

1-1-1994

The Feminine Other: A Study of the Women in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies

Kurt E. Wilamowski

This research is a product of the graduate program in [English](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Wilamowski, Kurt E., "The Feminine Other: A Study of the Women in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies" (1994). *Masters Theses*. 2036.
<http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/2036>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

5-12-94

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because _____

Date

Author

The Feminine Other:

A Study of the Women in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies

(TITLE)

BY

Kurt E. Wilamowski

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1994

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

5/6/94
DATE

5/6/94
DATE

Abstract

The central examination of this thesis concentrates on the essential contributions of the female characters in Shakespeare's major tragedies--Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. Without the women's conflict with the patriarchal order, the males would be unable to recognize and combat the corrupt elements in their society. The awareness of the female characters allows them to perceive the tainted patriarchal atmosphere they dwell in and operate within it as best as they can.

In short, each woman's individual field of awareness allows her to act as the executor of the dénouement in the tragedy. Even those women with limited or inconsistent awareness of their realities play a significant part in exposing the contaminated deeds of the guilty. While Gertrude and Ophelia may not always be aware of the dire circumstances that surround them, both shift the balance of power from Claudius's hands to Hamlet's. The sacrifices of both women provide Hamlet with the opportunity to punish Claudius for his crimes. In a similar fashion, the inconsistent perceptions of Desdemona and Emilia provide Othello with the means to uncover Iago's malicious nature. In standing up for one another, the women lose their lives; however, their atonement paves the way for Iago's punishment.

With a greater field of awareness, the women of King Lear and Macbeth contribute to the downfall of the corruption in the patriarchy. Cordelia and Lady Macduff

directly confront the patriarchal neglect of the feminine Other, while Goneril, Regan, and Lady Macbeth reflect the need for women to sacrifice their femininity in order to wield authority in their lives. Even though these alert females die as a result of their stances, their actions create the necessary elements for the dénouement in the tragedies to occur.

Although the main female characters die in Shakespeare's major tragedies, their deaths do not make them any less important than their male counterparts. Besides allowing the male protagonists to fulfill their roles to the greatest degree possible, the women deserve major attention because they challenge the patriarchal restraints imposed on their existence. In attempting to defy a world that supplies little chance for advancement, the female characters of the major tragedies generate hope for women that did not exist previously.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could only have been completed with the outstanding help of my encouraging, supportive committee. The greatest amount of thanks goes to Dr. Robert Funk for his guiding hand and generous amount of time and energy. He was an inspiring force before, during, and after the thesis. He made me believe in myself when I lacked motivation for this project. He went above and beyond the call of duty. I also appreciate the insights and suggestions of my readers, Dr. William Searle and Dr. Olga Abella. Both gladly offered time and energy during a hectic stage of the semester.

I also wish to thank my family--Dad, Mom, Leslie, Laura, Jeff, Larry, and Lisa--for always encouraging me to do my best. Their phone calls and cards throughout the years have been the sign of eternal support and devotion. Their belief in me has been phenomenal.

In addition, I wish to thank my friends--Thom, Kurt, Stuart, and Larry--who put up with me during this time of crisis and more than likely had better things to do with their time. Finally, a very special thanks to the woman in my life who has supported me through all this. Yvonne, you have been wonderful.

Table of Contents

Contents	Page Number
Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter One: The Introduction of the Feminine Other.....	1
Chapter Two: Limited Awareness.....	8
Chapter Three: Inconsistent Awareness.....	17
Chapter Four: Empowering Awareness.....	29
Chapter Five: Partners in Awareness.....	40
Chapter Six: The End of Awareness.....	49
Works Cited.....	51

Chapter One

The Introduction of the Feminine Other

Of all the works that Shakespeare created throughout his career, there are four plays that constitute what are commonly referred to as the "major tragedies": Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. Perhaps what separates these four from other Shakespearean tragedies is the intense emotional turmoil and singlemindedness that plague the characters of these works. All four protagonists, for whom the plays are named, share the tragic flaw of never being able to see beyond their own needs and desires. It is this fixation that eventually isolates each protagonist from everyone else in the play. This self-absorption eventually results in the deaths of the protagonists, as well as in the destruction of a good number of the characters with whom they interact.

While the male characters associated with the protagonists receive critical attention, the females in the "major tragedies" have received less attention even though their actions are essential to the tragic outcomes. Obviously, the men convey the central themes in these tragedies through their actions and personalities. But how important are the women to the workings of Shakespeare's tragic designs? Are they simply victims of the men's actions, which in turn are a reflection of the patriarchal society of Shakespeare's time, or do the female characters actually contribute some essential part of themselves (as do

the men) to the strength and life of the four major tragedies?

It is my contention that the female characters make essential contributions to these works. They are more than mere reflections of the male characters' needs and desires and more than mindless victims of the men in their lives (although they are indeed victims). The women do their best to deal with whatever circumstances they find themselves in. It is important for readers to remember that the society presented in Shakespeare's tragic plays is a patriarchal world in which women are powerless to escape traditional roles. Linda Bamber suggests that the roles of the males and the females fall into the categories of the masculine Self and the feminine Other. She further observes that "In tragedy the privileges of the Self are attributed to the masculine hero" (6). Whatever the male protagonist considers to be of importance defines the make-up of the Self. The Other usually represents the opposite of the Self: "Whatever most significantly challenges the masculine Self--whatever matters most in the tragedy, comedy, or romance--Shakespeare associates with the feminine" (Bamber 6). It is this feminine Other that reflects the threatening forces that challenge the agenda of the Self (or male). The females represent that part of society that the masculine Self cannot control. According to Marilyn French, "women . . . are identified with culture, control of the animal man, and morality (seen as oppressive)" (25). French notes that

the feminine principle supports and nourishes the Self's civilizing restraints. Since these "feminine" virtues reflect the power of civilization the Self cannot dominate, the men in the tragedies assert their control over the females by victimizing them; it is the only way that the men can display the importance of their power. Since the "menacing" feminine Other forces the empowered masculine Self to lash out, the females often find themselves sharing the same agenda that guides the male protagonists in these plays.

Even though the female characters are essential to the conflict, their value does not allow them to withstand the power of the patriarchal society in which they live. Even a powerful woman like Lady Macbeth (whose husband considers her to be an equal partner in their marriage--at least initially) cannot escape the control of the patriarchy. The female characters of Shakespeare's four major tragedies are destined to suffer a tragic demise, regardless of the actions they may take or the desires of the male protagonists.

This tragedy of the female characters can be observed through their agendas in the plays. By analyzing and comparing the behavior of Ophelia and Gertrude (Hamlet), Desdemona and Emilia (Othello), Cordelia and Goneril-Regan (King Lear), and Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff (Macbeth), we can see that women cannot avoid the inevitable destiny of death. What makes these deaths even more tragic is that

these women serve as the unwitting catalysts for their own destruction (although they cannot be held responsible for the circumstances that force them to act as they do). The women participate in their own destruction because they possess what Linda Bamber describes as "secure" Other personality traits. The women never question the stability of their own identities: "Certainly none of the women in the tragedies--Cordelia, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia--worries or changes her mind about who she is" (Bamber 7). Rather, they question their external relationships with the men in their lives. Bamber perceives this questioning of the males through the men's inner lives: "The tragic heroes, moreover, give the illusion of having an inner life. They have thoughts and feelings which are hidden from the other characters and sometimes even from themselves" (7). Since the men do not even know their own emotions at times, is it any wonder the women question their relationships? Also, because the women do not doubt their own qualities in the presence of the male protagonists, the men never see the women as human and capable of change. As Bamber observes, "Women do not change in Shakespearean tragedy; they do not respond to the events of the play, to the suffering, with new capabilities" (8). Even though Ophelia or Lady Macbeth may go mad, or the other women may be aware of the power they possess through patriarchal roles, Bamber maintains that the women never develop in response to their own inner needs but to those of the males.

