

Death Becomes Her:
Representations of Female Death and Dying in Three of Shakespeare's Tragedies

By
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Abstract

Representations of female death and dying in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* allow an exploration of Jacques Lacan's concepts of the male gaze and *objet petit a* within a historical and literary context. In addition, Judith Butler's theories on language and desire draw attention to the reciprocal relationship between gaze and language and their connection to desire in death. Examination of mothers' legacies, ballads, and historical documents demonstrate what was required for a woman's death to be constructed as "good," and reveal how Shakespeare challenges societal expectations with his depiction of female death. Juliet, Desdemona, and Cleopatra are all subject to the Lacanian male gaze and attempt to exert control over that gaze. Further, all three challenge what is required for a woman to die well. Despite this, they become external embodiments of desire, of someone's intrinsic lack or *objet petit a*, particularly at the moment of death.

March 2011

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Introduction: Dying Well or Dying Badly?

Nay, lay thee down and roar,

For thou hast kill'd the sweetest innocent

That e'er did lift up eye. (Othello, 5.2.197-199)

My thesis investigates the representations of female death and dying in three of Shakespeare's tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Othello* (1622) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623). Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra appear initially as independent, strong willed, and outspoken individuals who in many ways defy patriarchal societal expectations. While it is possible for their deaths to be seen as punishment for their defiance of a patriarchal structure, Shakespeare complicates this perception by presenting the characters as "good women"¹ in death. He allows the memory of them to be reconstructed as one acceptable to their patriarchal societies; however, in order to be considered a "good woman" after death, the characters must "die well" according to societal expectations. Shakespeare is, of course, the best known playwright of the early modern period and his work has been most influential in forming our understanding of the drama and culture of the period. It is therefore important to study his female characters because these characters have shaped the creation of other female characters in literary history. If the characters of Juliet, Desdemona, and Cleopatra are looked at within a feminist theoretical framework, which is defined as the "tools designed for a practical

¹ "Good/bad woman," "good/bad death," and "dying well/badly" are defined according to Lucinda Becker's terminology in *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*.

purpose—the purpose of understanding women’s subordination in order to end it” (Nelson and Robinson 99), then it can be established whether or not they are resisting the traditional patriarchal model of femininity in any way.

The deaths of these three characters provide a contrast on many levels. While they are clearly influenced by Shakespeare’s own cultural background in early modern England, all of them are from different cultures in the play world; Juliet is from Verona, Desdemona is originally from Venice, but goes to live in Cyprus, and Cleopatra is from Egypt. These cultures would have varying expectations on how the female characters should be gazed upon by society, which leads to some of the variances found. Juliet is described as a “melancholic, immature, and ‘hot’ Italian” (Roberts 112), as seen in her hasty marriage, her faked death and suicide. Also Italian, Desdemona is seen as a hot, lusty Italian and is repeatedly described as the “cunning whore of Venice” (120). Desdemona shows her lusty nature when she insists on consummating her marriage and accompanies Othello on a military mission to do so (*Othello* 1.3.252-256). She doubly Others herself by marrying a Moor who is considered to have “unnatural sexual and domestic practices...and prone to anger and jealousy” (Loomba 91). Cleopatra is also stereotyped as having excessive sexual desire, a jealous nature and is doubly Othered because of her race and gender. However, because Cleopatra is from Egypt she is described in a different manner from Othello. These differences in cultural perception affect how these women are gazed upon and ultimately how their deaths are responded to by both other characters and the audience.

The female characters share certain societal roles such as being wife and daughter; however, these roles are complicated by their life situation. Juliet is not only a daughter, she is a wife as well; Desdemona is a wife, but is also a daughter; Cleopatra is a wife and mother, but is also a public ruler. These roles carry with them different complexities and responsibilities that affect the way the character is perceived, even in death. All three characters explore the difficulty of combining the role of wife with other roles and the impossibility of remaining within the social codes that define these roles. As Jacqueline Eales so eloquently puts it:

Women made claims to particular authority in relation to childbirth, but they also acted as marriage brokers for younger relatives, as active agents in choosing their own husbands and lovers and as advisers to their husbands. Such activities reveal some of the disparities between the exhortations of the conduct books and an individual's responses to the practical problems of being a daughter, sister, wife or mother. (72)

The difficulty of combining these roles lies in societal expectations for women, which were heavily shaped by Christian theology. For example, it was difficult to combine the role of a wife, with her first responsibility to her husband (NIV, Col. 3:18-20), and that of a daughter, whose first responsibility was to her father (Prov. 6:20). Conduct books of the time outline a woman's inferiority and obedience very carefully. Juan Luis Vives, writing on behalf of Catherine of Arragon to her daughter, the future queen regent of England, makes it clear that when a woman married she was to obey her husband instead of her father:

Now then, what woman will be so presumptuous and so haughty to disobey her husband's bidding, if she consider, that he is unto her instead of father and mother and all her kin, and that she oweth unto him all the love and charity that were due to them all? ...she must needs obey her husband: in whom by rights, by all customs, by all statutes and laws, by all precepts and commandments, both natural, worldly and heavenly she ought to account allthing to be. (Aughterson 137)

Desdemona is following this social more in 1.3 by obeying Othello, and her father understands even though he disapproves of the match. In Juliet's case, her father still expects her to abide by his rules because he is unaware of her married status. Like all women of the period, Desdemona and Juliet are expected to fill the societal roles that apply to them. The hierarchy of these roles is such that the role of a wife comes before that of a daughter; a hierarchy that is complicated when a father does not know of his daughter's marriage.

To understand how the perceptions of Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra are altered by their deaths, I will use the theories of Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler. Although psychoanalytical theory was not developed until the twentieth century, this critical approach is most useful in analyzing Shakespeare's work because of the way Shakespeare shapes and complicates his characters through language. In an era that upheld plot development over character development, Shakespeare was far ahead of his time. The characters in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* are based on stock comic characters, while the title characters in *Antony and Cleopatra* are rooted in history.

However, Shakespeare does not simply copy and paste from his sources but complicates the characters by changing comedic stock characters into tragic characters, fully developing such characters as Iago and Othello, and exploring the thoughts and feelings of the Egyptian queen and her Roman counterparts as he brings historical characters to life.

With Shakespeare's focus on character development, examining his plays through the lens of Lacan's psychoanalytical theories of the male gaze and *objet petit a* allows for a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's female characters. When such a perspective is combined with feminist theory, namely Judith Butler's theories of bodies, language and the gaze, it prompts an exploration into female agency. Lacan's theories of the *objet petit a* and the gaze intertwine with Butler's theories of the body, language and the gaze to reveal the concept of desire in death. The female character who is the embodiment of the *objet petit a*, the object of the male gaze, has her body shaped and re-presented through language. In death, this reshaping through language allows the woman to be accepted into the patriarchal society and, therefore, become an object of desire in death.

As stated above, Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra travel from being independent individuals who defy societal expectations in life to being accepted into the dominant patriarchal culture in death. I will use Jacques Lacan's theory of the male gaze to interpret how the female characters are viewed by the other characters on stage and the viewing audience both before and after their deaths. For Lacan, the gaze is a function of the subject looking outside of him or herself. The subject is both seeing and being seen, but the gaze, as Elizabeth Grosz notes, "is located outside of the subject's control" (80).

Furthermore, it has been noted that this male gaze is not only adopted by men. Women have been steeped in the patriarchal tradition for so long that they have adapted to their surroundings and adopted the male gaze, a process which Lacan refers to as mimicry. The gazed-upon characters may observe the gaze, but social mores render them powerless to change it. Both before and after their deaths, these characters are subject to the male gaze and are judged for their actions. This leads to criticism of their actions which is represented in the language used by other characters. Lacan's theory of the male gaze particularly applies as these female characters exist both within the dominant patriarchal cultures of their play worlds, and within the theatre where they are subject to the male gaze of the audience. They are therefore subject to a double male gaze—and while these gazes may reinforce each other, they may also work in opposition to raise doubt about how the character is being constructed by one or other gaze.

The male gaze also relates to Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a*, an intrinsic lack in the subject which engenders an unattainable desire directed towards an external object. This desire is redirected when the subject comes close to attaining this goal, causing the external embodiment of *objet petit a* to be in a constant state of flux. For Romeo and Juliet, their desire is for the perfect love but, just as they believe this is reached, it is taken away by exile and death. In the case of Othello and Desdemona, Othello's desire is for a silent and obedient wife, but again, as soon as that manifestation of his *objet petit a* is reached through Desdemona's death, Othello wants Desdemona to live. With Antony and Cleopatra the *objet petit a* is a gendered lack that they see in one another. Cleopatra desires the male power and authority denied to her as a woman, whereas Antony desires

control of the Eastern femininity of Egypt (and Cleopatra) which is denied to him as a Western male. However, the closer they come to one another, to the point of a gendered role reversal, the more Antony and Cleopatra discover the Other cannot fulfil their lack; thus, causing the value of the Other to be questioned and undermined.² To complicate matters further, Octavius's desire, his *objet petit a*, is embodied in a submissive Cleopatra, and while he can control Cleopatra's body and perceptions of her after her death, her death is itself an act of defiance.

Lacan explains the theory behind the *objet petit a* as "I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the *objet petit a*—I mutilate you" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 268). It is possible to see the *objet petit a* as embodied in female chastity, silence and obedience because traditionally men have privileged these feminine ideals. For example, Othello loves his wife but because he desires her to be chaste, silent and obedient and fears she is not, he must "mutilate," or kill her to fulfill that desire. This theme is also present in *Romeo and Juliet* as Romeo desires Juliet to fulfil these roles in 2.2. In his attempt to reshape her through language he "mutilates" her even as she resists the construction. Antony and Cleopatra's mutual love of power prompts them to use, or "mutilate," the other for their own ends. This *objet petit a* can be identified in many ways, using different tactics; however, the result is the same. The woman is mutilated through being silenced and punished which brings about the "desired" result for the man. What is not realized by the

² Dubrow argues that "loss and its fraternal twin lack [...] in their many forms are [...] no less pervasive in the culture than in the style of Shakespeare's plays" (2).

male character is that when the embodiment of *objet petit a* is reached, the female is no longer the woman she once was: she is mutilated. When this happens, the *objet petit a* immediately becomes the desire for the woman.

