Decapitation and disgorgement: The female body's text in early modern English literature

Melanie Ann Hanson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/2568

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
DECAPITATION AND DISGORGEMENT: THE FEMALE BODY'S TEXT
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

Melanie Ann Hanson

Bachelor of Arts
San Diego State University
1975

Master of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1998

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2004

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Dissertation Approval
The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 12, 2004

The Dissertation prepared by

Melanie Ann Hanson

Entitled
Decapitation and Disgorgement: the Female Body's Text in Early Modern English Literature

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College
ABSTRACT

Decapitation and Disgorgement: The Female Body’s Text in Early Modern English Literature

by

Melanie Ann Hanson

Dr. Evelyn Gajowski, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

My dissertation focuses on language and forms of expression for women in early modern English literature. In particular, William Shakespeare’s character Lavinia from Titus Andronicus, Elizabeth Cary’s character Mariam in The Tragedy of Mariam, and Isabella Whitney’s narrative voice in her poem “The Manner of Her Will” are examined. French feminist Helene Cixous provides the theoretical framework for this project. Exploring manifestations of Cixous’s crucial terms “decapitation” and “disgorgement” is the objective of the three core chapters. Privileging the female body’s text and discussing the variety of means used to “speak” it is of central concern. The connection between silencing and expression that brings about a subversion of discourse through generosity rather than hostility is interrogated. I continue to be excited by an investigation of unique ways in which women use language to express rather than be repressed by patriarchal society. This project attempts to follow in the footsteps of contemporary psychoanalytic feminists and post-structuralist critics.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................ v

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... 1
  Review of Prior Criticism and Critical Dialogue ..................................................... 4
  Research Methodology ......................................................................................... 11
  Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 13

CHAPTER TWO LAVINIA IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S
  TITUS ANDRONICUS ................................................................. 23
  Figurative Decapitation ....................................................................................... 25
  Disgorgement ........................................................................................................ 42
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 57
  Notes ..................................................................................................................... 62

CHAPTER THREE MARIAM IN ELIZABETH CARY’S
  THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM ...................................................... 63
  Figurative Decapitation ....................................................................................... 64
  Disgorgement ........................................................................................................ 80
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 90
  Notes ..................................................................................................................... 97

CHAPTER FOUR THE POETRY OF ISABELLA WHITNEY ......................... 98
  Figurative Decapitation ....................................................................................... 101
  Disgorgement ....................................................................................................... 112
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 136
  Notes ..................................................................................................................... 138

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 139

WORKS CITED ........................................................................................................... 156

VITA ............................................................................................................................ 147
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to my examination committee, Dr. Evelyn Gajowski, Dr. Charles Whitney, Dr. Kelly J. Mays, and Dr. Kathryn Hausbeck who were instrumental in the development of this dissertation. Most importantly, I want to thank my parents, Milford and Florine Hanson, for their abiding support and encouragement.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation takes a postmodern and feminist look at early modern English literature, focusing on language and forms of expression for women. Male and female writers such as William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Cary, and Isabella Whitney and female dramatic characters such as Lavinia from *Titus Andronicus* and Mariam from *The Tragedy of Mariam* constitute the subjects of my analysis. The theories of French feminist Hélène Cixous provide the theoretical framework. Her ideas and semantics are tools for the discernment of women's voices from the past and the present, voices that have been stifled by oppression but are still recognizable if women are willing to investigate them. The means of expression for females in history and females in literature is stifled and female sexuality is manipulated by early modern English patriarchy, both in the historical period and in the dramatic worlds of the plays; however, female writers and the authors of the period who construct female characters are able to employ various means to outpour female desire.

How the female body struggles to express text is what first intrigued me about the study of the English Renaissance and its literature and has been the challenge of writing a dissertation on this subject. It takes perseverance and courage to express a female text especially since the texts of the male body are so pervasive in most cultures. Privileging
the female body's text and discussing the variety of means used to "speak" it is a central concern of this thesis. Michel de Montaigne, a contemporary of Shakespeare's, was cognizant of the body's propensity to express text:

What doe we with our hands? Doe we not sue and entreate, promise and performe, call men unto us, and discharge them, bid them farewell, and be gone, threaten, pray, beseech, deny, refuse, demaund, admire, number, confesse, repent, [ . . ] declare silence and astonishment? And what not? With so great variation, and amplifying, as if they would contend with the tongue. And with our head, doe we not envite and call to-us, discharge and send away, avowe, disavowe, be-lie, welcome, honour, worship, disdaine, demaund [ . . ]? What do-we with our eye-lids? And with our shoulders? To conclude, there is no motion, nor jesture, that doth not speake, and speakes in language [ . . ] common and publicke to all: whereby it followeth (seeing the varieties, and severall use it hath from others) that this must rather be deemed the proper and peculier speech of humane nature. (17)

Montaigne's lengthy descriptive litany, although intending to privilege the body's text, reveals that words are often privileged over the text of the body. Also, the male body's text in the past has been privileged over the female body's text. It is the function of the core chapters of this thesis, however, to discuss and spotlight the female body's text. For example, the specific differences between Montaigne's enumeration of bodily text in the male world and the female bodily text of Lavinia, her text of the tongue and head and hands, from Titus Andronicus are examined in Chapter Two. In addition, Montaigne's
list explains how the concept of the body "expressing text" is used in this project. The body can express text in a variety of ways including writing, speaking, gesturing, nodding, and so on.

What is of import about this thesis is the connection between silencing and expression that brings about a subversion of discourse through generosity rather than hostility. My thesis emphasizes bisexual discourse as a means to develop a unique female outpouring rather than the use of rancor or subterfuge to create a rebellious stance. The expression of text through the development of voice in the characters of Lavinia, Mariam and Whitney's narrator is ultimately subversive and not marginalized. Ironically, this is engineered by blending their text with what is stereotypically called "male discourse." An example of this subversive but blended voice is the reverse gender blazon embodied in Shakespeare's Lavinia and in Isabella Whitney's poetry that is not depicted in a way that is blatantly revolutionary. However, the subtle inversion of an accepted literary device nicely underscores the subtext nonetheless. My thesis is about expression in any form despite the power structures that disable the female body's text.

What is significantly different about my criticism is that usually the theories of a twentieth-century French feminist critic, women like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Simone de Beauvoir, are not compared to past literary works by anyone other than the critic herself. Cixous applied her own theories to a variety of fiction and non-fiction pieces from disparate time periods and societies including the works of Aeschylus, William Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Edgar Allan Poe, Soren Kierkegaard, Sun Tse, and even to the characters in children's fairy tales. Since I am
applying Cixous's theories to early modern English literature in this project, I will venture into an area that is uncharted.

I want to investigate how Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney illustrate in their works how a female body "speaks" its text, how a woman "voices" herself not just through the use of her larynx but the use of other imagery of the body, and how writers interpret the fragmented female body through writing and reading and being read by the body. Expression through subtlety is an important element to my project. I want to ponder the question that Elaine Showalter and Annette Kolodny have raised: if women become writers and speakers and use language to express their texts, are these texts that are dominated by male control of language then diminished, creating a divided consciousness? I feel that using language as a translating medium enhances the female body's text. I agree with Pamela Banting's assessment of Cixous's theory that women use patriarchal discourse as a source language to translate the female body's text, a source language that women dislocate, explode, contain, and translate (235). I dialogued with prior criticism to achieve these objectives.

Review of Prior Criticism and Critical Dialogue

Contemporary criticism of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus has centered on either the sexuality or the violence attached to the rape of Lavinia. For example, Charles Frey's research deals with the metaphoric violence in the drama. Although I agree with Frey's thesis that Titus Andronicus is a drama about "sign making," for example that the rapists are "deciphered," I interpret Lavinia's sign-making while using the staff to write in the sand as a disgorgement of the female body's text and not as "a desperate re-creation of
the sign” (18) of violence perpetrated against her by the rapists. Contemporary feminist criticism has examined the character of Lavinia as sign and signifier also. Coppelia Kahn argues that Lavinia’s body is a signifier: her body is a sign of Titus’ political power which has been devalued by Lavinia’s rape and a sign of her internal wounds. Sara Eaton’s essay “A Woman of Letters: Lavinia in Titus Andronicus” depicts Lavinia’s body as a sign of the educated woman of the aristocracy, her body used as a weapon and as a reflection of the humanist pedagogy of literacy.

I examine how Lavinia’s repeated presence on stage reveals her character as absent signifier in Titus Andronicus, and I apply this idea to how Herod’s wives are characterized as absent signifiers in The Tragedy of Mariam and how women of the gentry like Isabella Whitney were treated as absent signifiers by members of the aristocracy. There is a body of work by other critics, Katherine Rowe, Bernice Harris, and Harry Keyishian among them, who have written about the signification of body parts and the body as text and subtext, specifically in terms of the male characters and their interaction with the female characters within Titus Andronicus. I am especially indebted to Katherine Rowe’s criticism about Lavinia’s hands that influenced my interrogation of the metaphoric importance of hands, hands that signify the giving aspect of disgorgement in relation to Lavinia and Titus.

In addition, my work responds to Evelyn Gajowski’s examination of Shakespeare’s plays. Gajowski explains in her book The Art of Loving that contemporary materialist and historicist studies of early modern English society privilege power and politics; she suggests that this kind of criticism perpetuates the silencing of early modern women’s voices as well as the discourse of contemporary feminist critics. In contrast,
Gajowski’s research on Lavinia from *Titus Andronicus* brings the voice of one of Shakespeare’s female characters to the forefront. Gajowski applies Susan Gubar’s work on the constructs of the “blank page” and the “pen(is)” to Shakespeare’s drama. She indicates that *Titus Andronicus* “is a play that literally and violently silences Lavinia” (2). Gajowski asserts that it is the responsibility of contemporary feminist critics of early modern literature “to insure that the voice of silence [like Lavinia’s] will finally be heard” (15). I agree that Lavinia is an embodiment of the Petrarchan blazon, but unlike Gajowski, I view Lavinia not as blank page and not as a silenced character in *Titus Andronicus* but as a figuratively decapitated character that is designed by Shakespeare as a disgorging figure.

Lisa Starks applies aspects of Julia Kristeva’s theories from *Powers of Horror*, namely the “abject” such as the “consuming womb” (Starks 3) of the unclean feminine body, to Julie Taymor’s contemporary film version of *Titus Andronicus*. Starks sees Lavinia’s rape and mutilated body as “figuring castration itself,” the “ultimate fear of abjection on stage” (6). Starks points out that Julie Taymor’s depiction of the rape and its aftermath blurs the boundaries in the pairings of terms like attraction/repulsion, clean/unclean, and lust/cruelty. My research very specifically dialogues with Starks’s and Taymor’s discussions of the consuming womb and the blurring of the boundaries in the binary system of language; I explain the variety of ways in which Shakespeare, as well as Cary and Whitney, address these issues in their literary works. However, I do not see Lavinia as a figure of castration but as the embodiment of disgorgement.

Most criticism on *The Tragedy of Mariam* sees the play as a direct extension of Elizabeth Cary’s life and conflicts; my thesis is no exception. However, there are critics
like Alexandra Bennett who see the play as a study in duplicity rather than in reality.

Some of the criticism concerning Cary's Mariam deals with construction of domestic boundaries and the deconstruction of domestic spaces as in Naomi Miller and Theresa Kemp's work. In addition, there are feminist studies of Mariam that deal with the racial issues presented in the play. Past feminist criticism on Mariam has centered on the title character, how Elizabeth Cary crafts Mariam to exemplify aspects of the aristocratic early modern Englishwoman's life or the effects of patriarchal dominance on women in early modern England, for example, relating Mariam's martyrdom to Anne Askew's.

Elaine Beilin views Mariam as an attempt at self-expression for Elizabeth Cary that cannot be reduced merely to autobiography. Although the play is a study of historic figures recorded in Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, Beilin believes that Cary moves beyond history to develop a female character in full. Beilin suggests that Cary was unwilling merely to replicate accepted attitudes about patriarchal authority. "Only careful study of what we have [the Renaissance women's writings that survive] will allow us to speculate whether Renaissance women actually tried to create their own distinctive literature from existing traditions," as Beilin points out (64). I engage with Beilin's discourse in terms of the importance of "her story" and "herstory" in Cary's reworking of Judaic history as these ideas contribute to a distinct literature by Renaissance women writers. I agree that it is important to scrutinize Cary's text for revealing diatribe about female disturbance of patriarchal authority, for example, Mariam's refusal of Herod's bed and her choice of death rather than submission.

Carolyn E. Brown believes that there are complicated layers of meaning that Elizabeth Cary has written into Mariam. Mariam and Salome, the play's major female
figures, do not fit into neat packages in the patriarchal system of labeling women as good or evil and virgin or whore. Past readings of Mariam and Salome have focused on the character's display or lack of heroism. Brown reveals that Mariam has faults in Cary's version and that Salome articulates "valiant sentiments" (1) involving breaking with customs. Both women are politically ambitious, not weak, silenced entities. Brown observes that Salome is used by Cary as a foil to Mariam to suggest that Mariam needs to behave more like Salome to survive in a patriarchal society; Salome is careful to appear as if she abides by societal rules that restrict female behavior. The fact that Mariam refuses to embrace her wisdom as a defense, instead of merely depending on her beauty and reputation, is her "tragedy," according to Brown.

One of my objectives in Chapter Three was to investigate the different layers of meaning that might be attached to a reading of Mariam and Salome as figures that are decapitated and attempt to disgorge. However, I disagree with Brown that Cary creates Mariam as a tragic statement about early modern Englishwomen who are not more cautious in their approach to subversive behavior. Cary pens Mariam as a character that must be subversive through unbridled speech and through engineering her own death because sometimes figurative decapitation can be so overwhelming that desperate steps must be taken if a female character or author wants to disgorge her text.

The criticism of Isabella Whitney's poetry sometimes centers on her relationship to sixteenth-century publication, as in R. J. Fehrenbach and Lynette McGrath's research. Richard Panofsky critiques Whitney's love poetry, whereas Betty Travitsky is interested in Whitney's poems of protest. Elaine Beilin's work centers on the reflection of Christian definitions of female character in Whitney's poetry, Patricia Phillippy writes
about Whitney’s use of domestic terms and situations, Lorna Hutson discusses the pose of Elizabethan prodigality in Whitney’s writing, and Wendy Wall interrogates how Whitney negotiates writing to female and male audiences. Much of the prior criticism on Whitney focuses on her use of literary devices in her poetry.

Ann Rosalind Jones’s research on Isabella Whitney’s work was prompted by Jones’s study of gender ideology and self-representation in women’s poetry. According to Jones, Whitney was a *bricoleuse*, crafting poetry by juggling various literary materials (36). Jones examined Whitney’s revision of Ovidian discourse, how Whitney brought the demands placed on sixteenth-century women into the mix. “Whitney demonstrates the networks […] through which women poets (like men) constructed texts,” as Jones illustrates (52). In addition, Jones explains that Whitney’s warnings in her poetry about the behavior of women of her station imply that unfair treatment of maidservants was commonplace.

Paul A. Marquis points out that “Isabella Whitney has recently received critical attention from readers recovering the lost voices of women writers” (314). Marquis explains that Whitney was highly enterprising in her pursuit of publication, giving a hearing to her voice. Whitney’s voice is unique because its complexity gives it the ring of truth. Marquis reveals that Whitney rejects the idea that women should abjure the display of public voice or bawdy playfulness. Marquis suggests that Whitney is a distinctive voice in early modern English writing because she criticized male exploitation of women. My response to Jones’s and Marquis’s criticism is an in-depth analysis of Whitney’s disgorgement of text, far deeper than Jones’s discussion of Whitney’s subversive juggling of certain linguistic constructs and Marquis’s discussion of
Whitney’s use of public voice. My intense interrogation of Whitney’s use of language to translate the female body’s text in “The Manner of Her Will” is one of the unique and ground-breaking aspects to this dissertation.

There were certain works that were paramount to the shaping of my thesis in its entirety, texts with which this project specifically discourses. Gerda Lerner’s article “Veiling the Woman” and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger’s Off With her Head helped me to pinpoint my definition of figurative decapitation, a consuming of the female head into the female body as just another sexual part. Sandra Bartky’s interpretation of Michel Foucault’s “panopticism,” the concept that women have an internal eye of surveillance because they are treated as sexual objects, gave birth to sections of my thesis on the debilitating aspects of beauty, especially concerning Mariam’s relationship to Herod and Whitney’s description of London as a fickle suitor who trivializes the narrator in “The Manner of Her Will.” My thesis also builds upon the critical works of Janet Adelman and the relation of men and women to phallogocentric societies and the import of the mother and of Trinh Minh-ha and the assertion that women write their whole body and that women’s writing resists the body’s separation.

Banting’s article spoke to me, especially her clear re-interpretation and updating of Cixous’s semantics. My thesis reflects my interest in Susan Gubar’s discussion of the power of the pen(is) over woman as “blank page,” Evelyn Gajowski’s application of the “blank page” to Lavinia, and of David Willburn’s somethingness in nothingness which is what the section of the chapters on “jouissance through bisexual discourse” addresses. Julie Taymor’s film version of Titus Andronicus and Lisa Starks’s essay on the film that
applies Julia Kristeva’s idea of the “abject” to Taymor’s film adaptation assisted me in my exploration of monstrous and nurturing mothers in Chapters Two and Three.

In addition, this dissertation continues the work of post-modernist, French feminists who interrogate the empowering and disempowering constructs of language, the subtext and meanings of language, the *entredoux* area between words in binary opposition, and texts that can only be revealed by the female body. My three core chapters attempt to explore the portrayal of female characters in early modern English drama and poetry, analyze the work of women writers with the aim of reworking the literary canon, reveal the silencing effects of patriarchal ideology, contribute to a discussion of women’s culture and “herstory,” and value women’s experiences, thereby emulating aspects of the American feminist project. This work also dialogues with psychoanalytic, feminist discourse that concentrates on examining phallogocentric societies and thinking, discovers competing desires of characters, and explores the similarities and differences between female and male characters and female and male authors, in this case, from early modern England.

**Research Methodology**

This project attempts to follow in the footsteps of contemporary feminist critics of Shakespeare like Elaine Showalter, psychoanalytic feminists such as Janet Adelman, and post-structuralists like Marjorie Garber. I am indebted to Showalter’s discussion of Ophelia because it inspired my interrogation of Ophelia’s suicide which over time led me to the theory of figurative decapitation and to the completion of this dissertation. In particular, Janet Adelman’s examination of the “suffocating” or monstrous mother is
addressed in my chapters on *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Garber’s examination of *Hamlet* speaks to the issue of re-memberment; my exploration of *Titus Andronicus*, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, and “The Manner of Her Will” is a response to Garber’s theory. Deconstruction, the opposite of re-memberment, is of key importance to the concept of disgorgement. My application of Hélène Cixous’s terminology to contemporary research on Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney contributes to the critical discussion while also breaking new ground.

This thesis attempts to investigate the extent of the silencing of the female characters and narrative voices within the context of the literature and whether their voices break through the effects of containment. In other words, are the female characters voiced in any other way than through criticism? The core chapters interrogate various ways in which dramatic and poetic texts break down the binary system in patriarchal language and subvert literary devices. What motivates the choice of unruly speech in female characters from early modern English literature? The criticism of Elaine Beilin and Carolyn Brown of Cary’s play speak specifically to this issue. My dissertation discusses the desire to express text as an overwhelming motivation to subvert patriarchal discourse.

Locating the characteristics of the distinct voices of female authors Elizabeth Cary and Isabella Whitney is significant because each woman’s voice speaks a different story about the female body’s text that needs to be heard. The similarities and differences that exist between male and female writers “speaking” the female characters’ voices is important, as well, because male authors can write the female body’s text but they use a voice that has different qualities than women writers who experience societal silencing.
firsthand. This dissertation is concerned with examining, therefore, the methods used by the female characters/narrators in *Titus Andronicus*, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, and "The Manner of Her Will" to break down female stereotypes in early modern England. Are there similarities between the silencing of early modern women from different classes? Can a female character that dies at the end of a drama exude voice? The intricacies of the repression and achievement of female voice by character, narrators, and writers are of primary importance.

One of my goals is to contribute to the critical application of feminist theories to early modern English writings. Past criticism of early modern English texts has not focused on Hélène Cixous's theories, so my treatise explores how repression imprisons but does not always silence Renaissance women's public expression as it was intended to do. The French feminist project has been ignored in the past decade due to the censure of their theories as essentialist. However, Cixous's ideas work effectively with English Renaissance texts that speak to issues concerning women, so the use of Cixous's theories should be re-evaluated. To illustrate how female characters are depicted to embrace the female body's text and how women writers use a variety of subversive tactics to express it is one of my objectives. It is important to me to contribute to the understanding of "herstory" or the canon of women’s stories that should be investigated.

**Theoretical Framework**

The use of Hélène Cixous’s terminology and theories assists the intervention that this dissertation attempts. Cixous's work puts early modern English writing about and from women into a different context. There are trends in contemporary feminist and
historicist criticism of early modern English texts that view the fragmentation in women's voices from this time period, due to the censure of their writing, as a deficit instead of an asset. This kind of criticism characterizes the machinations English women writers had to go through during the Renaissance to express *jouissance*, to outpour their feelings, desires, and sexuality in their writing, as depleting the efforts and effects of their literary contributions. Applying Cixous to early modern English texts and voices validates these women's tentative approaches to writing, that the disruptive quality to their writing is facilitated by the forms and subversive tactics that these women utilized. Figurative decapitation of women should never be characterized or embraced as productive; instead, this project attempts to reveal how women writers from early modern England have used their marginalization to produce palpable texts, that the fragmentation that characterizes their writing is the very quality that makes their work so revealing about their lives and so lasting.

Cixous defines “decapitation” as a figurative beheading by which a patriarchal society manipulates and controls a woman's voice and her sexuality ("Castration" 163). Since men feel figuratively castrated by what they define as “female chaos,” according to Sigmund Freud, they feel they must restore and maintain order via the figurative decapitation of women. I view decapitation as an envisioning of the woman as “blank page,” an entity to be “composed” by men according to Susan Gubar (295). Men in a patriarchy re-inscribe the female body with their own meanings, thus decapitating the woman and rewriting her text. I concur with Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’s thesis that eroticizing the female head identifies it as another part of the sexualized female body, the female as all flesh (1). Therefore, the female face, eyes, voice, mouth, hair are all part of
the erotic experience. The head becomes submerged; it disappears into the body. Veiling
the head is just another form of figurative decapitation in the respect that the head
disappears and as it vanishes, the head is further eroticized as a symbol of desire
submerged into the body, as Schwartz and Doniger explain (2). Makeup and corrective
surgery hide and eroticize the real face and are yet other forms of figurative decapitation.
I also agree with Wendy Doniger that figurative decapitation insures that the female body
is blind, voiceless, and invisible (15).

Women have no access to language and law, because language and law are part of
masculine domain. Men cut away aspects of femininity they feel they cannot control and
replace these with constructs of what it is to be female according to men. A body that is
segmented is not whole. I see figurative decapitation as a segmenting of each woman's
body as well as the female communal body. A female cut away from the feminine
community has no support group or role models; she is isolated and alone. Women in
past centuries were expected to stay at home to cook, clean, and tend children. These
women were often alienated from their peer group.

The figuratively decapitated woman is organized and compartmentalized by the
patriarchy; she is told who she is and how she should behave because she is headless.
Women should be wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, mistresses, housekeepers,
seamstresses, but they should not be subjects. Not only are the roles of the decapitated
female defined, but her sexuality is controlled by the patriarchy as well. Therefore,
women are “beheaded” in more than one way. The beheading of women’s sexuality puts
all forms of female birthing and creativity under the control of men. Women in past eras
were passed from father to husband as property in arranged marriage. Therefore,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
decapitation can be viewed as figurative rape, a violation of the female body and its text. If a woman does not surrender to the patriarchal conditioning, she will experience psychological and physical violence to bring her under control.

Petrarchan and Ovidian discourse re-inscribe the female body. Petrarchan discourse is a term ascribed to language that idealizes women as do the sonnets of fourteenth-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch. Petrarchan poetic conventions were adapted by English writers during the Renaissance. Petrarchan discourse figuratively decapitates women by turning real women into the idealistic creation of the male imagination. Ovidian discourse is being used in a specific context in this project that differs slightly from ordinary scholarly usage. I use the term “Ovidian” to allude to Ovid or Publius Ovidius Naso’s treatment of women, particularly in Ars amatoria, where the author gives young men in his society advice on how to woo and entrap women, constructing women as merely sex objects. Because of its more explicit concern with seduction, Ovidian discourse also figuratively decapitates.

“Disgorgement” is a vomiting of indigestible patriarchal constructs. Disgorgement “splits open the closure of binary oppositions,” as Toril Moi puts it (106). In Cixous’s theories, decapitation facilitates “disgorgement” because the decapitated female becomes an entity with no head, no face, no voice, no reason, and therefore one that is unlike the male, revealing rather than concealing, open and vulnerable rather than withholding (“Castration” 176). Decapitation does not accomplish the patriarchal aim of silencing women, because it is a step towards female disgorgement. Cixous sees “disgorgement” as an outpouring of l’écriture feminine or “feminine writing” as it embraces an entredoux, or an in-between position, a bisexual discourse (“Laugh” 884). “Bisexual” discourse is
entredeux, because it deconstructs the binary system of male languages. Cixous's use of the term "bisexual" is not an attempt to discuss the contemporary notion of a person's sexual relations with both women and men; Cixous is using the term "bisexual" to discuss women's discourse or l'écriture feminine as being a discourse that automatically embraces the female body's text as well as male written and verbal languages. This merger of discourses conjures away the fear of castration, according to Cixous ("Laugh" 884). "Woman is bisexual" ("Laugh" 884) to Cixous, because it is part of a woman writer's existence to "speak" by translating the discourse of the female body into the discourse of phallocentrism. Phallocentrism is a term used to define the dominance of the male gender over others due to sexual anatomy; phallocentrism affects power structures, societal mores, and language as well as what and who is defined as proper and as property. Men are born into a phallocentric social order and therefore trained to "speak" from what Cixous names a "monosexual" position.

Cixous rejects the masculine insistence on form, order, wholeness, unity, hierarchy, and duality. Whereas language that labels women as either virgin or whore is decapitating, disgorgement is a discourse that undermines the binary system of language. The binary system of language is a process of labeling in which all things are ordered or positioned in one of two categories; for example, a woman would be characterized as either silent or outspoken, innocent or unchaste, obedient or disruptive, and so on. Cixous believes that male authors and male characters can disgorge, but this happenstance is rare in early modern England since men of that time were raised in a patriarchal culture and therefore were trained to embrace dichotomy in discourse. I like to think of disgorgement of the female body's text in the way that Banting does, as
corporeal grammatology (231). My dissertation attempts to illustrates how early modern women are manipulated, identified, and sexualized just as words are by the male-governed society.

Because the body is susceptible to inscription, the body therefore has signifying capabilities. The female body's text does not enable nor reinforce patriarchal stereotypes of women; it critiques the male gaze. Cixous's theories of decapitation and disgorgement reverse masculine hierarchy so that the body as text locates lack not within women's sexuality but within mastery and masculinity. Labels put on women's bodies and containment of bodies through the law and through language, as in religious practices and philosophical asceticism, take women away from their bodies and therefore away from using the body's text, as Banting indicates (231)

Disgorgement is utter generosity without the hope of return, without the involvement of property or propriety; language, like the male economy, implies an exchange, but disgorgement expects nothing back. Disgorgement is a kind of text that moves beyond the author's intent, and all authors, narrators, and characters disgorge differently, as Cixous explains. Disgorgement does not remember or reconstruct; rather, it deconstructs ("Laugh" 887). According to Cixous, disgorgement responds to decapitation by utilizing the female body to create an outpouring of the body as text although she envisions an ideal l'écriture that moves beyond masculine or feminine labels.