Shakespeare never allows his male characters (or his readers for that matter) to observe any dynamic changes in the women; their actions develop out of their initial situations. Bamber points out the significance of this fact: "They [the women] may surprise us, but only because we did not understand who they were to begin with, not because they seem to become something new" (8).

The males, however, advance from one emotion to another throughout the tragedies. Their actions result from an inner turmoil of feelings which originate within themselves but are prompted by a variety of external factors. Whatever the initial cause, the women's external durability only serves to irritate the unsettled mental state of the male protagonists. Since the feminine Other represents the civilized reality that the masculine Self is maneuvered into attacking (by other outside forces, no less), the women unwillingly bring the wrath of the male characters upon themselves simply by living the life that the patriarchal world has determined for them. In attempting to deal with the male relationships in the only ways provided for them, the women find themselves placed in the pathway of destruction.

Ironically, this path to self destruction presents itself in the social and personal awareness that flows through the female characters of the major tragedies. Shakespeare develops a pattern of increasing awareness in the roles of the female characters from the first of the four

plays (Hamlet) to the last (Macbeth). In Hamlet, the males easily manipulate the women in order to carry out their own devices and strategies; even though Ophelia and Gertrude prove to be essential components of the tragedy, their power lies in symbolic reactions rather than in direct actions. While Desdemona hovers between the reactive stance taken by Ophelia and Gertrude and an active response to patriarchal authority, Othello provides the first assertive action of a woman in the character of Emilia, who finally stands up to her husband. This realization of one's authority within the patriarchy increases in the women of King Lear--on the verbal level with Cordelia and on the physical level with Goneril and Regan. The highest level of female forcefulness occurs in Macbeth. Both Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff frankly express themselves in their actions toward the men in their lives. What places these women on the highest plateau of awareness is their relationships with their husbands: Macbeth and Macduff both refer to their wives as partners, not as possessions. These two women represent the equality that can be obtained between the sexes in Shakespeare's tragedies. However, this culmination of assertive femininity ends in illusion: as in the previous tragedies, the patriarchal forces intervene, and the women die as a result.

Although the "strong" female figures die in the same fashion as the "weaker" ones, their similar fates should not distract from their credibility as tragic characters. (After

all, most of the male characters involved in the initial action of the tragedies die too.) The women remain vital to the central action of the tragedies because, without them, the men would not be able to fulfill their roles as the major protagonists to the degree the plays demand. A closer look into the characters of Ophelia and Gertrude will reveal the obvious necessity of their roles in Hamlet. Even though their awareness of the reality they live in is very limited, Gertrude and Ophelia still play major roles in the action of the play.

Chapter Two

Limited Awareness

As the first women Shakespeare writes about in his four major tragedies, Gertrude and Ophelia serve as the springboard for the progression of essential action that Shakespeare develops in his female characters throughout these plays. Ophelia and Gertrude lack the operative awareness that the later female characters possess. This does not mean that the women of Hamlet are irrelevant to the plot; their actions have a profound effect on the development of the tragedy. They simply lack the perceptive power of the females who follow them. While the other women use their awareness to advance their own agendas, Gertrude and Ophelia never seem to grasp as great an understanding of the world they live in as do the women who follow them.

The women of Hamlet are presented in a limited manner: through their relationships with the male characters in the play. In this portrayal, Gertrude and Ophelia serve as objects that the men manipulate for their own designs; but the women's reactions, which are largely symbolic, drive the tragedy to its inevitable conclusion. While Gertrude and Ophelia may have no intention of using their sexuality or madness to influence the actions of the male characters, their influence cannot be denied.

The actual strengths of the female characters are never explicitly expressed because, as Linda Bamber remarks, "Gertrude and Ophelia are psychologically and morally

neutral characters who take on the colorations of the play's mood" (77). This mood usually reflects the desires of the men. Gertrude accepts her function as the Queen who serves the bidding of the King, while Ophelia allows Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet to direct her actions. However, Gertrude and Ophelia appear to be more passive than the women in the later tragedies because they are not the only representatives of the feminine Other. They share the presence of the Other with the play's protagonist, Hamlet.

In the beginning of the play, Hamlet functions as part of the Other, along with the women, because he does not follow the patriarchal conventions as a typical male protagonist would; he is more crafty and reactive, much like a female in a male-dominated realm. A good reason for Hamlet's "femininity" can be attributed to the fact that he is a student, not a warrior like Macbeth or Othello. His character defines itself outside of the masculine Self, partly because he wishes to destroy that masculine part of the patriarchy by taking revenge on Claudius. Although Claudius is the one that the Ghost instructs Hamlet to attack, the Prince displaces his energies on an easier target: Gertrude (and indirectly, Ophelia). Hamlet puts a large part of the blame for his father's death on Gertrude because he believes that she participated in the murderous plot. When Hamlet mistakenly slays Polonius, Gertrude says: "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this" (3.4.27), to which Hamlet responds "A bloody deed! almost as bad, good

mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother"
(3.4.28-29). This retort clearly indicates that Hamlet believes that his mother conspired to kill his father in order to marry Claudius. At this point, Hamlet's role as Other starts to shift to the masculine Self because he attacks the feminine Other (Gertrude's sexuality) and condemns her (and women in general) for betraying the patriarchal loyalty to his father.

In essence, it is Hamlet's obsession with his mother's sexuality which ignites the central actions of the tragedy; without Gertrude's sexual impulses, Hamlet would never stalk her as he does. Hamlet's fascination blinds him to the fact that Gertrude and Claudius are separate people, who are married. According to Juliet Dusinberre, Gertrude's marriage "denies Hamlet access to either Gertrude or Claudius as individuals" (99). His mother's sexual impulses cause Hamlet to transfer his revengeful feelings from Claudius to Gertrude. According to Hamlet's way of thinking, if she loves Claudius then surely she is as guilty as Claudius in the murder of Hamlet Sr. Peter Erickson notes that Hamlet is more upset about his mother's individual desires, which ignore his father's memory, than he is about Claudius's actions: "Gertrude stands out because her remarriage calls attention to her own separate desires, desires that Hamlet finds painful to contemplate" (73). Since Gertrude's sexual desires lead her to marry her husband's brother (an act usually prohibited by the

patriarchy), Hamlet's inability to view his mother as a person with human needs and wants drives him to discard his role as "feminine" Other and to take on the part of the masculine Self, who must deal actively and violently with his feelings. Marilyn French observes: "The speed of Gertrude's remarriage violates Hamlet's sensibilities because of what it betrays: sexual desire in Gertrude, desire great enough to lead her to ignore standard social forms" (148). Since Gertrude's desires violate the standards of the patriarchal order, her actions receive far more attention than those of Claudius, whose murderous actions are more acceptable to the warrior society of medieval Denmark. According to Madelon Gohlke, Gertrude's cooperation in Hamlet Sr.'s death is unnecessary: "It hardly matters whether Gertrude was implicated in the actual death of Hamlet. Adultery is itself a form of violence and as great a crime" (173). If adultery is as great a crime as murder, then it is not surprising that Hamlet fixes his attention on his mother's role more than on Claudius's.