Judith Butler's theories on language emphasize how the Lacanian gaze shapes language and how language shapes the gaze. Butler's work applies to Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra in the way they are defined because language aids in the development of the gaze; however, it also causes the gaze to be displaced from its original meaning. For Lacan, this original meaning "always signifies a rupture between signifier and signified, an irretraversable externality, with the further consequence that linguistic signification is a series of substitutions" (Butler, *Subjects of Desire* 198). In other words, desire cannot be fully articulated but it cannot be silent either. It therefore takes the form of a primal moan or scream such as Othello's "O! O! O!" (*Othello* 5.2.194). Othello's desire cannot be expressed in language, but instead finds release in a speechless moan. In her article, "On Linguistic Vulnerability," Butler argues that language has been assigned the power to wound the body through its address. The body is "strictly speaking, not accessible to us, that nevertheless becomes accessible on the occasion of an address, a call, an interpellation that does not 'discover' the body, but constitutes it fundamentally" (5). This seems to suggest that the body is not accessible without it being translated through language. In order to understand how the body is shaped, it is important to understand the language used to shape it: "Implicit in the notion of a threat is that what is spoken in language may prefigure what the body might do; the act referred to in the threat is the act that one might actually perform" (10). Therefore, in order to understand the gaze that is

fixed on the body, one must understand the language that shapes and is shaped by that gaze.

The ties between the gaze and language lead to the concept of desire in death. This desire is evident when the female characters are on display after death. In early modern literature, the male gaze does not linger on the body of a dead male. Repeatedly, however, the same gaze lingers on the body of a dead woman that is displayed and, even if she is defamed in life, in death her sins are purged and the language surrounding her becomes positive.³ She becomes an angelic figure for the gaze; however, there is still a sexualized element to these character's deaths. For example, Desdemona is killed on her wedding bed and Juliet stabs herself with Romeo's dagger, which is widely accepted as a phallic symbol—"from a sign of fertility in the old cult" (Nottveit 143). Cleopatra's speech, said while holding the asp to her breast in a maternal fashion, has sexual connotations: "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch" (*Antony & Cleopatra* [A&C] 5.2.294). Finally, early modern society referred to the climax of sexual intimacy as a "little death," so the ties between desire, sexuality and death were already part of the culture. Preparing for her wedding night, Juliet utters, "Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die" (*Romeo & Juliet* [R&J] 3.2.21), showing she is looking forward to her own sexual pleasure. Sasha Roberts states, "an Elizabethan audience would be sure to grasp the sexual double meaning of "die" as orgasm" (113). Butler argues that desire "exists, as it were, midway between silence and speech" (*Subjects of Desire* 199). This is significant because the desire at the time of the characters' deaths lies between the gaze (silence) and

³ See *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The White Devil*, *King Lear*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

language (speech). Susan Zimmerman points out in her article, "Psychoanalysis of the Corpse," that "the danger of the corpse, of abjection, is that it threatens to engulf the totality of the subject's identity as constructed by the symbolic order, drawing one toward the semiotic place where meaning collapses" (104) as is argued by Kristeva. Therefore, the corpses of Desdemona, Juliet and Cleopatra bridge these two orders by silently adhering to the symbolic (male) order; however, since they are dead and silent, their importance to the symbolic order is negated. They lie in flux, not belonging to the symbolic order or to the mother tongue of the semiotic.

Butler states that desire is "that which is denied" (*Subjects of Desire* 188) and, in the case of Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra, there is a sudden return of male desire when they die. Dead, these female characters can no longer be controlled by the male authority figures, hence desire arises for them to live and once again be subject to control. The body itself, which is present on the stage, also factors into this desire. What is being desired is not simply the character of Juliet, Desdemona or Cleopatra, but rather what the body on stage represents, a silent, chaste, perfect wife. The irony of this desire is that the body present on stage is actually that of a teenage boy and not that of a perfect wife. However, since the body and the costume of the character are not parted, what is *seen* by the audience and those in the play world is the "body" of a woman. Therefore, desiring this "female" body becomes acceptable and exemplary even as it hides undercurrents of homoeroticism.

Death in the early modern period was a time for community, friends, and family to gather around the dying person and help them find the right path to the afterlife. A

death could be categorized as a good death or a bad death according to how the person died. This was especially important in the death of a woman because of the expectation of piety. There were many rituals and traditions surrounding death so family and friends could cope with grief and “re-focuses attention again on the living” (Stone 206).

Lawrence Stone claims that the response to sickness and death was controlled by four factors: cultural, theological, sociological and pseudo-scientific, the two relating directly to this thesis being cultural and theological. Stone describes the cultural factor as “the traditional treatment of death in the particular class, society and time,” while the theological is described as “the prevailing eschatology about God’s role in determining every event in this world and about the prospects of life after death” (206). The cultural influences were paramount in the construction of death in the early modern period, with elaborate public rituals both at the time of death and at the funeral. The first of these served to “mitigate the fear of death for the dying and the second...separation anxieties and grief among the bereaved” (207). Of the three characters, Cleopatra’s death is the most ritualized. Much like the good and bad deaths Shakespeare’s audience would have been familiar with, and the “last rites” of the Roman Catholic faith, Egyptian culture required certain steps to be taken before death so Osiris would grant passage into the afterlife.⁴ Drawing on his source, Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives of the*

⁴ Osiris, god of the Underworld, was responsible for allowing Egyptians who had lived a good and noble life into the Duat. However, this beautiful afterlife was only available to those who had been buried with the appropriate ceremonies (McDevitt par 7).

Noble Grecians and Romans, Shakespeare emphasizes Egyptian death rituals in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In the other plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, there are also rituals with which Shakespeare's audience would have been familiar. An early modern audience would have readily recognized the rituals surrounding Juliet's first "death" such as the death speech that Juliet makes before taking the vial of potion. The next morning she is believed dead by the nurse and her family, who begins the mourning process. The funeral, flowers, and food that Capulet arranges were (and still are) rituals that help family and friends come together and find strength in each other's company. However, these rituals also had a drawback in the upper levels of early modern society. As the rituals were so opulent and public there was no place for the families and friends to express private grief. These rituals, such as the "funeral procession and the subsequent, often very drunken, funeral feast at the end of the affair" (Stone 208) allowed for the bereaved to focus on something other than the passing of loved one, but it did not allow a time for mourning. In *Othello*, the audience does not observe the mourning process for Desdemona, but Othello performs some of the rituals associated with death before he kills her. The most notable is his demand that she confess her sins, ensuring they are forgiven, so her spirit may go to heaven. An early modern audience would have been familiar with the deathbed confession, as the dying were to be in prayer almost constantly upon their deathbed to ensure none of their sins were left unpardoned (Becker 117-120). Children were also very much part of these rituals and became accustomed to death at a very early age. It was considered normal to have a curiosity of death and wish to observe it from a young age.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra's death is both ritualized and public in its display. Although the act of the death itself takes place in the privacy of the tomb with only her ladies present, Cleopatra designs it, knowing her body will be viewed, as common after the death of a ruler. She expects to be found by Octavius and possibly put on display, as he notes in his last speech of the play (5.2.355-357, 361-363). There are clear connections between Queen Elizabeth I and Cleopatra, both being strong female monarchs, and the scene Cleopatra creates reflects the tomb of Queen Elizabeth I in Westminster Abbey. This is one of the few tombs that does not depict the dead woman in prayer. Instead, Elizabeth is laid out with a lion at all four corners and at the foot of her bed, holding her sceptre and globus cruciger; these symbols representing her royalty instead of her piety. Shakespeare would have known of this effigy.⁵ Juliet's perceived death and actual death also have very public elements. On the day of her perceived death, Juliet is expected to appear as a bride, but is instead displayed as a corpse. This display of death becomes so public that strangers are admitted to her bedside and included amongst the mourners. With Juliet's actual death there is even more of a public spectacle. By the end of the scene, almost all the major characters are on stage along with the watchmen. The text also reveals the public rituals to follow with the description of the monuments the families intend to erect in Romeo and Juliet's honour (*R&J* 5.3.299-302). These edifices are both public and lavish, not allowing for private grief, but showing that the families are mourning in a fashion equal to their social position. Despite the

⁵ Queen Elizabeth was placed there in 1606 and it is believed that *Antony and Cleopatra* was written after that time (Jowett et al. 995).

circumstances of Desdemona's death, her body is also publicly displayed. Although she is murdered in her bedroom, the space becomes public when Emilia alerts others. This display allows for a public reconstruction of Desdemona's character and for her to be reintegrated into the patriarchal world.

In the early modern period, theology was a critical influence on the construction of death. Medicinal methods were primitive and could do relatively little to prevent death due to illness or accident and people generally believed that it was God's will when someone died. Christians particularly worried about the dichotomy in their theology. On one hand, "death was a blessing, a merciful deliverance from the miseries of this world into the comforts of the next; on the other, it was 'a most terrible calamity;' it was the curse of Adam, as a result of whose action 'sin entered the world, and death by sin'" (Stone 209). Christians were in a constant state of worry about where their souls would go in the hereafter and whether their souls were prepared for death or not. Although everyone was expected to prepare their bodies and souls for death, women were expected to prepare differently from men. In her book *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, Lucinda Becker discusses the criteria that had to be fulfilled for a woman to die well. If these criteria were not fulfilled the woman was looked upon as having "died badly." In order to be a "good woman" and "die well," women had to be in a constant state of readiness for death by living "their lives according to a code of conduct" (103). This code of conduct included such aspects as a life of piety, bearing many children, dying in childbirth, staying in prayer upon their deathbed, and creating a nuncupative (oral) will (Becker 103-121). One of the most noted aspects was a dying

woman's willingness to liken herself to a child in order to surrender to God's will.

Although this was a requirement for all, with women this act signified

the changing status of a woman in death, from wife and mother to spiritual virgin and child in Christ. It is as if a woman must begin her life again on the deathbed, following the biblical advice to be born again as a child in Christ, maturing during her wrestling with temptation and pain as she lies dying, in order to proceed, through death to her ultimate and enviable destination as a bride of Christ. (Becker 118)

Women's readiness to accept death with a clear conscience was a demonstration of their piety. They were expected to remain in a state of tranquillity and peace even when in great pain, to approach death meekly and with penitence, and to have total reliance upon God. These aspects, as well as many others, had to be fulfilled in order for a woman to be deemed to have died well.

Women were judged on whether or not they had died well both by their families and from the pulpit as "preachers judged the deceased not only by how well they had died, but how successfully they approached the ideal behaviour of their gender" (Becker 122). This ideal behaviour was commonly decided by the male clergy who performed the funeral ceremony. In the case of a woman "dying well," the male clergy would choose to highlight areas of the woman's life that had made her an ideal woman. If the woman had not died well the clergyman would use her as an example of a fallen woman, highlighting aspects of her life that did not fit the ideal structure. This criticism could be very

damaging to the deceased's family (121-122). However, the woman's family could counteract the denunciation by producing her legacy.