Cixous defines disgorgement as an outpouring of primeval feminine power or the mother tongue, the site of fragmentation, splitting, and detachment that male society attempts to contain ("Castration" 175). The mother tongue is a special communication, a body language between child and mother that children lose touch with as they are educated.
into male-governed society and its laws, language, and mores ("Laugh" 234). Cixous sees a woman’s body as disorder, passions, creativity – this is her text. In other words, women can use the identity women are given by men as a vehicle for disgorgement. Mirroring the patriarchal binary opposition, if Freud is correct that “history” is the destruction of the body, then it is my belief that “herstory” would be the restoration or preservation of the readable body. If, as Michel Foucault indicates, “history” is repressive, as Judith Butler points out (130), then “herstory” must be expressive. Therefore, the female body is its text; authors translate this text into language to be read and interpreted. Women disgorge “herstory.”

I see “herstory” as a disgorgement of bodily text because it escapes the containment of the page and transcends the end of the author’s text or the death of a character. Text is often meant to define or contain, but disgorgement is a communication of jouissance that does the opposite: it exudes, expresses, and transcends containment, as Cixous points out (“Castration” 170). Jouissance literally means sexual orgasm; it is the joy of sensation in all forms. Disgorgement is catalyzed by reveling in figurative jouissance, an expression of pleasure derived from the female body’s text, an outpouring that has no end and has nothing to do with the male economy of gain, profit, and debt. The term “jouissance” is used figuratively in this text. Jouissance is the link between sexuality and textuality; jouissance is manifested textually as an overflow of emotion from sexual response. Therefore, jouissance is always connected to sexual interplay between women and men or female and male characters. J. C. Smith and Carla Ferstman assert that there are different kinds of jouissance and that there can be no jouissance without a release of emotion (241). The emotional outpouring in jouissance is a part of
female disorder that disrupts system and structure. Therefore the outpouring of "emotion becomes an important metaphor for perceived threats to established authority; the emotionality of repressed groups becomes a symbol of their antistructural tendencies. To the powerful, this is their chaos; to the groups themselves, it is their impulse towards freedom," as Catherine Lutz explains (62).

The flow of emotions facilitates disgorgement, the female desire to express. Female expression is a manifestation of generosity, a gift of displaying the female body's desire in various forms. Cixous believes that a woman who disgorges breaks out in endless laughter (177). This laughter can be an expression of joy, of pain, of derision. Through *jouissance*, women can embrace their sexual difference as a disruption of patriarchal discourse, but most often female *jouissance* is a by-product of merging with male forms of expression. Disgorgement is a non-withholding; conversely, figurative decapitation is the containment of *jouissance*. My project is aligned with Cixous's definition of *jouissance*, but I emphasize textual jouissance or a merging of discourse that Cixous calls "bisexual" rather than a discussion of the female characters' sexual responses.

To exact a deeper understanding of the terms "decapitation" and "disgorgement," the influence of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida on Cixous's work must be addressed. Cixous problematizes Freud's assertion that the phallus is the "primary organizer of the structure of subjectivity" ("Castration" 167) in a patriarchal society. From a Freudian perspective, the male characters' repressed wishes and truncated desires are made manifest in the repression of female *jouissance* in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tragedy of Mariam*. It is impossible in patriarchal society to operate
outside the phallocentric order, but it is possible to subvert that order from within. Lacan indicates that men are trapped in the system of phallocentrism; he theorizes that as boys grow up they substitute things like language for their relationship to their mother, as Ross Murfin points out (248). French feminists like Cixous speak to theories proposed by Lacan and Derrida about male separation anxiety from the mother and how this impacts male separation from the mother tongue.

Cixous’s discussion of *l’écriture feminine* is also related to Derrida’s “*differance*,” the idea that all language is constituted by differences between word meanings and between the word and the referent it represents. In response to this idea, Cixous’s use of the term “bisexual discourse” is not phallocentric nor gynocentric but uses the metaphor of sexuality to imagine an ideal, an aspect of language that is a merged discourse of what Kristeva would term as the semiotic combined with Lacan’s notion of the symbolic. The semiotic is an aspect of language characterized by Derrida’s theory of slippage and displacement similar to Cixous’s idea of disgorgement; as Peter Barry observes, Lacan’s “symbolic” is language that is associated with authority and control (129). This study is influenced by all of these theorists.

Cixous indicates that women would disgorge to the death “were it not for the intervention of those basic movements of a feminine unconscious which provide the capacity of passing above it all by means of a form of oblivion which is not the oblivion of burial or interment but the oblivion of acceptance. This is taking loss, seizing it, living it” (“Castration” 176). Furthermore, the disgorgement of text can be achieved in a variety of ways: by using language to explore the *entredeux* position between stereotypically male and female discourse, to reveal generosity from the feminine body,
or to depict the chaos and fragmentation inscribed on women by patriarchal containment. However, the three core chapters of my dissertation will focus on exploring disgorgement in just two specific areas: the subversion of accepted discursive practices and the figurative *jouissance* achieved through creating a merged text or bisexual discourse.
CHAPTER TWO

LA VINIA IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S TITUS ANDRONICUS

Titus Andronicus discloses a Shakespearean pre-occupation, an interest in analyzing the female body as text. William Shakespeare drafts the character of LaVinia as a figuratively decapitated individual, and through her, he defines l’écriture féminine or how a female body “speaks” its text. Shakespeare achieves his disgorgement, a textual manipulation that offsets figurative decapitation’s inscription of women’s identities, through his depiction of LaVinia. The disgorgement of the female body as text in Titus Andronicus is made manifest in the following ways: the subversion of linguistic constructs and the creation of a figurative jouissance through bisexual discourse.

The tragedy in William Shakespeare’s dramas is that the male characters often misunderstand or misrecognize the female body’s text; the tragedy of Shakespeare’s tragedies is that most of the male characters are not capable of breaking through the binary system of language that identifies women as either virgins or whores. Men silence or decapitate (figuratively or literally) what they do not understand or what frightens them; Titus Andronicus is a story of decapitation. The dramatist exposes the male characters in Titus Andronicus who either completely or partially misidentify the female body or are in the process of seeing how their constructs about women are the ruination of women, of men, and of relationships between the sexes. Titus Andronicus, the title
character, and Bassianus, Lavinia’s husband, are in the process of awakening to the deleterious effects of male containment of women; they are beginning to embrace l’écriture feminine or the “voicing” of the female body’s text through their relationship with Lavinia. In psychological terms, each person never gets over the loss of the nurturing mother and the loss of the non-verbal language expressed between mother and child. Titus, in particular, evolves in the play and the audience witnesses his struggle with the constructs of the nurturing versus the monstrous mother (Lavinia and Tamora, respectively). Lavinia’s bodily text is the primary mover in the play, the discourse that changes the constructs that Titus and Bassianus believe in. Shakespeare fashions Lavinia to enlighten and elucidate. Other male characters in the play do not fair as well; some of them are totally blind and deaf to the female body’s text and unfortunately do not grow at all from their encounters with Lavinia.

Lavinia represents the idea that female sexual power might be productive rather than destructive, that male constructs about ordering the female body due to fear of the chaos of its text may be in error. Lavinia is raped, mutilated, constructed and re-constructed by the male characters in the play in a desperate attempt to stop the outpouring of her text, because her bodily text goes contrary to every construct of patriarchal society in ancient Rome as well as the society of Shakespeare and his male counterparts. Lavinia’s personal traits are entredeux: Lavinia’s text exists in the gaps created by the male world of precepts and language. Therefore, the characters in the play do not want to embrace Lavinia’s text: she is a woman who is sexual but not dangerous, who is powerful but also nurturing, who is tempting and also innocent. Her text cannot be true because if it is, then the binary system that constructs women as either virtuous or
contaminated is a lie and must be completely re-named and re-ordered. Therefore, the male characters in the play must contain and edit Lavinia’s text, must turn her physically into the monstrous woman, must eliminate her influence, must misread her text.

Societal constructs about women move women and men away from the mother tongue, the original force of expression learned from bonding with the mother before the child learns verbal language. The male dramatist must demonstrate his facility to connect with the mother tongue to disgorge, to translate the female characters’ bodily text into writing. Shakespeare designs his plays as the site of maternal absence; there are few mothers in the plays and few empowered and yet comforting ones. Therefore, paternal authority reigns. The law and language of male society takes over the function of the mother, ordering or creating the world. Then, man no longer has need of the maternal body, no longer has a use for the archaic mother tongue (Cixous, “Laugh” 885). The issue that Shakespeare illustrates in his dramas is that even though the male characters figuratively decapitate the female body and try to smother its text, feminine text transcends masculine attempts to extinguish it. In Titus Andronicus, as in all of Shakespeare’s tragedies, the dramatist embraces the chaos of the female body’s text by outpouring loss that culminates in the last act of the drama.

Figurative Decapitation

Silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic, and at times have lost more than speech: they are pushed to the point of choking, nothing gets through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn’t heard because it’s the body that
talks, and man doesn’t hear the body. In the end the woman pushed to
hysteria is the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance.
(Cixous, “Castration” 171)

Lavinia is the perfect example of the “hysteric,” figuratively decapitated by the
male characters in Titus Andronicus. Her voice and sexuality are manipulated by the male
figures in the play, and after her rape and mutilation, she is “pushed to the point of
choking” as she tries to communicate her rapists names to her family. For those who
view her plight, she is a disturbing presence in the drama. Most of the male characters
misread the disruptive female body’s text; misidentifying Lavinia’s bodily text
suppresses it.

Lavinia is figuratively decapitated by all the male characters in the play, and
Tamora also enables the suppression of Lavinia. Saturninus uses Lavinia as a bargaining
chip; his offer of marriage to Lavinia was made as repayment for Titus’ political support
and as a manifestation of the Emperor’s desire “to advance / [Titus’] name and honorable
family” (1.1.238-9).1 Lavinia’s body will be the vessel that will house Saturninus’s
progeny, the heirs to the throne. Lavinia is totally at the mercy of male bonding;
possessing her and her sexuality is being bartered for. Male possession of Lavinia
is a part of her figurative decapitation: Bassianus claims to have prior possession of
Lavinia when he states, “Lord Titus, by your leave, this maid is mine” (1.1.276). A
physical fight breaks out over ownership of her, and Bassianus and Marcus kidnap
Lavinia. Bassianus explains that Lavinia has been “surprised” “By him that justly may /
Bear his betroth’d from all the world away” (1.1.285-6). However, Bassianus intimates
that Lavinia is not really “surprised” by his actions at all and that their mutuality of desire
has separated them from the rest of the world of men and their misunderstanding of female *jouissance*. When Marcus, Bassianus, and Lavinia return to court later in the scene, Bassianus and Lavinia have married. Saturninus sarcastically concedes his claim on Lavinia stating, "So, Bassianus, you have play'd your prize. / God give you joy, sir, of your gallant bride!" (1.1.399-400).

Not only is Lavinia figuratively decapitated, but the female characters in the play are collectively decapitated. Lavinia and Tamora are interchangeable commodities to Saturninus, emphasizing their lack of individual worth and the devaluation of women in general. He offers one and then the other the position of Empress. First he approaches Titus:

> Titus Andronicus, for thy favors done
To us in our election this day,
I give thee thanks in part of thy deserts,
And will with deeds requite thy gentleness;
And for an onset, Titus, to advance
Thy name and honorable family,
Lavinia will I make my empress,
Rome's royal mistress, mistress of my heart,
And in the sacred [Pantheon] her espouse.
Tell me, Andronicus, doth this motion please thee? (1.1.234-43)

Saturninus sees his betrothal to Lavinia as an advancement for himself and for Titus within patriarchal society; Saturninus has no concern for Lavinia's desires and only pays lip service to his attachment to her. Bassianus is the brother who truly sees Lavinia as the
"mistress of [his] heart," because Bassianus is being changed by the power of her text, by her disgorgement. Saturninus’s words of betrothal to Tamora are just as figuratively decapitating as his lack of understanding of Lavinia:

And therefore, lovely Tamora, Queen of Goths,
That like the stately [Phoebe] 'mongst her nymphs
Dost overshine the gallant’st dames of Rome,
If thou be pleas’d with this my sudden choice,
Behold, I choose thee, Tamora, for my bride,
And will create thee Empress of Rome. (1.1.314-20).

Although Saturninus addresses Tamora rather than her male family members for her hand as he does when her proposes to Lavinia, his words are no less denigrating. He concentrates on praising Tamora’s beauty, objectifying her, as well as emphasizing his empowerment, that he “chooses” and that he “creates” and re-creates the women within his sphere of influence. In this way, Saturninus attempts to usurp the power of creation from the archaic mother.

When Saturninus takes Tamora for his wife in Act 1, scene 1, Tamora says she will “a handmaid be to his desires” (331). The expressions “handmaid” and giving one’s “hand in marriage” signify the contrasting relationships between the two women and Saturninus. Tamora uses the term “handmaid” to flatter Saturninus, but she has no intention of serving him. Lavinia is the character who is a handmaid to desire; she is not only the figure of the nurturing maternal body in the drama but Lavinia is a handmaid to the jouissance or outpouring of feelings concerning her oppressors and repressive
constructs. She assists her family in their revenge plot against Tamora and her sons, and she helps Bassianus and Titus to a greater understanding of the female body's text.

The fact that Tamora and Lavinia are interchangeable as marriage partners for Saturninus is re-emphasized later in the play where Tamora and Lavinia are interchangeable to Demetrius and Chiron, as Coppelia Kahn argues (74). Demetrius and Chiron view these two women as representations of the devouring mother that Tamora's sons want to destroy. Because the two female characters in the play are set up as rivals for the hand of Saturninus from the outset of the play, the collective body of women is decapitated or split apart as well; Lavinia and Tamora are not positioned in the play to bond. Women in a male-governed society are put in a position where they must compete for the attentions of men who will be their protectors and providers; this condition alienates women from each other and is another form of figurative decapitation. It is no wonder, therefore, that Tamora turns a deaf ear to Lavinia's pleas for death rather than rape by Tamora's sons; Tamora rebuffs Lavinia: "What beg'st thou then? Fond woman, let me go" (2.3.172-3). Tamora enables the silencing of Lavinia by the male characters in the play.

Demetrius and Chiron have been witness to how Lavinia and Tamora are passed from one man to the next, but at the same time, Tamora's sons have seen their mother wield power politically and sexually over the other male characters in the play. For example, Tamora toys with Titus; she is disguised as "Revenge" in Act 5, scene 2:

Come down and welcome me to this world's light;
Confer with me of murder and of death.
There's not a hollow cave or lurking-place,
No vast obscurity or misty vale,
Where bloody murther or detested rape
Can couch for fear, but I will find them out. (5.2.33-38)

Tamora represents the monstrous woman as she embodies “Revenge.” Tamora uses sexual wiles to manipulate Saturninus: “Then at my suit look graciously on him [Titus]; / Lose not so noble a friend on vain suppose, / Nor with sour looks afflict his gentle heart. / My lord, be rul’d by me, be won at last” (1.1.439-42). Her approach is no different with her lover, Aaron: “We may, each wraithed in the other’s arms / (Our pastimes done), possess a golden slumber, / While hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds / Be unto us as is a nurse’s song / Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep” (2.3.25-29). Here, Tamora links mothering to the hunt and to sexuality. In fact, it is Tamora’s monstrous sexuality that is the catalyst for the rape and mutilation of Lavinia by Demetrius and Chiron. This is of importance since Tamora’s sons see that Lavinia and Tamora are viewed by Saturninus as interchangeable commodities. Demetrius’s attitudes are clearly revealed when he states that women exist solely so that they may be woo’d, won, and taken from their husbands (2.1.82-9). Aaron and Tamora encourage her sons to avenge themselves on Lavinia: “Come, come, our Empress, with her sacred wit, / To villainy and vengeance consecrate, / Will we acquaint withal what we intend” (2.1.120-2). Aaron feels certain that Tamora will sanction the violent sacrifice of Lavinia.

Tamora uses Lavinia’s body as a toy as well, one to amuse her sons for a time, to occupy Demetrius and Chiron. Tamora tells Lavinia that she will not kill her because “So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee. / No, let them satisfice their lust on thee” (2.3.179-80). The subtext here is that Tamora wishes her sons to relieve their anxieties...
on Lavinia rather than on their mother; therefore, the rape of Lavinia's power will stand in for the annihilation of the mother. After all, Lavinia is newly married to Bassianus and could bear offspring, like Tamora has. Demetrius and Chiron have experienced the horror of living firsthand, as prisoners in the war between the Romans and Goths, and through the death of their brother, Alarbus, who, as a human sacrifice, was executed in Act 1, scene 1, to atone for the loss of Titus's sons in the Roman/Goth war. Tamora brings Aaron's child into this world in Act 4, scene 2, and Demetrius wants to kill the child (85-6). One purpose of killing the baby is so the child will not have to bear the burden of life's miseries that Demetrius has experienced. Chiron states, "I blush to think upon this ignominy" (4.2.115), and he is not only referring to the ruin of his mother in Saturninus' eyes. He also is speaking to the "ignominy" of being born.

The "abject" is Julia Kristeva's term for the chaos, black hole, or devouring abyss caused by the female body and its power over life and death that men fear (64). One manifestation of Kristeva's theory of the "abject" is the monstrous mother and the separation of self from maternal authority that Tamora embodies in the play (Quoted in Starks 5). Lavinia's ability to become the nurturing mother is literally cut away from her by Demetrius and Chiron. Demetrius and Chiron are attempting to eradicate the devouring maternal body. Shakespeare's Lavinia is set up as a contrasting figure to Tamora; Lavinia is the possibility of the nurturing mother that deconstructs the construct of the castrating mother. Tamora's sons fear maternal potential due to first-hand experience with their own mother.

The rape and mutilation of Lavinia is a transference or projection of Tamora's sons' fears. Since they feel impotent to desecrate their own mother, Demetrius and
Chiron use Lavinia as a substitute for Tamora to purge their Freudian anxieties through ritual sacrifice to reorder their universe, as Bruce Lincoln observes (13). Demetrius and Chiron are unchanged by their experience with Lavinia. They reveal in Act 4, scene 2, that they define love and lust as synonymous (41-43). They believe it is the duty of women to “serve” (4.2.41) male desire; it is male prerogative to manipulate and use women. The female tongue is viewed as a castrating weapon, as Sheila Delaney argues (97). Aaron, Demetrius, and Chiron all indicate a desire to control Tamora, to control her speech; in their fantasy, she approves of their misuse of women and says “Amen” (4.2.44), sanctifying their oppression and brutality. They are mocking the entity that they fear, the maternal body giving birth: Demetrius sarcastically utters “Come let us go and pray to all the gods / for our beloved mother in her pains” (4.2.46). The pain of women’s subjugation and the pain of childbirth is connected here; women give life to the men who later oppress them.

Therefore, at the play’s outset, Lavinia becomes the object of Demetrius and Chiron’s oppression and displaced sexual desire. Demetrius and Chiron also see the winning of Lavinia as a test of manhood and cunning: men avenge their family’s dishonor and so Tamora’s sons avenge their brother Alarbus’s death at the hands of Titus (1.1.142) and win their mother’s approval. After the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, Demetrius and Chiron feel assured that their identities as rapists will never be revealed. Demetrius mocks Lavinia by saying, “So now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak, / Who ’twas that cut thy tongue and ravish’d thee” (2.4.1-2), and Chiron taunts, “Write down thy mind, betray thy meaning so, / And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe”
The meaning of their gang rape, their figurative decapitation of Lavinia, is inscribed indelibly upon her body, or so they think.

Demetrius's claim that he will "thrust those reproachful speeches down [Chiron's] throat, / That he hath breath'd in my dishonor here" (2.1.55) could also be applied to Demetrius's disfigurement of Lavinia later in Act 2, scene 3. His fear of feminine text causes him to thrust the female body's text figuratively back down her throat, to suffocate that discourse, through rape and mutilation, and to replace her text with his own discourse of containment. Demetrius and Chiron represent patriarchal constructs about manhood and the control of femininity in their society: their discourse is loud and noisy but without substance. This is apparent where Chiron accuses Demetrius of being all talk and no action, one who is "foul-spoken [. . . and] thunders't with thy tongue" (2.1.58). In addition, the court, bereft of the true mother tongue, echoes with noise, the sounds of the hunt in Act 2, scene 2. The voice of the female body's text is silenced.

Demetrius calls Lavinia a "doe" that they will steal from her keeper, Bassianus (2.1.93-94); Aaron and Demetrius name Lavinia "a dainty doe" (2.1.117 and 2.2.26) and Aaron proclaims that "a solemn hunting is in hand" (2.1.112). Lavinia has been figuratively decapitated: she is not a woman but an animal to be hunted. Sexuality is total animality, a construction that men in the early modern English patriarchy projected upon females. Women who live in a society of male supremacy have a perpetual wound, the construct that female sexuality is connected to animal lust. Even Lavinia's uncle, Marcus, describes her as an animal, "straying in the park, / Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer / That hath receiv'd some unrecuring wound" (3.1 90). Rapists think female eyes speak with sexuality; the eyes say "yes" but the tongue says "no." Eyes
speak the message of animality, but speech makes the person unique, not one of many. Male composite figures (part animal, part human) are heroes in Greek mythology, but female composite figures are monsters and sexual animals, according to Harold Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (28). In Julie Taymor's film version of *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is costumed in the rape scene wearing the head of a doe on a woman's body.\(^2\) Since the female head is decapitated, the composite figure consists of a bestial mind and body.

Aaron suggests that Demetrius and Chiron hunt Lavinia “and strike her home by force, if not by words” (2.1.117-8). If Demetrius and Chiron rape Lavinia, Aaron hopes that a power play will ensue between Tamora’s sons and Titus’s family. At the end of the play, Aaron tells the tale of his misdeeds and describes the mutilation of Lavinia as “trim sport” (5.1.96). The rape, like clitorectomies in certain societies, trims her of the “female propensity” to lascivious behavior. She is figuratively beheaded in the rape, freed of the “excess of adornment.” The word “trim” classifies Lavinia as a commodity, displayed as goods and suitably adjusted or put in good order. “Trimming” women keeps them in line; it is figurative decapitation. “Trimming” female sexuality was ingrained in early modern English society and appears in other works than *Titus Andronicus*; Jacobean tragedy is preoccupied with curtailing or redressing feminine sexuality.

Even Marcus, Lavinia’s uncle, figuratively decapitates his niece. In Act 1, scene 1, he welcomes and praises Titus and his kinsman’s triumphant return home. Marcus believes that his nephews who have died in battle and will be interred in the family tomb “sleep in fame / [ . . . ]And triumph(s) over chance in honor’s bed” (1.1.173, 178). Chance or fortune is depicted as female in ancient cultures. Chance is violated here by death.
The dead have "a safer triumph" (1.1.176) than the living. The tomb or womb of the maternal body has been transformed linguistically into the site of a rape. Marcus's statement foreshadows the literal rape of Lavinia in Act 2, scene 3. The site of the tomb that Titus has venerated earlier in this scene is violated by masculine ideals just as Lavinia, whose virtue is honored by Titus, is raped by Demetrius and Chiron who enforce the constructs of men to order and contain women. Therefore, Marcus sees the tomb not as Titus does but as a site where "fame" and "honor," masculine constructs, can be forcibly inscribed.

It is denigrating to the female body as text that the men in Titus Andronicus try to inscribe meaning to the maternal body depicted as the Andronic tomb just as they try to force their own description on Lavinia's wounds. Marcus' belabored speech (2.4.11-57) attempts to contain the disorder of her violated bodily condition:

  O, that I knew thy heart, and knew the beast,
  That I might rail at him to ease my mind!
  Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopp'd,
  Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is.
  Fair Philomela, why, she but lost her tongue,
  And in a tedious sampler sew'd her mind;
  But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.
  A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
  And he that cut those pretty fingers off
  That could have better sew'd than Philomel. (2.4.34-43)
Marcus uses words to try to heal Lavinia; he tosses words at her as if the power of language alone will close her wounds, will re-construct the truth that he sees before him concerning the decapitating effects of patriarchal constructs. The length of his statement, like Montaigne’s ironic testament to the power of bodily text described in Chapter One, is in itself a testimony to the fact that Lavinia’s bodily disorder cannot be controlled by language. Marcus tries to impose his own meaning on Lavinia’s deformed figure when he finds her shortly after the rape: “Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say ’tis so?” (2.4.33). When presenting Lavinia to Titus after her rape, Marcus describes Lavinia’s mutilated form as loss and lack; Marcus speaks about her in past tense as if she is already dead: “This was thy daughter” (3.1.62). Lucius, like Marcus, sees Lavinia as voiceless, a blank page on which the men in his family should inscribe meaning, as Evelyn Gajowski observes (2). Lucius demands that Marcus speak for Lavinia: “O, say thou for her, who hath done this deed [the mutilation of Lavinia]? (3.1.87). Lucius and Marcus are attempting to re-inscribe Lavinia’s text and its connection to the mother tongue.

In Act 4, scene 1, the Andronicus men think Lavinia’s antics mean she is mad even though she is simply trying to communicate with them about her rape and mutilation. Lucius describes Lavinia’s disruptive force when she chases him to point out Ovid’s Metamorphoses containing the story of the raped Philomela as a communication by Lavinia concerning her attackers. Lavinia is this woman in Titus Andronicus; she is the embodiment of the nurturing female as “prey” to masculinity, Cixous’s definition of the “hysteric” (168), in the drama. After her rape and mutilation, Marcus and Lucius depict her behavior as hysterical, out of control. According to men, a woman like Lavinia who is
attempting to speak must be hysterical or mad: “some fit or frenzy do possess her” (4.1.17) and the “extremity of griefs would make [even] men mad” (4.1.19).

Hysteria is constructed by the patriarchy of early modern England to be "a rising up of the womb out of its place," as Lisa Jardine observes (110), the woman behaving in a disorderly manner that men must contain. Marcus views Lavinia in the same manner that he defines Rome, as a figuratively decapitated female body that needs a head, male reason, to complete her: “Be candidatus then and put it on, / And help to set a head on headless Rome” (1.1.185-6). Marcus tells the “sons of Rome”(5.3.67) at the end of the play: “Let me teach you how to knit / [. . .] these broken limbs again into one body” (5.3.70-72). He blames Rome for doing “shameful execution on herself” (5.3.76). The female body, figured as Rome, is continuously being figuratively decapitated, blamed for her own destruction, and then reconstructed by the male characters in the play.

The ultimate symbol of Lavinia’s figurative decapitation is her rape and disfigurement. A woman, like Lavinia, who is raped is sexually ruined in a patriarchal society. I agree with Kahn that Lavinia’s exchange value is nullified by the rape, but I don’t agree that her symbolic value is destroyed (49). Lavinia’s bodily text has value even after her violation. The raped woman embodies the persona of the temptress and the site of sexual promiscuity; she is transformed into the body of the monstrous maternal body. Tamora superimposes Lavinia’s chasteness in marriage, which Lavinia throws in her face right before the rape scene, with a woman’s virginity. This gives Demetrius a pretext to gain figurative power over his mother by raping Lavinia: “This minion stood upon her chastity, / Upon her nuptial vow, her loyalty / [. . .] And shall she carry this unto
her grave?” (2.3.124-7). The raped Lavinia is the woman whose sexuality, creativity, and birthing of children are ordered by the patriarchy.

For Demetrius and Chiron to separate from the void of the monstrous mother which threatens their sense of individuated identity from women, they not only rape but they mutilate Lavinia. Her mutilation is figuratively decapitating. Bassianus takes Lavinia’s hand in marriage, and Demetrius and Chiron mock this ceremonial passage of women from the hands or possession of one man to another by cutting her hands off in Act 2, scene 4. Demetrius and Chiron think the mutilation of Lavinia has dis-figured her so that she cannot identify her killers nor be handed off to anyone else within the masculine economy because she is socially and sexually soiled. Without hands, as Katherine Rowe points out, Lavinia has no connection between herself and the outside world; she is literally and figuratively cut off (70). The hand can represent a contract or consent (14, 24); Lavinia’s hand is the contract with her husband dissolved by Demetrius and Chiron murdering Bassianus. Lavinia’s hands also represent her rape, her lack of consent. According to Rowe, hands stand for “giving,” as Lavinia does not give herself freely to her rapists, and for “taking,” as Lavinia’s chastity and agency are taken from her by her assailants (Rowe 10). Lavinia’s sexuality is being controlled by the male characters in the play.