Although Gertrude's sexuality initiates many of the conflicts in the tragedy, it is important to remember that she also has a strong personality. French points out that Gertrude is "a loving concerned mother, a compassionate queen, a loving wife (to Claudius, so far as we see her), who is also able to comment with force and intelligence on Polonius' tediousness and the Player Queen's protestations" (149). Gertrude sees Polonius for what he is (a

manipulator) and does pick up the Player Queen's tone. Furthermore, Gertrude is aware of the effects of her actions on others, as Carolyn Heilbrun observes: "If there is one quality that has characterized . . . every speech of Gertrude's in the play, it is the ability to see reality clearly, and to express it" (15). Gertrude displays this ability several times throughout the tragedy. When Claudius informs her that Polonius knows what ails Hamlet, Gertrude responds: "I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage" (2.2.56-57). Instead of telling Claudius that Polonius has the answer, Gertrude provides the most obvious, logical explanation; neither does she merely reflect Claudius's opinion. As Heilbrun notes: "It is not the statement of a dull, slothful woman who can only echo her husband's words" (12). Moreover, in the closet scene Gertrude acknowledges her sexual violation of patriarchal value: "Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (3.4.88-90). It becomes clear that Gertrude knows that her sensual desires have ignited Hamlet's actions (and Claudius's, too, as she learns later in the scene).

While Gertrude is aware of her actions' effects, Ophelia represents the other extreme. Linda Bamber contends that "Ophelia is not developed as a woman with a choice to make" (79). While this assessment is accurate, I believe Ophelia has no other choices while Polonius lives and

manipulates her. In her father's presence, Ophelia unwilling betrays Hamlet as well as herself. Juliet Dusinberre describes this betrayal: "[When] her father and the king overhear her conversation with Hamlet, she is inevitably false to Hamlet" (94). Because of this deception and her alliance with his mother's husband, Hamlet categorizes Ophelia with his mother: "no independent view of Ophelia is possible because he can see her only as an extension of his agonized relation to his mother" (Erickson 76). In Hamlet's mind, Ophelia represents the same violation of patriarchal standards that Gertrude presents to him; ironically, Hamlet's denial of Ophelia's feminine Other occurs because she is manipulated by the masculine Self of the patriarchy.

When Hamlet kills Polonius, Ophelia finally finds herself in a position to make her first individual choice. The fact that her lover, whom she thought she was helping, has killed her father, who directed her life, places Ophelia in a position where she can no longer function in the patriarchal world (Gohlke 173). Because Polonius allowed Ophelia "no identity independent of his rule" (Dusinberre 94), she cannot cope with her relationship to Hamlet. Her relations with the two most important men in her life are altered beyond her ability to cope, so Ophelia enters the realm of a madness that leads to her suicide (Gohlke 173). Although David Leverenz argues that Ophelia's suicide "becomes a little microcosm of the male world's

banishment of the female [Other], because 'woman' represents everything denied by reasonable men" (121), I believe that Ophelia chooses madness and suicide as an escape from male domination. For the first time, Ophelia rejects the patriarchal will imposed on her; without the men in her life to manipulate her, Ophelia decides to disregard the conventions that have ruined any chance of happiness she might have found. Her madness provides Ophelia with the power to leave an unsatisfying existence in search of her own destiny.

Although Ophelia is no longer present, her madness continues throughout the remainder of the play. Her death initiates a madness in the surviving characters that greatly influences their decisions, as Linda Bamber observes: "[Ophelia] is part of the quarrel between Laertes and Hamlet; Laertes blames Hamlet for her madness, and each man is enraged by the other's claim to be her chief mourner" (81). In dying, Ophelia asserts more power over the men in her life than she was capable of when she lived; her mad death causes the characters to act rashly. Claudius's plot to poison Hamlet during the duel is concocted before it is given any real thought. The actual plan for Laertes to kill Hamlet in the duel might work, but Claudius rushes the event. After Ophelia's funeral he tells Laertes, "Strength your patience in our last night's speech, / We'll put the matter to the present push" (5.1.294-95). For someone who has waited months to analyze Hamlet's actions in the past,

Claudius cannot stop himself from rashly executing Hamlet's death right after Ophelia's funeral. It appears that Ophelia's madness influences the King to react impatiently to Hamlet's actions instead of analyzing them as he previously did. Ophelia's madness and death illustrate how desperate the men in the play become to fulfill their own selfish desires. Essentially, Ophelia's suicide symbolizes the breakdown of the patriarchal order at the finish of Hamlet. Months of harboring suspicions and hiding secrets unravel within hours of Ophelia's death. The surviving characters suddenly perform impulsive actions that illustrate the effects of Ophelia's madness in their lives. Even though she is dead, Ophelia directs the actions of the masculine Self as it once directed hers.

Even Gertrude acts out of character during the duel when she directly disobeys Claudius and drinks a toast in honor of Hamlet (Smith 206). Although she previously spoke her mind, this is the first time Gertrude disregards the commands of her husband. When Claudius cries, "Gertrude, do not drink," the Queen replies, "I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me" (5.2.290-91). Even though the Queen dies as a result of her defiance, her death is not in vain. Heilbrun verifies this claim: "Before she dies she does not waste time on vituperation; she warns Hamlet that the drink is poisoned to prevent his drinking it" (14). Gertrude's meaningful death enables Hamlet to finally justify his revenge on Claudius for his murderous crimes. Without

Gertrude's "rebellion," Hamlet would not have fulfilled his duty to the Ghost. Ironically, the feminine Other that Hamlet denies in the beginning of the tragedy becomes instrumental in aiding the masculine Self that he has embraced in order to carry out his tragic vengeance.

Overall, the women in Hamlet play a far greater part in the action of the tragedy than we can see on the surface. While Gertrude and Ophelia do appear subservient to the patriarchal order throughout most of the play, the individual choices they finally make contribute greatly to the tragic dénouement. Although each takes a different course of action, both women play essential parts in inciting and revealing Claudius's murderous plot to poison Hamlet during the duel. Even though they do not survive the patriarchal Self, the women do initiate the necessary movement that Hamlet needs to rid Denmark of its corruption.

Chapter Three

Inconsistent Awareness

The women in Othello are more advanced than the females in Hamlet because Shakespeare presents Desdemona and Emilia as people, not as objects. The men discuss these women as being responsible for their own actions, unlike the men in Hamlet, who simply view the females as victims.

In addition, Desdemona and Emilia are more aware of the consequences of their actions than the females in Hamlet. Although this awareness is inconsistent in the individual characters, the women in Othello are far more alert to the effects that their actions have on the other characters in the play than either Ophelia or Gertrude is. Even though the lives of Desdemona and Emilia center around their relations with their husbands, the men hold the women responsible for their own acts. This treatment differs greatly from the way that Ophelia and Gertrude are judged by the patriarchal world that they live in. Shakespeare advances the role of the women from passive background victim (in Hamlet) to active perpetrator who still finds herself victimized (in Othello).

This victimization occurs because the patriarchal world acknowledges only two types of females: "There are two kinds of women, one being superhuman, totally virtuous. The other kind is a dissembler, a deceiver, because of sexuality; she is thus subhuman, bestial, capable of any degradation" (French 212). This image is even harder for

the female characters to uphold in marriage. Desdemona, and to a certain extent Emilia, are supposed to be idealized wives with superhuman virtue, but they are also supposed to satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands. In order to carry out one of these actions, the women must sacrifice the other. Combining virtue and marital duty is impossible and falls on the woman's shoulders, as Irene Dash notes:

"Holding the balance are marital conventions--conventions that demand more of women than of men" (103).

It is in attempting to maintain this equilibrium that the women of Othello "supply" the males with the grounds for mistrusting them. The masculine Self detests the feminine Other in this tragedy because the Other, especially in the beginning, gives the Self what it craves: the balance between heavenly virtue and human sexuality. Desdemona possesses great virtue, but she also displays a great deal of sexual awareness. Her dual nature threatens the masculine Self because it provides Othello with what he desires and fears at the same time. French explains that Othello is just as threatened as Iago is by the feminine Other: "Iago has contempt for the feminine principle, for women, and feeling, and sex. Othello, without his awareness, shares this contempt" (209). Since the male Self cannot contain or understand the balance between sexuality and virtue, as the Other evidently can, the Self must dominate it, even to the point of destroying the Other. Carol Thomas Neely suggests that the male characters in

Othello fear the Other's marital balance because it mocks their domination: "the men in this play must destroy the women who make fools of them" (142).