Normally written by a woman to her unborn child, a legacy could act as a written version of a nuncupative (oral) will, and was an acceptable form of written expression for women in the early modern period. The legacies that remain today appear to follow the proper conduct of the time, but some of the writing has undertones of resistance. Two examples of legacies that exemplify this are Elizabeth Joscelyn's *The Mothers Legacie to her Unborn Child* and *The Mothers Blessing* by Dorothy Leigh. Both emphasize the maternal aspect of "dying well" which is understandable considering that the women, fearing they might die in childbirth, were writing to instruct their children. According to Becker, "a woman was sanctified if she died in labour not because she had shown great fortitude, but because she had given her life for the most important function of her existence: increasing her family" (109), and the maternal accomplishments of a woman were often highlighted in her funeral sermons. Aspects such as passing on her religion to the children, the smooth running of the household and the furthering of the family's interests were weighed and measured when a woman passed away. Women not only demonstrated their piety in legacies, but also in their actions on their deathbed. In the case of Lady Magdalen Montague we are told, "There did hang at her bed's feet a silver cross...To it she did very frequently lift her eyes, and sometimes, as she could, her hands, without uttering a word, but with signs of great devotion" (Southern 59). Women also gave moral instruction to their female friends, relatives and children as they surrounded the deathbed.

Elizabeth Joscelyn wrote her *Legacy to Her Unborn Child* in 1622, as she feared dying in childbirth, possibly because she was actively involved at her mother's deathbed when she was only six. Her mother's last words to Elizabeth instructed her to obey her father and maternal grandfather. Sylvia Brown suggests that this event "may very well have helped [Joscelyn] form the resolve to leave her own last words to her unborn child" (93). Brown also states that the common fear of dying in childbirth made "preparing spiritually for the possibility of death ...as much a part of a woman's pregnancy as taking physical care of herself and her unborn child" (91). This places even more significance on the mothers' advice books. Joscelyn's *Legacy to Her Unborn Child* is both instructions to her unborn child and a platform for her death speech. This speech, also referred to as a nuncupative will, was one of the many requirements for a woman to die well. If Joscelyn feared dying in childbirth, she knew she would not be able to make this speech as required. By writing it down in a manner she knew to be acceptable, she was able to give instruction and fulfill this requirement for dying well. One could argue that by leaving her Legacy, Joscelyn is creating her own narrative and not depending on someone else, i.e. the male clergy, to do it for her. However, one must also note that in creating this legacy Joscelyn did not have complete freedom. In her writing she still had to follow the patriarchal model set out for her by society as she had to follow the proper societal conventions for women's writing of the time. Joscelyn also expresses the fears she has about dying and records prayers to God for her safety in some of the chapters. She does this in a respectful manner, but her fear of imminent death is still apparent, writing "[a]fter this frail and miserable life bring me to that blessed life which hath no end for

thy great merit and mercy sake” (Joscelin 114). It is clear Joscelin expected to die in childbirth and was wrestling with her feelings and the societal expectations required of her.

In her legacy, Joscelin recommends that divinity be the primary pursuit of her child and advises her unborn child to observe the Sabbath day, praise God, study His word, avoid the dangers of sin, and keep the commandments. She warns her child against the desire to sin and prays that “thou mayest bee taught theas my instructions when thou art young that this foule sin may be weeded out before it take deep root in thy hart” (Joscelin 117). Joscelin also warns her child against an unnamed sin that everyone must find and overcome. Although she is writing to her unborn child the tone of this section sounds like she is talking about herself. It may have been that the closer Joscelin came to death, the more she considered her past sins and was finding it difficult to overcome them. Although most of the legacy seems to be addressed to a male child, there is one section where Joscelin pointedly addresses the female child she may have. Here, she echoes the patriarchal ideals of her time. Writing about the dangers of the sin of vanity she warns, “if thou bee a daughter I confess thy taske is harder because thou art weaker and thy temptations to this vice greater” (115). She also addresses her daughter by expecting her to follow societal expectations in regards to dress and modesty: “I desire; that you will not set your hart on such fooleries, and you shall see that this modest carriage will win you reputation and love with the wise and virtuous sort” (116). These instructions to a daughter and not a son show the gendering of the instructions mothers were expected to give.

Dorothy Leigh also feared dying in childbirth and, because of this, wrote *The Mothers Blessing* in 1616, a mother's advice book much like Joscelin's. Like Joscelin, Dorothy Leigh endorsed the ideal of the submissive woman but also challenged these ideas by writing and criticising preachers. Brown states, "if the only acceptable face of the Stuart woman-in-print was pious, meek, and self-effacing, then Dorothy Leigh ought not to have been the oft-reprinted author that she was" (3). In fact, *The Mothers Blessing* is written in the style of a sermon and her tone is closely related to that of the Protestant clergy of the time as Leigh passes her wishes on to her sons and instructs them in becoming a pastor:

Methinks if I were a man and a preacher of God's word, as (I hope) some of you shall be, and I pray God for Christ's sake, you may, I surely persuade myself, that through God's grace I should bring many to pray rightly, which now pray unadvisedly or not at all. (Leigh 48)

Leigh spends the first few chapters on specific instruction to her sons, but then branches off to give a sermon for a general audience on the importance and proper method of prayer. She also outlines some of the requirements for dying well and provides Biblical references. She tells her children not to fear death as doing so would diminish their chances of dying well. Leigh, much like Joscelin, also outlines the importance of prayer and avoiding sin.

There were also the politics and fear of a strong woman dying and whether or not her death should be considered a good or bad death. Popular ballads and plays of the period express fear of women crossing the gender divide and going into battle, either at

the side of their husbands or to fight (Becker 115). Even though these “warrior-like women” (115) were considered more masculine than feminine, their deaths were still regarded as “good,” despite being violent and bloody. Equally, a death would be considered “good” if the women lacked time to prepare for death because they were protecting someone “more worthy” (i.e. a parent or child). One such example is the death of a daughter protecting her father. The woman jumped into harm’s way to save her father and was beaten to death. By virtue of saving a life more valuable than her own, she was deemed to have “died well” (115). Normally, for a woman to die well she would have to prepare far in advance, but, in extraordinary circumstances these aspects could be overlooked. Although Cleopatra and Desdemona do not die in battle, both follow their husbands to the battlefield which is indicative of them being “warrior-like women” and possibly contributes to the perceptions of them dying well; although in the play world these actions are questioned as to how the women fit into these bloody worlds. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra remarks on Enobarbus’s feelings about her being present in battle, a feeling confirmed when she pulls her ships and strands Antony, and Othello begs the Duke for Desdemona’s safe keeping while he is at war.⁶

The other side of “dying well” was the possibility of “dying badly” which happened if a woman died in “undesirable circumstances, such as the execution of criminals, sudden deaths, suicides, [or if the woman was] mean or querulous” (Becker 70). However, even a woman who was deemed to have died badly by the clergy or her family could have her reputation redeemed later. Such was the case of Katherine

⁶ See *Antony and Cleopatra* 3.7.3-4 and *Othello* 1.3.231-237.

Brettergh who was accused of being the driving force behind “her husband’s zealous stand against Catholicism” (71). Although her reputation was tainted for a while after her death, supporters created “two funeral sermons, both with eulogies attesting to her good death” (71). Unless it was an unusual case, such as the accusation of blasphemy, the clergy would not normally write a “good death” as bad, but any death, if presented the right way, could be seen as a good death. However, as the focus was on women who died well to serve as an example for other women, there is comparatively little documentation on women who died badly. The records available, in the form of popular ballads and pamphlets, show the death of murderesses or condemned criminals to deter other women from performing these ‘hellish acts’:

‘Tis but a few years since Woman near Goodmans-fields was made
exemplary, by being burnt to Death for killing her husband: ‘Tis strange if
not the Laws of God or Nature, yet that the severity of the punishment
inflicted in such cases by the Law should not deter all women from such
traitorous attempts. (Martin 7)

These pamphlets highlight the woman going against the laws of God and nature; thus, her actions are evil and blasphemous. As Becker points out, these stories of evil women dying badly were used to control women. She writes, “The management of executions led to a dichotomy whereby women had to die badly, because of their crimes, but they were also, in a sense dying well, by serving the purpose required of them by their advisors and confessors” (96). A woman could die badly but still be used as an example of “what not to do” so that other women would not be tempted to follow in her footsteps of adultery,

speaking against her superiors, or murdering her husband. As the woman's death then provided moral instruction, it could be viewed as a good death, even though none of the traditional requirements were met.

Death could also be used as a punishment for unacceptable behaviour. Becker notes, the woman "must have overstepped the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour in a way that was possible for many women, and her repentance, or her horrible death, must be managed and as accessible to the public as possible" (96). The crimes, also referred to as sins because of the connection between church and state, were gendered. A woman's crimes could include emotional outbursts, irrationality, loose sexuality (connected with loose speech), and the "breaking of the social mores surrounding the domestic order" (Becker 96). In the plays, Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra are accused of unacceptable behaviour, and their deaths can be viewed as a punishment for these behaviours. Juliet commits the crime of disobeying her parents and, since she pursued her love affair with Romeo against the advice of parents and counsellors, her death can be seen as a direct result of her disobedience. With her death she pays the punishment for this crime and is accepted as Romeo's bride. Much like Juliet, Desdemona commits a crime against her father by stealing away with Othello. This causes Othello to distrust her and opens his mind to Iago's scheming. Once Othello sees her as an adulterous wife, he must restore his own honour and reputation by making Desdemona pay for her "sin" through her death. Cleopatra's death is a little different from the other characters because of her awareness that she is going to be punished for defying the norms set by the Western (Roman) gaze. She stages her own death rather than

be killed or humiliated by Octavius. In doing so, she defies what the Western gaze, as embodied in Octavius, considers appropriate for a woman. However, Cleopatra is also what Octavius fears the most, a powerful, dark, sexually immoral woman. It is for these “sins” (from the Western perspective) that she must be punished by death. In other words, these female characters die badly because they speak out, disobey or are sexually vivacious. Yet, as public, i.e. performed, examples of death as punishment, these become good deaths as the dying/dead woman’s bodies become literally “objectified” and are placed into the male gaze and the patriarchal order.

The worst sin of the early modern period related to death was suicide. In fact, “most early modern commentators regarded suicide . . . as a desperate, violent act that ran against God’s will” (Roberts 113). Becker points out that “suicide was the ultimate Early Modern bad death” (88). Suicide was considered self-murder and both the act and the person performing it were condemned at all levels of society. One reason suicide was so easily condemned is because it was believed to be a result of despair, which was akin to blasphemy. Due to the “stigma and legal penalties attached to an Early Modern suicide” (88), it was a common practice for a family to go to great lengths to avoid the accusation of a family member committing suicide, and this has led to a lack of sources depicting suicide in the period. Women, though, were less likely to commit suicide than men because of the deathbed practices surrounding women’s death.⁷

⁷ The ratio of male to female suicides quoted by Becker is 5.2:1 (88).