The head represents thought or intent and the hand is action and personal power; the head regulates and restrains the hand. So, Lavinia’s hands represent female containment in the patriarchy, the role of woman that must be ordered and constructed by male language. Lavinia’s hands become absent signifiers of the collective signifying body; her hands reveal the commodification of women in the marriage market. Titus
becomes disconnected from the male collective body when he agrees to give his hand away to ransom his sons Quintus and Martius in Act 3, scene 1. Without hands, Lavinia and Titus are severed from the dominating grip of judgment and acquisition in male-governed society and are free to return through death to the site of the maternal womb/tomb, as Rowe explains (80). The high body count in this play does not reflect the voracious maternal body but instead is Shakespeare’s illustration of the destructive force of dogma on the individual and on society, but especially as it applies to women as embodied in Lavinia’s figurative decapitation.

Enforcing chastity and virginity in early modern England was figurative rape, one form of silencing, as Marie Loughlin suggests (86). The mutilation of Lavinia’s mouth is a silencing, a figurative and literal sexual violation of her. By cutting her tongue away, her rapists ironically believe they have restored order to sexual disorder. The maiming and disfiguring of the female mouth in the early modern period, as Lynda Boose illustrates, was connected to the disorder created by female voice and sexuality (258). An example of the “disorder” of female license to speak occurs earlier in the drama when Lavinia speaks in opposition to the Emperor’s assertion that the call to the hunt has sounded “somewhat too early for new-married ladies” (2.2.15). With an absent tongue, the power of Lavinia’s sexuality and verbal license has been eliminated; this woman can no longer usurp male dominion over sexuality and language.

The term “mother tongue” is a misnomer since the disgorgement of text is the only true mother tongue. Demetrius and Chiron attempt to extract the mother tongue from Lavinia, a substitute for Tamora, who gave them access to the true mother tongue, the disgorgement of the body as text at birth; this is the tongue that phallocentrism destroys
through its containment of women. Men want to eliminate any connection for women or for men with the original mother tongue, the body as text, because that text displaces patriarchal text or the primacy of the phallus. Being subsumed back into the mother means the loss of everything that patriarchal culture has established: the supremacy of man over woman. The original mother tongue blurs the boundaries between bodies. Fear of the blurring between bodies, being sucked back into mother, causes Demetrius and Chiron to rape and mutilate.

The forest where Lavinia is raped and disfigured is paralleled with Lavinia; the woods are figured as a place without language, without a tongue, a place of figurative decapitation: “the woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull” (2.1.128). Instead, the woods are the site of the archaic mother and its “tongue.” Also, the woods are contrasted with the palace, the seat of male discourse: “The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears” (2.1.127). The palace is described as a head, and the forest is the female body; the palace possesses many body parts but not the text of the female body. Aaron describes the forest as “wide and spacious, / And many unfrequented plots there are” (2.1.114-5), the very description of the pit in Act 2, scene 4, that is the representation of the womb of the consuming maternal body. Men of the court have abandoned the “unfrequented plots” that comprise the maternal body. Male constructs must be forced upon the mother tongue, “there [in the woods] speak and strike, brave boys” (2.1.129), because the primeval maternal body cannot hear the authoritative commands of the patriarchy. Male language is unintelligible to this site.

Saturninus explains the early modern male viewpoint of women when he explains that it was right of Virginius to slay his daughter after she had been “enforc’d, stain’d,
and deflow’r’d” (5.3.38) “because the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence still renew his sorrows” (5.3.41-42). This is not the reason that Titus slays Lavinia; Titus only asks this question of Saturninus to prove how little the Emperor understands the female body’s text. Lavinia has indeed survived, is not shamed, and her presence has given a strength to her kinsman. Titus is “woeful” like Virginius but not for the same reason. The figurative decapitation of women is an “outrage” (5.3.52).

The very things that are done to Lavinia by the patriarchy—mutilation that creates incoherence and incapacity—is actually the property and composition of these men and not of Lavinia or of other women; these things are projected on to women. Lavinia’s rapists intend the mutilation of her mouth to stand as a signifier of her rape, that her bodily text reflects her disgrace. Lawrence Danson sees Lavinia as a representative of humanity’s pain, the need to be understood (1). Often, Lavinia’s bodily text has been consumed into mankind or humanity’s meaning in past criticism. Men in a patriarchy do to women what they fear women will do to them: men consume women into the text of men. However, Lavinia’s disgorgement that Shakespeare creates is a departure; Shakespeare’s play reveals the text of Lavinia to illuminate the female condition, specifically the situation of women of his time period.

Shakespeare’s Lavinia is a disgorgement that subverts early modern English constructs. Therefore, Lavinia’s body “transfigures” her decapitation; her form disappears behind the weight of the context, the multitude of meanings the mutilated female body represents. Lavinia’s continued appearance in society after she has been permanently soiled and tossed aside empowers the purity of Lavinia’s character and deconstructs male tenets concerning women as property and female propriety. Lavinia’s
scars are voices; they bear witness to the degradation of women in ancient society and in early modern society. Shakespeare turns Lavinia’s figurative decapitation into a disgorgement. What does Lavinia’s despoiled body as text “say”?

Disgorgement

The movement of the [female] text doesn’t trace a straight line [. . .] I see it as an outpouring [. . .] as vomiting, as ‘throwing up,’ ‘disgorging.’

(Cixous, “Castration” 176)

Shakespeare creates an outpouring or disgorgement of text by releasing Lavinia’s “voice” from containment. Although Lavinia’s mutilation disempowers her physically, the depth of metaphor attached to her after the rape, a text that “doesn’t trace a straight line,” becomes a textual disgorgement and “strikes [male sovereignty] home by force” (2.1.118), undermining Aaron’s statement, with the significance of her presence. She becomes a power that cannot be extinguished.

As part of her disgorgement, Lavinia always inhabits the entredeux space in the play: between Titus and Saturninus, Saturninus and Tamora, Saturninus and Bassianus, and between Chiron and Demetrius. Although Saturninus announces that he will make Lavinia his empress, it is apparent that Saturninus sees Lavinia’s body as a trophy that he has been awarded by Titus. Women are handed from man to man through the marriage ceremony in patrilineal societies. Saturninus asks for Lavinia’s hand in marriage, but Tamora has already caught his eye. Saturninus remarks, in an aside, when he first sees Tamora: “A goodly lady, trust me, of the hue/That I would choose were I to choose anew” (1.1.261-2). Lavinia’s betrothal to Saturninus places her in a position between
Tamora and her hopes to position herself in Saturninus’s court as empress. Saturninus and Bassianus both vie for the hand of Lavinia. Saturninus tells his brother, Bassianus, that he will “repent this rape” (1.1.404), the stealing of Lavinia as Saturninus’s bride. Saturninus feels that his brother has usurped the emperor’s rightful position as Lavinia’s husband. Demetrius and Chiron compete for Lavinia’s attentions; she is a prize to be won to prove their virility and cunning to Tamora:

Chiron: I care not, I, knew she and all the world,
I love Lavinia more than all the world.

Demetrius: Youngling, learn thou to make some meaner choice,
Lavinia is thine elder brother’s hope. (2.1.71-4)

Lavinia’s disgorgement is revealed in the subversion of the binary system of language and its constructs. In other words, she does not fit neatly within the story of the play; ultimately, she does not belong to any of the male characters in the drama.

Lavinia’s generosity of spirit is also part of her outpouring of text. In Act 1, scene 1, Lavinia is the dutiful daughter who celebrates her father’s fame and rise in status. “My noble lord and father, live in fame! / [...] bless me here with thy victorious hand, /
Whose fortune Rome’s best citizen applaud” (158-64). Lavinia is approving (1.1.270-1) towards the compassionate, “princely usage” (1.1.266) of Tamora, their prisoner of war. Lavinia expresses the qualities of selfless obedience to her father and to her sovereign. Lavinia fulfills her father’s prophesy in Act 1, scene 1, to “live [...] for virtue’s praise” (167-8). The male characters attempt to trivialize Lavinia’s text, but her words are sometimes bold and sarcastic; for example, Lavinia reproaches Saturninus when he asks her if she is displeased by his words to Tamora: “Not I, my lord; sith true nobility /
Warrants these words in princely courtesy" (1.1.271-2). Lavinia refers to “true nobility,” the bodily text that Lavinia represents, and how her “true nobility” transforms the patronizing manners and licentious thoughts, the text of the patriarchy, into “courtesy” or generosity, authorizing or warranting true words of comfort to all women. Lavinia’s words overthrow Saturninus's meaning and also his attempt to manage her. She displaces the male economy of exchange with the nurturing female economy of courtesy that consists of allowance, cooperation, respect, and indulgence.

The effect of Lavinia’s text is most prominently depicted in her relationships with her lover and with her father. Although all of the men in ancient Roman society and in Shakespeare’s age would be schooled in a language and law that objectifies and oppresses women, Shakespeare imbues some of his male characters with an ability to embrace a bisexual discourse, both the masculine and feminine aspects of language. Masculine language deals with constructs of the early modern English patriarchy, such as honor, fame, order and hierarchy, whereas feminine discourse reflects qualities inscribed upon it by male society, such as obedience, humility and graciousness, as well as characteristics of the maternal body. Shakespeare illustrates in his drama how Lavinia is able to manifest and at the same time manipulate the characteristics of “female discourse” to her advantage.

Rome is depicted in sections of the drama as a woman, and “Rome’s richest ornament” (1.1.52) would be her virginity or virtue, the quality that Lavinia embodies. Although Bassianus’s language sometimes objectifies Lavinia’s sexuality as in describing her as “Rome’s richest ornament,” Bassianus also uses words that are soft and yielding about Lavinia, as in “and her to whom my thoughts are humbled all, / Gracious Lavinia”
Bassianus admits that his "thoughts," the constructs of male society, are all humbled to the goodness of Lavinia, whose text throughout the play is all about the nurturing woman.

Titus, like Bassianus, is crafted by Shakespeare as a man who is beginning to embrace the female body's text. This is most evident in his description of the Andronici family tomb in Act 1, scene 1, that holds the bodies of many of Titus's sons killed in the war with the Goths. Lucius, Titus's son, views the tomb as an "earthly prison of their bones," (1.1.99) a site of "shadows" (1.1.100) and disturbance (1.1.101), much in the way that Kristeva describes the "abject" and its connection to the monstrous mother. Lucius is frightened by the tomb and envisions this space as a dreaded place producing demons; he wants to produce a sacrifice of the hewed limbs of his enemy to appease the power of the tomb. It is most striking that Titus, instead of railing in anger or fear at the tomb as his son does, speaks words that are respectful and reverent:

Make way to lay them by their bretheren...
There greet in silence, as the dead are wont,
And sleep in peace, slain in your country's wars!
O sacred receptacle of my joys,
Sweet cell of virtue and nobility..." (1.1.89-93)

It is clear from this passage that family is precious to Titus just as it is to Bassianus; Bassianus tells Marcus that he "love[s] and honor[s] thee and thine" (1.1.49) the family of Lavinia, the woman he loves. In addition, this is the only scene in the play in which a man (Titus) faces a bleeding pit, in this case the tomb holding the wounded dead bodies of his sons, with grace and acceptance rather than with horror and loathing. The
Andronici tomb in Act 1, scene 1, and in Act 5, scene 1, is a part of the disgorgement that Shakespeare creates concerning the outpouring of the female body’s text.

The dead are sleeping in peace, removed from the chaos of society’s attempts to order what cannot be ordered, the disruptive force of life and its connection to the archaic mother. Titus explains this theme in Act 1: “In peace and honor rest you here, my sons, / Rome’s readiest champions, repose you here in rest, / Secure from worldly chances and mishaps! / Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells...”(1.150-3). These dead are “secure from worldly chances” in a “sacred receptacle” or “sweet cell” (1.1.91-93). One of Titus’s meanings is that the tomb is revered and noble because his valiant sons reside there and define the nature of the site. However, lines 92, 93, and 152 in Act 1, scene 1 can also be interpreted as Titus coming to peace with death even at the outset of the play, that the male fear of returning to the maternal body is unfounded. Titus speaks directly to the tomb, as if he is conversing or creating a dialogue with the image of the maternal body.

Later in Act 1, scene 1, Titus professes to have “sumptuously re-edified” (351) the family tomb. Titus has not just rebuilt the tomb; he has restructured its meaning. Here Shakespeare addresses the issue of “differance,” the disparity between word and meaning. The tomb now instructs the mother tongue; it enlightens those “soldiers and Rome’s servitors” (352) who are laid to rest there. Titus thinks he has re-structured the tomb, but the tomb has actually re-arranged Titus’s thinking. Titus believes he is protecting the tomb from penetration by undeserving usurpers. Titus may be misguided about his “unworthy brother, and unworthy sons” (346) but not about the tomb’s edifying powers. The Andronici monument is indeed “virtue’s nest” (376). Mutius died in honor
for Lavinia’s or virtue’s cause. Men may live in fame, but they die and are buried in the
nest or site of virtue.

Titus sees himself as a gallant “soldier” (1.1.193) or champion of Rome, who is a
“glorious” (1.1.187) female. Titus also depicts Rome as Lavinia’s maternal guardian:
“Kind Rome, that hast thus lovingly reserv’d / The cordial of mine age to glad my heart!”
(1.1.165-8). Lavinia’s embodiment of l’écriture feminine and her outpouring of feelings
of devotion to her father, Titus, affects the way he reads the female body. Titus depicts
Rome as feminine, not as the site of masculine aggression. In like manner, Lavinia’s love
for Bassianus has influenced his figurative relationship with the female body and its text.
Bassianus loves Lavinia as well and is beginning to turn his back on male dominion in
favor of her; he believes that he is “possess’d of that is mine” (1.1.408). Bassianus does
not say he owns Lavinia but that they possess each other. Bassianus sarcastically retorts
that the “laws” of Rome as the true mother tongue will ultimately “determine all”
(1.1.407). He explains that he owes his “duties” (1.1.414) to his vision of Rome as the
nurturing female body. These statements foreshadow his own gruesome death at the
hands of two representatives of the ancient law of men, Demetrius and Chiron (depicted
as Rape and Murder in Act 5, scene 2), and his return to mother earth in Act 2, scene 3.

In Act 3, scene 1, Marcus is afraid of the outpouring of Titus’s passions that are
not controlled by reason (218). However, Titus has touched the body of mother earth and
is engulfed by it: “I am the sea / [. . .] I [am] the earth” (3.1.225-6). This connects Titus
to Lavinia, and he is identifying with the feminine side of himself: “Then must my sea be
moved with her sighs; / Then must my earth with her continual tears / Become a deluge”
(3.1.228-9). He vomits her woes (3.1.231). Disgorgement is a vomiting of text.
Lavinia’s compassion for Titus changes him; she kisses him when the heads of her brothers, accused of murdering Bassianus, are returned to them (3.1.249). Lavinia’s love helps her father to accurately read the text of the female body.

Lavinia continues to be loving towards young Lucius even after her rape and mutilation; she plays with him and they look at books together (4.1). Young Lucius admits that Lavinia “loves me as dear as e’er my mother did” (4.1.23), which connects Lavinia to the comforting maternal body. Lavinia read to Lucius before her attack just as a supportive mother would; Titus indicates that “Cornelia never with more care / Read to her sons than she [Lavinia] that read to thee [Lucius]” (4.1.12-13). The text Lavinia searches for is Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* with its tale of the rape of Philomel; young Lucius explains that his mother gave him the book (4.1.42), a text that reveals the bodily discourse of the abuse of women by men.

Marcus explains Lavinia’s interest in the book by stating that “for love of her that’s gone [Lucius’s mother], / Perhaps, she [Lavinia] cull’d [the book] from among the rest” (4.1.43-44). In other words, for love of the mother, Lavinia attempts to communicate her text to her family. Lavinia, like young Lucius, is motherless in the drama. Maternal absence in the case of Lavinia functions in this drama to isolate and spotlight her, to compare her isolation and lack of comforting mother to the male fear of the dreadful mother and the lack of a nurturing mother in the play. If Shakespeare is right that the “hand [is] the agent of the heart” (*Two Gentleman of Verona* 1.3.46), then Lavinia’s disembodied hands symbolize the outpouring of expression and feelings of the nurturing female. The disembodied hands of Lavinia “speak” in a way that her hands could not if she wrote out or if she “signed” her text, as Rowe indicates (12).
Subversion of Language

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic [. . . it exists] to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth.’ (Cixous, “Laugh” 888).

Lavinia’s repeated presence in each scene of the play creates a textual subversion that shatters the “framework” of Roman and Gothic law as embodied by Saturninus and Tamora’s family and breaks up the “truth” that her father has lived by. *Titus Andronicus* is about the perils of rhetoric, how instead of partnering the bodily text, it often stifles this text, especially the mother tongue and its disgorgement. Shakespeare creates a disgorgement of text through Lavinia’s character that “decapitates” or deconstructs language. For example, Lavinia’s bodily presence on stage after her rape and mutilation in *Titus Andronicus* not only stands for the words “rape,” “mutilation,” “decapitation,” “victimization” but also for all of the things that these words imply about a woman encaged by early modern patriarchal beliefs.

Shakespeare shows that Lavinia’s dismembered figure is a disruption of hierarchy and a turbulence that destabilizes male systems including male language. The early modern English patriarchy, Boose explains, characterized Eve’s seductive mouth as bringing disorder to the world (263); in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia’s subversive verbal discourse in Act 1 and 2 and her vacant, mutilated mouth after Act 2 bring disorder to male text. However, Lavinia’s empty mouth defines her as the disorder of the mother tongue, a text that subverts the masculine label of Eve’s “evil” placed upon women in early modern England by demonstrating what figurative decapitation does to women.
The disgorgement of Lavinia's text deconstructs Ovidian discourse and the Petrarchan *blazon*. Lavinia's body as an example of Ovidian discourse can be illustrated through the denigration of her before and during the gang rape. Demetrius's attitude towards women is clearly deprecating with no regards for what women desire: "She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd, / She is a woman, therefore may be won, / She is Lavinia, therefore must be lov'd (2.1.82-84). Demetrius's discourse is meant to belittle and objectify women. After her mutilation in Act 2, scene 3, Lavinia embodies the denigrated woman of Ovidian discourse, because she no longer possesses the parts of a woman that can be praised in poetic terms. However, Lavinia's bodily text, her continued presence in the play, especially after her rape and mutilation, undermines Demetrius's attempt to diminish her meaning.

Lavinia's mutilation represents a mockery of the ideal woman, because body parts like women's hands were praised in Petrarchan discourse. Lavinia's body "queers" the Petrarchan *blazon* that anatomizes women. Chiron's proclamation is like a perverse form of impassioned suitor/Petrarchan lover, competing with his brother for the already spoken-for maiden, Lavinia: "I am as able and as fit as thou / To serve, and to deserve my mistress' grace, / And that my sword upon thee shall approve, / And plead my passions for Lavinia's love" (2.1.33-36). I am in agreement with Evelyn Gajowski who asserts that Lavinia is reduced to mere body parts in *Titus Andronicus*, the literal embodiment of the Petrarchan *blazon* (8). An object has no subjectivity; therefore, the female as object is dehumanized under the façade of idealization.

Taymor critiques the Petrarchan *blazon* by putting the ruined Lavinia on a pedestal in her film version of the play. Lavinia on the pedestal is not the ideal woman
but the woman transformed into a monster by patriarchal containment in Taymor’s film. Taymor’s depiction of Lavinia on the pedestal is supported by the behavior of the male characters in the play; Saturninus, Marcus, Aaron, Demetrius, and Chiron all view Lavinia as the spoils of war, a trophy to be displayed, in one sense or another. It is not Lavinia but the norms of the early modern patriarchy that are monstrous. The figure of Lavinia ridicules the blazon as an objectifying linguistic practice in Taymor’s film.

Physical unchastity in early modern England was considered the same as verbal license, as Margaret Ferguson explains (242). Therefore, Lavinia’s text also ridicules the patriarchy’s construct that the ideal woman is silent, obedient, and chaste. Lavinia is silent; she has no tongue. Lavinia is obedient; she has no hands. Lavinia is chaste; she has been gang raped, an action that “beheads” or neuters her sexuality. Lavinia’s “lack,” her missing tongue and hands, is her decapitation and is used to illustrate the futility of patriarchal ordering of female chaos that in reality, rather than creating containment, just perpetuates more disorder. Therefore, Lavinia’s bodily “lack” is used by Shakespeare to critique male constructs; as Marcus points out, “what stern ungentle hands / Hath lopp’d and hew’d, and made thy body bare / Of her two branches” (2.4.16-18).

Tamora appears on the surface to have the body parts and face of the ideal woman, yet she is not cognizant of the text of the virtuous female body: “I know not what it means” (2.3.157). Lavinia entreats Tamora “to open [her] deaf ears,” (2.3.160) to allow Lavinia to re-teach the mother tongue to her, but Tamora will not be reminded of the maternal body she has turned her back on. Lavinia’s bodily text disables the binary system of coding or labeling women. The female characters in this play are created as stereotypes to deconstruct the binary system of language. In an aside as a response to
Demetrius, young Lucius says in Act 4, scene 2, “you are both decipher’d, that’s the news” (8). Shakespeare creates Lavinia’s bodily text to reverse and reveal meaning; it has transformed and decoded the text of Demetrius and Chiron for everyone to read. She has reduced her rapists to ciphers, non-entities which was exactly what they hoped to do to her and what male society tries to do to all women. Her bodily text has reduced the weight or influence of male text.

It is important that the last words Lavinia utters are “Confusion fall…” (2.3.184). She summons the chaos of her father’s revenge and that of the bodily text of the female hysteric in this scene. Her words come true in Act 5 where the chaos of her own text causes the male characters that comprise her family in the play to bring about the ruination of her rapists, of their mother, of their mother’s lover, and of the Emperor. The dramatist constructs female martyrdom in the play to place the woman completely outside the male symbolic, outside male jurisdiction as represented in language, in a place where true “female” discourse can originate as a disruption of the system. Lavinia’s death is a sacrifice, a generation of the discourse of loss where the body is given up to attain a higher level of expression. Martyrdom composes a meaning that cannot be eclipsed by male discourse. Lavinia’s death makes her body as “referent” disappear so that nothing but epitaph remains.

In the murder of Demetrius and Chiron, Titus stops their mouths (5.2.167) that cry in protest in a similar manner to the way her rapists stopped Lavinia’s mouth during her attack. Also, they are to “hear what fearful words” Titus utters (5.2.168), just as Lavinia was forced to hear Demetrius and Chiron’s words during her attack. Titus intends to bake Demetrius and Chiron’s heads, representing the heads of men of the patriarchy, the
heads of reason, and feed them to Tamora, back into the body of the monstrous mother which is a text that men have created, effectively neutralizing male power over the perpetration of “Rape,” “Murder” (5.2.45) and “Revenge” (5.2.3) against women and all mankind. By executing Demetrius and Chiron, Titus is effectively suffocating male language and destroying its constructs. In Act 5, scene 3, Titus tells the court that Demetrius and Chiron’s “mother daintily hath fed, / Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred” (5.3.61-62).

Titus does all of this to make a statement concerning the figurative decapitation of his daughter. Titus proposes that he was not the one who slayed Lavinia, who “did her all this wrong” (5.3.58); it was actually Demetrius and Chiron (56). Titus is aware that if he kills Tamora, Saturninus or someone in the court will kill him, so Titus engineers his own death, or merging with the nurturing maternal body, through Tamora’s murder. The deaths of Titus, Bassianus, and Lavinia are not written as idealistic romanticism. The deaths of these characters represent the dramatist’s disgorgement, an outpouring of text, like birthing, a loss, a giving, that are not intended to be identified, manipulated, or reconsumed back into the structures and constructs of the hierarchy.

*Jouissance through Bisexual Discourse*

This self-effacing, merger-type bisexuality [of text . . .] is each one’s location in self of the presence [. . .] of both sexes, non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and from this ‘self-permission,’ multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire over all parts of [the] body.

(Cixous, “Laugh” 884)
The author who disgorges is "penetrated" by the desire to express a merger of
text, a bisexual discourse; the writer who disgorges deconstructs the gap in the binary
system of language and fills the gap to overflowing. Shakespeare constructs Lavinia’s
gang rape so that it can be displaced by another kind of "penetration," the desire to
express rather than repress. Lavinia deconstructs "the gap" in her attempts to
communicate her rapists’ names to her family and fills this gap in communication to
overflowing (without the use of tongue or hands) by using her body as a text of her own personal jouissance. Lavinia’s text is her figurative baby, the one she did not get an
opportunity to bear.

Lavinia collaborates in Titus’ revenge plot against her rapists, collecting the blood
of the murdered Demetrius and Chiron in a basin; Titus explains that his "one hand yet is
left to cut your throats, / Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold / The basin that
receives your guilty blood" (5.2.203). The blood of her rapists is the ink Lavinia uses to
assert her text in this scene. Their blood fills her basin, representing her violated womb;
the visual image of her collecting the blood creates a statement about her mutilated
condition, her desecrated womb that will never be filled with human life but that is now
filled with the life of her oppressors, the body as text. The blood of her attackers
inseminates a female narrative about the monstrosity of the violation of women by male-
governed society and creates a figurative coitus through a joining of male and female
discourses.

Titus declaims the actions of men towards nature, depicted as female in the play:
"O had we never, never hunted there!" (4.1.56) and elicits the female body’s text: "Give
signs, sweet girl" (4.1.61). Lavinia writes her rapists’ names using Marcus’s staff. I
disagree with Kahn that writing in Latin reinscribes her existence with the text “of her
cultural dominators” (62) and obscures the context her mutilated body represents. Instead
of depending on the medium of “the feminine art of textiles” to tell her story like the raped
Philomel, Lavinia translates the body’s text into writing to explain her situation. Following
Marcus’s example of writing with the staff in the sand, Lavinia uses Latin, “Stuprum,” as
the means to translate the body’s text into a language the male characters who comprise
her family can understand (4.1.78).

For Clark Hulse and Douglas Green, Lavinia’s use of the stick in her mouth to
write the names of her rapists is a fellatio-like action that reenacts her rape, enabling her
own oppression (116, 325). I totally disagree with this reading of Lavinia’s body.
Indeed, Lavinia’s appearance with the staff in her mouth parallels the figure of women of
early modern England who were bridled in iron masks that had long tongues and put on
display in the marketplace as a humiliating tactic for being a “scold,” as Boose explicates
(267). The tongue of the bridle looks like a phallus stopping up the mouth of the woman.
Bridling was intended to stop the voice of a woman through a rape of the mouth.
However, Lavinia’s fellatio, using the staff as a pen/penis to inscribe her meaning in the
dust, is a “queering” of the sexual practice of fellatio, a subversion of male dominance
over language used to enunciate her rapists’ identities. In this way, Lavinia’s body is her
voice; it takes the place of her mutilated mouth that cannot speak and her deformed arms
that cannot write. The use of her body, rather than her hands or tongue, to write or speak
is a creation of bisexual discourse, using the staff as a phallic instrument. This bisexual
or merging of male discourse with the female body’s text transforms the language of
Latin, male domain. The female body is not only the force behind the writing implement (the staff as phallus) but also the text itself.

The male characters in *Titus Andronicus* are active, speaking, and commanding. The blank page women are made into is figuratively raped by the pen(is) (Gubar 295). Lavinia’s bodily text changes this process into a discourse between or an intercourse of male and female by taking the phallus/pole in her mouth. This action is significant and signifying, appropriating male symbols of signification, of authority, the phallus and Latin, to translate the body’s text for her family. Marcus is unsettled by and resistant to Lavinia’s action of writing with the staff even though he instructed her to do it; Marcus finds the figurative birth of bodily text created by the joining of the female body with the staff as the phallic pen, using writing as a medium of translation by women of the female body’s text, to “stir a mutiny in mildest thoughts” (4.1.85), something that would “arm the minds of infants” (4.1.86). To Marcus, Lavinia with the staff in her mouth appears to be the figure of what men fear: the mouth or womb devouring the phallus.