This mockery of the patriarchy occurs in Desdemona's first appearance. Dash comments that Desdemona's initial exposure to the audience allows Shakespeare to display her power in its greatest range (104). Desdemona informs Brabantio that her decision to marry Othello is valid because it is the natural progression of life: "But here's my husband; / And so much duty as my mother show'd / To you, preferring you before her father" (1.3.185-87). This scene illustrates Desdemona's power because she presents her justification for marrying Othello and wins. However, even with the patriarchal tradition of marriage supporting her argument, Desdemona does not possess enough power to overrule the will of her father; as Ann Jennalie Cook notes, "marriage at any age in defiance of parental authority was rarely tolerated" (188). What does supply Desdemona with the ability to succeed in her argument to marry Othello against Brabantio's wishes is her awareness of Othello's power as a warrior. Through her husband, Desdemona utilizes the power of the patriarchal government over that of the patriarchal family. When she tells the rulers of Venice of her marriage to Othello, Desdemona knows that they need his skills, and she uses this knowledge to her benefit. When the Duke remarks to Othello, "a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on

you" (1.3.225-26), Desdemona seems to know that the state will honor Othello's agenda, which is indirectly her own, over Brabantio's. Desdemona even requests that she travel by Othello's side, instead of remaining at her father's. Even though Brabantio says he will not accept her, this decision says little about his power because Othello does not want his wife at Brabantio's side anyway. When Desdemona bids, "And let me find a charter in your voice / T' assist my simpleness" (1.3.245-46), Shakespeare illustrates her abilities quite clearly. The idea that the Senate is even willing to allow Desdemona the option of going with Othello demonstrates her power to play off of the State's need to please Othello. It is important to remember that Desdemona presents her explanations for going with Othello before he ever states his appeal. Shakespeare presents a woman who is able to persuade the patriarchal structure to support her needs in the matters of marriage.

Besides promoting her own agenda in her arguments to accompany Othello to Cyprus, Desdemona also spars with Iago about his portrayal of women, as Marianne Novy observes:

Early in the play she seems mature and aware of people's limitations ("I would not there reside, / To put my father in impatient thoughts / By being in his eye"--1.3.241-43) and world-wise enough to deal with Iago's anti-feminist jokes with a cool "O heavy ignorance! Thou praisest the worst best" (2.1.143-44). (141)

When Iago refers to all women as hussies and wantons in his talk with Emilia, Desdemona responds, "O, fie upon thee, slanderer" (2.1.113) in defense of Emilia and women in general. Kezia Vanmeter Sproat praises Desdemona's strong actions in flying to the defense of those in trouble (46); however, Sproat also remarks: "Although in 2.1 Desdemona wins only part of her goal--protecting Emilia--she does courageously withstand Iago's clear hostility to all her class" (49). While she can prevent Iago from degrading his wife, Desdemona cannot alter his perception of women. This failure leads directly to her death.

Iago uses Desdemona's intelligence and especially her charity for those weaker than herself to paint a picture of wantonness in Othello's mind. Since Desdemona's agenda is to project her expectations of an ideal marriage into her relationship with Othello, she inevitably creates an idealized image of herself that she must maintain in Othello's mind to remain worthy of his love, a point that Marilyn French explains:

Since for Desdemona to be worthy of his
[Othello's] love she must be better than the
common run of women, the mere suggestion that she
is not the utter paragon of virtue and honesty she
has been made out is sufficient to tarnish her.

(212)

Iago realizes this, as well, and he discredits Desdemona through her charity toward Cassio. Iago convinces the

masculine Self in Othello that Desdemona's feminine Other grants favors to Cassio, as well as to numerous others. By approaching Othello on this level, Iago taints the love that Othello has for Desdemona since that love originated from the feminine principle of the Other. As soon as Iago plants the seed of doubt about Desdemona's nature, Othello disregards all of her positive actions and focuses on the negative ones. Novy says that: "He cannot keep distrust of women out of his marriage. Brabantio may not be physically present, but his message, 'She has deceived her father, and may thee' (1.3.293), rings in Othello's memory" (126). Even though Desdemona follows the patriarchal convention of choosing her husband over her father, Othello cannot prevent himself from suspecting her of deceiving him. His masculine Self cannot accept Desdemona's actions because they are beyond his control. Othello must kill her; otherwise he will, he thinks, be condoning Desdemona's infidelity and giving up total control of her (French 215).

While Desdemona is definitely innocent of Iago's slanders against her character, her greatest flaw is that she is oblivious to the "crimes" that Othello holds against her. For a woman whose awareness allows her to employ the patriarchal state in her favor, Desdemona never perceives Othello's actions as a hazard to her life. The awareness that allows Desdemona to observe and combat Iago's assaults on women seems to drop off when she analyzes the activities of her own husband. Desdemona's awareness only asserts

itself when she interprets the public realm of reality. When she examines her own private existence, Desdemona fails to see the obvious. She is unable to focus on Othello's mistreatment of her because Desdemona's notions of creating an ideal marriage blind her to Othello's intentions until it is too late. This internal blindness allows Desdemona to disregard Othello's strange actions; she optimistically tries to fulfill her marriage vows. Dash concurs:

"Desdemona continues to strive for success in an unusual marriage, relying on her two major supports: her intelligence and her ideal of a wife's role" (121). Her innocence is made clear during a conversation with Emilia about untrue wives, when she says, "Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong / For the whole world" and "I do not think there is any such woman" (4.3.78-79,83). In proclaiming her own innocence and the innocence of every other woman, Desdemona reveals a lack of knowledge about sin and corruption, as well as her inability to commit such actions. "Desdemona's obedience bespeaks a clear conscience," says Juliet Dusinberre; "her behavior is independent of her husband's judgement of her" (91).

Desdemona's innocence and commitment to Othello are so strong that she never blames him for his actions toward her: "she never accuses him of irrationality or shows more than a fleeting resentment of his unfairness and cruelty . . . she seems to feel that she is some way responsible for Othello's anger" (Paris 419-20). Desdemona feels that she has not

served her husband in the way he deserves; however, she has enough integrity to realize that it was her own decision to renounce her father and marry Othello. In a last attempt to convince Othello of her innocence, Desdemona tells him that her only sins are the loves she bears for him (5.2.40). In his jealous rage, Othello confuses his wife's supposed sins with the loves she always bears, and, as Cook observes, "in both the Senate scene and the death scene, Desdemona exercises her considerable skills at persuasion, winning the public argument but tragically losing the private one" (194). Othello thinks Desdemona tries to save her life at this point by utilizing her wanton skills on him as she did with so many others. Desdemona's virtue only reinforces Othello's altered view of her and serves as the impetus for his condemnation of her.

When she dies Desdemona carries no guilt with her (nor should she). However, she does say she brought the death upon herself when Emilia asks who committed the deed: "Nobody; I myself" (5.2.124). Cook states that Desdemona "has made the choice, and she alone accepts the responsibility for its consequences" (193). At this point Desdemona's earlier awareness returns, but it is too late. While she understands that she created a situation that eventually traps her, she does not see the harm she is in until she is totally isolated from any form of help. It seems as if she realizes that by trying to fulfill her marriage vows she has only given Othello more reason to kill

her. By following the conventions of the patriarchy, Desdemona gives Othello the justification for murder although she still dies with her innocence intact.