In the early modern period the fashioning of a woman's death into a narrative for churchgoers, playgoers or the everyday readership of the broadside pamphlets, gives language the power to construct a woman's identity and determine how she is perceived. Shakespeare shows this time and time again with Desdemona, Juliet and Cleopatra, but complicates the distinction between good and bad deaths. In each case, Shakespeare creates a narrative surrounding the female character's death but then revises that narrative as a result of the death itself. However, while many narratives may be created about a character (or an actual woman in the case of Joscelyn or Leigh), those narratives become more focused following death, as in the case of Desdemona and Juliet, when all secrets—theirs and others—are revealed. This analysis allows us to return to Butler's theories on language and, through that, Lacan's theory of the male gaze. Language constructs the gaze, as shown when Othello's gaze is guided by Iago's language and Romeo's gaze is directed through his own Petrarchan speech. By looking at examples of early modern women writing from their death beds and how "good" and "bad" deaths were perceived, it is possible to understand the connections between language, the body and the gaze in Shakespeare's representation of the deaths of these three female characters.

Chapter One

“My dismal scene I needs must act alone.” Juliet: Doubly Dead in the Gaze

The Lacanian male gaze figures largely in the underlying motifs present in *Romeo and Juliet*; the first play to be analysed in this thesis. Not only do the situations presented in the play exemplify this gaze, but the characters themselves discuss this phenomenon. In fact, Benvolio and Mercutio show their awareness of the male gaze in 3.1:

Benvolio: All eyes gaze upon us.

Mercutio: Men’s eyes were made to look and let them gaze. (3.1.50-51)⁸

Although this quotation focuses on one type of gaze (male-male), the language of the play often directs the male gaze onto Juliet (male-female) and attempts to shape her character. Juliet is an interesting character and worthy of analysis in this study of gaze, language, and death because, of all Shakespeare’s female characters, she is the only one whose death is staged twice. This double death is only part of the equation though; Juliet is also looked upon by the male gaze and shaped via its language throughout the play. This is evident in 1.3, 2.2, 4.3, 4.5 and 5.3; however, the gaze in these scenes takes many different forms. In 1.3, Lady Capulet and Juliet’s Nurse mimic the male gaze; in 2.2, Romeo gazes on Juliet with the gaze of a courtly male lover on his mistress; and in 4.3, while Juliet is alone onstage, she is still in the male gaze of the audience. In 4.5, Juliet’s family and fiancé gaze upon her apparently dead body. In 5.3, first, her lover perceives

⁸ All quotes from *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet: Oxford School Shakespeare*. Ed. Roma Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 unless otherwise stated.

her body as dead and uses language to describe her that bears many parallels to 2.2. Then Juliet's dead body "newly killed" is gazed upon by her family, the people, and authorities of Verona. These characters shape Juliet's character and show their desire for her through their language and gaze. How Juliet fits into the gaze, and how she is constructed as a character, allows the audience to see the layers of gendered constructs Shakespeare is using. If her character is traced through the play, it is apparent that Juliet, not Romeo, initiates all the major decisions in their relationship, and her death is the culmination of the masculine role she assumes. Her masculine role skews how Juliet is analysed within the gaze as she uses the male gaze in relation to Romeo. This is similar to the gendered role reversal in *Antony and Cleopatra* to be discussed in chapter three.

The first clear example of the male gaze in *Romeo and Juliet* comes not from the male but rather the female characters. Not only men can place the male gaze on Juliet, but women are also steeped in the tradition of the male gaze and know how it shapes their bodies; they then shape each other with this gaze. This phenomenon is described by Lacan as mimicry and he explains it in terms of how it is used in nature. One example is when insects or butterflies use mimicry to fool their predators; a predator may gaze on them, but does not see them. Lacan describes mimicry as "not only the very form of the imitated body, but its relation to the environment, from which it has to be distinguished or, on the contrary, in which it has to merge" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 73). In *Romeo and Juliet* this imitated body, which must blend with its environment or what is acceptable, is shown in 1.3, when Juliet's mother and Nurse mimic Lord Capulet's gaze and direct Juliet on how she should approach marriage.

Since Juliet's marriage to Paris is most advantageous for Lord Capulet, it is his gaze that shapes the scene; he is cast in the role of the predator. By mimicking this gaze, Lady Capulet and the Nurse ensure that they are not at risk of attracting his attention. Although Lacan classifies mimicry into three categories, camouflage, intimidation and travesty, camouflage is the most readily used defence against the gaze. The object of the gaze is able to hide behind a mask that distracts the gaze so "it is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 99). By choosing areas that will help them to blend the best and talking about their own experiences of marriage, Lady Capulet and the Nurse remain unnoticed by Lord Capulet.

In contrast, intimidation is involuntary in the sense that it is forced upon the prey as a means of survival. This intimidation is seen in *Romeo and Juliet* in 3.5 when Capulet intimidates Juliet into accepting marriage to Paris: "Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch! / I tell thee what: get thee to church a'Thursday, / Or never after look me in the face" (3.5.160-162). At first Juliet attempts to resist this gaze and the way it shapes her: "Cast me not away! / Delay this marriage for a month, a week, / Or if you do not, make the bridal bed / In the dim monument where Tybalt lies" (3.5.198-201). However, the intimidation of the male gaze is then adopted by Lady Capulet in her attempt to force Juliet to marry Paris: "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" (3.5.202-203). Even the Nurse, Juliet's confidante, and privy to her marriage to Romeo, persuades her to marry Paris: "I think it best you married with the County / [...] For it excels your first, or if it did not, / Your first is dead,

or 'twere as good he were / As living here are you no use to him" (3.5.217,223-225). This causes Juliet to rely on mimicry (specifically disguise and masquerade) by appearing to accept the marriage to Paris: "Thou has comforted me marvellous much / Go in and tell my lady I am gone, / Having displeas'd my father, to Lawrence' cell, / To make confession and to be absolv'd" (3.5.230-233). This mimicry keeps Juliet safe from her father's wrath and the intimidation of her mother and Nurse. She also thinks it will allow her to achieve her own desire. Once these characters leave and the male gaze is removed from the stage, Juliet reveals her true feelings to the audience, especially about her nurse:

Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!

Is it more since to wish me foresworn,

Or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue

Which she hath prais'd him with above compare...

I'll to the Friar to know his remedy;

If all else fails, myself have power to die. (3.5.235-238, 241-242)

Juliet is shaken by the Nurse's disloyalty and turns away from her as a confidant. She goes to the Friar for help because he is the only one she feels she can trust. If he has no satisfactory solution, she is resolved to take matters into her own hands and die if necessary.

To an early modern audience, the death Juliet mentions would be related to sexuality, and this sexuality figures into the final classification of mimicry: travesty. According to Lacan, the most important aspect "in the case of travesty, [is that] a certain sexual finality is intended" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 100),

meaning that the subject pursues a sexual aim with respect to the object of gaze. This aim is reached through feminine and masculine identities being mediated through a mask of sorts, one that may hide one part of the body, but leave another exposed. When the male gaze is filtered through this mask, the sexual aim produced by the male is refocused away from the original target and directed to another. Travesty can therefore be considered a lure for the gaze that causes the gazing subject to break up “in an extraordinary way, between its being and its semblance, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the Other” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 107). Lacan also notes that the object of the gaze may attempt to control the gaze through masquerade and camouflage, but that the effects of this lure are not always under the object’s control (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 99-103). The female as the object of the male gaze is protected by the mask in a sense, but is left vulnerable as she can only see and mimic what the male shows her (Kelly 208). This travesty of the gaze, as described by Lacan, is present very early in *Romeo and Juliet* and happens even before Romeo meets Juliet. The sexual aim of the male gaze is mentioned by Mercutio in 1.4 as he advises Romeo on his quest for Rosalind. Mercutio’s counsel to Romeo is “If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down” (1.4.27-28). This advice suggests that the only way Romeo will be able to shift his gaze from Rosalind is through sexual penetration. Mercutio’s view is that there are no consequences for Romeo, except satisfied lust and a lost erection. As a result, prior to seeing Juliet, Romeo also connects satisfied lust with his gaze: “He that hath the steerage of my course / Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen” (1.4.112-113).

Lacan argues that travesty results from “all kinds of effects that are essentially disguise, masquerade” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 100), which is important to consider when thinking about the camouflage of mimicry adopted by Lady Capulet and the Nurse in 1.3. Here, they watch Juliet to ensure that she is fulfilling the proper role of a young aristocratic lady of the time. Ideal behaviour would include the following:⁹

Women were taught to keep their eyes downcast; timidity was encouraged and the blush considered a sign of reverence and maidenly virtue. Women were also taught not to perceive the physical proximity of others as an intrusion. Adult women, even those of high status, were expected to endure the approach of others, and even to endure disciplinary violence enacted upon their bodies. They were discouraged from physical resistance to aggressive seduction or even sexual coercion. (Low 6)

Young ladies would also be trained to gaze (under lowered eyelids) upon eligible bachelors with the hopes of an advantageous marriage. Lady Capulet suggests that Juliet is already exceeding the appropriate age for marriage since younger women are already wives and mothers: “Younger than you, / Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, / Are made already mothers” (1.3.70-72). Lady Capulet also wishes to direct Juliet’s gaze to the merits of the parentally approved suitor by describing him as “the *valiant* Paris” (emphasis added). Juliet’s gaze is compromised because she is instructed in exactly what

⁹ Appropriate behaviour for women was outlined in conduct books such as Richard Brathwait’s *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), which included information on chastity, obedience, and the appropriate behaviour of a young aristocratic lady, wife and mother.

to gaze at, how it should be seen, and what is acceptable according to the mimicry of Lady Capulet.

Lady Capulet not only mimics her husband's male gaze, but she wants Juliet to do the same:

This night you shall behold him at our feast;
 Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face,
 And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;
 Examine every married lineament,
 And see how one another lends content;
 And what obscur'd in this fair volume lies
 Find written in the margent of his eyes.
 This precious book of love, this unbound lover
 To beautify him, only lacks a cover...
 So shall you share all that he doth possess
 By having him, making yourself no less. (1.3.80-95)

This description of how Juliet should view Paris focuses almost entirely on the surface. Lady Capulet first draws attention to Paris's handsome face. Seemingly Paris is very pleasing to look at: "such a man / As all the world--Why, he's a man of wax" (1.3.76-77); however, in the pursuit of a husband for her only daughter it may have been more suitable for Lady Capulet to focus Juliet's attention on his accomplishments or character. Lady Capulet then reinforces Juliet's gaze on Paris's physique as she asks her daughter to "examine every married lineament" (84) and refers to him as "this fair volume" (86). The

only time Lady Capulet directs Juliet's gaze beyond the physical is when she suggests that Paris's almost perfect appearance may hide other qualities, though Juliet can also find these "written in the margent of his eyes" (87). In the early modern period the eyes were considered the "windows of the soul" (Porter viii). Lady Capulet is advising Juliet to look beyond Paris's physical traits through these "windows"; however, this is an area that could be easily masked by Paris. Even in referring to Juliet's relationship to Paris, Lady Capulet focuses on how Juliet will beautify Paris's appearance: "This precious book of love, / this unbound lover, / To beautify him, only lacks a cover" (1.3.88-89). She says nothing to encourage Juliet to probe Paris's intentions, as Juliet does Romeo's in 2.2, because these intentions are known and approved by Capulet's gaze. Lady Capulet only describes how handsome Paris is and that the only thing missing from his life is a wife; something that Lady Capulet, informed by her husband's gaze, believes Juliet can remedy.

