findlay sees Tamora as not expressing an excess of femininity so much as appropriating masculinity as a means of occupying dominant male spaces; in “behaviour [that] is deeply disturbing, her vengeance against Titus [allies] her more closely with the male rapists and their appetite for erotic despoliation than with the female victim” (76). Alternatively, Tamora consistently speaks in terms of motherliness, she expresses overt sexuality; she uses her status as woman as a means of subverting Rome’s extreme patriarchal state institutions. The threat of rape in the early modern era and now tends to exert control over the behavior of women because rape is often discussed in terms of a preventable crime, the onus being on women to stop the incitement of lust in men. Tamora, in trying to exert agency and self-fashioning in a patriarchal system, must use the tools with which she is familiar—the most disturbing of which is rape. If one agrees with Findlay, however, that is just one of the ways that *Gone Girl* expands and improves *Titus Andronicus*. Amy uses false rape accusations as a tool of containment. Narratives have shifted enough by 2012 that Amy can subjugate men by accusing them of rape instead of being the subjugated rape victim. Amy appropriates rape as a tool of containment in reverse. *Gone Girl* suggests, then, that a matriarchal society might use the very same tools that patriarchal societies use. Amy exerts control over men through her ability to claim that she was raped, paralleling the threat of rape that controls women’s behavior under patriarchal control. Whether that is preferable or desirable is arguable. It is perhaps difficult still to imagine matriarchal Western

societies without precedent, and so an imaginary matriarch might look like the still-reigning patriarch: predicated on fear and subsequently aggressive.

Finally, the end of both narratives make it clear who is in control. Tamora all but disappears in Act V of *Titus Andronicus*, supplanted by Aaron and Titus. Aaron's most notable speeches are reserved for Act V, characterizing him as the author of every villainous deed enacted on the Andronici. Aaron is able to gloat over his actions, too, a feeling Tamora is never afforded. Aaron revels in his villainy:

I have done a thousand dreadful things
 As willingly as one would kill a fly,
 And nothing grieves me heartily indeed,
 But that I cannot do ten thousand more. (5.1.141-44)

Aaron may have come up with most of the (successful) revenge plots, but his villainy is channeled through Tamora. Without Tamora, Aaron would have no reason for murdering various Andronici. Lucius' play-ending speech also asks that Tamora be forgotten, while greater punishments are reserved for Aaron:

As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
 No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
 No mournful bell shall ring her burial;
 But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey:
 Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
 And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (5.3.194-99)

Ravenous though she may be, Lucius damns her to nonexistence. No further attention will be paid to Tamora. Instead, Lucius asks that audiences forget about Tamora and focus righteous anger towards Aaron. It may be that an early modern audience would be more inclined to understand and acknowledge violence when perpetrated by people of color rather than a woman. Xenophobia in the Isles contributed to a depiction of moors and Jewish people as incapable of mercy, atheistic, and inherently violent.¹² An early modern audience may have been reluctant to imagine a woman capable of such violence and may have felt more comfortable shifting blame to Aaron as a result. A twenty-first century audience is perhaps ready to handle vengeful women.

Where Tamora disappears in her narrative, Amy looms large in hers. The end of *Gone Girl* is somewhat ambiguous regarding whether Nick truly loves Amy, but it does not matter to her. Nick is both afraid and in awe of Amy, and she uses his feelings for her and his child to control him. Nick acts the perfect husband in public and private. The novel ends with Amy announcing a novel *she* is writing based on her disappearance, signalling her continued efforts to fashion her entire life as a narrative subject to her own subjectivity. Unlike Tamora's disappearance, Amy specifically says that she "just wanted to make sure I had the last word. I think I've earned that" (415). Todd VanDerWerff finds overt feminist film technique in David Fincher's 2014 adaptation of *Gone Girl* as well. VanDerWerff found that

¹² See Barabas of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, or Shylock of *The Merchant of Venice*, or Othello himself. Although it can be argued that Barabas, Shylock, and Othello are sympathetic, especially Othello, the characters represent typical early modern fears about recognizably foreign groups of people.