If Desdemona bears no guilt in her death, the same cannot be said for Emilia. Shakespeare clearly implicates Emilia in Iago's plot because she commits the act that generates the strongest "evidence" against Desdemona--the missing handkerchief. Even though she steals her mistress's handkerchief for Iago, she has no idea why he wants it: "what he will do with it / Heaven knows, not I; / I nothing but to please his fantasy" (3.3.297-99). Emilia honors her husband's request for the handkerchief; she does not know the plans he has for it in his evil mind. Even when Desdemona becomes frantic over losing the handkerchief, Emilia never reveals what she knows. Dash rationalizes Emilia's failure: "her actions merely characterize a woman who, although she has not lost her ability to discern right from wrong, finds it simpler to be guided by her husband's moral code than her own" (123). Emilia acts in the only manner that she possibly can at this point. She is trapped by a patriarchal system which dictates that a wife defer to her husband's wishes. In this she is a lot like Desdemona, who also trusts and finally accepts her husband's judgments.

Regardless of Emilia's reason for not revealing what she knows at that time, she does redeem herself by the tragedy's end. Marianne Novy believes that after Desdemona loses her handkerchief, Emilia becomes the central female

figure. The transfer occurs as Desdemona's disillusionment with Othello weakens her worldly perceptions and as Emilia's understanding grows because of her secret knowledge:

"At this point it is Emilia who takes over the articulate awareness that Desdemona showed earlier" (Novy 141). While speaking to Desdemona, Emilia comments on the treatment of wives by their husbands. She states: "Then let them use us well; else let them know, / The ills we do, their ills instruct us so" (4.3.102-03). The women have reversed roles by this point: where Desdemona once protected Emilia from Iago's assault, Emilia now instructs the docile Desdemona on the nature of relationships. Only Emilia can resolve the crisis at large; however, the patriarchal restraints prevent her from acting until Othello makes his move. Once Emilia realizes that Iago has used the handkerchief to tarnish Desdemona's virtue in Othello's eyes, she reveals the truth about her husband's scheme, rejecting his command to remain silent:

'T will out, 'twill out! I peace?

No, I will speak as liberal as the north:

Let heaven and man and devils, let them all,

All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

(5.2.219-22)

She no longer wants to please Iago; Emilia goes against her wifely duty and reveals her part in Iago's evil plan. Dash observes: "Only the murder of a woman she treasured could finally break the chain that had dictated Emilia's

relinquishing of responsibility for her own actions" (129). Emilia knows it would be worse to bear the guilt and let her crime destroy her silently. She would rather risk death for speaking against her husband and confronting him with his crimes. Even though Iago murders Emilia for her "betrayal," it matters little. She does the right thing and dies as a heroine. It is this decision that allows Carol Thomas Neely to interpret Emilia as a stronger character than Othello: "Othello chooses Iago's friendship over Desdemona's love temporarily and unwittingly; Emilia's choice of Desdemona over Iago is voluntary and final" (145-46). Emilia decides to speak when she could remain silent and not endanger herself; however, she chooses to act in order to defend Desdemona's reputation. Emilia's choice to act on the knowledge she possesses makes her an essential part of this tragedy because she uses her awareness to correct a serious misconception.

The actions of the women in Othello move beyond the symbolic contributions of the females in Hamlet. Desdemona and Emilia are essential to their tragedy because they are portrayed as real women, who are able to think for themselves, but their understanding and crucial actions in the play are limited by their marriages. When they perceive actions outside the boundaries of their marriages, Desdemona and Emilia are able to execute positive movements in the tragedy. However, when they find themselves as the targets of marital authority in the

patriarchy, Emilia and Desdemona are unable to utilize their awareness to help themselves in time. Even though Desdemona and Emilia both possess a greater field of awareness than the majority of the men (except for Iago), their observations are limited by the fact that they both possess a shifting awareness. This shifting awareness never lets Desdemona and Emilia see the innate, malicious designs of their own husbands until it is too late; this inconsistent awareness contributes greatly to the women's final fates. The fragmented feminine Other is never able to see the motives of the masculine Self until the males are ready to carry out their agendas upon the women. Although Desdemona and Emilia are not always aware of the patriarchal system's confinements on their own lives, they do have enough understanding to oppose the dominating order in the defense of others. While the women's fluctuating perceptions prove to be tragic, they do allow Desdemona and Emilia, in part, to shape their own agendas.

Chapter Four

Empowering Awareness

While the female characters in Hamlet and Othello face their conflicts with the masculine Self using limited awareness, the representatives of the feminine Other in King Lear confront the patriarchal structure with far greater understanding and action. Lear's daughters do not passively wait for the patriarchy to judge them in their roles and actions; instead, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan activate their own agendas against the masculine Self. As Peter Erickson observes: "Though they respond differently to [Lear's] provocation, all three daughters share the common purpose of protecting themselves against the father's total claims on them" (104). Shakespeare's symbolic use of Lear as the universal patriarch turns the daughters' battle with their father into a battle against the confines of the patriarchal family structure. Or, as Linda Boose points out, family issues in Lear "are less a reflection of those in the political world than they are the genesis of them" (60). The denial of Lear's authority reflects the women's rejection of the overall patriarchal foundations, as Boose observes: "The organization of the Elizabethan family and the society it mirrored was . . . patriarchal and patrilineal, transmitting authority and kinship through only the father" (60).

The women's expanded awareness illustrates the progressive movement that Shakespeare follows in formulating

each subsequent tragedy of the major four. Lear's daughters know that their limited power can only be increased through their relationship with their father. Each daughter's particular understanding and choice enables her to advance to her individual level of power in the patriarchal world. It is through these separate agendas that Shakespeare presents the greater scope of the feminine Other's awareness in this tragedy.

Even though Cordelia's reaction to Lear's request for parental devotion differs greatly from her sisters', her understanding of patriarchal power goes beyond the emulation of the masculine Self that Goneril and Regan engage in. Cordelia remains true to the underlying principle of the feminine Other and questions the extent of Lear's power. This stance sets the tragedy into motion because it ruins the stability of Lear's patriarchal power (Boose 64). Her first line in the play--"What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1.62)--clearly invokes the feminine principle of devotion and silence. This stance grants Cordelia a moral advantage over Goneril and Regan, who maneuver dishonestly for Lear's love; Cordelia draws her power from the feminine Other, not from an imitation of the masculine Self. Her answer is a true expression of love for her father, not a processed answer for the King's benefit. Cordelia realizes that if she is to ever obtain any real power as a woman in the patriarchal order, she must do so by presenting herself from the

feminine principle. Marilyn French notes that Cordelia "is not swayed by the desire for power and possession into falsifying her feelings; she does not feed Lear's delusion of control" (231). Cordelia accepts that her answers must come from the true nature of her being. Whether she gains any power from her stance is secondary to Cordelia; she accepts the consequences from the beginning (French 226). Cordelia acknowledges the outcome when she says, "I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less" (1.1.92-93). She can give Lear only the love of a daughter, not the love of both wife and daughter. However, these consequences reach further than Lear could ever realize when he rejects his youngest daughter's answer.

Since Cordelia does not desire her father's power enough to alter her answer, it matters little to her that he removes her dowry. This denial of patriarchal favor grants Cordelia "a release from the father's structure and permission to pass out of it" (Boose 63). In taking Cordelia as his queen, France recognizes that her true power is independent of Lear's will. France sees in Cordelia, as Juliet Dusinberre explains, "a royalty beyond the majesty of wealth and land" (125). When Cordelia's stance inspires France's agreement to marry her, Lear's patriarchal will is disrupted to an even greater degree. Ironically, France's acceptance of a disowned Cordelia also grants her a great deal of power on the patriarchal level. Even though Cordelia gains her power through her marriage to France, she

finds herself married only after she stands up to Lear's patriarchal dominance by remaining true to the principle of the feminine Other. Cordelia even states her contribution to marriage: "Happily, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (1.1.100-02). Since France decides to marry Cordelia after this speech, he knows what her commitment will consist of: the stance of the feminine Other. In addition, this marriage creates Cordelia's role as Queen of France, which becomes an essential component of the plot later in the play. Barbara Millard sees Cordelia standing in opposition to Edmund's bid for power because "Edmund's only legitimacy in the last two acts of the play is as defender of Britain against this foreign Queen" (148). Without Cordelia's intervention, Edmund would not eventually lose the power that he usurps from his father; Lear's refusal of Cordelia's stance has more implications than Shakespeare presents initially in the tragedy.