Unconventionally, Lady Capulet suggests that Juliet will act as Paris's cover in the marriage. The traditional belief was that a woman would be covered by marriage, as in the idea of "femme covert," which meant that "under the common law fiction of coverture...a wife's legal identity was covered by her husband" (Erickson 3). Lady Capulet also begins the bawdy humour with the double meaning of "By having him, you make yourself no less" (1.3.95), referring to his wealth, position and possible children. The nurse immediately picks up on this and provides plenty of base humour. She copies the sexual humour of her late husband by punning on Lady Capulet's words, saying, "No less! Nay, bigger women grow by men" (1.3.96), referring to the anticipated outcome of

sexual intercourse in marriage, a wife pregnant with future heirs to continue the male line. Although the Nurse is mimicking her husband, her sexual humour is similar to that of Mercutio, and of Gregory and Samson in 1.1 who make clear that women are seen as sexual objects in the male gaze. The Nurse describes how her husband saw Juliet as a child (l. 40-49, 51-58) and what he said to the young Juliet: “Dost thou fall upon thy face? / Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit” (1.3.42-43). The Nurse is not purposely adopting the male gaze of her husband, but rather it has been engrained in her subconscious. At the end of the scene, the Nurse offers a benediction of sorts to Juliet by telling her to “Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days” (1.3.106) again suggesting that Juliet will find happiness fulfilling hers and her husband’s sexual desires. This suggests that Juliet will affirm the male gaze on her as a sexual object by adopting a further form of mimicry in her desire, perhaps even leading to sexual travesty. This theme is returned to many times during the play, especially regarding the sexualization of Juliet after her perceived death and the sexuality surrounding her actual death as she attempts to kiss poison from Romeo’s lips and then falls on a dagger, a symbol of male sexual penetration.

While the Nurse’s sexual puns are very similar to Mercutio’s dialogue in 2.2: “O Romeo, that she were, O that she were/ An open-arse, thou a pop’rin pear” (2.2.37-38), when Mercutio makes such puns in front of the Nurse in 2.4, she considers it unacceptable:

Mercutio: [T]he bawdy hand of the dial is / now upon the prick of noon.

Nurse: Out upon you, what a man are you?” (2.4.101-103)

In male company, bawdy puns are acceptable, but in mixed company they are offensive because of the connotations attached to them. Richard Brathwait makes it very clear that women should not engage in conversation with those who are immodest or strangers:

[T]o entre into much discourse of familiarity with strangers, argues lightnesse or indiscretion: what is spoken of Maids, may bee properly applyed by an usefull consequence to all women: They should be seene, and not heard. (Brathwait 293)

In mixed company, the Nurse is subject to the male gaze, and a certain decorum is expected from her. While she breaks Brathwait's rules by conversing with immodest strangers, she attempts to mimic the proper feminine behaviour by feigning outrage at Mercutio's bawdy puns though the audience knows the Nurse's true feeling about this type of humour. However, it is not necessary to have bawdy humour to indicate the presence of the male gaze.

In 2.2, the balcony scene, there is none of the earlier bawdiness of Mercutio or the Nurse, but the male gaze of Romeo on Juliet is still clearly seen. This is a classic example of the Lacanian male gaze because Juliet seems unaware she is in Romeo's gaze for the first 49 lines of the scene. Even though Juliet is unaware of this gaze, Lacan argues that a woman is always aware of the male gaze on her, and her language and her body movements are shaped by the knowledge that this gaze exists. In return, this knowledge shapes how the woman is seen. Romeo uses Petrarchian language to shape Juliet into the ideal woman: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east and Juliet is the sun" (2.2. 2-3). Romeo continues drawing on Petrarchan courtly love

traditions and compares Juliet's beauty to different elements, suggesting that she is even more perfect than the goddess of chastity, Diana, associated with the moon: "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, / Who is already sick and pale with grief / That thou her maid, art far more fair then she" (2.2. 4-6).¹⁰ This sentiment is also present in Petrarch's sonnets to Laura, "When through my eyes the image of my lady / enters my heart's depths, she banishes all others" (Sonnet 94 1.1-2), the source Shakespeare most likely used.

After discovering Romeo's presence, Juliet fails to behave like a pampered lady on the pedestal. She does not respond to Romeo's romantic poetry in the manner of the heroines of courtly love who are silent but "look shyly, as befits a maiden" (Schultz 21). Instead, Juliet quotes facts and tries to make Romeo aware of the reality of the situation by questioning him on particulars. He answers with romantic imagery:

Juliet: How cam'st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,

And the place death [...]

Romeo: With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,

For stony limits cannot hold love out. (2.2.62-64,66-67)

Juliet is not Petrarch's silent Laura or a blushing maid; she is pleased by Romeo's presence and is flattered by how he describes her, but still keeps her wits and is very

¹⁰ Shulz notes the elements of the traditional Petrarchan blazon in Chretien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal* (1181), who "gives his heroine the conventional treatment: first her clothes are praised, then her blond hair...her smooth white forehead, her eyebrows, bright eyes, straight nose, and rosy complexion" (20).

aware of the danger his presence affords both of them. Romeo fails to shape her language and her gaze, and Juliet remains grounded in reality and does not abandon herself to his romantic fancies.¹¹ Romeo tries to cast himself as the hero of a courtly love poem, gazing upon his lady on a high balcony, but Juliet will have none of this and addresses Romeo as an equal, questioning his motives instead of accepting his love blindly: Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay'; / And I will take thy word; yet if thou swear'st / Thou mayst prove false" (2.2.90-92).¹² She will not believe his language because she claims it may simply be a performance.

Juliet also resists the conventions of courtly love literature by pointing out the haste and rashness of the situation and expressing her discomfort with it:

Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight,
It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,
Too light lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' (2.2.116-120)

Juliet is showing that she does not trust Romeo's gaze or language, and attempts to represent the situation in her own language; pointing out that she is uncomfortable with the rapid pace of their relationship. However, attempting to slow down the situation with

¹¹ Juliet does not respond as the typical ingénue of early modern drama, unlike Clorin in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609): "Oh you sons of earth, / You only brood, unto whose happy birth / Virtue was given, holding more of nature / Than man, her first-born and most perfect creature / Let me adore you" (3.2.3-7).

¹² Romeo and Juliet stand in contrast to Eneas and Lavinia in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman* (1170-85). Lavinia is the typical lady of courtly literature, looking modestly at Eneas and never speaking.

her language seems futile as Romeo dismisses these attempts and uses his own language to fulfill his agenda.

The language that Romeo uses throughout 2.2 demonstrates his desire for Juliet. Butler defines this desire as “that which is denied” (188). Lacan explains desire to be

situated in dependence on demand—which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminable, which is the condition of both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, an element that is called desire. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 154)

Romeo desires Juliet because she is denied to him. This denial affects Romeo in three ways; first he is denied access to her because of the feud between her family and his through which she becomes the “forbidden fruit.” She is that much more attractive to Romeo because he cannot marry her. Second, Juliet’s body is denied to Romeo because of where she is. Being placed in the “heavens” (the balcony) Romeo may only gaze upon her but is unable to reach her. Juliet’s elevated position on the balcony hearkens back to the metaphysical position in the courtly love tradition when the lover places the beloved on a pedestal. Third, Juliet is denied to Romeo because of the societal demand that women remain chaste. Juliet may therefore be considered the external embodiment of the *objet petit a* in Lacan’s theory of desire: she is denied to Romeo, which makes him desire her all the more. Lacan explains this theory of the *objet petit a* as

One lack is superimposed upon the other. The dialectic of the objects of desire, in so far as it creates the link between the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other...this dialectic now passes through the fact that the desire is not replied to directly. It is a lack engendered from the previous time that serves to reply to the lack raised by the following time. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 215)

What this means is that there is only one *objective* of desire: *the objet petit a*. However, the *objet petit a* is not the *object* of the desire, but rather the *cause* of desire through intrinsic lack. Therefore, the *objet petit a* is indefinable since it is in a position of ever changing flux (Evans 37). Juliet represents the external embodiment of the *objet petit a* Romeo lacks, because a beloved object—a woman to adore—is integral to his concept of himself as a courtly lover. If he lacks a woman to adore he cannot be a courtly lover.

Early in the play Romeo bemoans that Rosalind does not love him: “She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow / Do I live dead, that live to tell it now” (1.1.216-217). Romeo’s desire for Rosalind results from her denial and his lack of a mistress, thus making her representative of an *objet petit a*. However, when Romeo spies Juliet, she replaces Rosalind as the denial—and therefore his desire—is even greater to him because of the family feud. This is because “The *objet a* is not the [sexual] drive’s *object*, but the *cause of the desire*” (Grosz 75). The *objet petit a* is not fixed; it is in a constant state of flux. Lacan notes, “desire is constantly running up against a limit which, paradoxically, is what sustains the desire” (*Ecrits* 311). Because Romeo is told he cannot have Juliet, he desires her all the more; thus she becomes the reflection of his *objet petit a* for the

moment. Romeo expresses his knowledge that Juliet is out of his reach by placing her in the heavens in his poetry:

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night. (2.2.19-22)

Nonetheless, Romeo expects Juliet to be his because he has heard her declare that she would give her all for him. He also claims that Juliet already belongs to him; she just doesn't know it: "It is my lady, O it is my love: / O that she knew she were! (2.2.10-11). Romeo's gaze therefore traps Juliet into being with Romeo because he has already claimed her. In this way, Romeo attempts to shape Juliet into the traditional courtly lady placed on a pedestal, whose love is unattainable, while Juliet resists this construction by speaking to him and pointing out the danger of the situation. Juliet also notes the problem with Romeo's metaphorical construction of her with and tries to ground Romeo in reality with her language.