how Fincher uses centered compositions in *Gone Girl* is part of what makes the film so feminist. The very first image in *Gone Girl*, before the opening credits sequence, is Amy's head taking up the full center of the screen, before her face snaps up to look at camera and occupies all of our attention. (2014)

The very first *and* last images of the film feature Amy Dunne's face in extreme close-up, filling the screen. This technique tells audiences on whom they should focus. The first image of Amy's face is in cool, winter tones. She wears a confused, scared expression. In confirmation of Amy's masterful identity-creation, the last image of Amy's face is nearly identical to the first, but the scene is in warm summer tones. Her expression is that of a woman who has forged her personhood and is in complete control of herself and others. Nick Dunne provides a voice over for these scenes, but the voice-over is his questioning what is going on in Amy's mind, what she is thinking and feeling, and how they have destroyed one another—and how much destruction may lie ahead. That the questioning of Amy's personhood comes from Nick's voice-over suggests that patriarchal forces can never understand women's motivations without first considering feminine subjectivity. The focus is entirely on decoding and seeing Amy—her visage and her subjectivity—from start to finish.

CHAPTER V

“WE ARE ALL WORKING FROM THE SAME DOG-EARED SCRIPT”; GONE GIRL PERCEPTION AND PROBLEMS

“...Feminism should not be comfortable, and it certainly shouldn't be pretty.” -
Jessica Abrahams

Critics of both the novel and the film adaptation of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* tend to argue that it is emblematic of feminist ideals, but there are those who consider Flynn's work reductive at best, misogynist at worst. Some concede that the film misses some of the detail that makes the *Gone Girl* novel powerfully feminist. Valid criticisms revolve around Amy's use of false rape accusations as a tool of power, and her revenge plot that at its core is driven by and focused on a man who is not worthy of Amy's attention, let alone the kind of obsessive attention Amy gives to detail. Perhaps even more insidious and often overlooked is Amy's portrayal of other women. These criticisms are not to be taken lightly and must be discussed in the wider discourse of typifying female revengers and identifying the work left to be done in textual or film representations of women.

Amy's diatribe on the Cool Girl is powerful, but when directed at a living, breathing woman, Amy's criticisms become vicious. Amy temporarily occupies a disturbing position in which she employs something like the male gaze, describing Andie's "cum-on-me tits" (Fincher 2014), vilifying her for being younger and more willing to play the part of Cool Girl. Putting the onus of responsibility onto Andie and describing her in oversexualized terms, as "fuckable" (Flynn 329), makes Amy a

problematic character for third and fourth wave feminism, a precept of which is asking that women support women wherever possible (Munro). One of the issues feminism faces today is the way a woman might approach criticism of another woman, and how to accurately and fairly depict the problems or issues in the behavior of female figures without falling into misogynist rhetoric. Amy does not subscribe to capital-F Feminism other than a general inclination to see and understand women's issues, but she is characteristically blind to her own misogynist behavior. Furthermore, her criticisms of Nick stem from *his* misogyny toward her and other women in his life, yet she contributes to negative gender stereotypes herself. By oversexualizing Andie, Amy makes herself a hypocrite and upholds a social culture for which she assigns blame to Nick and other men in her life.

Amy does not stop at criticizing Andie and other Cool Girls, however; she also speaks disparagingly about Southern women she encounters in Missouri. Amy *and* Nick tend to describe them as motherly (a quality Amy does not view positively), simple in terms of lifestyle and intelligence, and not self-aware. The driving force behind Amy's need to point out the flaws in other women, be they Cool Girls like Andie or Southern Mothers like Nick's mother, is her need to compete with other women. Nick understands this about Amy, noting that

here in Missouri, the women shop at Target, they make diligent, comforting meals, they laugh about how little high school Spanish they remember.

Competition doesn't interest them. Amy's relentless achieving is greeted with open-palmed acceptance and maybe a bit of pity. It was about the worst

outcome possible for my competitive wife: a town of contented also-rans.