Perhaps the greatest disruption of Lear's patriarchal power occurs when Regan and Goneril demonstrate an even greater disregard for Lear's rule than previously noticed by Cordelia in her observation of their true natures. During her rejection of Lear's request, Cordelia observes: "Why have my sisters husbands, if they say / They love you all?" (1.1.99-100), and as she leaves, Cordelia remarks to her sisters, "Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides" (1.1.280). Cordelia is obviously aware of Goneril and

Regan's real intentions, and as she departs, Cordelia knows that no good will come to Lear from his elder daughters. French comments that while Cordelia denies Lear his demands, "Goneril and Regan deny him what he has asserted as his right, afterwards" (222). He cannot make his "beloved" daughters see the validity of his authority.

When Regan and Goneril see that they no longer need their father because he has no more power to grant them, they concentrate on other avenues, such as their husbands and Edmund. But Cordelia's defiance has established the limits of Lear's power; she is responsible for his transformation from masculine Self to feminine Other: "Lear . . . is one of the few men to enter the experience of women, and discover his own nullity in the eyes of the world once he is separated from his possessions" (Dusinberre 125). While Lear loses none of his masculine traits, he does lose his patriarchal power; this loss makes Lear far weaker than any of his daughters. The moment he denies the only true child in his presence, the feminine Other, working through Cordelia, allows for the transfer of the masculine Self from Lear to Goneril and Regan. By rejecting the feminine Other in his life, Lear must fill the void that his exile of Cordelia has created.

As Lear takes over the feminine role, Regan and Goneril assume (to a certain degree) the part of the masculine Self. Unlike Cordelia, who embraces the power of the feminine Other and utilizes her feminine qualities to refuse Lear's

will, Goneril and Regan give their father the answer he desires by being submissive to the patriarchal order. When petitioned by Lear to tell of their love for him, Goneril responds, "Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter" (1.1.55), while Regan replies, "I find she names my very deed of love; / Only she comes too short" (1.1.71-72). Although they profess unlimited love, they go beyond the boundaries of love that are possible for a daughter to give a father; Goneril and Regan simply tell Lear what he desires because they know that it will advance their own power. However, once the daughters get what advantage they can by submitting to Lear's patriarchal requests, they begin to extend their power beyond the limits of the feminine Other.

Goneril and Regan use their relationships with their husbands to further their own plans, but they eventually discard the men. For as French observes, Regan and Goneril do not need Albany and Cornwall, since the women possess more power than their spouses: "Goneril is a better soldier than her husband; both she and Regan are assertive, nonnutritive, uncompassionate, interested in power, prowess, and status" (231). Since their awareness extends beyond the patriarchal world's ambitions for females, Goneril and Regan emulate the traits of the men in their lives. Goneril's savagery extends beyond that of Albany; when he shows compassion for those weaker, Goneril calls him a "Milk-liver'd man, / That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head

for wrongs" (4.2.50-51). Once Goneril observes her husband's humanity, she no longer desires his services because he cannot fulfill her agenda. Regan dares even more than Goneril; when Cornwall is wounded by a guard, Regan interferes and kills the guard by wielding a sword with her own hands: "Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus?" (3.7.80). Even though she attacks from behind (an unmanly act), Regan startles the group by picking up the weapon, let alone using it with her own hands. French calls this act "unique in Shakespeare" because no other woman, not even Lady Macbeth, commits such a violent act (231).

Regan and Goneril eliminate anyone who is "weaker" than they are and cannot aid them in advancing their agenda. Marianne Novy notes that there is "a compensatory quality in their cruelty--a hatred of others they consider weak because of a fear of being weak themselves" (154). This disassociation from the feminine Other lets the women act outside the conventional limitations of their gender. In addition, "Both sisters act rather than feel, and move to gain what they want in both the public and personal spheres. They are 'masculine'" (French 231). Through these acts, Shakespeare illustrates how Regan and Goneril take advantage of the opportunities that their awareness reveals to them.

While this awareness may supply Goneril and Regan with more power than Gertrude, Ophelia, Desdemona, or even Emilia, it does not allow them to escape the conventions of the patriarchal world; they simply follow the pathway to

power that their perceptions supply them with. Even though Lear's elder daughters reject their father and husbands in their quest for power, they react in a different fashion toward Edmund. French perceives this flaw in their masculine pose: "The sisters value power and authority, and believe in their own right to hold them; they respect control and 'reason,' and are utterly reasonable except in one thing--Edmund" (225). Although Goneril and Regan are doing quite well in their pursuit of power, they let their involvement with Edmund alter the focus that their awareness has provided them.

This desire to be Edmund's partner forces the sisters to dissolve their partnership with each other. Regan, whose husband is dead by this time, needs Edmund to carry out her plans. She wishes he would ignore Goneril's presence: "I never shall endure her. Dear lord, / Be not familiar with her" (5.1.12-13). When Goneril enters, she states: "I had rather lose the battle than that sister / Should loosen him and me" (5.1.18-19). Goneril is willing to risk the position she shares with her husband rather than allow Regan to take Edmund away from her. Both women realize that their unified stance cannot further their agendas to any greater extent without a man, so they retreat to the principle of the feminine Other. Instead of continuing the imitation of male abilities, such as fighting, killing, and challenging a man's authority, Goneril and Regan both decide to submit to the will of Edmund in hopes of gaining power in the same

manner that they once obtained control from Lear. By the end of the tragedy, Goneril even kills Regan in a "'woman's' fashion--with poison, and offstage" (French 231), thus completing the retreat to the feminine principle.

The sisters' decision to revert back to their original furtive behavior shows that even the most aggressive females cannot work outside the principle of the Other indefinitely, no matter of how much awareness they possess. According to French, "when women (and it must be women) do not uphold the inlaw aspects [of the feminine Other] when they attempt to move into 'masculine' power and control, as do Goneril and Regan, they do not threaten the world in the ways males do" (235). Once the initial shock of Regan and Goneril's savagery passes, the women have little choice but to rally behind the figure of power that Edmund represents. The patriarchal system adjusts itself to the women's activities, whether they operate in a feminine way or imitate masculine behavior.

Even though Cordelia achieves the greatest power among King Lear's female characters, she does not escape being entrapped by the masculine Self. Although she refuses the patriarchy through the stance of the feminine Other, Cordelia cannot resist returning to Britain to aid her father. As Erickson observes: "Upon her reentry to the play, she obliges Lear in the role of the good, comforting mother, to which he had originally assigned her" (112). On some level, Cordelia takes responsibility for

placing Lear into these dire circumstances, and she responds as both the mother figure he really desires all along and the masculine son that her new position as a patriarchal ruler allows her to assume. The mothering aspect of Cordelia's nature is so powerful that it prompts her to invade Britain without her husband and battle her father's enemies. According to Barbara Millard, "Cordelia . . . first rejects the self-obliterating role of the daughter/mother demanded by her father, only to be defeated later by her attempt of the heroic militant role reserved for the son/father" (144). While Cordelia never abandons the feminine principle in her life, she does utilize the authority she gains through her marriage to France to extend the limits of her female role. The feminine principle, which once empowered her to reject the patriarchal order, now motivates her to realign herself with it.