Since the male characters cannot read her bodily text, she must use male productions such as books, writing, and Latin as a means to speak to her family members. Lavinia blends her female body with the phallic staff and with the masculine hand to appropriate these objects’ power in the patriarchy to translate the body’s text. Lavinia grabs Titus’s hand in her mouth; Titus instructs Lavinia to “bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth” (3.1.282). The hand is the writer. I believe Marie Loughlin is correct when she states that Lavinia’s carrying her father’s hand in her mouth in Act 5, scene 1, indicates that the tongue is the site of masculine status and the origin of language (Quoted in Rowe 218). Lavinia’s action of carrying Titus’s hand in her mouth also
makes fun of the patriarchal belief in the potency of their symbolics, their manipulation of language. In addition, the bodily text of Lavinia is blended here with the discourse of male society, with the language of the writer. In Act 3, scene 2, Titus and Lavinia retire together so that Titus can read with her stories “in times of old”(83). Shakespeare designs this scene to be a blending of “his story” and “her story,” a linking of male and female discourse into a “bisexual” text.

Conclusion

Rare are the men able to venture onto the brink where writing,
freed from law, unencumbered by moderation, exceeds phallic authority,
and where the subjectivity inscribing its effects becomes feminine.

(Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 86)

Lavinia’s body “speaks” because Shakespeare is such a writer. Shakespeare constructs Lavinia to be invincible; she is the only character who emerges from the pit in Act 2, scene 4 (the image of the consuming womb in the drama), and lives on. Because of this, she becomes a living sign of the opposing maternal body, one that nurtures. “There is something of the mother in every woman,” as Cixous puts it (“Coming to Writing” 50). Quintus explains that the hole is “blood-stained” like the site of the female womb. Martius describes the hole as “a very fatal place” (2.3.202) and “a fearful sight of […] death” (2.3.216). Quintus suggests that the pit is a “swallowing womb” (239) and that those in the pit are on the “brink” (241). Because the pit is depicted as a womb, the generator of life and death, it is also “unhallow’d” (210) or a representation of the
contaminated maternal body to Martius. Therefore, the birthing process is defined by the male characters as dirty and defiled.

However, in 2.3, Martius also notices “a precious ring that lightens all the hole, / [...] like a taper in some monument” (2.3.227-8). Martius refers to a ring on Bassianus’s finger but he could well be defining the womb/tomb that Titus discusses in Act 1 and the figure of the nurturing maternal body that Lavinia represents in the play. In addition, the light from the ring is compared to the moonlight that shone on Pyramus in legend “when he by night lay bath’d in maiden blood” (2.3.231-2). The blood of Lavinia and of the maternal body anoint the murdered body of Bassianus, his blood mixing with theirs. Lavinia’s bodily text conveys the mutilation of herself and of her husband, Bassianus, by the patriarchy; she is raped lying on her husband’s body. Therefore, her body translates and transports both their texts, their meaning. Instead of disarming or disempowering Lavinia’s text in the gang rape and mutilation, Demetrius and Chiron succeed in doing the opposite; Lavinia’s bodily text becomes so overwhelming that it makes the patriarchal text that Tamora’s sons represent mute.

In the final scene of the drama, Lucius, as the new emperor of Rome, declares that Tamora will have “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 (5.3.196-9). In these final words, Lucius imagines the “ravenous” (5.3.195) and “beastly” (5.3.199) maternal body being ignored and consumed and, in its place, honors Lavinia’s bodily text that is enclosed in the Andronici tomb, in the nurturing maternal body that Lucius describes as “our household’s monument”
Lucius and Marcus' tears and kisses cannot remove the bloodstains from Titus: "O, take this warm kiss on thy pale cold lips, / These sorrowful drops upon thy blood [-stain'd] face" (5.3.153-4). Titus is being committed to the family tomb, returned to the body of mother earth. Titus, like Bassianus earlier in the play, has his blood mixed with that of Lavinia in the Andronici tomb, returning him figuratively to the maternal body.

Shakespeare crafts his characters to indicate that the body's true text cannot be dismembered because it continues to outpour signification of the mother tongue. Marcus relates Lavinia's blood to "a crimson river" (2.4.22) and "a bubbling fountain stirr'd with the wind" (2.4.23) after her mutilation. The blood from her mouth is like the bleeding pit in the previous scene; it is the ink of the female body's text. The female body's text as authorial disgorgement is translated to the page; it is a text that deconstructs the whiteness of the blank page and puts in the place of male constructs a feminine text in blood, like Lavinia's streaming blood (Gajowski 8).

When Lavinia kneels with her family (4.1.87) to swear "mortal revenge" (4.1.93) to see the blood of her attackers (4.1.94), she becomes a collaborator in Titus's plan, not as a mad woman nor as an innocent or unwary victim of her father's madness and rage as she is often interpreted. In Act 5, scene 1, Lavinia enters the feast veiled, as a bride might be or as a handmaiden who is returning to her husband and to the womb/tomb. It is of import to this study that Titus executes his daughter; it indicates his acceptance of the maternal body. If Lavinia had committed suicide, which is alluded to by Titus and Marcus in 3.2.16-22, Shakespeare's interrogation of the female body's text would be incomplete. The love that Titus and Bassianus have for Lavinia helps them to get in
touch once again with the mother tongue as well as to see the damaging effects of
figurative decapitation on the female body.

Lavinia’s death is a requiem for the victimized female body. Even after
Lavinia’s body has disappeared from the stage, her bodily text “speaks.” When Titus
kills Lavinia in Act 5, scene 3, her corporeal body completely vanishes in death and what
is left alive is the purport representing the body. The image of Lavinia’s raped and
mutilated figure onstage makes an indelible impression on the audience; it cannot be
erased or commodified. For example, the mental picture of Lavinia’s ravaged body that
reappears onstage in 2.4 and Lavinia’s veiled presence awaiting death at the banquet
scene in 5.3 are indelible visual images for the audience. Lavinia’s “monstrous” presence
on stage in six scenes after the rape and mutilation testifies to the illusion of patriarchal
power and is an allusion to male linguistic impotence. Therefore, the female body’s text
is a more powerful sign than anything that men do to inscribe meaning on women.

Titus explains at the outset of the play that the dead bodies of his family in the
Andronici tomb “speak” (1.1.90) through silence. This phrase is very telling, since later
in the play the text of Lavinia’s living, disfigured body and then later her slain body will
“speak” in its silence. Titus exhibits the ability to express the disruptive powers of the
female bodily text throughout the play but especially in the final scene. Titus would not
be able to translate the female body’s text if it were not for all that goes before, if it were
not for Lavinia and her outpouring of expression. Titus executes Lavinia in Act 5,
assisting in producing her body’s text that not only “speaks” through silence but disturbs
the silence. “Silence contains all potential sound,” in Susan Gubar’s words (305).
Disgorgement through the form of the female body’s text and using male language to translate this text explodes his story and history, which is based on the oppression of women, and creates her story and “herstory” which is based on the expression of women. “Herstory” is always a tragedy. Lavinia is a “map of woe” (3.2.12), the tragedy of figurative decapitation that men might read, but most of the men in the play aren’t able to follow it. Patriarchal rules in the early modern era, their expectations inscribed on to women, rape, mute, and mutilate the discourse between the sexes. Lavinia bears on the outside of her body the scars that all women bear on the inside: the decapitating force of oppression, silencing, and marginalization. Titus suggests that Lavinia’s wounds depict “her story” when he states that Lavinia “shalt not sigh, not hold thy stumps to heaven, / Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign, / But I, of these, will wrest an alphabet, / And by still practice learn to know thy meaning” (3.2.42-45). To hear the female body’s text, a member of the patriarchy must be “still,” not immersed in the noise of male language.

Titus has begun to embrace the female body’s disgorgement. Titus’s list of Lavinia’s body parts that “speak” her text, unlike Michel de Montaigne’s litany of bodily texts, delineate the story of female figurative decapitation, of the “herstory” of women who have been physically of figuratively raped by patriarchal constructs. Furthermore, the disgorgement created by Shakespeare through his character Lavinia, and Elizabeth Cary’s text expressed through the character of Mariam, not only disorders the male worlds the characters live in but also expresses an outpouring of the female body’s jouissance.
Endnotes

1 All quotations from Shakespeare’s texts are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* and are hereafter identified in the chapter with parenthesized act, scene, and line reference.

2 Julie Taymor’s film version of *Titus Andronicus* greatly influenced my thinking concerning the depiction of Lavinia as the nurturing feminine body contrasted with Tamora as the monstrous mother. Lisa Starks’s discussion of Lavinia and Tamora in her essay “Powers of Horror and Horrors of Power in Julie Taymor’s *Titus*” assisted me in developing my own theories concerning Lavinia’s decapitation and Shakespeare’s textual disgorge ment.

3 By asserting that Lavinia’s text is translated by taking the hand of Titus in her mouth, I am following the lead of Cixous’s statement in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that women must seize patriarchal discourse in their mouths and bite it to write (887).
CHAPTER THREE

MARIAM IN ELIZABETH CARY'S THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM

Elizabeth Cary uses writing to translate the female body's jouissance into language in her closet drama, The Tragedy of Mariam. Death, like writing, is a translating medium between the body's text and a statement or expression. Shakespeare and Cary create female characters whose deaths are a textual disgorgement, an outpouring of feelings and a subversion of language constructs, for the dramatists. The deaths of Lavinia and Mariam are a text of loss, of releasing the voice from containment. Women writers want to translate into language what the body performs naturally.

Ironically, giving birth to oneself as a woman sometimes involves a death. A female death is not a glorified martyrdom, a celebration of female death that underscores figurative decapitation by the patriarchy, but instead, as Catherine Belsey (190) and Frances Dolan (159) assert, a female presence on the scaffold, like Cary's representation of her character Mariam, expresses text in a way that early modern Englishwomen were not permitted at any other time or place. Hélène Cixous believes that women do not give to the point of death, because women embrace "the oblivion of acceptance" ("Castration" 176). I agree with this but I also re-envision "the oblivion of acceptance" to include death, an argument that this chapter and the previous chapter attempt to articulate. Cary's character, Mariam, accepts her fate because she knows that she will go on, residing in
heaven in "Sara's lap" (4.8.574). I believe that sometimes women "live loss," as Cixous puts it, through their own deaths.

It is my contention that Elizabeth Cary rewrites past history, deconstructs male texts through the veiled discourse of the closet drama and uses this re-telling, this mythmaking in process, to create a disgorgement of text. The author re-creates six female characters (Mariam, Alexandra, Doris, Salome, Graphina, and Cleopatra), sticking closely to the history of Herod the Great laid out in Book 14, chapters 12-16 and Book 15, chapters 1-7 of Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*. I agree with Alexandra Bennett who views the female characters in this play as representations of different methods of approaching textuality (298). Elizabeth Cary as a female writer who is rewriting history is actually expressing "herstory," the saga of women's past experiences as an expression that validates her own life story. Mariam is the key figure in the drama and, like Lavinia in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Mariam turns her figurative decapitation into an expression of the female body's text. Cary creates disgorgement through subverting language, disrupting the order of the hierarchy through Mariam's death, and producing *jouissance* through a bisexuality of discourse.

**Figurative Decapitation**

Women have no choice other than to be decapitated [...] they don't actually lose their head by the sword, *they only keep them on condition that they lose them* [...] to complete silence [...] If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this
castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head. (Cixous, “Castration” 163-4)

Mariam is figuratively and literally decapitated by her husband Herod, catalyzed by his issues concerning masculinity, namely his jealous possessiveness of Mariam. In fact, the female characters are carefully positioned in Elizabeth Cary’s play to illustrate different aspects of figurative decapitation, all of which impact Mariam’s situation in some manner. Alexandra, Mariam’s mother, blindly enables patriarchal containment, consumption of herself and her daughter, throughout the play, even though she rails against it. In Act 1, she objectifies Mariam’s beauty when she uses a “portraiture” (2.187) of Mariam’s “visage” (2.197) as a snare to catch Marc Antony’s attention, but Alexandra’s attempts to win favor do not work. Alexandra figuratively decapitates Mariam with her description of the powers of Mariam’s beauty over men; Alexandra indicates that in Mariam’s visage is an entire assortment of alluring women on display for the highest bidder (1.2.197). Cary characterized her relationship with her own mother as “trying,” as Naomi Miller indicates (356); more than once in Cary’s biography The Lady Falkland; Her Life, Cary’s mother, like Alexandra, enables the figurative decapitation of her daughter.

Alexandra’s words in Act 1 indicate that women must compete with each other for the favors of men. Doris and Mariam, like Tamora and Lavinia in Titus Andronicus, cannot bond because they must vie for male protection and attention; women end up in an adversarial position to maintain their status in relation to men. One example of the separation of women in Mariam’s world is at the beginning of Act 1 where Mariam reveals that Sohemus saved her from death, that Herod had decreed that she should die if
he was killed. Herod intended to figuratively decapitate Mariam even after his demise. Alexandra suggests that Herod may have wanted Mariam dead so that he could return to Doris, Herod’s first wife (1.2.128-9). Herod’s cruelty (2.3.264) is his figurative decapitation of the women in his life. Doris believed Herod’s oaths that “affirm’d [her] face without compare” (2.3. 240) when they were married. However, this is no longer the case. Doris believes she has lost her position as Herod’s queen to Mariam because she was not considered to be “fair enough” (2.3.235) compared to Mariam’s beauty. Women are judged on their beauty and virtue.

Therefore, in Act 2, Doris “begg’d for vengeance” (2.3.247) and for “the fall of her [Mariam] that on my trophy stands” (2.3.250). Doris’s statement about the “foul adultery [that] blotteth Mariam’s brow” (2.3.278) is conflated with Doris’s words about “revenge’s foulest spotted face” (2.3.280). Adultery and Revenge are depicted as destroying Mariam’s beauty and therefore her hold on Herod. Adultery and Revenge are joined in language the way Doris and Mariam are connected in the play. However, Doris fears that words will not have the power to heal the wrongs done to her: “Had I ten thousand tongues and ev’ry tongue / Inflam’d with poison’s power, and steep’d in gall: / My curses would not answer for my wrong” (4.8.609-11). Doris is completely wrapped up in her son, Antipater, and his position in the hierarchy that has been lost to Mariam’s son because Mariam has usurped Doris’s position in Herod’s court. Doris’s words enable the patriarchal control of women, including her own containment. Just as Lavinia kneels to Tamora to beg not for her own life but for Tamora to stop Demetrius and Chiron from violating her in Titus Andronicus, Mariam kneels to Doris later in the play to beg not for her own life but for the lives of her children (4.8.604-7). Tamora and Doris have drunk
from the cup of wrath Doris wishes on Mariam (4.8.600); Tamora and Doris represent the male definition of the contaminated maternal body.

Doris signifies all women who are interchangeable in the male world, just as Tamora and Lavinia are interchangeable in *Titus Andronicus.* As absent signifiers, Doris and Mariam, like all women in the ancient Judaic patriarchy, are considered to be “nought” or nothing. Being “nought” is figurative decapitation. Elizabeth Cary uses this word several times in the drama. The status of Doris and Mariam as “nought” is directly related to the homonym “naught,” referring to women’s connection to Eve and the original sin. Being free or appearing to be free from “naught” also decapitates women and makes them “nought,” purified entities.

Sohemus suggests that Mariam’s vow to forego the bed of her husband is unwise, but that Mariam will not listen to his advice, which she considers to be “nought” (3.3.144). Male language is becoming unimportant to Mariam. This section of the play is directly related to the Chorus’s profession that a “spotless” woman must free herself from “naught,” from even the “suspicion” of wrongdoing (3.3.217). Elizabeth Cary may have been influenced in this section of the play by Stefano Guazzo’s work or the conduct manuals of her time, Margaret Ferguson and Barry Weller indicate, that reflected sentiments similar to that of those in Guazzo’s writing: “It is not sufficient to be honest and innocent in deed, if she doe not likewise avoyde all suspicion (in respect of the world) between being naught and being thought naught” (165). Herod believes that “Nought is so fix’d, but peevishness may move” (4.3.149). Anger changes the condition of “nought.” “Nought” is not a fixed term but can be manipulated or changed by male society’s edicts.
The concepts of "nought" and "naught" are connected to the women in Shakespeare's plays in William Carroll's analysis: "A woman is not a virgin [or chaste] whose knot is nought because she has been naught" (297). Carroll's word play is significant to Shakespeare and Cary's establishment of Lavinia and Mariam as absent signifiers. The use of "knot/nought/naught" signifies the bond of marriage, the frailty of feminine status in society, and the arbitrary male tenets women must abide by. The very stigma that some of the characters hope to achieve (like the rape of Lavinia by Demetrius and Chiron or Salome's slander of Mariam to persuade Herod to execute Mariam) is also the very aspect of Lavinia and Mariam that not only brings about their downfall but also the disruption of male discourse.

Lavinia and Mariam's courage in the face of a fate worse than death and the female body as the mythos of victim display the opposite of "nought"; "nought" is transformed into a text concerning figurative decapitation. Constabarus describes Salome: "You are with nought but wickedness indued" (4.6.346). Tamora and Salome's "knots" of chastity are also "nought" because they have been "naught," but the opposite result occurs. Tamora and Salome's indiscretions ultimately contribute to their figurative decapitation, make them more sexually objectified, in comparison to the textual disgorgement created by Shakespeare and Cary through the depiction of Lavinia and Mariam.

Because Mariam embodies living death, she is an absent signifier. An example of Mariam's living death appears in the exposition. Before Act 1 opens, before Josephus spares Mariam's life, Mariam was waiting for death due to Herod's edict (1.1.50). Mariam lives with the threat of death throughout the play and is finally sentenced to
death by her husband in Act 4. In addition, Herod’s vacillation (4.4.241-58) between killing and imprisoning Mariam emphasizes her entredeux status as an absent signifier. Another way in which Mariam is presented as absent signifier is in Mariam’s frequent reference to herself in third person; this linguistic effect creates another form of living death. Mariam’s use of third person throughout the play foreshadows her execution in Act 5 and at the same time defines the existence of women who live under male oppression as a living death. In Act 1, scene 2, Mariam states: “Not to be empress of aspiring Rome, / Would Mariam like to Cleopatra live: / With purest body will I press my tomb, / And wish no favours Anthony could give” (199-202). Mariam makes herself a separate entity by speaking about herself in third person.

Mariam is the voice of Elizabeth Cary, the voice of all women who are all absent signifiers. She is also the maternal body since she is the mother of children, and in Act 5, she returns to the womb/tomb of mother earth in death. Mariam speaks about herself in third person in three other instances: in Act 3, scene 3, when she tells Sohemus that Mariam will break her own heart before she will break her vow to forego Herod’s bed (136); in Act 4, scene 3, where she discards worldly possessions in preparation for death (109-16); and again in Act 4, scene 8, where Mariam says, “Who sees for truth that Mariam is untrue?” (581).

Salome also enables the figurative and literal decapitation of Mariam; in Act 4, Salome describes Mariam’s beauty as an entrapment of men’s souls (7.401-2). Salome suggests that Mariam is immodest because she does not blush due to her sins that Salome defines as Mariam’s seductive use of her physical beauty (4.7.405). Salome surmises that “Beauty is a blast” (3.1.20). Beauty is like a puff of wind; it is insignificant just as
women signify nothingness in the ancient Judaic patriarchy. Beauty also does not last; an old or ugly woman in the patriarchy has lost market value. Salome is analyzing the figurative decapitation of women as simply beautified objects. Eroticizing the female head, according to Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger, “incorporates” the female head through language and societal tenets as just one more part of the female body, an eroticized object to pleasure men. Therefore, female beauty in face and body is a sexual possession to be marketed and manipulated by men.

Elizabeth Cary discusses the fact that women are the object of the gaze by emphasizing the face and facial beauty in her play. Cary ridicules the importance of beauty in male-governed society by comparing the beauty of Mariam to the other female characters: the aging beauty of Doris, the dark beauty of Salome, and the empowered beauty of Cleopatra. All of these women have their own unique beauty, but the male characters in the play only see beauty as a part of women that men own and manipulate to their advantage. Makeup to enhance the beauty of the face as well as words, the “paintings” of women, are also subsumed into the body’s text as part of sexual allure. Salome explains this phenomenon when she says of Mariam: “She speaks a beauteous language, but within / Her heart is false as powder: and her tongue / Doth but allure the auditors to sin, / And is the instrument to do you wrong” (4.7.429-32).

Mariam’s tongue is part of her beauty, but it is also her chaos. It is explosive. From Salome’s viewpoint, Mariam’s words enchant men, put them under a spell (4.7.436). In Elizabeth Cary’s drama, the abuse of women is provoked by the “sins” of the female characters. Salome’s sins are disobedience and unchastity, but Cary wishes to illustrate that in the early modern English patriarchy, Mariam’s sin is greater: she cannot
keep silent. The woman’s tongue is identified by the patriarchy in early modern England as the female phallus, as explained by Lynda Boose: “A discourse that locates the tongue as the body’s ‘unruly member’ situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority” (263).

Herod discusses the power of Mariam’s beauty in Act 4, scene 7: “For on the brow of Mariam hangs a fleece (like that in Greek myth), / Whose slenderest twine is strong enough to bind / The hearts of kings” (413-15). This reference connects Mariam’s hair to her seductive powers. However, Cary counters the decapitating effect of Herod’s comparison in Act 4 by connecting Mariam to myth in this statement, thereby giving Mariam’s life a more weighty significance. Lavinia in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus is compared to legendary women for the same textual purpose. Salome describes Mariam’s hair as a net or bait to “catch the hearts” (4.7.417-8) of men. Elizabeth Cary places a truncated line concerning Mariam’s hair near the mention of Mariam as myth and as seductress: “In sooth, I thought it had been hair” (4.7.422). The use of decapitated lines in Cary’s drama is another way to underscore or give extra significance to the dramatist’s words, or in this case to ridicule the importance of female beauty. Cary turns the sarcasm of Herod’s words to Salome about the powers of Mariam’s hair back on itself, implying that the oppression that accompanies idealizing women’s bodies is a ludicrous enterprise. Set side by side to lines of metrical similarity, the truncated lines disrupt the order of the meter.

Graphina enables her own oppression in Act 2; when Pheroras suggests that her silence is a sign of female chaos (2.1.42), she refutes his comments by falling in with the “party line”: “If I be silent, ’tis no more but fear / That I should say too little when I
speak: / But since you will my imperfections bear, / In spite of doubt I will my silence
break” (2.1.52). Graphina says exactly what she knows Pheroras wants to hear. She is
ccontrasted with Salome, who says exactly what no one wants to hear, and with Mariam,
who speaks when she should not and refuses to speak when her speech is elicited.
Pheroras, Graphina’s intended, anatomizes his love (3.1.15-18) in the manner of a
Petrarchan blazon that figuratively decapitates the object of desire.

In like manner, the male characters in the play often figuratively decapitate and
re-construct Mariam as the epitome of purity through the use of the Petrarchan blazon.
Constabarus defines “sweet-faced Mariam, as free from guilt / As Heaven from spots”
(1.6.487-8); Mariam is one who was destined, by Herod’s edict, to be of “purest blood
[... ] unjustly spilt” (489). Mariam is compared to the sun in Act 4 (1.8-9) and her face is
described as cheering Herod’s heart (4.1.12). Herod relates that Mariam’s eyes are like
stars (4.4.220), she brings light to the world (4.4.236), she is “the flaming sun” (4.7.395)
and “the moon” (4.7.396), and “her forehead is like the sky” (4.7.451). Mariam’s speech
is “world-amazing wit” (4.7.428). In Act 5, Herod depicts Mariam as a “precious mirror
made by wonderous art” (1.125) that “dazzl’d” (5.1.124) Herod’s eye and that he keeps
folded in his heart (5.1.127). Mariam is a mirror in which Herod sees his own reflection.
She is also a prisoner of Herod’s heart.

Even at the end of The Tragedy of Mariam, Herod and Nuntio continue to discuss
the executed Mariam, not as a subject, but as a series of objectified parts: her "rare" beauty
and hands (5.1.153-4) and her "fair" face and virtuous nature (5.1.198). Herod uses
Petrarchan discourse in a futile attempt to restructure Mariam after she has been
executed. He states that Mariam’s hands were whiter than snow (5.1.151). Lavinia’s
hands are a signifying presence in *Titus Andronicus* also; Herod sees Mariam’s hands but not what they represent about her: her generosity and love that Herod took advantage of and her innocence that Herod refuses to believe when he has her executed. Herod’s use of Petrarchan discourse decapitates Mariam figuratively just as she is literally decapitated in that same section of the play.

Cary uses body parts as figurative language in her drama, especially repetition of the ear, mouth, and tongue, female body parts that men try to censor. Elizabeth Cary intends to show through these repetitive references the difference between the Petrarchan *blazon* that figuratively decapitates women into body parts and her textual use of female body parts to create a subtext of disgorgement. For example, Herod connects Mariam’s chastity to her public speech: “She’s unchaste, / Her mouth will ope to ev’ry stranger’s ear” (4.7.433-4). Patriarchal society sees public conversation on the part of women as a sign of unchaste behavior that needs to be controlled; on the other hand, a woman of magnanimous spirit might be described in like manner with no derogatory emphasis.

The question of rape, a form of figurative decapitation through the manipulation of female sexuality, is broached by Elizabeth Cary through Mariam’s relationship to Herod. The execution of Mariam at Herod’s order is a violation, a figurative rape of her since Mariam will not sexually yield to Herod voluntarily, as Jocelyn Catty asserts (160). I concur with Catty’s assessment that throughout the play there are images of women’s sexual vulnerability clashing with images of their sexual power (161). Once Mariam chooses to forego Herod’s bed, she chooses execution rather than to be raped by her husband. Years after Mariam’s death, Herod is reported in historical documents to have entered the sepulchre where Mariam was interred and removed gold furniture and
precious goods so that he could pay his debts, according to Ferguson and Weller (166). By violating Mariam’s tomb, Herod’s rape of Mariam is figuratively enacted. In Act 4, Herod says he will violate “holy David’s sepulchre” (4.3.105) and “make the Temple bare” (4.3.108) if Mariam wants wealth to make her happy. Through these words, Herod violates the maternal body, the site of the womb/tomb. Constabarus’s bitter diatribe on female sinfulness (4.6.311-50) is another example of how words can wound.

Not only can words be used to violate women, but Elizabeth Cary utilizes various manifestations of breath, the force behind words, as examples of the decapitation of women in her closet drama. Salome accuses Alexandra and Mariam of spending “suppliant breath” to plot to separate from Herod. Salome envisions the two women as triumphant in Herod’s death, moving on to find another male conquest (1.3.207-10). In this sentence, Salome twists the generosity of Christian humility depicted as breath into a form of female decapitation by men that women are happy to be released from. Women must behave with humility in ancient Judaic culture because they need men to take care of them. However, breath is lost or “spent” in supppliance according to Salome. Salome also suggests that Mariam feigns this behavior while she actually has a hidden agenda used to manipulate men. Salome is projecting her own manipulative powers of verbal and bodily persuasion, a reverse decapitation or castration of men, on Mariam who does not use Salome’s tactics.

Mariam also relates Herod’s commands and edicts to breath in Act 3 (3.191). In Act 2, scene 2, Babas’s first son fears, as Mariam does in other sections of the drama, that Herod’s “breath will be preserv’d to make a number bleed” (2.2.149-50). This statement foreshadows the outcome of his life and Mariam’s. Herod’s breath decapitates the other
characters figuratively and literally. The breath and voice of men fill the temple with the news of Herod’s life or “rebirth” (3.2.38); Herod is not dead as everyone believed. This is an example of male characters in the play usurping the birthing process from the maternal body. In essence, Herod gives birth to himself, using the church as midwife, resurrecting himself from the dead. Salome, however, is incredulous of the church’s ability and the power of language to usurp female birthright: “What? Can your news restore my brother’s breath?” (3.2.42). Just as Cary creates a disgorgement by using the repetition of female body parts as a subversion of the blazon, Cary also disgorges by subverting Herod and Salome’s “breath” through Mariam’s “loosing” of breath in Act 5.