Juliet's language also contributes to shaping Romeo's gaze on her and her gaze on him. Juliet wishes to separate the gazed-upon subject (Romeo) from the language label (Montague) which holds a wealth of meaning and family ties. She feels that if she can do this then the object of her gaze (Romeo) would be attainable. However, in a patriarchal society she does not have the agency or the voice to do this. Juliet can say whatever she wants, but her language has no power to change reality. She first suggests that Romeo "deny thy father and refuse thy name" (2.2.34), but because Juliet does not have the

power to shape Romeo through her gaze she turns her gaze upon herself, an element she believes she can control: “If thou wilt not, be but sworn my love / And I’ll no longer be a Capulet” (2.2.35-36). However, the name change is still out of her control because she cannot shape her father through her gaze. It is necessary for Juliet to either change her father’s gaze so that he approves the marriage (which is impossible considering Juliet’s object position), or doff her own name which is again impossible because she is under the rule of the father until he approves a marriage for her. Aware of her lack of power over the gaze and language, she returns to musing about what Romeo can do since he seems to have control of the gaze and language because of his gender:

Tis but thy name that is my enemy,
 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
 What’s Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,
 Nor arm nor face, nor any other part
 Belonging to a man [...] Romeo doff thy name,
 And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
 Take all myself. (2.2.38-42, 47-49)

Here Juliet speaks “of his name as a piece of clothing that can be removed...something physical, external and easily disposed of” (Leggatt 33) and offers herself as a trade for the name Montague. Juliet’s offer emboldens Romeo and prompts him to speak. The language used by both Romeo and Juliet shapes Romeo’s gaze so that he believes (correctly) that she will invite his attention. Language also shapes Juliet’s gaze to see Romeo not only in relation to his family name, but also as an independent being,

unattainable and thus desirable, an embodiment of her *objet petit a*. Juliet, though, is trapped between two gazes: Romeo's and her father's. If she mimics her father's gaze, she would see Romeo as the enemy; if she mimics Romeo's gaze she would see him as desirable but unattainable. Neither gaze allows her to make her own choice, but shapes her gaze and language, forcing her to mimic one or the other.

In Juliet's preparation for her feigned death she chooses not to mimic either gaze but bans everyone from her chamber so that she may perform this rite alone. This is one of only two times that she is free of the onstage male gaze, though she is still very much in the eye of the audience. She almost invites the mimicked male gaze back when she calls her Nurse but then decides there can be no witness to her "death:" "Nurse!--What should she do here? / My dismal scene I needs must act alone" (4.3.18-19). The Nurse's only purpose would be to gaze upon the "dying" Juliet or to stop her from performing her death, making Juliet once again conform to the male gaze—and her father's wishes by marrying Paris in the morning. By escaping the male gaze of the characters, Juliet can control what she does. Even though the audience's predominantly male gaze is still present, it can only disapprove or sexualize her actions; it cannot change them. The audience's gaze on Juliet is further complicated by the mimicked male gaze of the female audience members as they may have "had a special sensitivity to, and perhaps a special preference for, pathetic plots and situations" (Levin 171), thus making them sympathetic to Juliet's plight. It was also believed that women in the audience were to learn from the diversions on stage (Levin 170). The action of the play would encourage women to emulate pure and noble characters and learn from the punishment of the unchaste and

wanton women.¹³ Juliet embodies both positive and negative characteristics, which leads to a type of double gaze on her. Although she is a good lady of gentle upbringing, Juliet breaks a taboo by marrying against her father's wishes—and consummating that marriage—and by embracing her death. To avoid this double gaze, all the other characters are banned from the stage.

Juliet's feigned death fulfils the requirements of a "good death" much better than her actual death. She is able to give a "death speech" much like Cleopatra but, unlike the Egyptian queen, Juliet expresses her fears and does not ask for forgiveness or have anyone with her. Her death is not the usual social event: "The deathbed scene that is described is usually a crowded place, the dying woman surrounded by friends and family, supporting her in her last days and preparing to give their testimony in her memory" (Becker 117). Juliet, on the other hand, is alone on a deserted stage, her only companions being the bottle of sleeping potion and her dagger (foreshadowing her actual death at the end of the play). In her preparation for death she expresses her fear of what will happen to her: "I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins / That almost freezes up the heat of life" (4.3.15-16). She is also afraid that if she only falls asleep and wakes in the morning she will have to marry Paris. She is resolute that this will not happen and places

¹³ Thomas Heywood, in his book *An Apology for Actors* (1612), states that good women would gaze upon the noble heroines in the plays and be "encouraged in their vertues" and that others were to see how they were "unchaste and by us shewed their errors (Heywood, *Third Section* 9).

a dagger at her side to end her life if necessary: “No, no, this shall forbid it; lie thou there. *Laying down her dagger*” (4.3.23).¹⁴

Juliet also fears that the poison will work too well and that Friar Lawrence has designs to kill her to cover up the fact that he married her and Romeo without their parents’ permission. She dismisses this fear, however, by reassuring herself that the Friar “hath still been tried a holy man” (4.3.29). Her next fear is her greatest: “How if, when I am laid into the tomb, / I wake before the time that Romeo/ come to redeem me?” (4.3.30-32). Juliet questions whether she will suffocate in the vault because it is sealed and has no air coming in (33-25); she wonders what horrors she will see if she wakes surrounded by her dead relatives including her newly dead cousin, Tybalt (39-43), and fears she may be visited by the spirits of her ancestors (45-48). Juliet nearly goes mad just contemplating these issues, so her mind turns to the possibility of actually going mad if she wakes and experiences all this: “Envioned with all these hideous fears, / And madly play with my forefather’ joints, / And pluck the mangl’d Tybalt from his shroud” (4.3.50-52). She imagines that she might “In this rage, with some great kinsman’s bone, / As with a club, dash out my desp’rate brains?” (4.3.53-54). At this point Juliet has worked herself into such a frenzy that she hallucinates and believes she sees Tybalt’s ghost coming to kill Romeo in revenge. It is this vision that pushes Juliet to take the poison as she commands her cousin and cries out to her lover three times as if saying an

¹⁴ This action emphasizes Juliet’s decisiveness and strength in a difficult situation as shown before in the balcony scene, “If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow” (2.2.143-144) and is echoed later in her actual death scene: “Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief. O happy dagger, / This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die”(5.3.169-170).

incantation: “Stay, Tybalt, stay! / Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here’s drink--I drink to thee” (4.3.57-58). This rejection of Tybalt and demand for Romeo shows Juliet’s rejection of her father’s language and gaze and an acceptance of Romeo’s language and gaze. The scene ends with Juliet falling amongst the bed curtains, away from the male gaze, until her Nurse discovers her.

Juliet’s performed death is, like Cleopatra’s death, simultaneously the ultimate rejection of, and a complete submission to, the male gaze. What is to Juliet and Cleopatra an act of rebellion and escape becomes an act of submission to the patriarchal society and its demands upon their female bodies. Juliet sees her feigned death as a means of rebellion and escape, but her actual death can be viewed as the means by which she is punished for her rebellion. Nonetheless, her actual death is also the catalyst that leads her to be accepted by society. Juliet’s deaths are also interesting because of their positive outcomes. Her feigned death not only sends her father into mourning and expressing his desire for his lost child: “Alack, my child is dead / And with my child my joys are buried” (4.5.63-64), but it also gives her freedom from her impending marriage to Paris. Her actual death in act five appears to end the strife between the Capulets and the Montagues.

Following her feigned death, Juliet’s family mourn the loss of their daughter even as the male gaze continues to sexualize Juliet in death. Speaking to Paris, Capulet declares,

Death has lain with thy wife. There she lies

Flower as she was, deflowered by him.

Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir. (4.5.36-38)

David Thatcher writes, “When Capulet tells Paris that Death has beaten him to Juliet's deflowering [...] he is envisioning death as an unmannerly interloper or intruder, a claim-jumper, a rapist, defrauding him and Paris (the kinsman of Prince Escalus) of their patriarchal rights rather than Juliet of her life” (46). Capulet personifies Death as a hasty lover who, like Romeo, has had sexual intercourse with Juliet prior to her planned marriage to Paris, and also as a murderer: “Despis'd, distressed, hated, martyr'd killed! / Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now / To murder, murder our solemnity” (4.5.59-61). Capulet seems intent to place the blame on Death as a sexualized grim reaper rather than taking any responsibility for Juliet's death.

Capulet sees Juliet in a very negative light when she refuses to marry Paris in 3.5, and tells her, “[F]ettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next, / To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church, / Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither” (3.5.153-155). His gaze, however, becomes positive the moment Capulet finds out she is dead; he accepts Death as Juliet's bridegroom and heir because the situation is out of his control. Capulet's wish for a living daughter reflects Butler's view of desire as “always linked with a project of impossible recovery” (193). Juliet is therefore an embodiment of unattainable desire—of *objet petit a* for Capulet as well as for Romeo. When Juliet is alive, Lord Capulet desires a silent, obedient daughter who will bend to his wishes, this is the embodiment of his *objet petit a*. However, when he achieves silence and a form of obedience through Juliet's “death,” he no longer wants this but now desires a living daughter, demonstrating how the *objet petit a* is always in flux. Lacan explains this as “I love you, but because

inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the *objet petit a*—I mutilate you” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 268). Once Lord Capulet has this mutilated body, in the form of the “dead” Juliet, he desires the living, un-mutilated Juliet once again.

In the tomb, Juliet is once again the subject of the male gaze with Romeo who, like her father, praises her in death, “Ah, dear Juliet, / Why art thou so fair? [...] / Eyes look your last!” (5.3.101-102,112). With this last line, he not only directs his own gaze on Juliet, but also the audience’s gaze. It is in this scene that Juliet is in the male gaze the longest. Romeo’s gaze rests on the apparently dead Juliet, while the audience knows they are gazing at the sleeping Juliet. Romeo shows his desire for the dead Juliet in his language:

O my love, my wife,
 Death, that hath suck’d the honey of thy breath,
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
 Thou art not conquer’d. (5.3.91-94)

Romeo’s desire for the “dead” Juliet can be paralleled to the desire Othello shows for the sleeping Desdemona. Although Romeo’s love never turns to hate, he desires Juliet when he sees her in a state of silent submission to death. She is fulfilling the role of the ideal woman, silent and open to being gazed upon.

While Juliet appears to be the image of the ideal woman in death, the means by which she and Romeo die challenge such gendered constructs. Romeo’s death is by poison, a traditionally female death. It was thought that dying by poison was easier and

therefore a more feminine method of suicide; in fact, “men were *never* consistently linked to poisoning” (McMahon 118). Juliet, however, dies by very masculine means; she stabs herself. This was considered a masculine death as it was considered harder to stab oneself in the chest than to swallow poison. Van Hooft points to the masculinity of suicide by weapon in his historical work *From Autothanasia to Suicide*: “The spheres of man and woman remain separate even in shared death. When women touch weapons, often there are special circumstances which account for this unwomanly behaviour” (49). That Juliet, an almost fourteen-year-old girl, does this is another example of how Shakespeare plays with gendered constructs. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Juliet’s death is the culmination of her masculine-gendered behaviour in her relationship with Romeo. Moreover, Juliet acts quickly in this final scene as opposed to her hesitancy taking the poison. This is partly because she does not wish to be in the male gaze as she dies. Friar Lawrence has left the tomb and Romeo is dead, leaving Juliet alone on stage. She acts swiftly as she knows the onstage male gaze will soon be upon her but will not be able to stop her. Juliet, like Cleopatra, is stoic in death and makes it clear that death is her choice: “Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief” (5.3.169). Without hesitating, she grabs Romeo’s dagger and, with no speeches or absolutions, plunges it into her breast. As Jennifer Low writes, “Juliet ecstatically stabs herself...and her final gesture transforms her entire body into a sheath (punning on the Latin vagina) for Romeo’s phallic dagger.”¹⁵ The site of her budding fertility becomes a place of death” (2), which causes “the sexual innuendo [to

¹⁵ Certain critics underscore Juliet’s autonomy in this scene, arguing that Juliet may have used her own dagger which may have been “part of her personal equipment as an upper-class lady” (Duncan-Jones 315).

be] as resonant here as it had been in her bedroom reveries” (MacKenzie 23). This sexual tension is also heightened by Romeo’s language when he comes to the sleeping Juliet, and when Juliet attempts to kiss the poison from Romeo’s lips. Unlike Desdemona who is able to speak after being strangled, Juliet dies instantly and frees herself from her father’s restrictions through death.