Since Cordelia's actions are not motivated by a lust for power, her actions are truly essential to the play's dénouement. The feelings of her strong feminine nature cause the breakdown of Lear's patriarchy and free Britain from Edmund's conquest. However, no matter how fundamental her actions are to the movement of the tragedy, Cordelia cannot prevent her own death. French remarks: "Her qualities can 'redeem' Lear's sufferings but they cannot sustain her in the world. Cordelian nature gets destroyed" (233). Millard agrees: "She has in a 'manly' fashion

forged her own destiny and loses her life as a result of heroic risk" (160-61). Even though Cordelia triumphs over Lear's original demands and returns upon her own terms to undo the evil actions of sisters, she still succumbs to the patriarchal world because she indirectly fulfills its conventional desires. As Claudette Hoover notes: "Cordelia rejects her father's clumsy and misguided bargain of love in order, paradoxically, to preserve it" (96). As with Goneril and Regan, Cordelia's increased awareness cannot prevent her from returning to serve the patriarchal system they all reject in some way or form.

Chapter Five

Partners in Awareness

With the female characters of Macbeth, Shakespeare produces the most assertive women of the four major tragedies. Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff demonstrate a greater field of awareness than any of the preceding tragic female characters. Their utilization of this awareness allows the two women to comprehend their husbands' actions to the greatest degree possible. Shakespeare allows Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff to perform actions that move beyond the structured patriarchal role of the wife; instead, they act as partners in their husbands' doings. The women refuse to stay in the background and remain silent about the decisions of Macbeth and Macduff. However, the manner in which Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff involve themselves in their husbands' activities varies greatly and distinguishes their separate roles in the tragedy.

When Macbeth first mentions his wife, he refers to her as "my dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.11). This form of address indicates that Macbeth places his wife's opinion on the same level as his own. Lady Macbeth is no mere subservient spouse; she is her husband's partner in life. Their relationship initially goes beyond the patriarchal relationships of the other marriages in the tragedies; Lady Macbeth is very much aware of how her husband's position affects her own. Macbeth is aware of her motivating authority and relies upon his partner's perceptions to prompt

him during his times of weakness. Kay Stockholder describes the mutuality of the couple's understanding this way:

"Their loving intimacy is further suggested by her instant intuition of Macbeth's excited fear, and her similar assumption that circumstances alone will not fulfill the witches' prophecy" (227). In order to maintain her place of equality at Macbeth's side, Lady Macbeth must combine her feminine side with the masculine Self, or, as Carolyn Asp explains, "she must appeal as a woman to his manliness as well as channel her energies into maintaining a persona of masculine courage" (160).

Once Shakespeare reveals Macbeth's insecurities about murdering Duncan in order to become king, Lady Macbeth's awareness comes into play. She knows that in order to gain any power herself she must work through Macbeth. Since his anxieties prevent Macbeth from aggressively pursuing his interests, Lady Macbeth must encourage aggression in him. In order for her to do so, the future Queen must combine the role of the feminine Other with the masculine principle of aggression, which Macbeth cannot activate on his own accord. Through this combination, according to Stockholder, Lady Macbeth "overcomes the impending pity [that Macbeth feels for Duncan] by equating his murderous desire to his sense of manliness" (229). By using her feminine qualities to support Macbeth's manly feelings, Lady Macbeth maintains her power within the structure of the patriarchy. However, once Lady Macbeth instructs her husband in the plan of action

they must take to murder Duncan, she surpasses the limitations of the feminine Other. "Lady Macbeth consciously attempts to reject her feminine sensibility and adopt a male mentality," Asp observes, "because she perceives that her society equates feminine qualities with weakness" (153). If Macbeth acknowledges his wife to be his "dearest partner," then Lady Macbeth understands that she must supply the strength that he lacks; if she fails to do so, then she cannot fulfill her function in the partnership. She also knows that she must reject her womanliness to acquire the strength she needs to support Macbeth (Asp 159).

Even though Lady Macbeth takes an active part in the formulation and execution of Duncan's murder for the sake of her husband's position (and indirectly her own), she finds herself punished for violating the patriarchal conventions in order to aid Macbeth. Her masculine assertions do not strengthen her partnership with Macbeth; instead they distance her from her husband. By abandoning the feminine principle, Lady Macbeth destroys a partnership that her husband relied on. Although Macbeth encourages his wife to use the power of the feminine Other to bolster his masculine Self, he does not accept her usurpation of his male role. The unacceptability of Lady Macbeth's actions becomes apparent in Macbeth's treatment of her after Duncan's murder. Stockholder confirms this point: "The collusive intimacy between them fades almost immediately after Duncan's murder, for as Macbeth espouses her image of

him as an unthinking man of action he redefines her in a more conventional feminine role" (232). From the moment that Lady Macbeth faints and cries, "Help me hence, ho" (2.3.118), she finds herself relegated to the background. Regardless of whether she actually faints or pretends to in order to throw suspicion off Macbeth, Lady Macbeth commits a very traditional act for a female. After that, she hardly speaks with Macbeth again and he never shares any other plans with her. By drawing on the masculine qualities in herself, Lady Macbeth has created a husband who no longer needs a partner. According to Asp, "Her dream of being partner to his greatness is doomed by the very means she has used to insure that greatness" (162). Macbeth no longer desires a partner because his wife has instilled in him the very masculine force that he hesitated to use in seeking power for himself.

Lady Macbeth's downward spiral continues past the point of being reduced to the conventional female role she tried so hard to escape. She eventually becomes entrapped by the guilt of her actions and goes mad as a result. As Marilyn French remarks, Lady Macbeth initiates an action that "leads to the murder of a king, father, [and] guest. These actions lead to a new ambience, a world in which the feminine principle is being wiped out" (246). Not only has her espousal of the masculine principle created a husband who no longer needs her, but her abandonment of the feminine Other results in her failing to perform the patriarchal

hospitality expected of her during Duncan's stay. Her guilt over Duncan's murder leads to the spots of blood on her hands (5.1), as well as to her death (possibly suicide). What makes this death even more pitiful is that it occurs off-stage; Lady Macbeth's character is such a pale shadow of its former self that Shakespeare does not even allow her to die on stage. Macbeth's reaction conveys this impression: "She should have died hereafter" (5.5.17). Macbeth's unemotional response to the death of someone who was once his "dearest partner in greatness" confirms Lady Macbeth's reduction from a strong woman to an insubstantial one by the tragedy's end. The "perfect" union of man and wife that once existed between the Macbeths is finally revealed as one of the weakest in the major tragedies.

As a foil to Lady Macbeth's relationship with Macbeth, Shakespeare presents the audience with the figure of Lady Macduff and her relationship with her husband. Although Lady Macduff plays a very minor part, it is an essential one that eventually outclasses the primary female character. According to Linda Bamber, "The one woman in Macbeth who does represent the feminine as Other is Lady Macduff" (93). On the surface Lady Macduff seems to represent a wife trapped by patriarchal conventions, but Shakespeare bestows her with much more awareness than the typical wife.

Because of Lady Macduff's situation, Bamber declares, the "claims of the feminine Other are perfectly valid in this play; they are simply ignored by the entire cast" (94).

When Macduff decides to leave his wife and family in a helpless position, Lady Macduff attacks her husband's choice: "He had none patience; / His flight was madness" (4.2.2-3). As Bamber observes, "unlike . . . Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff is hostile to the hero's public role when it calls him away from her" (93). Lady Macduff candidly criticizes her beloved's reason for leaving her. She cannot fathom what would possess him to leave his family in such a dire position when they need him the most. "She resents his departure and interprets it as a desertion" (Asp 158). By attacking Macduff's role in front of the messenger, Lady Macduff displays her assertiveness. She will speak as she sees fit; however, in contrast to Lady Macbeth, she utilizes the authority of the feminine Other but never crosses the boundaries of her wifely role. Lady Macduff never attacks her husband's masculine qualities, just his actions in general. She presents her argument upfront, instead of indirectly influencing her husband's actions, and never betrays the feminine basis of her power.