Male sense of exclusion, male fear of female power over life and death through giving birth, leads men, like Herod in Elizabeth Cary’s play, to decapitate women figuratively and sometimes literally. Men in ancient Jerusalem decapitate by bridling women with a network of propaganda; they attempt to control female biology, to be the masters of language and voice. These men who try to take control of female sexuality feel empowered, because they have usurped female birthright. The seizing and manipulation of birthright is of central importance to Herod’s ascent in the political hierarchy due to his marriage to Mariam. Herod surveys Rome in much the same way he describes Mariam (4.1.22): both are the objects of Herod’s desire (4.1.35). The male characters in the play envision their ownership of land, fortunes, and status just as they see their possession of women. Herod manipulates Mariam’s identity in an attempt to ally himself with her family, to legitimize himself. More than once in the play, Herod’s and his family are referred to as “base” Edomites (1.2.84), as “damned Esau’s” heirs (1.2.84), who do not have the claim to royal blood that Mariam does.
Herod does not actually appear until Act 4; Cary suggests here that the decapitating force of the ancient Judaic patriarchy does not need to be bodily present to have influence. Herod twists words when he speaks to Mariam. His words are indicated to woo Mariam and convince her that she controls him when Herod is fully aware that Mariam has been imprisoned as his wife for years. "To be by thee directed I will woo / For in thy pleasure lies my highest pride" (4.3.99-100). There is no bisexuality of discourse when Herod speaks; Mariam’s “pleasure” is violated by Herod’s “pride.” Men often used seduction as a means to subjugate women, and language was one of the major tools of seduction, as Catty points out (127).

Herod uses language to cajole Mariam out of her “mood” so that she will take him back into her bed. Herod has used wooing words with Mariam before when he wanted to win Mariam as a replacement for his wife, Doris. “Thine [Mariam’s] eye / Is pure as Heaven, but impure thy mind” (4.4.190-1). This disparity between mind (male text) and body (female text) is a major issue in the play and part of the figurative decapitation of women by male society. In contrast, Mariam is not able to disconnect her body and her thoughts. Later, Herod intimates that “a beauteous body hides a loathsome soul” (4.4.178); the soul and the body are disconnected for him as well.

In Act 4, scene 4, Herod attempts to control Mariam’s sexuality by confronting her when he suspects a liaison between Mariam and Sohemus, who is supposed to be guarding Mariam against intruders (193). Mariam’s reply is terse: “They can tell that say I lov’d him, Mariam says not so” (4.4.193-4). Herod would rather hear Mariam plotted to kill him than to find out she has been unfaithful (4.4.207). Herod’s jealousy figuratively decapitates Mariam and instigates her imprisonment and scrutiny of her by guards while he
is away. Mariam has protested her innocence to the charges of infidelity earlier in the play (1.3.258) which is confirmed by Salome’s husband, Constabarus (1.6.487-92). Adultery is a central issue in the texts of patriarchal societies.

Cary’s discussion of divorce through her character, Salome, in Act 1, scene 4, is purposefully contrasted to her depiction of Mariam, another woman in an unhappy marriage, who, unlike Salome, seeks death rather than divorce. Therefore, divorce is a controversial issue that Cary disputes in her drama. The controversy of female adultery and promiscuity is connected to the issue of divorce. Salome does not understand why the Bible is so narrow in focus; she feels women should be able to divorce their husbands as well as men divorcing their wives (1.4.303-10 and 1.6.419), voicing the opinion of Elizabeth Cary who was herself in an unhappy union. Constabarus chides Salome by telling her that from Moses day until the present, 1400 years have passed but there has never been a woman who divorced a man (1.6.437-52). In other words, a married woman is indebted to and possessed by her husband. Marriage is a system of returns for men; the woman’s obedience to her husband is the return. If debts are paid, balance and order resume. In this system, words end in a balance, in a reduction to a binary system of language. Women are either chaste or adulterous. In the case of Elizabeth Cary’s play, the accused adulterer is Mariam. However, Mariam’s death does not bring balance back to the system.

Herod rails against female jouissance, defining it as “outrageous will” (4.4.164). Herod believes that words and oaths are important parts of male power (4.4.172 and 174). Herod does not want to hear a word from Sohemus when he orders his death in Act 4 but Herod cannot hear enough about Mariam’s words in death from Nuntio in Act 5. Herod
privileges Mariam’s words over her bodily text. When Herod thinks Mariam intended to poison him, he names her “painted devil / [. . .] white enchantress” (4.4.175-6), connecting Mariam’s supposed actions to the evil of Eve’s original sin in Eden. Herod claims Mariam is so foul that she cannot be cleaned (4.4.17607). This is the fate of women who fall out of favor with male society. In the binary system of Herod’s language, “love and hate do fight” (4.4.244).

The male gaze that figuratively decapitates women is described by Nuntio in Act 5 as the “gazing troop” (1.21) who looked on Mariam’s death. Herod believes he has power over history and herstory, in fact, over all stories (5.1.47); he claims that he will “smother” any record of Alexandra except that her name will live in infamy (5.1.48). Herod, as representative of the patriarchy of Jerusalem, believes that he has control over all texts or discourses. However, Mariam’s “silent prayer” (5.1.84) right before her death undermines his attempt and is her expression of “herstory” that overthrows history. It is also apparent that Herod adores Mariam for her name and status that she brings to him in the Jewish hierarchy, but he is not really in love with her (5.1.70). In fact, he attempts to consume her text into himself so that no one else can have contact with it: “Each word she said / Shall be the food whereon my heart is fed” (5.1.71-72). Words have more power over Herod than the significant statement Mariam’s bodily text in death has made. Nuntio resists Herod’s attempts to change Mariam’s text at the scaffold by controlling Nuntio’s words (5.1.94).

Herod believes he can control language as well as women; he tells Mariam that he will exile “all unkind conceits” (4.3.144) if Mariam will smile. “My word, though not my sword, made Mariam bleed” (5.1.189) and Cain, standing in for Herod, “stain’d the
virgin earth with brother’s blood” (5.1.250); Herod believes that the power of language, the power of constructs figuratively decapitate and are stronger than the power of the phallus and the power of the maternal body. The word has taken over the maternal body’s text, the birthing or productive powers of Mariam. Also, the maternal body as “virgin earth” is stained with blood by man, rather than the maternal body staining her progeny with blood through birth; Herod is taking over the power of birthing through the use of language. In fact, Herod attempts to conquer Mariam in death and reinscribe his text on her by using a great many words (5.1.153-258) but to no avail.

In essence, Herod violates the site of the maternal body linguistically by trying to take possession of Mariam, the mother of his children, with his words. He defiles this site in the same way he defiled Doris by abandoning her and by violating Mariam’s body through ordering her execution. In reality, Herod’s power in the hierarchy has not afforded him the power to produce life, but instead, Herod is the harbinger of death for those within his sphere of influence: Mariam, Aristobulus, Hircanus, Josephus, Constabarus, and Babas’s sons. The maternal body gives the breath of life to its progeny, but the patriarchies of ancient Rome and Judea as well as early modern England attempt to smother the mother. As Salome puts it, the female womb is a room that men take possession of (1.4.318).

“By three days hence, if wishes could revive, / I know himself would make me oft alive” (5.1.77-78). Mariam understands that after her death, Herod will feel remorse and attempt to reconstruct her, just as Lavinia’s family tries to do to her after her rape and mutilation, but the male world is unable to linguistically resurrect these two women. Herod says the very thing Mariam foretells: “Is there no trick to make her breathe again?”
(5.1.89). Later, he reveals his belief that “there might be found by art / Strange way of cure; 'tis sure rare things are done / By an inventive head, and willing heart” (5.1.91-93). In the case of Mariam and Lavinia, the men in their lives think they can bring these women back to their original state, that somehow they can re-order the universe so that everything is whole and unified again, but their words and actions are futile. Nuntio parallels Herod’s inability to reconstruct Mariam with male ineptness to resurrect “holy Abraham” (5.1.96) from entombment. Herod again tries to resurrect Mariam when he denies that she is dead: “But sure she is not dead, you [Nuntio] did but jest” (5.1.135).

Through marriage, Herod has kept Mariam, like Babas’s sons, in a “living tomb” (2.2.117), “quick buried” (2.2.120) and “confin’d” (2.2.121). Herod has controlled Mariam’s identity by murdering the support group of kinsmen around her (1.2.81) to usurp their right to the Jewish monarchy, manipulated Mariam sexually through the legitimacy controversy of her children versus Doris’s offspring (1.2.137), suppressed Mariam through marriage while expecting her to exhibit the attributes of a submissive wife, and effectively stopped her honest speech through death (5.1.90). Mariam’s tragedy is the tragedy of all women repressed by patriarchal dominance into silence.

Disgorgement

I have volcanoes on my lands. But no lava: what wants to flow is breath.

And not just any old way. The breath ‘wants’ a form. ‘Write me!’ [. . .] The nature of its fury demanded the form that stops the least, the body without a frame, without skin, without walls, the flesh that doesn’t dry, doesn’t stiffen,
doesn’t clot the wild blood that wants to stream through it. (Cixous, “Coming to Writing” 10)

Elizabeth Cary refers to breath in many different ways in The Tragedy of Mariam; breath represents figurative and literal decapitation as well as a disgorgement of the female body’s text without the framing effects of figurative decapitation in her play. Cary creates a signification of the female body by using the verbal and bodily texts of her female characters in various ways. In fact, each female character emphasizes a different aspect of Cary’s textual disgorgement, but Mariam is the embodiment of all forms of disgorgement in the play: an entredeux text, a subversive discourse, a merging of discourses, a text of generosity, and an absent signifier. For example, Cary uses Mariam and her entredeux status as an absent signifier in death to disgorge.

Mariam thought her face and her virtue, the Petrarchan objectification of herself and her obedience to female attributes dictated by the ancient Judaic patriarchy were enough to save her (4.8.559-62), but now she sees the hypocrisy in trusting in this belief. Mariam is Cary’s subversion of male constructs like the blazon. Another form of Cary’s disgorgement appears in her use of the word “breath”; Mariam’s “looks alone preserved your sovereign’s [Herod’s] breath” (4.4.254) which joins Mariam’s looks to Herod’s breath in a bisexuality of discourse. Breath represents Cary’s disgorgement of generosity and service related to Mariam (3.3.214), and breath is connected to the expression of love between Mariam and Herod (4.4.218). Mariam, like Lavinia in Titus Andronicus, is an absent signifier, a symbol of chaos and living death that disables and merges with various constructs. Mariam is literally decapitated in Act 5, and Act 5 is totally devoted to
revealing Mariam’s body as text. By having Mariam’s head severed from her body (1.90), Elizabeth Cary creates a character which is all bodily text.

"Tell thou my lord thou saw’st me loose my breath" (5.1.73). These are part of Mariam’s last words before her beheading in Cary’s play. The loosing of breath is Mariam’s chaos; it is her way of deconstructing the hierarchy and its hold on her. The loosing of breath is a figurative vomiting, a refusal to choke down the life of oppression Mariam has been forced to live. Mariam’s last lines speak volumes about the female condition under patriarchal domination. The paradox here is that though commanded to speak to prove their virtue (on the scaffold), speaking on the scaffold negated virtuousness for women in the patriarchy, as Lisa Jardine points out (109). Cary uses the “loosing” of breath as well as Mariam’s terse last words to outpour an expression of innocence in the face of tyranny.

The loss of breath is connected to Herod in Act 1, scene 1, and to Mariam in Act 5, scene 1; these sections frame the drama. Breath is connected to the hypocrisy of speech in Act 1, scene 1, of wanting triumph over and death of the oppressor: When Herod liv’d, that now is done to death, / Oft have I wish’d that I from him were free: / Oft have I wish’d that he might lose his breath, / Oft have I wish’d his carcass dead to see” (15-18). When Herod is “resurrected” in the play, Mariam considers death as an alternative to continuing to live under Herod’s rule. Also, Mariam uses a different word to discuss Herod’s death versus her own: Herod “loses” his breath in her dreams of being free of containment in Act 1, but when Mariam is on the scaffold in Act 5, she takes control of her own life by letting her breath “loose,” triumphing over her husband’s tyranny. Moreover, Mariam will not get into a game of words with Herod; her words in
Act 5 are terse. Therefore, breath becomes synonymous not only with objectification but also with language.

Subversion and Chaos through Language

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history.

(Cixous, "Laugh" 880)

In the narrative, Mariam's life and death "rupture" the world that Herod is trying to maintain and the texts that he inflicts upon her. Mariam is given positive and negative attributes by Elizabeth Cary in an attempt to rewrite scriptural history; in addition, Cary "transforms" past history concerning women through the veiled discourse of her closet drama and uses this re-telling, this myth-making in process, to mask and give voice to her own life story, to "write her self." Mariam is constructed as arrogant and prideful (1.3.235-8) but also generous (1.2.134) and innocent (4.6.312-4). Mariam’s pride is evident in her haughtiness towards Salome, Herod's sister in Cary's play (1.3.223-6 and 233-8). Cary could be haughty about her genealogy, as Ferguson and Weller discuss, but also faithful to her husband and to her religious beliefs (3, 193,195).

The male characters in the play place Mariam in the binary system of language: she must be either virtuous or unchaste. Her verbal and bodily text undermines their attempts to construct her, because Mariam’s traits are entredeux. The character of Mariam is transgressive and destabilizes the dichotomy of woman as either virgin or whore. Her words deconstruct the concepts of females as “property” and female “propriety.” By engineering her own death, Mariam refuses to be Herod’s property. Mariam’s
“improprieties” are her unguarded speech to any man other than Herod which Herod views as “adultery,” Mariam’s vows to keep Herod from her bed, and her inflammatory words to Salome about Salome’s family heritage.

The Chorus explains that for Mariam “‘Tis not so glorious for her to be free, / As by her proper self restrain’d to be” (3.3.220). Cary splits the word “herself” with the word “proper,” Ferguson and Weller explain (165). The dramatist is disrupting the social relationship between women and men; Cary is discussing appropriate behavior as designated by men for women, as well as women as male property. Mariam’s speech and behavior in the play subvert the ideas of what is proper for women in a society that views women as the property of men. Mariam’s speech undermines the societal constructs about women’s speech practices. In her play, Elizabeth Cary “negotiates and recasts the attendant contingencies upon women’s utterance,” Catty observes (131), by creating a dialogue with texts written during the pamphlet wars and with conduct manuals for women from the early modern era in England. Cary’s play engages with the debate on female speech in private and public settings. Many women writers in the early modern period responded to attacks on women such as the one stated in Schoolhouse of Women. Cary’s drama, like Jane Anger’s Protection for Women written in 1589, speaks out against the oppression of women by male society.

If a woman speaks out in a patriarchal culture, she is considered unchaste because she is usurping the place of men. In Act 1, scene 1, Mariam begins by stating: "How oft have I with public voice run on / To censure Rome's last hero for deceit" (1-2). Mariam’s outspokenness is criticized by Sohemus, who believes that "Unbridled speech is Mariam's worst disgrace" (3.3.183). In her research of the early modern English practice of
“bridling,” Lynda Booze illustrates that women who were deemed scolds or shrews could be disciplined by having their mouths bridled with iron bits or gags (267). Mariam’s “unbridled speech” undermines male constructs that dictate female silence. The Chorus reiterates Sohemus' concern about Mariam’s speech: "For in a wife it is no worse to find, A common body than a common mind" (3.3.243-4). The central question in The Tragedy of Mariam is "a wife's right to speak," according to Catherine Belsey, “to a position from which to protest” (171). A woman who speaks threatens the difference of the sexes. The female characters in Cary’s play produce speech in various forms: Alexandra’s speech is chaotic, Cleopatra’s image is muted by Alexandra’s distortion of her, Doris’s rhetoric is venomous, Salome’s words are veiled subversion, and Graphina’s words are submissive.

Mariam’s subversion of discourse is different from Lavinia’s in Titus Andronicus. Lavinia’s bodily text undermines the constructs of male society that dictate women to be silent, obedient and chaste. Lavinia’s mutilated form is silent because she has no tongue, obedient because she has no hands, and chaste due to her sexual ruination through rape. Mariam is not silent, obedient, or chaste according to the men in her life due to her “unbridled speech” (3.3.183), but she is silent, obedient, and chaste at the time of her death. Before her execution, she is silent, she is obedient during the moments leading to her execution, but more importantly she is obedient to her own beliefs, and she is chaste because she foregoes Herod’s bed, taking control of possession of her body. Mariam goes to her death believing that the freedom to express forthright speech, to have unencumbered access to voice, is more important to the female body than royal bloodline and physical beauty.
“For he, by barring me from liberty, / To shun my ranging, taught me first to range” (1.1.25-26). Cary’s word play on the word “range” deconstructs the binary opposition of the hart/heart hunt, the game/dogs, stag/doe (all of these opposing terms descriptive of Herod and Mariam’s relationship). Lavinia in Titus Andronicus is referred to as a “doe” by the men who oppress her. Mariam uses the word “range” to delineate that she is a prisoner as Herod’s wife due to his jealousy which has changed her feelings about constancy towards her husband in her “ranging” speech. Mariam’s opening words indicate that Herod’s possession of her has taught her to “range” (1.1.26); ironically, Herod’s text opposes hers by stating that “no creature having her [Mariam], can wish to range” (4.7.484). Herod’s oppression taught Mariam about her own desire for freedom; Mariam says "virgin freedom left me unrestrained" (1.1.72). Mariam realizes that due to Herod’s figurative decapitation of her, she will never be free.

In Act 5, Nuntio’s translation of Mariam’s bodily text in death is an assault on Herod’s ears (1.99), a violation of the order of the hierarchy. Nuntio administers and Herod hears Mariam’s text as an assault on everything an androcentric society believes in. Mariam divorces herself from tales of slander through her death (5.1.114), a deconstruction of male texts. “My punishment must needs sufficient be, / In missing that content I valued most” (5.1.116-7). Cary has created layered meanings in this line of Herod’s. Herod not only admits that Mariam’s life contented him and that he will be punished since now she no longer can be a companion to him. Herod also misses the opportunity to try to make Mariam content with her life with him.

However, the word “content” can also mean the purport of text. Therefore, Herod has inscribed Mariam with his own text; he will miss the content of her verbal and bodily
discourse now that she is dead. The word “missing” also has more than one context here. Herod misses the point that Mariam will never be contented with him. Also, Herod misses the point of the content of Mariam’s bodily text in life and in death, something that he “values” and therefore tries to possess but also something that he does not really comprehend.

Nuntio claims that Mariam’s bodily text through her death in Act 5 is “the last of her that was the best” (1.22). Language has no power over the chaos of bodily text in death; words cannot explain or rename Mariam: “All tongues suffice not her sweet name to raise” (5.1.32). Alexandra uses the chaos of her discourse to attempt to darken (5.1.37) Mariam’s bodily text as Mariam goes to the scaffold by “loudly railing” (5.1.36) at her daughter, but Alexandra’s words are powerless over the body’s text. Alexandra even goes so far as to renounce Mariam’s birth; Alexandra turns her back on her own maternity (5.1.43-44). Herod wants to be able to control the chaos of his own words, his sentence of execution, as well as Mariam’s text created through death, but this is impossible: “Oh, that I could that sentence now control” (5.1.74). The word “sentence” has two meanings here. Herod is unable to contain the chaos, the deconstructive force of the female body’s text, he let loose by having Mariam put to death.

Graphina’s name means “writing” in Greek; Cary expresses herself through translating the female body’s text into writing. Lavinia in Titus Andronicus embodies the idea of silent writing as well. In Act 3, Salome denigrates writing through the figure of Graphina; Salome constructs Graphina as being “of meaner mind” (3.1.12) with “natural defects” (3.1.13). Cary implies that only the body’s text is the purest form of expression, exploring her own imprisonment in writing plays for private consumption versus writing
dramas for public production. Public production is created by using the body as text since the body is the actor’s instrument. Cary also addresses the issue of women’s public versus private speech in Act 1 when she has Mariam in the first scene speaking to herself in private but, as Ferguson and Weller point out, since the character is appearing onstage, she is also speaking in public through soliloquy, using the body as text (152).

**Jouissance through Bisexual Discourse**

But is your voice an absence? It is very difficult for me to unravel the absences form the presences. I am not really sure where absence begins. Perhaps part of my body is only imagined? Some apparent absences seem to me to be the beginnings or the continuations of presences. (Cixous, *Or the Art of Innocence* 269).

The female characters in Elizabeth Cary’s play are absent signifiers; they are insignificant presences because they are depicted as women living in a patriarchal society, but even so, they are capable of signifying, capable of subverting language, capable of transforming their absence into a “beginning or continuation of presence.” Cary’s characters use their marginalization to their advantage. Cary signifies through her writing. Therefore, the joining of absence with signification creates a bisexuality of discourse, a link between figurative decapitation and textual disgorgement, connecting the silencing of women with the signifying practices of male-governed society.

Doris is an absent signifier in Cary’s play; Doris experiences the lack of her rightful place at Herod’s side that she believes has been usurped by Mariam. Doris’s progeny also have been displaced by Mariam’s in the societal hierarchy. However, Doris is still in the background, waiting to step in when and if Mariam is displaced. Doris is
significant because Herod could reinstate Doris and Antipater to their former status if he grew weary of Mariam. Mariam is the subject of Doris and Antipater’s dialogue in Act 2, scene 3. Because Mariam is the title character of the drama, she is often the main subject of a scene in the play even when she is does not physically appear in that scene. When Herod returns in Act 4, Mariam is the main topic of conversation between Herod and Pheroras, Herod and the Butler, and Herod and Salome. Mariam is the center of the discussion once again in Act 5 between Herod and Nuntio. Pheroras explains Mariam’s absent significance in this manner: “Absent use of her fair name I make” (4.2.70). Pheroras is using Mariam’s name to manipulate Herod into killing Constabarus so that Salome can marry Silleus.

Cary’s use of apostrophe in Act 1, scene 1 (5-8), situates Mariam’s dialogue as linguistic intercourse with a male absent signifier, in this case, Julius Caesar. The use of apostrophe creates an imaginary interchange between two absent signifiers: the figure addressed in the apostrophe and a woman. Mariam also addresses her grandsire, Hircanus, in apostrophe in Act 1, scene1 (43-46). In this section, Mariam speaks to her grandfather who is an absent signifier because he was executed by Herod but has not been forgotten by Mariam and her mother. As a woman, Mariam represents the oppression that forces women to be silent and obedient. In the last act, Nuntio’s opening comments (5.1.1-4) are a dialogue with Mariam in apostrophe, a merging with the female body’s text.

Nuntio’s discourse that relates Mariam’s death to Herod is a bisexuality of discourse. Nuntio is a male creation of Cary’s who speaks in her place; his speech is connected to hers and transformed by hers. Nuntio’s text is also connected to Mariam’s
Constabarus describes Salome's fickle behavior in Act 2: "As good go hold the wind as make her stay" (2.4.323). This sentence can also be applied to Mariam who lets loose her breath or spirit in death; her breath of life is like the wind that cannot be contained. It is an outpouring of text. Breath is associated with time and with death's chaos (2.4.353-4, 355-6). Breath leaves the body in death (2.4.379-80); therefore breath becomes Mariam's subversion as well as a statement about woman as absent presence.

In Act 3, scene 3, Mariam makes her decision to depart, to separate from a world of suffering. "Tell me I shall a death disgraceful die, but tell me not that Herod is return'd" (128-9). In Act 1, Herod is presumed dead, but now Mariam realizes that report was premature. In Act 3, scene 3, Mariam sees the hypocrisy in her words in the opening of the play when she mourned Herod's death; she tells Sohemus: "But speak no more to me — in vain ye speak — to live with him I so profoundly hate" (3.3.137-8). Mariam also perceives the truth in Sohemus' words about tempering her behavior in Act 3, scene 3, but she has made up her mind. She knows the decision she is making will be disruptive.

It is here that Mariam begins to engineer her own death, because she sees that only death will free her from oppression. Monique Wittig in Les Guérillères says that if women are possessed by men as currency, as items of exchange, as merchandise for bartering, then "what belongs to you (women) on this earth? Only death. No power on earth can take that away from you . . . if happiness consists in possession of something, then hold fast to this sovereign happiness — to die" (Quoted in Rubin 200). The behavior of Mariam signs her death warrant, and Mariam knows what she is doing. Through death, characters are removed by the dramatist from the order of society and the binary system of language. Through death, Mariam's bodily text becomes public, rather than private.
The connection between face and thoughts is examined in Act 4 as Mariam realizes her own complicity, "myself against myself conspir'd" (8.533), in the objectification of herself. Mariam states: "Am I the Mariam that presum'd so much, /And deem'd my face must needs preserve my breath? / Ay, I it was that thought my beauty such, / As it alone could countermand my death. / Now death will teach me" (4.8.525-9). Mariam discovers that Herod had left orders with Josephus, Herod’s uncle, to murder Mariam if he did not return from facing accusations in Rome. Mariam utilizes speech and silence as well as bodily text to create a textual chaos.

In Act 4, scene 3, Mariam calls Herod a liar (136). Her words purposefully engineer her death, knowing that subversive speech will get her executed. Cary uses the character of Mariam to reveal “how a woman handles tyranny and maintains her own integrity,” as Sandra Fischer asserts (227). In Act 4, scene 8, she declares that although her body will die, "My soul is free from adversary's power" (569-70). Mariam bids farewell to the earth: “Now earth, farewell, though I be yet but young, / Yet I, methinks, have known thee too too long” (627-8). Herod tells her that “for impurity shall Mariam die” (4.4.192) and that "Hell itself lies hid / Beneath thy heavenly show” (4.4.203-4). The excuse for executing Mariam is that she is impure as well as treasonous; Salome has implicated Mariam in a “plan” to poison Herod. Herod feels she has consorted with Sohemus which also makes her unchaste. Herod describes Mariam as Constabatus defined Salome: Mariam has a “wavering heart” (4.7.510). Herod is inscribing his own text on Mariam. Of course, Mariam’s “wavering” nature comes from “discontent” (4.7.510). The men in Herod’s world cannot abide her subversive text which disrupts the credo for women of being silent, obedient and chaste.
Herod admits that Mariam’s bodily text in death will speak; therefore, the executioner must be deaf and blind so that he will not be affected by her (4.7.440). “Her eyes can speak, and in their speaking move” (4.7.445). Mariam’s bodily text does not encompass order, reason, and hierarchy. Salome fears Herod is losing his grip on reality, that his “thoughts do rave” (4.7.453), so she entreats him to “speak of reason more, of Mariam less” (4.7.456). Salome’s words endorse reason and oppose Mariam’s text of disorder. The power of Mariam’s chaos has affected Herod’s words and thoughts; in fact, she has affected Herod so greatly that he will not look at her (4.7.505). Herod describes Mariam’s death as the catalyst of a great disturbance that imbalances nature. The balance in the heavens, of the sun and moon, that have before this been “safely governed” (5.1.204) on a “steadfast course” (5.1.206) are now disrupted. The earth is said to rebel at the idea of Mariam’s execution (4.7.361-82).

Herod reiterates this concept when he says that Salome is “gone to bid the world be overthrown” (4.7.390) by going to order Mariam’s execution. Mariam’s death has created a world that is “topsy-turvy” (1.6.424). Cary’s word-play is itself a chaotic construction. The “v” in “turved” may be an inversion of the “n” in “turned” or a pun on the word “topsy turvy,” as Ferguson and Weller observe (159). Mariam does and says things in the play to “reverse all order” (1.6.458). By executing Mariam, Herod has betrayed his own power (5.1.285), admitting that the power of the female body’s text outweights his own jurisdiction. Frances E. Dolan explores that idea that the executed female represents male impotence, the inability to control female chaos (166). Female bodily text floods over, overwhelms, and destroys order and unity. Mariam’s body is executed but her text continues every time the text of Elizabeth Cary’s play is read and...
studied. The literal decapitation of Mariam does not reinforce the consumption of her voice by her body thus physically embodying her own figurative decapitation, but instead, Mariam’s execution releases her voice from the figurative containment of the body.

If masculine commands conflicted with a woman’s Christian conscience, conduct books in early modern England claimed that the woman had a right to disobey, as Margaret Ferguson discusses (244). Rather than stay with a husband who has murdered her kinsman, Mariam chooses to engineer her own death and reside in heaven in “Sara’s lap,” referring to Abraham’s wife (4.8.574). This admission ties Mariam to the maternal body in death since Sara was believed to be Mariam’s grandmother. This statement emphasizes matriarchal versus patriarchal descent; the mother’s identity was important in Jewish genealogies. Herod admits that “within her [Mariam’s] purer veins the blood did run” (5.1.179). Although Herod is referring to his loss of Mariam as his bloodline connection to his position in the hierarchy, the blood of the maternal body is actually what flows through Mariam’s veins and her death returns her to the maternal body. Cary disgorges the mother tongue through her character, Mariam. Herod describes Sara as one who at all ages attracted men (5.1.181), but he just as easily could be describing the maternal body and the mother tongue this body teaches to its young. Herod laments Mariam’s death: “Oh, that her [Sara’s] issue had as long been liv’d” (5.1.182), but the language and law of male-governed society obscure the life of the progeny of the maternal body.