After Juliet dies, the male characters enter the tomb thus returning the onstage male gaze to the scene. Although Juliet, Romeo, and Paris lie in the tomb, the focus is on Juliet, who is again constructed through the male gaze. The reason the gaze is fixed on Juliet is twofold: first, she is female and the male gaze sees her as an object of desire in death, as explained by Lacan and Butler. Lacan sees this desire in death as one aspect of never reaching what is desired. The desired object always represents an intrinsic lack in the desiring subject because once it is possessed, it is no longer lacking and therefore no longer desired. In death, the desire moves to the impossible recovery of life. When Romeo sees what he believes is Juliet’s dead body in the tomb, she is an object of desire for him because he wishes to return to the point when she was living and their love was new. After Juliet dies, her father desires her to once again be his living daughter and heir, for with her death all his hopes of furthering his line are banished. Both men want to return to a time in the past that cannot be regained because of their actions. Butler connects desire to a reclamation of the past by noting, “Lacan understands the tacit project of desire to be the recovery of the past through a future which, of necessity, prohibits it; desire is the pathos of the cultural being” (191-192). Both Capulet and Romeo attempt to reclaim the past by desiring the idealized living Juliet (Capulet, his

obedient daughter; and Romeo, his new love), but this point is never reached as Juliet stays in the fluctuating position of the *objet petit a*.

Juliet is the last person to die onstage, so her body is in plainest view. Her death is normally staged so that Juliet's body falls and covers Romeo's body. The male gaze then stops at her and cannot see his body.¹⁶ The tradition of having Juliet fall on Romeo supports the preferred object of the male gaze because it was not thought desirable or socially acceptable to look at the dead body of a man. It must be considered, however, that in the original performance, Juliet would have been played by a young boy, so the gaze of the audience would have been on the body of a boy actor, even if the male characters on stage were gazing upon a female character. However, the audience may have also been prone to view the body of the boy actor as gendered feminine. David Cressy argues that cross dressing was supposed to have "the power to alter and unman the body itself" (442), a view emphasized by early modern period clergy who claimed that the change of clothing also changed the genitalia and body of the person to match the gender of their apparel. Therefore, for the audience, the young boy playing Juliet may not have been seen as male, but by virtue of the dress viewed as female and socially acceptable and desirable to gaze on.

When the Captain of the Watch finds the bodies, he mentions that Paris is dead and does not mention Romeo (although he tells his men to go wake his parents), but rather focuses on the body of Juliet, "Juliet bleeding, warm, and newly dead, / who here

¹⁶ See John Cranko's *Romeo and Juliet* (Stuttgart Ballet 1970), Renato Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet* (1954), Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998).

hath lain this two days buried” (5.3.175-176). Once again, later in the scene, when the parents of Romeo and Juliet are told that their children are dead, Montague speaks first about his dead wife: “my wife is dead tonight; / Grief of my son’s exile hath stopp’d her breath” (5.3.210-211), then turns to his son who is newly dead at his feet: “O thou untaught! what manners is in this? / To press before thy father to a grave?” (5.3.213-14). Juliet’s parents, on the other hand, gaze upon their daughter and describe the hideous sight they see:

O wife, look how our daughter bleeds!
 This dagger hath mistane, for lo his house
 Is empty on the back of Montague,
 And it mis-sheathed in my daughter’s bosom! (5.3.201-205)

Their focus here is on blaming the Montagues, or at least their dagger, for Juliet’s death. Thatcher states, “Capulet cannot understand why Romeo’s dagger comes to be “missheathed” in his daughter’s bosom” (48). The first time Juliet “died,” Capulet blamed death and said that Death had lain with his daughter and deflowered her. He now blames the Montague dagger that is “mis takenly” in Juliet’s breast; it is not Death, but Romeo who has now “deflowered” his daughter.

Realizing that they have lost their children over the enmity between them, Montague and Capulet swear to bury their hate, only to immediately enter into an economic battle. First, Capulet offers his hand to Montague as his “daughter’s jointure” to end the conflict between them. Not to be outdone, Montague states, “but I can give thee more” (5.3.298) and thereby creates the final gaze on Juliet by swearing to erect a

“statue in pure gold, / That whiles Verona by that name is known, / There shall be no figure at such rate be set, / As that of true and faithful Juliet” (299-302). Capulet takes up the economic gauntlet and vows to set “as rich shall Romeo by his lady’s lie” (303). Although it appears that the Capulets and Montagues have laid aside their physical violence, the statues provide a way to continue the feud and set the gleaming statue of Juliet in the male gaze for eternity.

Although Juliet does not die well because she commits suicide and dies alone without absolution, her death can still be seen as a “good death” because of its outcome. With Romeo and Juliet’s deaths a lesson is learned. Capulet and Montague say they bury their strife (although this is also questioned because of the statues that they plan to erect, one bigger than the other). However, as Lucinda Becker points out, if the woman’s death could be used as an example, or if something was accomplished with her death, it could be deemed a “good death.” Shakespeare is therefore complicating Juliet’s death by having her die in a questionable manner but allowing her death to be deemed “good” because of what it accomplishes: an apparent truce between two feuding families:

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;

Whole misadventured piteous overthrows

Do with their death bury their parents' strife. (Prologue 5-8)

The “sacrifice” is deemed acceptable because, although Juliet loses her life, it accomplishes something greater, the death of an ancient family feud that had taken the lives of many Capulet and Montague men.

Juliet is firmly placed in the male gaze throughout *Romeo and Juliet* and only leaves the male gaze in her moment of death. Even in the sole presence of her mother and nurse (1.3), she remains in the mimicked male gaze the women have adopted as a means of survival. Juliet's feigned death is a means of rebellion and escape but even that does not allow her to escape the male gaze or the desire it expresses. Neither does she escape the male gaze or desire in her actual death, although her death allows her to be seen as a "good woman," and to be accepted back into a patriarchal society. While Juliet never escapes the male gaze, especially in death, she frees herself by choosing her death and committing suicide. Her death is a way of expressing her love for Romeo as she not only chooses death, but in doing so, makes it clear to the audience, and those onstage, that she has defied her father regarding marriage. While Juliet's death makes her desires clear, she will remain in the male gaze, both through the statue that will be erected of her within the playworld and through repeated performances of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which have already kept her in the male gaze for more than 400 years.

Chapter Two

“Am I that name?” Desdemona: Doubly Othered in the Gaze

Juliet is not the only Shakespearian heroine to find herself in the male gaze; *Othello*'s Desdemona is in the spotlight as well. Early in the play Brabantio, Desdemona's father, fixes Othello's gaze on her, “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father and may thee” (1.3. 292-293). This quotation exemplifies the classic Lacanian male gaze present in *Othello*. Desdemona is objectified in this male gaze during the play, a position dependent on who is looking at her and whose language constructs that gaze. The first item to be considered is Brabantio's gaze on his daughter, which is only broken when she marries Othello. The gaze is then transferred as Desdemona moves from being a daughter to being a wife. Othello, therefore, has a twofold gaze on Desdemona. He first looks at her as a Petrarchan lover (much as Romeo constructs Juliet) and loves her not because she speaks, but because she listens to his stories and pities the trials he has been through. His perspective changes, however, once he is encouraged by Iago to adopt a negative male gaze and see Desdemona as an adulterous wife. Iago is able to control Othello's gaze on Desdemona because Othello fears being cuckolded, a fear fuelled by his Otherness in Venetian society. Iago plays on Othello's fears by echoing them, which Othello draws attention to in 3.3, when he says, “Think, my lord! By heaven, he echoes me, / As if there were some monster in his thought” (ll. 108-109). Othello allows the “monsters,” fear and jealousy, to eat away at him until he murders Desdemona. This causes the gaze on Desdemona to

once again change, with Emilia presenting her mistress in a proto-feminist gaze. While Iago and Othello have controlled the gaze on the living Desdemona, after her death, Emilia is able to reconstruct her as a virtuous wife. This leads to Othello's renewed desire for Desdemona. A now unattainable desire, like that of Capulet for his daughter, which fits with Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a*.

As noted in the Introduction, for Lacan the gaze is a function of the subject looking outside of himself. The subject sees and is seen, but "the gaze must be located outside of the subject's control" (Grosz 80), which applies to both Desdemona and Othello. Lacan's theories are also relevant to *Othello* as they deal with different aspects of the gaze such as ownership and the male gaze on other males (which can be used to show how Othello's thoughts are reconstructed by Iago, to consider Othello's gaze on Cassio, and to assess the termination of the male gaze after Othello's death). Lacan's exploration of mimicry, as was discussed in relation to Lady Capulet and Juliet's Nurse, also applies to Emilia's mimicry of Iago's gaze for her own survival. In addition, Lacan's theories of desire apply to Othello's desire for Desdemona after he kills her, while Judith Butler's discussion of desire, language, and the gaze is useful for understanding how Othello's gaze is influenced first by Desdemona's language and then by Iago's.

To begin with, Desdemona's father, Brabantio, negatively constructs her at the opening of the play, albeit under the influence of what Iago says about his daughter's elopement. While it is his responsibility as her father to keep her in view, he loses sight of her for a short period as Iago notes with his cry, "Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags. Thieves, Thieves!" (1.1.80). Iago not only objectifies Desdemona as

property stolen from Brabantio, but he also implies that Desdemona's marriage to Othello would not have happened if Brabantio had watched his daughter more carefully. Ann Jennalie Cook argues that when she escapes her father's gaze, Desdemona rejects his authority and ownership of her and defies the social condemnation of marriage without parental consent (188). S. N. Garner argues that Desdemona shows "liveliness, assertiveness, and sensuality" and demonstrates her subject position by marrying Othello (239). Ironically, the law then makes her Othello's property. Further, having been negligent in watching Desdemona, Brabantio calls on the audience to keep the women of the play, and the real women in their lives, in the male gaze. He warns, "Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds / By which you see them act" (1.1.171-175). Brabantio's command sets the tone for the play and ultimately brings about Desdemona's death. By commanding men not to trust women, but to judge them through their own flawed gaze he sets up how Othello will view Desdemona with suspicion, a negative gaze promoted by Iago.