(Flynn 45)

Competition among women is a hallmark of third wave feminism, which seeks to expose and eliminate a patriarchal insistence that women compete with one another for social acceptance (i.e. male attention). Amy cannot exist outside of feminist movements, and that is true for both her successes as a female revenger and general complexity of character as well as for the criticisms of her character. The misogyny she internalizes and employs towards other women is intrinsic to the general goals of twenty-first century feminism. Amy's use of negative stereotypes of a feminine ideal and a feminine abject are the exact issues today's feminist is concerned with. Naomi Wolf, however, finds fault in contemporary feminism's strict and unquestioning adherence to female relationships, as she laments feminist praxis that

celebrated women's focus on connectedness and consensus through always listening and "talking things through." For Wolf, this model that "intended to hold women together with the honey of personal love" was "highly 'feminine'" and "far too weak." (qtd. in Mann 264)

Amy reflects feminist ideals in her complexity of character and championing over an adulterous partner, but also embodies the problematic nature of women's social roles in her combative attitude toward other women. Her self-awareness and self-fashioning come at the detriment of other women. As Greenblatt suggests that self-fashioning must be formed in contrast to an Other, Amy eschews common feminist understanding by pitting *herself* against other women.

Misogyny deflected outward by the female revenger herself has somehow become standard. Tamora and Aaron silence and rape Lavinia by proxy, deaf to Lavinia's pleas. Lavinia even uses their shared womanhood in begging Tamora to murder her outright. The scene is intensely disturbing for Tamora's betrayal of her sex. This proposes yet another issue in that men rarely if ever have to consider how they approach criticism or behavior towards other men, and men who murder or torture other men do not face criticism for gender-based crimes. Furthermore, sexual assault and harassment is often overlooked when perpetrated by men; Harvey Weinstein has been accused of abusing women for decades and has only as of October 2017 faced serious backlash (Puente and Mandell 2017).¹³ A male revenger's behavior is often overlooked,¹⁴ but a female revenger is subject to nit-picking over her treatment towards other women. As male revengers or villains are able to stand in for a general understanding of humanity as inherently corruptible, female characters should not be excluded from a discussion of innate moral evil. It is important to note the way discourse is shaped around female and male revengers. That there are specific details in a female revenger trope or her character development that rely on her gender is not necessarily a negative aspect of gendering the revenger, but criticisms of a female revenger for these gender-based issues is problematic. At a certain point a female revenger character, in becoming equitable in representation and

¹³ See: Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, Casey Affleck (who recently won an Oscar even after allegations of sexual harassment), *et cetera*. Weinstein's exposure triggered the rise of sexual assault allegations in October 2017, resulting in severe punishment for male figures like Matt Lauer and Kevin Spacey.

¹⁴ By a wider media culture, it is not necessarily overlooked by those who are aware of and vocal about sexual assault accusations.

public perception, must have some sort of universality that excludes her from conversations of whether or not her specific behavior toward women is misogynist and therefore unfeminist. There is not necessarily an answer to this issue. The character of Amy has already been discussed in terms of her gendered problems, and the issues critics bring up are exceptionally important to feminist discourse. There must, however, be some sort of future when a female revenger either does not behave according to internalized misogyny at all, or does provide sexist commentary but is exempt from blame for the behavior based on a universality of experience. Violence and disturbing behavior are no longer exclusive to masculinity.