Cary extols “virtues of patience, fortitude, and unselfishness,” as Elaine Beilin points out (“Elizabeth Cary” 63). Although several of the characters attest to Mariam’s purity of spirit and mind (i.e. Sohemus, 3.3.208), Mariam defends her “honour” by
discarding all worldly things to purify herself further; she says she must retain her
innocence at all costs (3.3.171-80). Herod foolishly thinks Mariam will be happy is she is
“empress of Arabia crown’d” (4.3.103). However, Mariam indicates in Act 1 that she
does not desire fortune, position or status in the hierarchy (2.199-200). In Act 4,
Mariam’s forthright speech is her triumph over the adversity of female life:

I neither have of power nor riches want,
I have enough, nor do I wish for more:
Your offers to my heart no ease can grant,
Except they could my brother’s life restore.
No, had you wished the wretched Mariam glad,
Or had you love to her been truly tied:
Nay had you not desir’d to make her sad,
My brother nor my grandsire had not died. (4.3.109-16)

At the end of the play, Nuntio refers to the sun’s respect of Mariam’s death as a metaphoric
element of the rise of the phoenix from the ashes (5.1.24). In other words, Mariam’s text
in death “speaks.” The Chorus predicts that Mariam’s death will “draw her story into
history” (5.1.290). The Chorus’s statement is an example of jouissance through bisexual
discourse, a linking of “her story” to “history” catalyzed by Mariam’s death, a blending of
female and male discourses. The statement derived from Mariam’s execution is the text of
all the female characters and the author of The Tragedy of Mariam: the ineffectiveness of
male dominion over textual disgorgement.

Mariam’s death also has some linguistic parallels to Isabella Whitney’s poem “The
Manner of Her Will.” Herod and Nuntio are the witnesses to Mariam’s bodily text.
Whitney's poem lists pen, paper, ink, and Time as the witnesses to her "will." These are the same "implements" that bear witness to the *jouissance* of Mariam's bodily discourse. Mariam's blood spilt in execution is her ink, Nuntio is commanded to tell her tale (he becomes the "page" or messenger that carries her tale), Elizabeth Cary as dramatist usurps the pen(is) from men who inscribe women's "roles" in early modern English society by creating the character of Mariam, and Herod tries to control Time, but Mariam's chaos through death disrupts this pursuit. Mariam explains that in three days' time after her execution, Herod will try to wish her alive again. Herod restates/reorders her words: "Three days: three hours, three minutes, not so much, / A minute in a thousand part divided; / My penitency for her death is such" (5.1.79-81). However, Herod also realizes Mariam's power to affect Time: "Time runs on, / Her sight can make months minutes, days of weeks" (4.1.17-18). Mariam is linked to the maternal body who has power over Time, over the life and death of her progeny.

Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney all use the chaos or fragmentation in relationships, family, and inner selves as a means to disgorge. The fragmented family relationships of Tamora and her two sons and the splintered fighting between the Romans and the Goths catalyze the happenings in *Titus Andronicus*. Lavinia's raped, mutilated, and executed form is a disgorge ment because Shakespeare intends to have Lavinia's text inform, and at the same time, heal this disjunction. Similarly, the domestic problems of Mariam and Herod end at the gallows. Whitney's poetry uses domestic life as veiled discourse to dismantle accepted writing practices but also creates a merger of female and male texts. Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney directly link gender and text.
Endnotes

1Quotations of Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* are from Margaret W. Ferguson and Barry Weller's book *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry with The Lady Falkland; Her Life.*
CHAPTER FOUR

THE POETRY OF ISABELLA WHITNEY

Elizabeth Cary, a member of the aristocracy, was concerned with the decapitating effects of the censure of women in early modern England. Cary’s characters Mariam and Salome in The Tragedy of Mariam are constructed to reveal the dramatist wrestling with the disparity between acceptable speech for women in private and public arenas. An outpouring of public text, written or verbal, was not considered seemly in women. Cary explores “the many impediments that even a socially privileged Renaissance wife encountered when she attempted to assume the role of author,” as Margaret Ferguson and Barry Weller explain (7). Isabella Whitney was also interested in the idea of how to circumvent the restrictions put on women’s speech and writing. Born into the landed gentry, she used rhetoric in her poetry to negotiate conformity and non-conformity. Her use of syntax deflected negative attention that might surround the non-conformity of her life and attitudes by making it appear that she was conforming to societal constraints on women and on authors. Her apologies and other strategies of veiled discourse in her poetry were used to create a counterfeit persona or narrative voice that covered up authorial disgorgement. Whitney chose to subvert societal dictates by disguising her societal criticism within acceptable forms of private writing for women like family letters and wills, just as Mary Sidney used her version of the Psalms to result in the same end.
Public literature about private life with a didactic and grave overtone was a popular writing genre produced by male and female writers of the aristocracy in Tudor England. A clever device that Whitney used in this regard was that the speaker in her poetry was always identified by the author’s real name, thereby presenting all of her poetry as genuinely personal reflection. *Copy of a Letter, Lately written in metre, by a young Gentlewoman: to her unconstant lover* is a poem written by Whitney in 1567 takes male figures from history like Aeneas, Theseus, and Jason to task for being unfaithful to their devoted lovers. Whitney’s narrator in *Copy of a Letter* hints at this profession of ideas for the masses through private forms:

> And when you shall this letter have
> let it be kept in store:
> For she that sent it hath sworn the same,
> As yet to send no more.
> And now farewell, for why at large
> my mind is here expressed.
> The which you may perceive, if that
> you do peruse the rest. (lines 109-16)\(^1\)

Whitney’s veiled discourse is often made manifest in puns. The narrator’s mind “at large [. . .] expressed” can be read as “largely” or “mostly” but can also indicate Whitney’s purpose of speaking to a wider, more public audience. In other words, she is expressing her mind “at large” or for the masses. The narrator swears she will send no more letters to her “unconstant lover,” but Whitney appears to be enticing her readership to “peruse the rest” of her work at the same time. “The Manner of Her Will, and What She Left to
London and to all Those in it at her Departing” and “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney to Two of her Younger Sisters Serving in London,” from the book *A Sweet Nosegay*, are two other poems of Whitney’s constructed as personal documents, a will and a letter, and they explain life in London for women of the gentry. These two poems discuss “unconstant lovers” just as *Copy of a Letter* does, so the author does “send more” in 1573.

This is not the only instance in Whitney’s poetry where her narrator seems to be telling her readership to do one thing while at the same time encouraging them in another direction. Whitney knew her text would be read by a female and male audience, the male audience behaving as voyeurs of female territory, as Ana Kothe asserts (20), so Whitney wanted to “appear” to be conforming to standards set down by male-governed society. Therefore, the use of the word “store” has significance here. She uses this word in many of her poems, extensively in “The Manner of Her Will,” and on the surface, Whitney’s narrator in *Copy of a Letter* urges the faithless lover to keep her letter safe and hidden. However, “store” to Whitney also reflects the male world of economy, storing or withholding, versus the world of a woman in the gentry which encompasses a “store” of generosity and giving linked to the feminine body, especially those women in service to the aristocracy. Letters are given to others, but the men in Whitney’s time period contain female speech and writing. The poem “To her Brother Brooke Whitney” attempts to reinforce the relationship between the narrator and her brother; in the poem, the narrator asks her brother to write to her and see her more often. Whitney alludes to public versus private dialogue again in this poem: “As you shall know; for I will show / You more when we do speak / Than will I write or yet recite / Within this paper weak”
Whitney uses the modesty topos to apologize for the “weak” writing of a woman of her station, but the narrator also articulates that public writing in the form of a letter was not the proper place for a woman to reveal a depth of content and intimacy compared to a private conversation between family members. Aristocratic women like Elizabeth Cary and women of the gentry like Isabella Whitney were not supposed to put on a public display, either in the theatres or in the realm of publishing, through writing. However, Isabella Whitney holds the distinction of being the first Englishwoman to publish a book of poems. She is “the first Englishwoman who writes and publishes in the hope of earning money” as Randall Martin indicates; in so doing, she is “remarkably pioneering” (279).

She was also the first woman of her time, moreover, to criticize men in her poetry, crafted in *Copy of a Letter*, as Tina Krontiris maintains (33). Isabella Whitney explains in the poem “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney” that her purpose in writing and publishing is to use her life and pen, a merging of female and male discourses through the joining of the female body as text with the pen(is), to frame an erudite example for all to witness (line 38). Men may control the pen in her world, but women like Whitney can manipulate the pen(is) that “draws” women, a pen that simultaneously inscribes and attracts. The pen dictates female identity and behavior in early modern England but also attracts women like Isabella Whitney to use the pen to illustrate her view of female life.

**Figurative Decapitation**

[There is] a particular relationship between two economies: a masculine economy and a feminine economy [ . . . ] an order that works by
inculcation, by education: it’s always a question of education. An education that consists of [...] the force history keeps reserved for woman, the ‘capital’ force that is effectively decapitation. (Cixous, “Castration” 163)

Whitney’s poetry compares and ridicules the male economy in early modern England of containing, ordering, and commodifying everything with the female economy of patiently giving, economies that were taught to the people in her time period. The male economy is about figuratively decapitating women, controlling their identity and sexuality, a major theme in Isabella Whitney’s writing. Women were expected to emulate the virtues of the Virgin Mary; as Elaine Beilin illustrates, “a good woman was pious, humble, constant, and patient, as well as obedient, chaste, and silent.” (Redeeming Eve xix).

Women living in early modern England were figuratively decapitated; they were forced to exhibit these qualities. Having no head to think for herself, the early modern woman in England was told who she was and how she was to behave. Being forced to display virtuous characteristics takes away the individual personality of each woman, something that Whitney protests in her poetry. Isabella Whitney the writer was not silent, not obedient, and not modest. She shares these attributes with Elizabeth Cary’s fictional creation, Mariam. Public display, as in Whitney’s publication of her works, was unacceptable behavior, especially for a woman born into the gentry. She had to offset her outspoken and inappropriate behavior through the use of self-effacing techniques, manipulating patriarchal expectations of women to her advantage. “The customary
apology which attributes the imperfections of a work to the sex of its author is usually one indication of the constraints felt by women writers,” as Krontiris explicates (28).

In addition, women like Isabella Whitney needed the financial support and protection of male family members and/or aristocratic patrons. Her poetry reveals the figuratively decapitating effects of this dependence of women in her social strata. In “To her Brother Geoffrey Whitney,” Whitney’s narrator discusses the need for financial as well as emotional connections between siblings, especially the loneliness for a single woman separated from her family because they are all working as servants in various households. Whitney’s poetic narrator explains in “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney” that women of the gentry in early modern Britain must exile “all wanton toys,” female pleasures, from their lives (line 12). Stoic behavior was privileged. With God’s help, women were also expected to shield themselves from sexual advances, especially from the master of the household for whom women servants worked. “God shield you from all such as would by word or bill / Procure your shame” (lines 21-22). Women were supposed to appear to be modest and gentle (line 27), and women of the gentry in service were also expected to be trustworthy (lines 23, 41).

Isabella Whitney uses societal conventions for women in her poetry to criticize patriarchal treatment of women. Stanza four of “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney” explains the purpose of the entire poem, to “devise” a plan of outward behavior as a survival tactic, a resistance to the abuse that women in service received from aristocratic bosses as well as men as a whole: “Of laughter be not much, nor over solemn seem, / For then be sure they’ll count you light or proud will you esteem, / Be modest in a mean, be gentle unto all, / Though cause they give of contrary, yet be to wrath no thrall
[... ] painful be to please your rulers well” (lines 25-28, 32). Whitney depicts female servants as guardians of the household (lines 41-42) who serve God rather than man. However, in the society in which she lived, men had usurped God’s place.

Sometime in the late 1560s, Isabella Whitney was in service to a London household where part of her duties included housekeeping: “Manual labor of this kind was mandated for any unmarried woman from fourteen to forty by the 1563 State of Artificers, in an effort to cut down on vagabonds,” as Ann Rosalind Jones reveals (“Apostrophes to Cities” 156). Whitney may have been indentured in this way but her poetry frees her from the constraints put upon a woman in her station. London is depicted as a faithless man in two of Whitney’s poems; “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney” speaks to the issue of women serving untrustworthy men instead of God.

Whitney’s “order” speaks to the hierarchy of command. Women are “ordered” in early modern Britain by men, but Whitney’s writing is subversive because she is creating “an order” and this action is not a woman’s place in her time period. She “prescribes” a different commander, God, for women to serve in her poem. The word “prescribed” also connotes healing, and her poems often allude to avoiding infection. She intends her poetry as a healing force that subverts infection from the decapitating effects of early modern English patriarchy: “But this I know, too many live that would you soon infect / If God do not prevent, or with his grace expel” (lines 14-15). There are those who would “infect” women if these women are not careful.

Again and again in her poetry, Whitney refers to the act of writing. In “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney,” she refers to act of writing five times. Writing inoculates her against the infection, and she writes in the hope that her words also
inoculate other women against figurative decapitation: “I cannot speak or write too much because I love you well” (line 16). Whitney is not just speaking to her blood sisters here but to all women as sisters. In “The Manner of Her Will,” she again speaks of the infection of figurative decapitation personified in the male figure of London (lines 93-96); people try to cut away or wash away (line 123) the disease, the “drug” (line 126) or drudgery of domination in the poem, but it does not remedy the situation. Even the air is contagious in London (line 124). Decapitation is a suffocation, and Whitney discusses this through a description of a litany of forces at work in London. Elizabeth Cary’s Mariam “looses her breath” in the last act of The Tragedy of Mariam so that she no longer has to breathe in the oppressive forces in her life. London, the unfaithful suitor in Whitney’s poetry, consumes women of the gentry and the women are left poorer for it (lines 133-35).

Figurative decapitation of women is defined at the outset of the preamble to “The Manner of Her Will” called “A Communication Which the Author had to London Before She Made her Will,” the narrator’s farewell note directly addressed to her lover:

Wherefore small cause there is that I
Should grieve from thee [London/unfaithful lover] to go;
But many women, foolishly
Like me and other mo,
Do such a fixed fancy set
On those which least deserve,
That long it is ere wit we get
Away from them to swerve” (lines 5-12).
Women are loyal and giving to their lovers even when the lovers do not deserve such treatment; women are slow to discover that their love is misplaced. Women of the gentry are especially susceptible to cruel treatment from others. Early modern English conduct manuals encouraged women to be silent in public, and as Paul Marquis explains, this was especially true concerning speaking out against male abuse (315). Whitney meticulously presents her narrator as the epitome of feminine virtues “to escape the Ovidian victim/loquacious whore double bind,” as Krontiris explains (35). Whitney depicts London as a domineering male jailer of the female body (singular and plural). London is a prison from which the narrator wishes to depart. From line 25 to near the end of “The Manner of Her Will” the narrator describes in detail the structures or buildings that comprise London, representing the government and religious hierarchies that she wants to leave behind so she wills them to be contained in London. These hierarchies are the source of female figurative decapitation. The narrator explains that she was “bred” (line 26) among these structures, implying that she was not born of them. Societal rules have dictated the narrator’s life, but her birth is not figured by these hierarchies.

Killing (line 34) and consumption (lines 33-36) are part of the male world and male economy. Authority and hierarchy “orders” (line 37) or dictates the rules of consumption. Clothmakers of London weave and spin cloth for clothes (lines 41-48); men command an activity that is usually considered female. Women are stitched or inscribed and also stitched in by their clothes (line 71). Clothing is another form of prison. Men “tailor” (line 77) women; they are “bodymakers” (line 82). Clothiers are the “chiefest” (line 78) guardians (line 84), related to the head, of societal oppression by using attire like “swords” (line 87) or “artillery” (line 85) to decapitate women.
figuratively. Men are cloaked (line 83) and the narrator is suspicious of their deceptions (line 44). Male clothes are connected to terms of warfare. Female clothing is part of figurative decapitation: hoods and bongraces hide the head and face (line 57). Women in early modern England are surrounded by these pressures -- both physically and socially -- to conform (lines 59-60). Although there is a wide selection of “hats or caps” (line 57) to choose from, the “fashion” of the narrator’s passion, the “manner of her will” is something “other” (line 60) than the lists, including clothing, that appear in the poem. The narrator intimates that she “leaves” (line 62) behind the following: the “nets” (line 61) that constitute the Petrarchan blazon and other accoutrements of female figurative decapitation, clothing that accentuates sexual objectification (gorgets, line 63) or separates the head from the body (French ruffs, high purls, line 63).

These collective lines of the poem (lines 49-66) are connected to the “stocks” (line 67) in the heart of the city at the site of the marketplace, a place of public imprisonment and humiliation where women who were judged too brazen with their tongue were oftenbridled and displayed, as expounded upon by Lynda Boose and Christoph Hinckeld. "Eloquence in a woman [was] often associated with aggression or sexual deviancy. A woman’s tongue was popularly represented as her phallic weapon," as Kim Walker indicates (11). This display of “deviants” in the center of the marketplace in Whitney’s poem is connected to male ownership of women as possessions or trophies to be adorned, displayed, and handed from man to man. She ridicules women’s vanity that enables their own oppression (lines 65-68). The boy the narrator has “left” by the stocks “will ask you what you lack” (line 68). In a patriarchal society, women are considered to lack everything and men provide what women need. To
subvert the label of female lacking, Whitney's poem takes stock or "store" of London, apprises his worth, and finds him wanting. This is particularly apparent in the section of the poem about Ludgate: the narrator wills "nothing" to Ludgate (line 176), a prison for debtors and bankrupts who were often from the lower classes. Women in early modern English patriarchy are debtors of a different kind: they lack credit or value. The narrator is leaving London because she is in debt. This debt is related to her station in life, because she must find employment, but her debt is also the devalued state of women in her society. Therefore, the narrator is leaving London because she refuses to choke down figurative decapitation, the devaluing of self simply because she is female. "I feel myself so weak / That none me credit dare" (lines 190-1). The narrator also wills "bankrupts" (line 192), debtors but also nothingness, to the creditors who put people of her station in life in prison.

Line 49 refers to "Cheap" or Cheapside in London where there are many jewelers, goldsmiths (line 51) who sell plate "of silver and of gold" trim (line 55). However, the word "cheap" also refers to the futility or worthlessness of male hoarding and containment of things and people: "In Cheap, of them they store shall find" (line 49). The wares of the jewelers and goldsmiths "satisfy your mind" meaning London as well as "ladies meet" (line52), but the produce of "Cheap" does not satisfy the "will" of the narrator as a representative of the common woman in her society. "And in oblivion bury me / And never more me name" (lines 267-8). The decapitated female, like all people born into the gentry, are inscribed or named by male society. Those of the lower classes were often buried in unmarked graves, so that no one was able to name them again. They
were insignificant. The dead are rid of “this vale so vile” (line 274). Burial
“ceremonies” are “lost” (lines 269-72) on those who are devalued by society.

Near the end of the poem, one hundred lines are devoted to describing the
structural buildings that are real-life prisons in London, the figure of the early modern
English patriarchy: the Counter (line 141), the Hole (line 147), Newgate (line 149), the
Fleet (line 165), Ludgate (line 176), Bridewell (line 229) a woman’s prison, Smithfield
(line 217) where women who were accused of witchcraft or religious heresy were burned
at the stake, and Bedlam (line 225) where the insane were kept. The prisons are “heaped”
with the “infection” (line 151) of the city. Justice (lines 149-50) cannot cure the disease
and even honest men (line 143) are caught up in the malaise. Whitney spends so much
time discussing these prisons and their cruelties that there is obviously some underlying
meaning. The poet wants the reader to witness what offenses an unscrupulous suitor can
inflict; life with him is like being in the worst of prisons in London, especially for women
from her station in society.

Also, the society Whitney lived in spent much money on containment of those,
debtors, heretics, the insane, who were deemed out of control, bringing chaos or
disharmony to order. Women were defined in this same manner: lacking control,
heretical, disorderly, and in need of containment: “And though I nothing named have /
To bury me withal, / Consider that above the ground / Annoyance be I shall” (lines 261-
4). Like the people in Bedlam, women’s sexuality was considered to be disruptive, “out
of tune” (line 228) with the order and economy of the hierarchy. In this section of the
poem, the poet questions the “sanity” of early modern English patriarchy.
The early modern English patriarchy also regulated and repressed male/female relationships, as Martin observes; women could not openly mourn a man if he was not her husband or family relation (304). “But woe is me, I live in pinching pain, / No wight doth know what sorrow I sustain” (line 54). This is a line from the elegy “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman upon the Death of her Late-deceased Friend, William Gruffith, Gentleman” (1578) in which Whitney’s narrator celebrates the life of a dear friend and lover by comparing their relationship to famous legendary couples like Admetus and Alcestis. Specifically, the narrator of the poem is “pained” by the restrictions put on women. Life for women in her situation is full of “woes” (line 59).

The power over life and death is connected to birthing, to the maternal body (lines 55-58). Later, the narrator explains that death is female: “And when that death is come to pay her due” (line 79). English men are like Narcissus, in love with their own reflection, and they use women to mirror this image (line 108). The narrator pictures her beloved, William Gruffith, reborn and transformed into a flower as was Narcissus, “Which flower out of my hand will never pass, / But in my heart shall have a sticking place” (lines 113-4). Thus, her heart, like the mind and will of the narrator in “The Manner of Her Will,” are steadfast, determined that the woman writer’s art is to give birth to a new world for men and women. Also, love is related to the natural world.

However, Whitney’s narrator realizes she is dreaming: “But woe is me, my wishes are in vain; / Adieu delight, come crooked cursed care! / To bluntish blocks I see I do complain, / And reap but only sorrow for my share” (lines 115-8). The narrator bids “adieu” to a new world order, to female jouissance, and to a merging of discourse because the men she deals with are like “bluntish blocks.” Female will or delight is
“blunted” by the cares that the real world inflicts on women: “And as I can, I will abide the rest” (line 124). Women’s lives in a patriarchal society are about living with loss; however, the flame of the passion for writing and for a different world for men and women lives on for the narrator in secret: “For as I am, a lover will I die” (line 132). The narrator must keep her identity secret for fear of societal contempt; women writers must keep their anonymity as well (line 126). The will to court “Lady Fame” so that she will “spread my praise” (line 86) but also the fear of societal backlash (line 129) are constant companions for the woman writer. Women like Isabella Whitney and Elizabeth Cary are always in this entredeux position, always disruptive because they are at once outside and inside the system. Whitney, unlike Elizabeth Cary, was not a member of the aristocracy, and therefore not a dominating force in any sense in her community; nonetheless, these women writers were commentators on the repressive practices of their society.

Whitney colors her forbidden desire for writing, “a web of black” in her heart (line 24), as a poem about the forbidden desire for Gruffith. The narrator frames the web (line 24) indicating that women are forced to hide or contain their will to disgorge, to outpour generosity and loss through text. At the outset of “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman” the narrator indicates that women are not supposed to write nor call upon the Muses for inspiration. Women are supposed to suppress these desires even though they are a natural part of a woman’s embrace of loss as a part of birthing. This poem is dedicated to teaching women about the loss, inability and expression, of disgorgement, camouflaged as eliciting their help in mourning.
You ladies all, that pass not for no pain,
But have your lovers lodged in your laps,
I crave your aids to help me mourn amain;
Perhaps yourselves shall feel such careful claps,
Which God forbid that any lady taste,
Who shall by me but only learn to waste. (lines 25-30)

Women are trained by society to represent lack. Whitney does not want women to absorb this repression from her writing but instead to use their marginalization to express text. Writing the elegy is connected to women’s sexuality (line 26) just as the poet connects writing her will to sexuality at the end of “The Manner of Her Will.” The “fashion of her passion” is the outpouring of text.

Disgorgement

She doesn’t try to ‘recover her expenses.’ She is able not to return to herself, never settling down, pouring out, going everywhere to the other [. . .] Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide: her writing also can only go on and on. (Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 87)

To create an outpouring of text, a writing that can “go on and on” explicating and opposing the woman’s position in early modern England, Whitney versifies Sir Hugh Plat’s book Flowers of Philosophy published in 1572. These verses make up Isabella Whitney’s book A Sweet Nosegay or Pleasant Poesy published in 1573, as explained by Martin (279-80). A Sweet Nosegay includes the following poems: “To her Brother Geoffrey Whitney,” “To her Brother Brooke Whitney,” “An Order Prescribed by Isabella...
Whitney,” “To her Sister Mistress Anne Baron,” “A Communication” and “The Manner of Her Will.” “To her Sister Mistress Anne Baron” is similar to Whitney’s other poems addressed to family in which the narrator attempts to salve her loneliness by cementing the emotional bond with her brother’s family, wishing they may have happiness, health, success, and longevity. Plat’s book is a collection of neo-Senecan moral precepts. Whitney speaks of “borrowing” flowers from Plat’s garden and urges other women to do the same in A Sweet Nosegay. She is advising women to translate the female body’s text into male language. She is also deconstructing linguistic conventions established in Plat’s book. The opening lines of A Sweet Nosegay are an apology for spending time reading and writing, but her excuse is that idle hands are the devil’s workshop. Whitney establishes her motive for writing because as a good Christian woman she should keep busy. Therefore, Whitney uses her marginalization in the English patriarchy to her advantage in her writing.

Isabella Whitney uses her marginalized position in other ways in her writing as well. “Epistle to the Reader” explains the purpose of writing the collection of poems called A Sweet Nosegay; each of Whitney’s poems also contains a short preamble near the opening of the lyric which serves as a structural frame for the piece, explicating the narrator’s discursive reasoning. Whitney’s “so-called” mental depression or illness, one of her reasons for writing explained in the “Epistle to the Reader,” may be a pose, because women who were non-conformists were thought by early modern English society to behave like a “hysteric.” Whitney is justifying her authorship by saying that depression is “natural” in a woman, using disenfranchisement as an excuse to outpour text. A widow or virgin in early modern England might be prone to “hystera,” “a disease
caused by the wandering of the *hyster*, or womb... (referring) to a whole range of possible female afflictions," as Audrey Eccles elucidates (Haslem 442). Whitney uses the ruse of a "hysteric’s" reaction to apologize to the men in the private sector for her writing; after all, she is "only" a woman. Whitney is being sarcastic here, and her humor is an important part of her writing technique. Her *Copy of a Letter* and *A Sweet Nosegay* use camouflaged sardonic humor to comment on social conditions of her time period, particularly the state of affairs for women of the gentry. I disagree with Krontiris, who reads the poem at face value, that Whitney really was depressed. Although Whitney was indeed physically ill for a period of time in her life as Martin indicates (280), she was also an expert at using social norms to justify her non-conventional behavior. She had to offset the common societal reaction to a woman writer.

In very specific ways, Whitney narrates the female body’s text. The poem “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney” is just one of many of her poems that uses her own name in the title. In this way, the poet creates a narrative voice that appears to be her own, as if her readership is privy to her private correspondence. Yet, as absent signifier, as a woman of the gentry who is a published writer, the poet can simultaneously subvert and merge with the narrative voice. In stanza seven of “To her Sister Mistress Anne Baron,” Whitney’s narrator reveals that “My books and pens I will apply” (line 42). She wields power over the pen(is) and applies it to the page rather than being inscribed by men. Housewives, like the narrator’s sister-in-law Anne Baron, do not have the time to write (lines 37-42). “Good sister so I you commend / To him that made us all, / I know you housewifery intend, / Though I to writing fall” (lines 31-34). Patricia Phillippy bases her discussion of Whitney’s poetry on the precept that Whitney defends her role as writer...
as part of the proper art and duties of “housewifery,” but I disagree. Although writing appears to be paralleled with housewifery in lines 33 and 34 of “To her Sister Mistress Anne Baron,” the connecting word is not “and.” The word “though” redirects the reader to another meaning. Writing inoculates the narrator from being placed in a position of subservience to men. Whitney only serves “him that made us all.”