Like Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff is an assertive female who comments upon her husband's actions. However, unlike Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff does not usurp her husband's position of power. While Lady Macbeth assumes a masculine role in order to give her husband the power he desires, Lady Macduff uses her feminine role to criticize Macduff's activities. What distinguishes Lady Macduff from Lady Macbeth, though, is the position of her stance. While Lady

Macbeth wavers from feminine Other to masculine Self, Lady Macduff holds her ground. She does not alter her nature to suit her husband's actions; she obtains her power through the feminine Other. She demonstrates that a woman who draws her power from the feminine Other can be a strong character without crossing into the realm of the masculine Self. When Macbeth's henchmen arrive at the Macduff household, Lady Macduff does not passively submit to her fate; she resists their murderous attempts, although to no avail. Through this active response she remains true to her stance: "for the poor wren, / The most diminutive of birds, will fight, / Her young ones in her nest, against the owl" (4.2.9-11). Lady Macduff's critical commentary on Macduff reflects the tragedy's concern for the feminine Other; it must fend for itself (no matter how feeble the attempt), since those who embody the masculine Self ignore its relevance.

Even though the feminine Other suffers great neglect during Macbeth, it does find itself defended in the end. Bamber finds that "the reaction of the two husbands on hearing of their wives' death is the reverse of what we might expect" (94). Lady Macduff's death elicits sorrow and grief from her husband (4.3.213,16-17), while Macbeth registers little emotion when told of Lady Macbeth's death (5.5.17). While the critical wife is missed, the "dearest partner of greatness" is barely acknowledged. Bamber concludes: "it is the feminine as Other who is loved" (94). Although Macduff represses his emotional anguish over the

death of Lady Macduff and his children, it is this anguish that propels him to defeat Macbeth in combat, illustrating how the feminine Other is used to rationalize the masculine Self. But Lady Macbeth, the Other who rejects her true nature to advance an agenda through the emulation and support of the masculine Self, is cast aside and forgotten.

Overall, Shakespeare expands the field of female awareness in the characters of Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff. Both women are fully aware of the power that their husbands command, as well as the amount they are able to wield in relation to their husbands' positions. Where they differ is in their expression of power. Lady Macbeth's awareness only permits her to see the weakness of the feminine Other in her life; this vision of helplessness deceives Lady Macbeth into thinking that she must assume the masculine role in her partnership. Little does she realize that the very power that allows her to advance also diminishes her role to something less than she previously held. On the other hand, Lady Macduff's awareness of her position allows her to tap into the full capacity of the feminine Other. She uses this authority to defend herself against the patriarchal apathy she encounters. Even though she dies, the feminine Other is secured through Macduff's victory over Macbeth. This victory shows that the Other's principles cannot be denied and eradicated, as Madelon Gohlke maintains: "The values associated with women and children, which he [Macbeth] considers unmanly, come to be

perceived as the source of greatest strength" (177).
Macduff triumphs because he acknowledges the feminine
principle that Macbeth denies.

Chapter Six

The End of Awareness

In retrospect, even though the female characters of the "major tragedies" receive less critical attention than the males, the women do contribute to the essential movement of the tragic action in the plays. Shakespeare uses the women to correct the inaccurate judgments carried out by the male characters against the falsely accused. Through these rectifying movements, the women serve as the executors of the dénouement in the tragedies. Without the feminine Other, the unjust actions of the corrupt characters would never be revealed and amended in the plays.

Hamlet could not expose Claudius's evil actions without the presence of Ophelia and Gertrude; the women's sacrifices provide Hamlet with the opportunity he needs to punish Claudius. Likewise in Othello, Desdemona and Emilia's roles are necessary to unveil the evil doings of Iago. In a slightly different fashion, Cordelia and Lady Macduff's awareness of their situations highlights the neglect that the feminine Other suffers at the hands of the masculine Self. Even Lady Macbeth, Goneril, and Regan, whose aggressive acts exemplify the extreme measures women must take to express any control in their lives, indirectly contribute to the downfall of corruption.

Even though the extensively perceptive women share the same fate as the females acting with less awareness, the importance of the feminine Other should not be judged by

its inability to survive in a patriarchal society. The ingenuity and determination that the women possess in contesting the restricting order in their lives substantiates the strength of their characters. The power of feminine Other lies not in assimilating itself into the patriarchal system, but in challenging the restraints it finds imposed upon its existence. Through wielding the unconventional authority of the feminine Other, the women receive the attention they demand and deserve.

Works Cited

- Asp, Carolyn. "'Be Bloody, Bold and Resolute': Tragic Action and Sexual Stereotyping in Macbeth." Studies in Philology 78 (1981): 153-69.
- Bamber, Linda. Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1982.
- Boose, Linda E. "An Approach through Theme: Marriage and the Family." Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's King Lear. Ed. Robert H. Ray. New York: MLA, 1986. 59-68.
- Cook, Ann Jennalie. "The Design of Desdemona: Doubt Raised and Resolved." Shakespeare Studies 13 (1980): 187-96.
- Dash, Irene G. Wooing, Wedding, and Power: The Women in Shakespeare's Plays. New York: Columbia UP, 1981. 103-30.
- Dusinberre, Juliet. Shakespeare and the Nature of Women. London: Macmillan, 1975.
- Erickson, Peter. Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.
- French, Marilyn. Shakespeare's Division of Experience. New York: Summit, 1981.
- Gohlke, Madelon. "'I Wooed Thee with My Sword': Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms." Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays. Ed. Murray Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1980. 170-87.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. "The Character of Hamlet's Mother." Shakespeare Quarterly 8 (1957): 201-6.

- Hoover, Claudette. "'The Lusty Stealth of Nature':
Sexuality and Antifeminism in King Lear." Atlantis: A
Woman's Study Journal 11.1 (Fall 1985): 87-97.
- Leverenz, David. "The Woman in Hamlet: An Interpersonal
View." Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic
Essays. Ed. Murray Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn.
Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1980. 110-28.
- Millard, Barbara. "Virago with a Soft Voice: Cordelia's
Tragic Rebellion in King Lear." Philological Quarterly
68.2 (Spring 1989): 143-65.
- Neely, Carol Thomas. "Women and Men in Othello: 'What
Should Such a Fool / Do with So Good a Woman?'"
Shakespeare Studies 10 (1978): 133-58.
- Novy, Marianne. Love's Argument: Gender Relations in
Shakespeare. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985.
- Paris, Bernard J. "'His Scorn I Approve': The Self-Effacing
Desdemona." The American Journal of Psychoanalysis
44.4 (1984): 413-424.
- Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. The Riverside Shakespeare.
Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
1974. 1135-97.
- . King Lear. The Riverside Shakespeare. Ed. G.
Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
1249-1305.
- . Macbeth. The Riverside Shakespeare. Ed. G.
Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
1306-42.

- . Othello. The Riverside Shakespeare. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. 1198-1248.
- Smith, Rebecca. "A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertude." The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare. Ed. Carolyn Lenz et al. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980. 94-210.
- Sproat, Kezia Vanmeter. "Rereading Othello, II, 1." Kenyon Review ns 7.3 (Summer 1985): 44-51.
- Stockholder, Kay. "'Blanket of the Dark': Stealthy Lovers in Macbeth." Dream Works: Lovers and Families in Shakespeare's Plays. Toronto P, 1987. 100-17. Rpt. in Macbeth. Major Literary Characters. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1991. 221-36.