Perhaps the most serious issue with *Gone Girl* is its reliance on false rape accusations as plot points or character development for Amy. Tamora uses rape as a silencing technique when she urges her sons to rape and mutilate Lavinia, effectively controlling her ability to communicate and staining the purity of femininity used to juxtapose the oversexualization of Tamora. Amy's use of false rape and false domestic abuse accusations are one of the more complicated devices in *Gone Girl*. Crime writer Joan Smith is involved in "monitoring violence against women and girls in London," and says that "every month the Metropolitan police answer more than twice as many calls about domestic violence as domestic burglary, so turning domestic abuse into a plot device seems cheap" (qtd. in "Gillian Flynn: Putting Femme Fatale..." 2014). One of the metanarratives facing fourth wave feminism is the perception that women frequently falsely accuse men of rape. The issue is a hot topic as Education Secretary Betsy DeVos proposes Obama-Administration Title IX

legislative protection changes that have been met with criticism. DeVos cites the many instances of false accusations of sexual assault as of particular importance in her decisions (Smith 2017). In *False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases*, David Lisak, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, and Ashley M. Cote found that roughly 2-8% of campus rape allegations are false. Lisak et al. address the controversial nature of rape allegations, noting that “for centuries, it has been asserted and assumed that women ‘cry rape,’ that a large proportion of rape allegations are maliciously concocted for purposes of revenge or other motives” (1318). For those falsely accused, this is a problem. For the roughly 70% (RAINN 2015) of women who do not report rape or sexual assault, this is an even bigger problem. It is a delicate issue, but a prescient one. Amy represents all of the fear and anxieties that men project onto women, but her reliance on false rape and domestic violence allegations is troubling. Men already tend to fear the malicious woman who accuses men of rape after consensual sex, and Amy feeds into that fear. Eliana Dockterman addresses these issues, summarizing that

Amy fakes a sexual assault, even though overwhelming evidence indicates that women don't lie about being raped. She manipulates men to an exaggerated and terrifying degree (like faking a pregnancy), saying reasonable things despite being a murderous madwoman. Her vengeance is utterly feminine. In short, it would be easy for someone to see the movie and reduce its message to “bitches be crazy.” She's a men's rights advocate's worst nightmare. (2017)

In this respect, Amy has not transcended the destruction that Tamora faces. Tamora represents early modern fears about women; women as monstrous mothers, as overtly sexual, unfaithful, conniving, cunning, uncontrollable, alien; Amy embodies these same fears that persist to this day. Tamora's use of rape and Amy's use of rape and domestic abuse allegations are nefarious in and of themselves, but what is truly damning is that these fictional actions reinforce a dangerous metanarrative that women are inherently emotional or insane and are not to be trusted with agency, let alone equitable responsibility as social agents.

The casual viewer or reader might not notice these criticisms, but they are worth discussing in academic circles as representations of women in media pervade social stereotypes. *Titus Andronicus* was wildly popular in 1593 and is both a representation and a product of early modern England's view of women, people of color, and otherwise othered members of a society. Its status as popular fiction tells us how early modern people understood the world. *Gone Girl*, then, is wholly representative of how *we* see the world, and that world is exciting but bleak. We have gone beyond woman as destructive force in need of controlling, but we still apparently use women as symbols of male anxiety. The tools Amy uses are an appropriation of the world she knows, but it is not a world where women are social equals. Flynn excuses the behavior because, she wonders, "is it really only girl power and you-go-girl and empower yourself and be the best you can be? For me, it's also the ability to have women who are bad characters" (qtd. in "Gillian Flynn: Putting Femme Fatale..." 2014). The short answer, then, is that it is complicated. *Gone Girl* is

an accurate depiction of twenty-first century social roles, but it is an often troubling depiction. It both represents and disavows feminist ideals.

That Amy spends so much energy, time, rage, and livelihood on controlling her adulterous husband is another detraction from Amy as feminist character. One can argue both that female revengers punishing male characters for their behavior is a cause to champion and that a female revenger's compulsory link to a male character is passé. Russ decries this link as narratives for female characters are often about "how she lost him, how she got him, how she kept him, how she died for/with him. What else is there?" (85). For an early-modern proto-feminist, female domination over men is the only shift in power that makes sense because of an adherence to hierarchical social structures. Because revenge is typically a personal wrong for which a revenger cannot seek justice, it is understandable that a female revenger both in the early modern period and now would still be bound to vengeance for gender-based traumas or injustices. Titus' actions toward Tamora are not gender-based, but that Tamora is bound to several male characters, is one of only three female characters in the play, and uses gender-based characteristics and tropes to plot her revenge marks her as woman and incapable of successful revenge. Her trying to control a male-dominated world makes complete sense for the time period.