Both “The Manner of Her Will” and “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman” are poems about death. In the former, Whitney uses the fictional imminent dead body of the narrator and the body of London, singular and plural, to create a scathing criticism of the city and its systems. In “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman,” the poet uses the dead body of William Gruffith as a springboard to talk about her own passion for writing. In both poems, the use of a dead body’s text generates a subversion of literary practices and an outpouring of feelings from the author. Shakespeare and Cary use the dead bodies of Lavinia and Mariam for the same purpose. London is described in Whitney’s “The Manner of Her Will” as the heart of life. Leaving London is a kind of death, but at the same time the narrator sees her leaving as a rebirth. Therefore, she casts aside imprisoning devices of male and aristocratic society, leaving them to various parts of the city, and returns instead to the power of the feminine body, explained in the last section of the poem.

The narrator leaves by departing and also giving to the city, and the poem takes stock or “store” of London and its citizenry. The outpouring of text is a loss and in “The Manner of Her Will” and “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman” a textual loss is the main focus of the poems. “In lieu of love, alas, This loss I find” (line 16). “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman” is an elegy dedicated to William Gruffith, and elegies are dedicated to
loss. In “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman…” Whitney writes that “wit wants to will” (line 11), that feminine jouissance is privileged over the reason of the mind, male jurisdiction in early modern English society. The form of an elegy is used to commemorate a deceased friend, but the elegiac form is a camouflage for the true intent of the poem which is to profess Whitney’s passion for writing, her commitment to textual disgorgement. Isabella Whitney achieves her disgorgement of female text through undermining and also merging with the established literary practices of male society.

**Subversion of Language**

Women [. . .] take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down. (Cixous, “Laugh” 887)

Whitney’s “subversion [of] a male hegemonic literary order” (16) is exemplified in her verse, according to Kothe. Indeed, Whitney’s writing, her fragmentation of “structures” and “values,” is an intentional maze of voices, hiding behind the employment of male language and patriarchal social dictates, in an attempt to free herself of figurative decapitation and release her voice from containment. Kothe cites the following quote as a perfect example of Isabella Whitney’s discussion of the metaphoric maze in Plat’s book-garden and in her own poetry: “One word, and then adieu to thee, / yf thou to Plat his Plot / Repayie: take heede it is a Maze / to warne thee I forgot” (26). Whitney’s maze of words in her poetry subverts accepted linguistic practices in early modern England. She achieves a subversion of male language by playing with word phrasing. For example, her use of first person “we” is intentionally ambiguous in her
poetry; “we” might include women or men or both, giving Whitney a bisexual narrative position. Therefore, she manipulates her female personae to create the desired impact on her audience, much as Elizabeth Cary does through the use of her female characters in *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

Whitney worked closely with Richard Jones, publisher of her works, and was aware of popular trends in authorship. She dedicates *A Sweet Nosegay* to George Mainwaring, a friend of her family as a way to solicit patronage for her work. She does not want to offend her readership because she has no patron. This is one of the methods Whitney uses to masquerade as a conformist while writing subversive text. “Publication was problematic for male writers; for women, the ‘stigma of print’ was intensified,” as Walker argues (22). A complex problem requires a complicated strategy to circumvent it. Whitney had an intricate solution to her authorial problem. What she is not saying is as important as what she is saying. By using male literary technique in combination with the façade of the “virtuous female” to conceal her true intentions as an author, Whitney is creating her own semantic outpouring.

*Copy of a Letter* is written as an Ovidian lament in verse epistle and ballad form. This poem “is the closest Whitney comes to expressing a feminist consciousness: seeing women as an oppressed and persecuted group,” as Krontiris indicates (38). The Ovidian discourse presented in the pamphlet wars, namely Joseph Swetnam’s *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Unconstant women* (1615), discusses unfaithful women, reflecting upon and quoting sections of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Instead, Whitney’s poetry from thirty years earlier, particularly “An Order Prescribed by Isabella Whitney,” “The Manner of Her Will,” and *Copy of a Letter* takes unfaithful men to task. She wants
to illustrate how Ovid’s writings, as Krontiris demonstrates, “disclose the history of the
discourse that teaches men how to be deceptive” (37). This is also apparent in Whitney’s
“The Admonition by the Auctor,” a literary sequel to Copy of a Letter where Whitney
combines as she does in Copy of a Letter classical allusion and gender discourse but in
“The Admonition,” she demonstrates solidarity with other women instead of addressing
men and she attacks male poets instead of classical male heroes. In “The Admonition,”
Whitney’s narrator refers directly to Ovid’s Ars amatoria: “Ovid, within his Arte of love,
/ doth teach them [men] this same knacke / To wet their hand and touch their eies: / So
oft as tears they lacke.”2 This poem is focused on legendary women who were deceived
by men from Ovid’s Metamorphoses.

Whitney understands female figurative decapitation, and her approach is wily.
She realizes, as Elizabeth Cary inscribed in her daughter’s wedding ring, that as long as a
woman appears to “be and seem” the virtuous woman, she can manipulate her position,
as Sandra Fisher notes (289). Whitney inscribes the notions of the ideal woman in Copy
of a Letter; the female waits patiently for the lover to decide whom he will take as his
wife. “Wed whom you list, I am content, / your refuse for to be” (lines 83-84). The
woman is “content” to be treated as property. However, the narrator’s “virtuous woman”
testimony in Copy of a Letter is a cover for Whitney’s real purpose, which is to critique
the double standard applied to faithless men versus the brand of the female temptress on
women in early modern England. Men may be untrue to women, but the ideal woman is
expected to wait patiently for her lover’s return and for her lover to decide whom he will
wed. The woman is depicted in her poetry as “content” to be treated as property. Women
were supposed to be silent concerning male abuse, but whether you are an early modern,
modern or post modern woman, I don’t think it’s possible to miss the sarcasm in lines 83-84. These lines from the poem are a good example of how Whitney uses sarcastic humor as a technique to release her voice; she is making fun of the ideal woman who is a doormat for men. Her cautionary advice to women concerning betrayal in *Copy of a Letter* is used to conceal Whitney’s own betrayal of social customs.

Sweetness in speech was considered a “restrained alternative to silence” for women in the Tudor period, as Walker asserts (13). However, Isabella Whitney is so sweet in all of her poetry, she’s diabetic; her “virtuous woman” testimony is a cover for her real purpose, which is to critique society’s expectations about women. *Copy of a Letter* alludes to many unfaithful men from classical literature (Aeneas, Theseus, Jason, Paris) as examples of male betrayal of trusting women. Whitney patterns *Copy of a Letter* after Ovid’s *Heroides*, an amatory verse epistle, as Jones professes, and its diatribe concerning faithless male lovers and the women who try to reclaim the men who have abandoned them (*The Currency of Eros* 43). The undercurrent of criticism in Whitney’s poetics is apparent:

> Now may you heare how falseness is made manyfest in time:
> Although they that comit the same, think it a veniall crime.
> For they, for their unfaithfulness, did get perpetuall fame:
> Fame? wherefore dyd I terme it so?
> I should have cald it shame. (lines 65-72)
The narrator transforms the "fame" of famous unfaithful men into "shame," undermining standards of behavior for men that women must simply embrace in early modern England.

Disgorgement is textual manipulation that offsets a patriarchy's textual inscription of a woman's character, behavior, actions, and place in the societal hierarchy or order. Puns or word play are this sort of textual manipulation in Isabella Whitney's "The Manner of Her Will" which contains a series of puns, starting with the title itself, that cues the reader to look for subtext throughout the poem. The title of Whitney's "Will" alone is an array of word play. A woman's "manner" might be her custom, fashion, method, style, behavior, bearing, or a display or depiction of behavior. It also could be a play on words or homonym for "manor," the housing or receptacle of the female body's text. The "fashion" of much of Whitney's writing is that of the instruction book, a popular type of writing in the early modern period. *A Sweet Nosegay,* of which "The Manner of Her Will" is the final section, is a "middle-class conduct book" in verse form, as Krontiris describes it (39). Her instruction in her poem reveals the "behavior" or "bearing" of a woman of the gentry in Whitney's time period.

Women of the gentry were doubly marginalized as a woman and as a member of the gentry; these women were subservient to all and must be careful to portray the female virtues of submission, passivity, chastity, and silence lest they be punished severely. Women of the gentry were absent signifiers. Therefore, their behavior would not include "will" of any kind. Yet, the speaker in Whitney's "Will" does indeed have a will of her own. A woman's "will" could be interpreted as her determination, desire, passion, gift, choice, or intent. Therefore, the poet's "Will," a legally rendered document, has the
underlying meaning of also being a discourse that illustrates the fashion of female passion or *jouissance*. A woman’s will, especially a woman of the gentry, would disturb the natural order of patriarchal expectations for female manner. In addition, since an unmarried woman of the gentry in the early modern period like Whitney would have nothing of value to will to anyone upon her death, and since this woman would have no Will and no will of her own in a society where everything of value is possessed by the patriarchy, the reader must assume the text of Whitney’s “Will” is really about something else. Isabella Whitney transforms female nothingness into somethingness through the outpouring of text, since, as Wendy Wall indicates, Whitney’s writing is the only real possession she has (75). As an unmarried and childless woman, she has given birth to nothing else.

In the introduction to the “Will” entitled “A Communication Which the Author had to London Before She Made her Will,” the narrator’s first two lines are: “The time is come, I must depart, / From thee, ah famous city.” Time figures prominently in this poem so it is not surprising that the word appears in the very first line of the poem. Time in this poem is related to the subversive nature of the discourse; time is reiterated to punctuate the temporal disturbance of the poem. The word “depart” is used again in the title to the body of the “Will” itself, called “The Manner of Her Will, and What She Left to London and to all Those in it, at her Departing.” “Depart” can refer to the narrator leaving London in either a physical or spiritual sense, looking for living arrangements in another town or dying and leaving the world of the living. “Depart” can also mean to separate, to break, to fragment, just as disgorgement of the female body’s text is defined as giving a “signal to depart,” making departure from the masculine economy a gift.
(Cixous, "Castration" 175). Therefore, the Whitney’s whole poem is set up from the start to subvert meaning. “I never yet, to rue my smart, / Did find that thou hadst pity” (lines 3-4 “A Communication”). The narrator is “smarting” because although she displays her generosity throughout her “Will,” London, depicted as a fickle lover in the preamble and in the “Will” itself, has no pity on her to heal her humiliation. The narrator is also “smart”; she has never yet rued her intuitive abilities despite men’s censure of women’s intellect. Whitney inverts Petrarchan discourse where the male lover cannot tear himself away from his beloved even though she may be unfaithful to him, and in Whitney’s version and inversion, the jilted female actually does “depart” from her “unconstant lover.” “She is outside the city, at the edge of the city,” as Cixous says in another context, and “the city is man” (“Castration” 170).

Isabella Whitney opens the “Will” with language constructed to imitate a real will, hiding behind religious pretext as a means to express text. Her poetic “Will” has the flavor of Margaret Hoby’s real life will and testament. Hoby left the bulk of her estate to her husband’s heirs since she had none, and Whitney, with a flare of wit, wills her “estate” to the London populace, as Lena Orlin articulates (255). However, Whitney’s opening phrase to her will is a word reversal of standard contemporary wills:

I whole in body and in mind,
   But very weak in purse,
Do make and write my testament
   For fear it will be worse.
And first I wholly do commend
   My soul and body eke

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
To God the Father and the Son,

So long as I can speak. (lines 1-8)

Compare this verse to the opening lines of her brother, Geoffrey Whitney’s will: “I
Geoffrey Whitney of Ryle’s Green in the County of Cheshire, gentleman, being sick in
body but of sound and perfect memory, thanks be to God, therefore make and set down
with my own hand this my last will and testament.”

Whitney’s entire poem is designed to subvert a document of discourse from the
patriarchal system that orders society by passing on possessions from one man to the
next. “I whole in body and in mind” (line 1) -- this line imitates the actual language of a
real-life “Will,” but also subverts figurative decapitation because the narrator is “whole in
body and in mind.” The line also undermines the power of the Petrarchan blazon that
anatomizes and objectifies women as mere body parts. She is not anatomized but
“whole.” Whitney also reverses the order of the standard “Will” in Western societies,
“being of sound mind and body.” Her brother, Geoffrey, emphasized the importance of
his “sound and perfect memory” in his “Will.” In early modern English patriarchy,
reason is privileged over the text of the body, but in Whitney’s poem, the body comes
first, is of most importance. God’s speech created the world in Genesis, and the
narrator’s speech re-creates her body to be inscribed not by men’s will, but by God’s
(lines 5-8).

In fact, Isabella Whitney reveals the true purpose of the poem in these lines: “And
though I nothing named have / To bury me withal, / Consider that above the ground
/ Annoyance be I shall” (lines 261-4). Whitney’s use of the word “annoyance” here is
another display of jouissance. Having no husband, no children, and at the time of the
“Will,” no “virtuous lady” to work for as a servant, the narrator must find a different way to put her body to good use. A dead body is an absent presence, the state of all living women in the patriarchy who must affect a stoic persona. Representing the female speaker in the “Will” as this absent presence places Whitney, the writer, in a non-threatening pose. The speaker’s “dead body” is a ruse used to camouflage the voice of the author; with the author’s voice “dead,” the poem attempts to stand apart from the author’s biases to reveal an objective picture of the London scene. It is apparent that Isabella Whitney is using the fictionalized dead body of the speaker of the poem as the catalyst for a text that is not a “Will” in the common legal definition, but instead a discourse that deconstructs the powers of the male body, as a unit and as a group, and disgorges the female body’s text, as a unit and as a group, in a new light. In other words, the female “body” is not as absent, as dead, as the patriarchy would like the world to believe. Instead, the manner of the female “will” is presented in Whitney’s poem as a powerful entity.

There are precedents for many of Whitney’s writing techniques, including the idea of personifying London as the early modern male. The Renaissance theory of one depicted as many or many depicted as one was common in European literature and art, according to Edgar Wind (115); the artistic renderings of personified cities or countries (man as microcosm of a larger macrocosm) during the Tudor period include John Donne’s elegy XIX and the engraving “America” by Italian artist Giovanni della Strada, as Raymond Waddington elaborates (289). Authorial word play with wills, leaving parts of one’s life to others or to abstract concepts was also a literary convention of Whitney’s time period; John Ford uses this convention with dramatic effect in The Broken Heart.
where Penthea wills her “jewels” to Calantha. Penthea gives her youth to virgin-wives, her fame to memory and truth, and her brother to Calantha (3.5.60). Moreover, writers of the early modern period had an admiration for the rhetorical accomplishments of *imitatio* and *copia*, Lynnette McGrath notes (283).

It is therefore not unusual that Isabella Whitney’s works resonate with the Renaissance stylings of the Petrarchan *blazon*, the conduct book, the verse epistle, the pamphlet wars exemplified in the writings of “Jane Anger,” and literature of private life. The *blazon* as a writing convention is characterized by anatomizing the beloved’s body, a fetishizing of the speaker’s desires; in the *blazon*, the speaker’s love in unrequited. A female writer reversing the gender of the *blazon* was not innovative; other early modern women writers had played with this idea in their poetry, Lady Mary Wroth’s sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* being a good example. Inverting the discourse of Ovid and Jean de Meun concerning the masculine preoccupation with female unchastity, reverse *blazons* written by English Renaissance women warn women about fickle male lovers. The reverse *blazon* did not idealize men as Petrarch’s poetry idealized women; on the contrary, Whitney and Wroth criticized men’s fickle nature as lovers and at the same time affirmed the positive qualities of devotion and loyalty that virtuous women embodied.

What is distinctive about Isabella Whitney’s “Will” is that her inverted *blazon* reflects the female body in terms of the gentry rather than the aristocracy, a philosophy that permeates all of her writings. In addition, her “Will” is a far more elaborate criticism of the English patriarchy, inscribed in her poem as the London landscape. London is separated into its different geographical sections in Whitney’s poem and the glories of
each section are venerated. London is displayed as an object of obsessive reverence and irrational devotion since the speaker cannot cease being generous towards the town despite the town's indifference to the speaker, and the speaker indicates London's horrors without losing the speaker's loyalty.

The blazon also contains flattery and complaints. For example, the word "store" is used numerous times in the poem. The first half of the poem demonstrates how the male world puts great store in displaying "store" as a symbol of its munificence. The first half of the poem appears to flatter London as a picture of health, hospitality, and charity. As a male lover, London appears on the surface to be the kind of suitor every young woman, in any time period, would dream of. However, abundance and treasury are the outpourings of the female body, not the male body, for Whitney; the word "store" is fool's gold and used sarcastically throughout the poem to contrast female philanthropy with the stinginess of spirit, affection, and prosperity the English patriarchy actually has for man and womankind. London is the kind of smooth-talking, shallow suitor honest, moral women should avoid. For in the second half of the poem, the pretty picture of fruitful London life is undercut by a litany of negligences perpetrated on London's "lovers" or the populace of the town by their "generous" benefactor. These negligences are the blazon's complaints concerning the lover.

London in Whitney's "Will" is originally characterized as bountiful. At the beginning of the "Will," London is teeming with food (line 33), drink (line 35), linen (line 43), silk (line 47), jewelry (line 51), plate (line 53), clothing (line 57), books (line 241), schools (line 247), churches (line 27); Whitney's "Will" provides for an even greater stock of all finery for the London populace (line 32). At the same time, however,
London houses many sick people (line 95), thieves (line 97), prostitutes (line 120), starving writers, publishers (line 195), and actors (line 251), lonely women (line 201), and the blind and lame (line 223). London's populace gathers to watch executions of condemned prisoners (line 160) and witches and heretics (line 217) as well as the people who are committed to Bedlam, the lunatic asylum, (line 225) for sport. London is characterized in "A Communication" as unpitying (line 4) and undeserving of loyalty (line 9). Whitney's London is not "of woman born" (4.1.80) to borrow a line from Shakespeare's Macbeth; Whitney's London is produced by patriarchal institutions of order and structure. London is not a creator as women are through childbirth and through the production of female discourse.

The treasury that women possess is everything that London is not: women are depicted as feeling, giving, and understanding in the poem. The speaker reveals in the "Will" that she is humble (line 7), reverent (line 10), joyful (line 14), trusting (line 19), generous even with those who oppress her (line 31 "A Communication..."; line 89 and line 275 of "The Manner of Her Will"), astute (line 100), comforting (line 75), honest (line 132), meticulous (line 255), modest (line 266), thrifty (line 272), loving even with those who have been cruel to her (line 29 "A Communication," line 278 and line 312 "The Manner of Her Will"), kind (line 283), protective (line 306), and encouraging (line 308). The women of London in the "Will" are depicted as courteous (line 208), innocent and proper (line 117), happy and quiet (line 285).

Part of Whitney's complaint against London is to contrast it with the treasury of female text. London is depicted, especially at the end of the poem, as a destroyer of lives. London is stingy (line 24 "A Communication"); for all of London's "store," "he"
oppresses the less-fortunate. The “Will” reveals that there is poverty (line 105), filth (line 124), horrific prisons for debtors (line 137) and other felons (line 150), and excruciating torture for petty offenders (line 154).

The complaints about London in Whitney’s “blazon” outweigh the flattery. London is full of the “dulled minds” (line 114) of the male body. Everything is a commodity in the patriarchal structure; men keep to sell in a closed system of reciprocity. “If they that keep what I you leave / Ask money when they sell It / At Mint there is such store it is / Unpossible to tell it” (line 109-12). Therefore the male economy is its jouissance; everything, including sex and reason, is linked to marketability and commodification. The desires of London (lines 275-6) are the items listed in the poem “The Manner of Her Will” which the author compares to the desires of the narrator. “They oft shall seek for proper girls / [... ] That needs compels or lucre lures / To satisfy their minds” (lines 117-20). Male desire is compared and merged with female jouissance in the poem.

In line 31, the bodies of the masses “craveth cost.” London must “keep” or take care of its people. Isabella Whitney refers in this line to the male economy that is afraid of loss and craves balance in life’s account book of give and take. The female economy is the true “store,” one that “craveth cost” also, but in contrast, it desires loss. It gives without return. It gives “more” (line 32) and imbalances or subverts the order of the patriarchal system. “Such store” (line 59) is reiterated many times in this poem. Whitney uses the word to delineate the male economy of containing, ordering, and hoarding versus the female economy of giving from her “store.” Using the word in both ways creates a link between men and women, in the way they suppress and lose their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
“store.” The word becomes connected to the oppression of the female body by men due to fear of loss.

Whitney’s poem as _blazon_ anatomizes London, the narrator’s male lover, just as courtier/poets imitated Petrarch’s _blazon_ to characterize women of their time period. The speaker directly addresses London as a person more than once (line 21 and line 35 “A Communication,” and line 253 and line 289 “The Manner of Her Will”); London is also stipulated as the executor of the speaker’s “Will” (line 277). However, the Petrarchan _blazon_ is used to _idealize_ women. Whitney’s “_blazon_” characterizes her “man” as corrupt, selfish, and cruel. Whitney’s speaker rebukes London:

> And now hath time me put in mind
> Of thy great cruelness,
> That never once a help would find
> To ease me in distress.
> Thou never yet wouldst credit give
> To board me for a year,
> Nor with apparel me relieve
> Except thou payed were.
> No, no, thou never didst me good
> Nor ever wilt, I know. (lines 17-26 “A Communication”)

In “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman” Whitney once again subverts the Petrarchan _blazon_ by anatomizing Griffith through the use of colors of clothing rather than body parts (lines 13-18). She uses the modesty topos in most of her poems; many examples appear in “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman.” “My wits be weak an epitaph
to write” (line 31), “My phrase doth serve but rudely to recite” (line 33), “Then had it been that I, poor silly dame, / Had had no need to blot this scratched scroll” (lines 49-50), “Wherefore I do attempt so much the more / By this good hope to show my slender art” (lines 67-68), and “But I, poor I, as I have said before, / Do wail to want Minerva’s learned lore” (lines 95-96). However, the author undermines her professions of inability to compose well by continuing to write, in this case sixteen more sestets. This balance of modesty and disgorgement speak to the figurative decapitation of women in male-governed societies who must maintain a façade of humility at all costs. The narrator compares her meager poetic gifts with Gruffith’s male friends who were writers (lines 37-44). The narrator does not praise these writers and their “rhyme rough” (line 40).

Furthermore, through repetition, the modesty topos loses its intent of muting the words of a “weak woman.” The repetition sounds like sarcasm, that Whitney does not really believe that her writing and publishing are inappropriate activities for a woman of her class. The narrator asks her “mournful muse, good ladies” to give “worth” to her writing (line 73). The passion for writing is “recorded” within the breast of a woman (line 76), “and there is lodged forever to remain” (line 77); she has dared to “publish forth” her poetry (line 75).

So live I shall, when death hath spit her spite,
And Lady Fame will spread my praise, I know,
And Cupid’s knights will never cease to write
And cause my name through Europe for to flow:
And they that know what Cupid can prevail,
Will bless the ship that floats with such a sail. (lines 85-90)
Through writing, the narrator experiences *jouissance*, a merging of the praise of Fame and the place in destiny that a love of writing will create. The narrator explains that if her writing is blessed by goddesses and muses, "By tract of time, great volumes I would fill" (line 93). Through the lapse of time, Whitney hopes her work will be a part of great volumes and inspire other women writers.

"By help, I hope, these ragged rhyme shall go [...] and ’scape the chaps of chiding every foe" (lines 97, 99). Whitney writes in the hope to bring the dead back to life, her friend William Gruffith as well as the female body at large in early modern England; in addition, she reverses female decapitation by inscribing through her poem male life and death. "Though death has shaped his most untimely end, / Yet for his praise my tristive tunes I send, / In hope the gods, who guide the heav’ns above, / His buried corpse alive again will makes" (lines 101-4). Her words are written to "restore" the poem’s subject to life (line 110); thus, language has the power of creation, just as language creates woman in the early modern English patriarchal image.

One of the major contrivances Isabella Whitney uses is the idea that her art is really artless. In "The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman," the narrator pronounces the theme of artless art, her unworthiness as a woman writer, no less than 11 times (lines 2, 9, 11, 31, 33, 49, 50, 68, 95, 96, 97). This repetition of qualifying her own narration represents one aspect of Whitney’s use of subversive textual devices. She also utilizes the conceits of Petrarchan and Ovidian love poetry to express her subversive views on love, sexuality, and mourning (lines 61-66).

*Jouissance through Bisexual Discourse*

She excels at marrying oppositions and taking pleasure in this as a single
pleasure with several hearths. (Cixous, *The Feminine* 209)

It is apparent that Isabella Whitney “takes pleasure,” as evidenced in her use of humor, in creating a subversive text as well as a bisexual discourse in her poetry. In “Auctor to the Reader,” Whitney claims she has had to give up reading works by classic male writers such as Ovid because they “mazed” her “muse” and “bruised” her “brain,” as McGrath notes (286). She is being sarcastic since although she often used Ovid’s writings as a model for her own, Ovid’s works were widely prohibited to female readers, as Phillippy reveals (459). In “The Manner of Her Will,” the narrator of the poem speaks of the booksellers at St. Paul’s, men like Whitney’s publisher. Whitney merges the writing of her poem, a disgorgement of female text, with that of the publisher’s of male texts.

Writing and publishing is an art that is also connected to nothingness, a futile enterprise, since text is not reality; in a clever turn of phrase, the narrator bequeaths “To all the bookbinders at St. Paul’s, / Because I like their art, / They every week shall money have / When they from books depart” (lines 193-6). On the surface, the narrator wishes the bookbinders to sell many books, but the phrase also means that the publishers will make money as soon as they depart from selling books. Therefore, the only writing of substance from which the narrator wishes profits to amass is from her own printer (line 197). Whitney is most probably referring here to Richard Jones, her publisher, who specialized in printing the works of women writers. Her writing is connected to the talents of her male publisher in this passage of the poem.

More importantly, St. Paul’s was a male arena, a marketplace where lawyers, merchants, soldiers, and cony catchers gathered for “the great exchange of all discourse,”
according to John Earle (Quoted in Hibbard 13). Women were excluded from this public exchange. Also, St. Paul's was a cathedral with a courtyard, a sacred place. The female body was also depicted in male writing, such as the Petrarchan blazon, as a sacred site of discourse. Therefore, St. Paul's as depicted in Whitney's poem serves the dual purpose of a place of merged and subverted discourse. Her poem creates an interchange of discourse between the central discourse, the public discussion of men who were scholars and business associates in St. Paul's square as well as the publications of male writers, and that of a disenfranchised group, women writers. Whitney blends her poem's discussion of faithless men from a woman's viewpoint with the exchange of language at St. Paul's and at the same time undercuts male discourse by discussing St. Paul's in terms of how much money she and her publisher will make on her writing. The commodification of women has merged with female discourse and also has been replaced by a different marketplace of inscription.

To offset the figuratively decapitating effects of English patriarchy, Whitney's narrator asks the reader to bear "witness" to her "Will" and "will": "Thus have you heard touching my soul / And body, what I mean; / I trust you all will witness bear / I have a steadfast brain" (lines 17-20). The reader is pulled into the narration, witnessing and connecting with the female writer's mind as the poem unfolds. The reader also witnesses the merging of the narrator's "soul and body" (lines 13-16). The narrator's mind is "steadfast" or determined; it is connected to her steadfast "will." The reader is asked to "witness bear" that women have minds and reason as well as bodies, thus subverting figurative decapitation. The reader as witness to the "Will" and "will" of the narrator is connected here to the other witnesses of the poem: God (line 3 "The Manner
of Her Will”), time (lines 1, 13 “A Communication,” line 323 “The Manner of Her Will”), and “Paper, Pen and Standish” (line 321).