A twenty-first century Amy, too, is unable to right the social wrongs that gender-based stereotyping and violence causes. The prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse perpetrated on women is heinous and indicates a social ill that cannot be legislated or magicked away. Amy's obsession with doling out punishment to men

who have wronged her is a classical interpretation of revenge as a necessary vehicle for righting social ills. Gillian Flynn defends Amy's actions and link to a male character, asking "isn't it time to acknowledge the ugly side? ...I've grown so weary of the spunky heroines, brave rape victims, soul-searching fashionistas that stock so many books" (qtd. in Teitel 2014). Critics like Emma Teitel, though, bring up valid disagreements. Teitel feels

weary of the woman scorned. A heroine willing to set the world on fire to punish her inattentive, philandering husband is a cliché far greater and older than *Eat Pray Love*. *Gone Girl* may begin a smart and promising mystery, but it ends in a misogynistic wet dream. (2014)

Teitel is absolutely right. Amy fits into the mold of female revenger, but also inhabits a more tried and tired trope of Woman Scorned. Rather than move on from an injustice at the hands of man, Amy spends over a year meticulously plotting her disappearance when most women would advise their friends and loved ones to move on. Amy is characterized as wildly intelligent, and it is almost disappointing that she stays in Missouri with Nick instead of forging an identity outside of her relationship to Nick and others. Rather than leave Nick, which is clearly what he wants, Amy successfully supplants Nick's personal subjectivity with a narrative that he is bound to carry out. What better way, Amy thinks, to control someone and right your perceived injustices, than forcing them into a life of servitude? Amy "won't divorce him because that's exactly what he'd like. And I won't forgive him because I don't feel like *turning the other cheek*" (234) (original emphasis). Amy wants the version of

Nick from the courtship stage of their relationship, and she stays with him to mold him into that person. Rather than a misogynistic wet dream, Amy fulfills the wish of many women—to revenge personal wrongs so utterly that they are the ultimate victor.

Gone Girl is not a perfect portrayal of a female revenger. A twenty-first century feminist like Teitel and others have plenty of fodder for criticism when it comes to deciding whether *Gone Girl* is feminist or not. Ultimately, the infighting of the third wave of feminism haunts the novel. As Amy is a product of the changes brought about by the third wave, she also embodies the issues the feminist movement faced in the 1980s and 90s. The discourse around whether sex positivity is a universal goal, if women feminists should embody femininity or eschew it altogether, whether women should still be working outside the domestic sphere and saying “no” to homemaking; all of the contradictions of the feminist movement converge around *Gone Girl* and make it difficult to identify where it lands. There may not be a perfect future where female characters are just characters, so to speak. There may never be a time where there are not problematic characters that readers love to hate and hate to love, but feel guilty for admiring just because they have a toe or two over some theoretical line in the sand. Perhaps Amy still embodies male anxieties about women, but her success and domination over Nick is both troubling and exciting. Both Nick and Titus are flawed characters and it is difficult to root for Amy and Tamora, but that it is now socially acceptable to root for a character like Amy is a milestone. *Gone Girl* brings Tamora back to life in stunning detail, taking what Shakespeare started and expanding it into the complicated Amy. Like David Fincher’s film adaptation, in

the end the focus is on Amy. The implication of Amy's success is that in the world of female revengers, perhaps the outcome can only be a shift toward matriarchal control rather than binaric equality. Just as early modern audiences could only conceive of a proto-feminism that espoused matriarchy *in place* of patriarchy rather than equality, *Gone Girl* seems to suggest that imaginary female equality is still conceived of as domination rather than egalitarian. Having lived through patriarchal control for centuries if not millennia, perhaps it is not only acceptable but entirely preferable to imagine literary worlds where patriarchal forces shift towards matriarchal control.

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