Isabella Whitney’s speaker finishes the “Will” by stating that the only “ciphers” to her “great accompt” (line 17, Prologue to Henry V) are “Paper, Pen, and Standish... With Time” (lines 321-3). These four simple items are the “witnesses” (line 319) to her “Will” and will. Moreover, these items are the “store” of female outpouring; they are the grand muses, contrasted to the Muses of male writers, which Whitney invokes to assist her in creating her disgorgement. “Time,” one of the witnesses to her “Will,” is depicted as a woman who is the speaker’s friend (line 14 “A Communication” and line 323 “The Manner of Her Will”). Borrowing imagery from Susan Gubar, Evelyn Gajowski, and Janet Adelman, it is my contention that the paper in Whitney’s “Will” is the symbol of the female as blank page that the early modern English patriarchy manipulates, the inkwell represents the female womb that contains the blood of birthing that women use as their ink, and Time is the blessing and curse of life and death that birthing produces. The “Pen(is)” is surrounded by items associated with women in the line of poetry; female outpouring from Whitney’s “Will” and will has engulfed, swallowed up the power the “Pen(is)” can evoke and has, in effect, temporarily castrated patriarchal power. The intercourse or figurative coitus between the pen(is) and the paper, ink, and Time has created Whitney’s jouissance, the production of writing.

The “Pen(is)” also represents the convention of the blazon, the use of London as the fickle male lover in her poem, that Whitney has subverted to produce her verse. In this way, she creates her own discourse of veiled defiance by manipulating popular writing traditions. Through her “Will” and will, the author has created text out of the
blank page the patriarchy makes of women. The word “will” also connotes the future tense verb; through the imagined legacy of the text of her “Will,” the author passes on the real value of the female body’s jouissance so that future generations of women can perpetuate the process. The function of the female body is to produce life, and life is always a saga. Whitney’s “Will” tells “his story” or the history of early modern London as a means to actually reveal “herstory.”

In “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman,” the author uses various allusions to mythology, including one about Admetus and Alcestis where she parallels her own life to theirs and, as Martin points out, also reverses gender roles by “representing herself as a female Heracles” (309). This is a perfect example of the author merges her writing with male literary practices, in this case the didactic use of a legendary hero, to camouflage her own textual disgorgement. Typical female stoicism is portrayed in the lines “Since wailing no way can remedy me, / To make an end I therefore judge it best, / And drink up all my sorrow secretly, / And as I can, I will abide the rest” (lines 121-4). However, the publication of this poem signifies expression, not containment. Therefore, as Martin indicates, there is always the merging in her poetry of Whitney’s “self-determination and personal expression” with the “submission to social conventions within which she must live” (306). Her poetry always joins the English society’s acceptance of male and female stereotypes of identity and demeanor through her writing.

The narrator states “But I, a maid, am forced to use my head” (line 9) in “The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman.” To create poetry, maids must link up with the head, the domain of men. “But as I am, so will I still be bent: / No blasts shall blow my linked love awry” (lines 46-47). The narrator criticizes the “blasts” (line 47) from the would-be
poets or "worldly friends" (line 43) of Gruffith who try to do him justice. Her love for Gruffith is "linked" or private, not "worldly." It is a woman's place to bend her will to men, but the narrator also suggests that she is "bent" or pledged to her own desires.

Conclusion

I would define a feminine textual body as a feminine libidinal economy

[.] a feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop, and it's this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read. (Cixous, "Castration" 174).

Isabella Whitney's "The Manner of Her Will" and "The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman" are works that disgorge the "endless" generosity and loss of the "female libidinal economy"; these poems are about giving to others. In addition, her poetic creations do not perpetuate the woman as "blank page" (Gubar 295); Whitney manipulates the unique opportunity through her writing to create an outpouring of the female body, what Helene Cixous defines as the jouissance of disgorgement. Whitney's "Will" and "will" reveal the female body as text, not the female body as blank page. Her "Will" does not, as Susan Gubar puts it, illustrate the creation of art by destroying the female body (302). The body as text displays and characterizes the female body in a new way. The female body as text is a discourse that resists; it is an outpouring of expression that subverts the code of stoicism for women in early modern England. For Mary Ellen Lamb, emotional suppression is submission, which eventually becomes "self-erasure" (140). Self-erasure is part of the notion of woman as blank page, the very thing Isabella
Whitney's writing opposes. Her writing takes the privileged place of the male lover or husband who does not exist in her life. The narrator's "Will" and "will" are Whitney's disgorgement, because they reveal the author's desire and satisfaction in life through her writing, writing that simultaneously criticizes and merges with male literary practices.
Endnotes

1Quotations of Isabella Whitney’s poetry, except Copy of a Letter, are from Randall Martin’s book entitled Women Writers in Renaissance England. Quotations of Copy of a Letter are from Betty Travitsky’s Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance.


3Lynda E. Boose and Christophe Hinckeldey have written works that graphically illustrate the torture of early modern women who would not keep quiet. Boose’s article contains pictures of metallic “scold’s bridles” that were used to mussel outspoken women in early modern England (Figs. 6-8). Hinckeldey’s book contains a picture of a town square with bridled women on display similar to the marketplace that Whitney describes in “The Manner of Her Will” (Fig. 2B).

4Quotations of Geoffrey Whitney’s will are from Randall Martin’s book, Women Writers in Renaissance England (290).
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that early modern Englishwomen's lives were dictated, for the most part, by a society governed by men, there were women born into different classes who tried to convey their situation to others. They attempted to tell their stories through their writing. They often used the types of writing that were considered appropriate for women to create (private correspondence, poetic translation, the closet drama) as the vehicles for their disgorgement of text. These female authors undermined the purpose of the kinds of linguistic practices and language constructs that were popular with male writers in their time period; the Petrarchan blazon and Ovidian discourse present in the pamphlets and conduct manuals were used to train men to control and mold female behavior. Women writers reversed the expectations in the literary community concerning these constructs to assist in voicing their desires. Women like Anne Askew, Mary Sidney, Mary Wroth, Amelia Lanyer, and Aphra Behn wanted their voices to go on record concerning the condition of women's lives in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

In addition to these women, male writers like William Shakespeare exposed the brutality of female oppression through their work. Shakespeare was not alone in his exploration of the female body's text; men like Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, John Ford, and John Webster facilitated the release of women's voices through the female characters.
and narrators depicted in their poetry and drama. Spenser's Britomart in *The Fairie Queene*, Sidney's Philoclea in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, Ford's Penthea in *The Broken Heart*, and Webster's Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* add their perspectives to the dialogue concerning the manipulation of female voice and sexuality. The disgorgement of text can be discerned in the use of subversive tactics, including merging with accepted authorial practices, to express feelings and to outpour commentary about what the female body's experience was like during this era. A merging with acceptable male texts, a bisexual discourse, is not suppression and is not submission. Instead, bisexual discourse is a means to display generosity, which is the point of writing. Writing is a giving, not a taking.

Women writers in early modern England did not submit; they manipulated their positions in society, the roles of the obedient, kind, faithful, chaste, silent female, as a method to create voice.

The French feminists are often criticized for an essentialist approach to criticism, that their theories universalize the female experience that is far too varied to be generalized; therefore, many contemporary feminists are uncomfortable interrogating the female material body as text. As a result, the influence of the French feminists has been on the wane from the latter part of the 20th century to present, as Pamela Banting points out (226). By focusing on the "other" rather than the "mother" and adding plurality to the words "body," "feminism," and "gender," anti-essentialists try to counter linguistic and critical universalism. However, feminists who protest essentialism often end up creating essentialist statements of their own without realizing it. For example, Banting indicates that Toril Moi's anti-essentialist analysis of Cixous in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics* contains various essentialist errors (227). In addition, the discredit of universalizing constructs does not take
into consideration that marginalized groups do have certain characteristics in common. The stigma of essentialism, according to Banting and Naomi Schor, is a form of “excommunication” (226) that discounts and silences all of the work by the French feminists concerning l’écriture feminine and the longing for the maternal archaic. I agree with Banting’s argument; I believe contemporary criticism should be open to all women’s discourses. Therefore, to label any feminist discourse and thereby discount it, is a form of “intellectual terrorism” (226) that I do not want to embrace. I believe all women’s voices should be evoked and validated.

The aim of this project is to show how three individual writers voiced women’s jouissance from their perspectives. This is not to say that all women in early modern England felt oppressed or felt a desire to express dissatisfaction with their lives. However, certain conclusions about early modern society can be drawn from the scrutiny of the texts discussed in this thesis. Life for women could be violent and harsh, but women were expected to embrace such conditions stoically. The women of the aristocracy were not always treated better than women of the lower classes. Women’s bodies were defined as male property, and women’s sexuality was under the jurisdiction of men and used as part of the interplay between men when dealing with the spoils of war or when trying to solidify a place for the man in the political hierarchy. The legitimate claims of the affiliation of a wife and child to a man could be questioned, putting the woman and her child into a precarious domestic situation. Therefore, women lived in fear of being disowned and cast aside. A marketable asset of women in this tenuous situation was a woman’s beauty and her ability to give birth to male children. In addition, women did not always give aid to one another. Women were isolated from each other by the laws and customs of male-governed society. It
was impossible for women to be united against the oppressive circumstances they lived with.

Although early modern English literature could be used as social and political propaganda, it could also be used to reflect and comment upon the life that the authors experienced and the lives of others that the writer viewed from a distance. Female characters in literature had import only in their relationship to male figures of authority in the play. Domestic conflict in Elizabethan drama could be as bloody and pointless as foreign wars. However, there were male authors who revealed in their works that the oppression of women was unconscionable. Women of the aristocracy and of the gentry in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in England, women like Elizabeth Cary and Isabella Whitney, struggled with censorship, especially the censorship of the female author. They, along with men like Shakespeare, decided to make statements about women in their society through their literary characters and narrators, women who were at times in life-or-death situations where the dead or dying female body had something to communicate.

Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney used metaphor to disguise and manifest authorial commentary on their own society by showing how women in past worlds, women like Lavinia in ancient Rome or Mariam in ancient Judea, led muted lives not unlike those of their real-life counterparts in early modern England. Being silenced led these female characters to desperate means to communicate the female body's text. Isabella Whitney uses more humor than Shakespeare or Cary, but her objective is the same. Women of the gentry in Renaissance England had to be clever, even more clever than women of privilege if they wanted to express themselves. Cary and Whitney were among a handful of women who attempted to emphasize the female characters in a literary work rather than the male
characters; notice that Cary’s play is not called “The Story of Herod.” These women and their writings mark the very early beginnings of what later was named the feminist movement.

In the mid-twentieth century United States classroom, the study of the female characters in early modern English plays was subordinated to the study of male characters. A cacophony of privileged voices and their agendas is excavated from early modern drama and poetry but this emphasis drowns out all other voices. This type of scholarship perpetuates the silencing of women’s voices as one of many “othered” groups in early modern England. This type of scholarship reveals that our society continued to acknowledge the primacy of the patriarchy rather than the diversity of our civilization. Contemporary advertisements achieve the same affect: they privilege the male gaze. This gives students and viewers of advertisements a skewed vision of the societies women of the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries are part of, that women and all “othered” groups are swallowed up by and exist invisibly inside male systems and structures. It appears as if the early modern woman condones her own oppression which was not the case. Therefore, a large part of historical and social erudition is ignored.

I am continuing the scholarship of feminist critics that began world-wide in the twentieth century to change the reading of literature in classrooms and in criticism. By privileging an examination of those who were not in control, we see a very different picture of early modern society, one in which the systems and structures do not seem so omnipotent, one in which those who possessed and managed “othered” groups of people do not look so heroic. The systems and the literature appear more complex and intricate than a one-dimensional perspective of a society’s history and culture. This interrogation of a society
makes the system seem so much more rich and full than just a cardboard cutout. My thesis takes a look at the women's voices and lives rather than the men's and in so doing shows the reader a fuller picture of what life was like not only in the societies like those of ancient Rome and ancient Judea that were written about by Shakespeare and Cary but in the culture of the authors as well, particularly in Whitney's portrayal of London life. The implications of encouraging others to interrogate literature in a detailed sense are that the community of professors who embrace diversity encourage those students in their classroom, who make up a portion of society at large, to take a critical look at the perpetuation of patriarchal propaganda. Students will not look at history, at government, at sociology, at advertising, and most importantly, at literature, in the same ways.

Also in this thesis, I wanted to open out the similarities rather than the differences between the cultures of the United States and England during contemporary and early modern time periods, respectively. Too often, we view literature from the past as this far off place with people that have little to do with contemporary life. This concentration on the differences between us walls the reader away from understanding how early modern English lives inform our own. Also, there are numerous stereotypes about early modern Englishwomen, for example that they were all silent and obedient, that need to be interrogated. The examination of early modern English writers should lead us to a greater appreciation of their contribution to what would be termed "feminist" writing in contemporary times and an admiration of the struggle of early modern women writers to be heard. There were brave women and men in early modern England who wrote about their world through the veiled discourse of another world, as Shakespeare and Cary did. There were and still are progressive women and men who fight for women's rights through the
change of societal mores and governmental laws throughout the world. Silenced voices enable the oppression of women everywhere. Knowing the audience is important to successful writing and to social change. In addition, there were women in early modern Europe who were bridled and shamed in the marketplace, and there are women in contemporary societies whose actions are sexually eroticized and who are shamed by the media. There are those who were and are in a position to wield language; George Dugdale’s manipulation of the press about the hanging of Elizabeth Caldwell for poisoning her husband in 1603 seems very current and no different than many of the stories that people read in the tabloids today.

Writing is a thermometer, a gauge of figurative decapitation; interrogating a society’s writing reveals the manipulation of female sexuality within that culture. Scholars study writing to glean information about the relationships between men and women and between the empowered and disempowered; scholars study writing to see how writing is manipulated to oppress the marginalized or to express the disturbance of the status quo by the disenfranchised. In this project, I wanted to connect the twentieth-century theories of a French feminist to early modern English literature to find out what the literature of sixteenth-century England says about the oppression and expression of women. For young American scholars in particular, the ones that American professors have in their classrooms on a daily basis, the literature of centuries long ago written in other countries sometimes seem difficult to embrace. However, there are palpable threads of commonality between contemporary Americans and Renaissance English men and women that appear in our respective literatures. For one thing, there are young, contemporary American women who believe that we are far more emancipated than the women who lived in early modern
England, and yet all American women are still dealing with the residue of figurative
decapitation that is exemplified in sixteenth-century English drama and poetry. Because of
the residual effects of patriarchal control of female gender and sexuality, the first and second
waves of the feminist movement, the suffragettes campaign for the vote, birth control, the
Betty Friedan-generation’s quest for equal pay for equal work, and a more open dialogue
concerning sexual practices and proclivities were born. The contemporary feminists who
are seeking equality, the liberal and socialist feminists, are attempting to create a dialogue
with men that is similar to Cixous’s concept of a joining or blending of discourse which
Cixous calls “bisexual.” Cixous does not intend to connote a sexuality that embraces
intercourse with both sexes, the common, contemporary use of the word “bisexual.”
“Bisexual” is a blending of l’écriture feminine and male dependence on written and verbal
languages.

The contemporary feminists seeking to emphasize their difference from men and
male constructs disgorge their text in a way comparable to Cixous’s discussion of the
disruptive force that comes from the subversion of language by women writers. Part of my
project emphasizes the importance of investigating the early modern Englishwoman within
her culture and as reflected in literature as a tool that informs contemporary feminist
theoretical positions and that reveals the commonality between women in the sixteenth and
twenty-first centuries. I believe contemporary American, French, and British feminists,
among others, are still dealing with issues that were prevalent in the literary endeavors of
writers like Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney. For example, Shakespeare, Cary, and
Whitney discussed how language privileged male society and how language produced
meaning as well as the ways in which women characters were portrayed in literature. These
three authors interrogated “herstory” and revealed how political and social power relationships impacted women’s lives. These writers were doing the same work that contemporary feminists are still pursuing. Figurative decapitation and women’s propensity to disgorge has not dissipated and is not dead simply because scholars find evidence of it in ancient literatures; remnants exist and appear in contemporary social relationships and in contemporary journalism. Contemporary men and women still deal with the vestiges of figurative decapitating language; contemporary women writers still fight to disgorge their texts. Of course, one of the reasons scholars study Renaissance literature is its facile applicability to modern constructs and lives. This is notable in the adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays to modern settings, as in the Baz Luhrman film version of *Romeo and Juliet* or Tim Blake Nelson’s *O.*

Female figurative decapitation still exists in contemporary societies; for example, in third world countries, figurative decapitation is pervasive, made manifest through veiling ordinances, arranged marriages, and the practices of clitorectomies, sati, and dowry death. Female decapitation of women in Western cultures today is more subtle but no less noxious: I am speaking of a form of contemporary “literature,” of the advertisement. Decapitation advertisements, depicted in television commercials, print ads, and billboards that objectify women by showing women to be all body, are used to silence the voices of contemporary women. Contemporary advertising techniques parallel the suffocating and humiliating effects of Petrarchan and Ovidian discourse by idealizing women or denigrating them and by not embracing the reality of all women. I am very interested in how female body image is portrayed in United States’ advertising in the twenty-first century and how this affects how women “see” themselves.
Contemporary advertising is no different in the way it dispenses propaganda about women's voices and sexuality than the conduct manuals prescribing female behavior and pamphlet wars about the nature of "woman" in early modern England. "Within the cult of gender, members are required to weave the continual maintenance of the cult into their daily lives," as Kate Bornstein asserts (103). Corporeality expresses what it is to be female. This was true in early modern England and also true today for women in most cultures. The body's text says something about the culture a person lives in. Figurative decapitation says something about how early modern English society viewed the female body's text. To disgorge text, writers had to overcome the disabling nature of their own society's view of the female body; these writers had to beat the early modern English patriarchy at its own game of manipulating the female body's text.

Isabella Whitney discussed body image when she spoke about the figuratively decapitating, imprisoning effects of women's clothing in "The Manner of Her Will." Elizabeth Cary interrogated the suppression of women through emphasizing beauty as a trait to be cultivated and manipulated through her character, Mariam. In the twentieth century, John Berger examined this same issue; Berger indicated that women in most contemporary societies worldwide are valued for their beauty and behavior but not for their accomplishments. Women have two selves: the real self and the image that is their constant companion. Women are always surveying themselves and being surveyed. "Men act and women appear," as Berger puts it (47).

I cannot help but note the recent trend towards ultra slimness in Western culture. What does this propensity towards emaciation say about how much equality and freedom has been gained by the women's movements? How much progress have women made
toward emancipating their bodies or their sexuality since the days of women like the
caracter Mariam in ancient Judea, or women like the character of Lavinia in ancient
Rome, or women like Cary and Whitney from early modern England? Today, women in
the United States can vote, women can work in jobs gendered as masculine, but women
are still surveying their attractiveness according to male standards of desire, just like the
female characters in Elizabeth Cary’s play. This surveillance by women enslaves and
oppresses. Is ultra thinness a statement of individuality or a step backward, totally
embodving the androcentric desire for women to be silent, obedient, chaste, and therefore
invisible? I have been wresting with this dilemma. I see how thinness is a statement of
protest towards the common trend of plumpness or fatness; all societies in all cultures
view fatness as a sign of prosperity. In contemporary Western societies, we know obesity
is unhealthy. However, I keep coming back to a theoretical perspective: repression of
indulgence is the basis for stoicism, encouraged as the proper behavior for women by all
patriarchies.

Sociologist Sandra Bartky applies Michel Foucault’s theory on surveillance or
“panopticism” to the female personae in contemporary patriarchies. She discusses
Foucault’s conclusion that people who are incarcerated constantly deal psychologically
with a “third eye.” In other words, the belief that someone is watching them from a
central position is internalized by prisoners. Bartky’s twentieth-century treatise is that
this self-surveillance is an unending prison that women also deal with, but that women
are concerned about their bodies and physical looks. Women pursue the ideal body
image, using makeup and dieting and plastic surgery. A face without makeup isn’t
perfect. Media images surround us with the perfect face and body for a woman; recently,
the body image is that of a young woman. The immature, waif-like body is pursued, because it represents the patriarchal ideal woman: submissive, chaste, quiet, obedient.

Bartky says that a "woman's body language speaks eloquently, though silently, of her subordinate status in a hierarchy of gender" (229). Although older forms of oppression die away with female resistance to them, new forms of suppression just take their place. Chastity is not a crucial issue in most Western countries today; instead, the visual image of a woman's body has become the focus of patriarchal constraint and has spread to all classes, not just the aristocracy. Bartky indicates that female "self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy" (230). Male-governed society wants women to be repressed physically, verbally, sexually, and emotionally. A child's body does not have the sexual subtext or the sexual threat attached to a real woman's sexual body with hips and breasts. Catharine MacKinnon, a contemporary feminist and Marxist theorist, raises the question: "Is women's sexuality its absence?" (182). My gut reaction to all this idealization of thinness as the epitome of beauty is that women absolutely must start embracing heterogeneous body types and promote acceptance of all women if the women's movement(s) hope to be successful in any society and in any era.

Advertisements are one of the most insidious ways that the oppression of women is omnipresent in contemporary cultures. Granted, some advertising critiques society, but most marketing reflects the "market" it targets, just as women writers like Cary and Whitney in early modern England shaped their narratives towards what the market would accept. Women are still commodified around the world in 2004. William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Cary, and Isabella Whitney were voicing the position of women in England in their era. The issue of proper behavior for women concerning public versus private speech in early
modern England is discussed in Cary's closet drama and in Whitney's poetry. Cary and
Whitney interrogate public and private speech as it relates to public versus private female
sexuality, the visibility versus invisibility of the female body's text. The female body's
contained text is still an issue in contemporary societies; transgendered individuals, exotic
dancers, porn stars, phone sex workers, and prostitutes are today's targets for censure.
These "bad girls" in the contemporary U.S. are paralleled with the scolds, shrews, and
adulterers of yesteryear. The sexual commodification of women who live in the United
States in contemporary times is reflected in twenty-first century advertisement. Non-verbal
communication is featured in advertising all the time. The female body's text in the
forms of gestures, facial expressions, body posturing and poses, non-verbal cues like
clothing and body image are all used to sell products in the United States. What do ads
"say" about the subjectivity of women in the United States in the twenty-first century? Isn't
there still a double standard; isn't there still stereotyping of the good girl and the bad girl, the
binary system of language that was in effect, repressing women in England in the
Elizabethan and Jacobean periods?

Decapitation advertising is one of the worst forms of objectifying women in 2004.
In these ads, the women have no heads, no identity, no individuality. They are sexual
objects, a commodity used to sell products, reduced to the Petrarchan blazon of body parts.
A case in point is the Levi Strauss hip-hugger jeans ad that aired on television in the United
States a few years ago. In the ad, we never see these women's faces; crotch shots are the
emphasis of the commercial. Is there not a kind of monstrous female sexuality attached to
that Levi-Strauss ad that the patriarchy wants to control and censor? Is this monstrous
sexuality any different from that which is portrayed in Shakespeare's Tamora? In what
Lavinia's gang raped and mutilated body "says" about the commodification of women? 

Ironically, the song used in the ad is "I'm coming out / I want the world to know / Got to let it show," as if to sound the trumpet of female sexual emancipation, but I think the song masks a more powerful subliminal message, a message of propaganda. The daughters of Eve who might purchase the Levi-Strauss product represent the attitude from the early modern period in England that a wagging tongue connoted a free sexual appetite. Likewise, contemporary women who show their navels are rebellious and outspoken.

The girls who buy these jeans and the models who wear them are not physically bridled and paraded through the streets or displayed in the marketplace as some women were shamed in early modern England and Western Europe. Instead, contemporary women living in patriarchal countries are figuratively bridled or decapitated. This ad reflects a residual form of "bridling" that concerns the female body and how women's clothes in any era are a demarcation of figurative decapitation. The advertisers have made "puppets" of these models and the women who buy the product, just as the men in Titus Andronicus try to make a puppet out of Lavinia in the first act of the play by using her as a bartering chip, nullifying the female models' claims of independence and freedom, revealing that female lack still exists in the androcentric society of the United States in the twenty-first century.

Most important of all, the women in the ad are made to appear silly. In this manner, feminism and the feminist movement are ridiculed. This is just one of many ads in the United States that speaks to the issue of monstrous female sexuality which is depicted as castrating and, therefore, must be silenced. An old Virginia Slims cigarette ad professes "You've come a long way, baby," but this is ultimately a disabling United States slogan for
women, not fact. It lures women into a false sense that the censure of women no longer exists.

What contemporary feminist criticism has made apparent is that the systems in early modern England that figuratively decapitated women are still with us but that these systems are not as easily definable and discernable as past criticism might indicate. Silencing is a complex layering of restraints that makes the achievement of disgorgement complicated as well. In addition, figurative decapitation of each woman in early modern England had its own specific properties. There is no essential way to silence women or for women to express discourse. The fragmentation or chaos of text that constitutes the disgorgement of the women does not make these women inscrutable but, on the contrary, indicates there is much beneath the surface to investigate.

The female inhabitants of this time period do not fit neatly into the “great chain of being” as stipulated in *The Elizabethan World Picture* by E. M. W. Tillyard, a theory that was once thought to have credibility in critical circles, and women were not merely weak, submissive, and silent as the stereotype of women from this time period would suggest. The subversion of literary constructs implies that the disenfranchised were not helpless and that they used the disgorgement of text to validate their position. Female writers produced distinct texts from one another, and there are varied female voices to be heard in texts written during this time period. One type of voice comes from the female body’s text, a viable form of communication that reveals other layers within literature. The female body’s text speaks in ways that explode traditional readings of female characters in early modern English literature. It is of value to see the diversity in their society because critics should not hope to find “the” answer, the clear picture of the Elizabethan world, but instead should
explore all the questions that the complexity creates and from the intricacies derive a comparable critical text. Women's voices from this time period speak to us and challenge contemporary critics to re-evaluate the critical methodologies that make up our readings.

Researching early modern English literature is fascinating because the literary canon has been dominated by male writers for centuries; therefore, it is important for contemporary feminist critics to spotlight female writers and characters in publication and in the classroom. Women writers in early modern England have been virtually neglected until the past decade or two, and there is a treasury of hidden stories of women waiting to be explored. The voices of these women contribute to "herstory" or the tradition of stories that needs to be recuperated so that contemporary women can understand themselves in relation to their heritage. Understanding a woman's heritage simultaneously enables her voice and gives credence to it. "A woman writing thinks back through her mothers" as Virginia Woolf famously put it (97). Recuperating "herstory," moreover, enables contemporary students of early modern England to obtain a more accurate, complete understanding of the literature and the society of the period formerly known as the "Renaissance." Education is a powerful tool towards offsetting marketplace propaganda and creating progress for women in the future. These are the things that the female voices in the works of Shakespeare, Cary, and Whitney say to me.

The main reason I study specifically the disgorgement of women writers in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is that these women speak to contemporary women in all countries about what it is like to be female in a male world. No matter how progressive and enlightened we think we have become, these female voices still have something of import to convey, not only about the past but, more importantly, about our
present condition. Textual disgorgement, today and yesterday, offsets the debilitating propaganda of figurative decapitation for women. However, all that I have just said is irrelevant and idealistic, as Annette Kolodny astutely pronounces, as long as women continue to emphasize female voices merely in the fictional world of literature, in the ivory towers of educational institutions, and do nothing to confront and to attempt to solve the problems of real women in today's world. Ultimately, fictional study should facilitate a commitment to eradicate real-life situations of figurative decapitation.
WORKS CITED


Bennett, Alexandra G. “Female Performativity in *The Tragedy of Mariam*.” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40.2 (Spring 2000): 293-309.


Kemp, Theresa D. "The Family is a Little Commonwealth: Teaching *Mariam* and *Othello* in a Special-Topics Course on Domestic England." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 1996): 451-60.


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Melanie Ann Hanson

Local Address:
3651 N Rancho, #260
Las Vegas, NV 89130

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, English, 1975
San Diego State University, California

Master of Arts, English, 1998
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Special Honors and Awards:
President's Fellowship, 2003
Graduate Summer Assistantship, 2003
Alumni Association Scholarship, UNLV, 2002/3
Graduate Assistant Excellence in Teaching Award Nominee, UNLV, 2003
Graduate Thesis Award Nominee, UNLV English department, 1998

Dissertation Title: Decapitation and Disgorgement: The Female Body's Text in Early Modern English Literature

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Evelyn Gajowski, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Charles Whitney, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Kelly J. Mays, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Kathryn Hausbeck, Ph.D.