Brabantio is forced to transfer his flawed gaze to Othello because the Duke legitimates the marriage between Desdemona and Othello. The Duke sees the Moor as virtuous, telling Brabantio that "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3.287-288). Once Brabantio recognizes the Duke's authority and begrudgingly accepts that Desdemona will remain married to Othello, he passes the male gaze onto his son-in-law, thereby adhering to the Lacanian theory that the gaze must always be transferred and transmitted:

In our relation to things, is so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze. (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 73)

Although the gaze can be transferred from male to male it is not a perfect transfer. The fallible nature of language causes some elements to elude the transfer. Such is the case of a white Venetian father passing his flawed gaze to his Moorish son-in-law. When Desdemona recognizes that her father's gaze is no longer upon her, she can tell the Duke in response to his suggestion that she continue to live with Brabantio, "I would not there reside / To put my father in impatient thoughts/ by being in his eye" (1.3.239-241). Furthermore, Desdemona notes that she is now subject to Othello's supervision: "That I did love the Moor to live with him[...] / My heart's subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord" (1.3.245, 247-248). She thus accepts the transmission of the male gaze on her from father to husband.

As previously mentioned, there is always something eluded or missing when the gaze is transferred. Othello fails to recognize that he does not fully understand Brabantio's gaze and this shapes how Othello looks at Desdemona for the remainder of the play. Brabantio's warning, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father and may thee" (1.3.292-293), acts as a curse for Othello, ensuring that he takes great pains to watch Desdemona and causes him to no longer trust her. This heightened surveillance on Desdemona (as defined in Patricia Hill Collins in *Fighting*

Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice) is because of Othello's Otherness: he is called "the Moor" (1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 5.2), compared to the devil (5.2), and addressed as "the Turk of Cyprus" (1.3). Othello's race greatly affects his perception of his marriage to Desdemona as he views his race as a disability in Venetian society and does not consider himself worthy of his new wife. Ania Loomba states, "Iago's machinations are effective because Othello is predisposed to believing his pronouncements about the inherent duplicity of women, and the necessary fragility of an unnatural relationship between a young, white, well-born woman and an older black soldier" (91). Further, Millicent Bell argues that Othello believes Desdemona is capable of having an affair, because he is persuaded the "marriage itself [and] her inclination for Othello is a perversity" (10). The lack of equality that Othello perceives in his marriage plants seeds of doubt in his mind regarding Desdemona's faithfulness, thus contributing to his belief that she will try once again to escape the male gaze. Moreover Othello, himself, is in the gaze of white male authority (embodied in Brabantio and the Duke), which pressures him to ensure Desdemona does not escape the male gaze again. Iago takes advantage of Othello's insecurity to bring his plans to fruition.

Iago is able to control Othello's thoughts, language, and gaze on Desdemona by echoing Othello's thoughts and fears through his language (and silence). To avoid detection as the instigator of evil in the play, Iago surrounds himself with a "false" gaze so that people, including his own wife, do not see him for what he truly is. They are only able to "look" where he commands them. What Iago is doing is reminiscent of the animals that Lacan discusses: "[T]he being gives of himself, or receives from the other,

something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 107). In 2.1, the audience is able to see behind this “false” gaze to Iago’s “true” gaze on Desdemona; indeed, as Karen Newman writes, “by virtue of his manipulative power and his superior knowledge and control over the action, which we [the audience] share, we are implicated in his machinations and the cultural values they imply” (85). In other words, even as the audience is shown Iago’s evil, they participate in it. He makes Desdemona appear in a negative light to others looking at her in the playworld. He even admits to constructing himself and diverting the gaze of others so they do not see the “false” gaze he creates: “’Tis here, but yet confused. / Knavery’s plain face is never seen till used” (2.1.310-311). Iago hides his true self by diverting the gaze to others and by drawing attention to their gaze.

Iago draws attention to Desdemona’s gaze by repeatedly referring to her eyes: “Her eye must be fed, and what delight shall she have / to look on the devil” (2.1.226-227), “What an eye she has!” (2.3.21), “An inviting eye” (2.3.23). These comments serve to distort Desdemona’s character, with Iago constructing her as sensual and inviting the male gaze. According to Iago (and early modern society), only licentious women with wanton desires invite the male gaze (Peters 70-73). Iago’s view, and his distortion of Desdemona’s character is, as Garner claims, “clearly limited by his devious purpose and also by his cynical notions about human nature in general and women in particular” (239). When this is considered along with the Lacanian theory that “In so far as I am under the gaze...I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye the gaze

disappears” (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 84), one understands why Desdemona is unaware of the gaze upon her, even though the men are aware of her gaze. Desdemona’s gaze therefore disappears but the gaze on her remains. Moreover, according to Iago, while his gaze objectifies Desdemona and constructs her as adulterous, she has invited men to see her that way. Indeed, Othello interprets the exchange between Desdemona and Lodovico to be an invitation of his gaze in 4.3. After a simple exchange of pleasantries Othello attacks Desdemona, ordering her to bed: “Get you to bed on th’ instant. I will be returned / forthwith. Dismiss your attendant there. Look’t be / done” (4.3.7-9). Othello speaks to her as a disobedient child, but in this case he believes her to be a disobedient wife who is inviting the gaze of another man and must be punished for it.

It is evident that Iago’s language and silence constructs Othello’s gaze in 3.3 when Othello begins to suspect that Desdemona has been unfaithful. The scene begins by Iago constructing Othello’s gaze on Desdemona through language, both his own and the language he encourages Othello to use by his own silence and echoing of his general. Othello initiates his own doubts by imagining what Iago is hiding by his silence: Othello exclaims, ““Think my Lord?’ By heaven, thou echo’st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown!” (3.3.110-112). Othello reads Iago’s silences through his own flawed gaze so that the images Othello sees in his mind are created not with words, but with silence. Othello continues to explain how he reads these silences, which in turn shows the audience Iago’s control over language and Othello’s gaze:

I know thou'rt full of love and honesty,
 And weigh'st thy words before thou givest them breath,
 Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more:
 For such things in a false disloyal knave
 Are tricks of custom, but in a man that's just
 They are close delations, working from the heart
 That passion cannot rule. (3.3. 119-125)

Othello is blind to Iago's "false gaze," seeing "honesty" rather than "a false disloyal knave" due to Iago's cunning manipulation of Othello's language and gaze. Iago assumes full control of Othello when the scene culminates in a mock marriage with Iago assuming what should be Desdemona's role in Othello's life. As Elizabeth Gruber notes, "Iago takes the place of Desdemona: for the remainder of the play, she is relegated to the periphery of the action and functions as the object of a search for knowledge" (104), with Othello unaware that he should take a closer look at the "monster in thy thought" rather than at Desdemona. The monster Othello fears is not Desdemona's unfaithfulness, but being seen as a cuckold. Initially, Iago does not actually accuse Desdemona of being false, but rather suggests that Othello may be a cuckold, thus awakening this fear: Iago tells Othello, "That cuckold lives in bliss / Who, certain of his fate, loves not the wronger" (3.3.171-172), thereby directing the gaze not on Desdemona as an adulteress but on Othello as a cuckold.

Iago's language affects Othello's thoughts as Judith Butler points out: "We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language." She

then adds, “Language is also the thing we do” (*Excitable Speech* 8). Language is something that Iago is so comfortable using that it becomes his occupation, thus fulfilling all aspects of Butler’s statement. With his gaze and language, Iago is able to produce effects on his master, of which Othello is completely unaware. Othello insists on knowing Iago’s thoughts but, even as Iago refuses to reveal his thoughts, Othello’s own imagination leads to his belief that he is a cuckold. Instead of gazing on Desdemona through his own gaze and language, as when he strongly states, “for she had eyes and chose me” (3.3.193), Othello now sees his wife with a gaze constructed by Iago’s language, words that remind him that “she did deceive her father, marrying you” (3.3.208). The shift between these two perspectives begins with Othello defending Desdemona and ends with him asking for proof of her infidelity: “I’ll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove” (3.3.194), and receiving what he considers proof in 4.1.

Othello has replaced the Petrarchan love language he used to construct the Duke’s gaze on his wife in 1.3, relying on his physical sight, and unaware that Iago’s language is actually constructing his gaze. The irony is that although Othello asks to “see” proof, implying agency by seeing for himself, Iago tells him to “mark his [Cassio’s] gesture” (4.1.86). Iago’s command demonstrates his control over Othello’s gaze: Othello is to “look,” not “see,” and he is told what he is “seeing.” It is after Othello has “looked” and had his gaze commanded by Iago that he believes he “sees” Desdemona as an adulterous wife. Othello is, however, listening rather than seeing and not even looking at Desdemona. As Philippa Berry writes, It is Othello’s “naïve belief in the possibility of what he calls ‘ocular proof’ [that] leads him and Desdemona to tragedy” (91). The ocular

proof is the image that Iago has created to trap Othello's gaze. This image permanently sets Desdemona as an unfaithful wife in Othello's gaze, ensnaring her in this position.

The gaze in which Desdemona finds herself leaves her no avenue of escape but does allow for self-reflection. She recognizes that she is trapped in the male gaze and is powerless to change it. Kaja Silverman addresses this sense of self-recognition in *The Subject of Semiotics*, building on Lacan's theory of the gaze and focusing on the *I saw myself seeing myself* aspect of the Lacanian gaze. She writes,

As long as the subject remains trapped within that order, it will be unable to mediate between or escape from the binary oppositions which structure all of its perceptions; it will fluctuate between the extremes of love and hate towards objects which will undergo corresponding shifts in value. Moreover, the subject will itself be capable of identifying alternately with diametrically opposed positions (victim/victimizer, exhibitionist/voyeur, slave/master). (158)

Silverman reinforces Lacan's theory by arguing that the subject is not only capable of *I saw myself seeing myself*, but also that he/she is able to recognize different positions within that gaze. For example, Silverman's argument applies to Othello who "sees himself seeing himself" as a cuckold because of the way Iago has shaped his language. It also applies to Desdemona who is trapped in a negative position when Othello switches from constructing his gaze through Petrarchan language to fashioning it through Iago's language. Desdemona begins to see herself in that position even though she does not understand why. Desdemona's problem is that she cannot reconcile Othello seeing her as

an adulteress with her own self-image and this leaves her open to attack. Desdemona is aware of the male gaze and tries to interpret it but, because of the mask used by Iago, her translation is faulty and does not allow her to fully see herself as others see her.

Desdemona does not fully understand that her translation of the male gaze is faulty when she tries to interpret it in 4.2. and 4.3. In 4.2. Desdemona attempts to see herself through Othello's language and asks Iago, "Am I that name? / [. . .] Such as she said my lord did say I was" (4.2.121, 123) as she cannot understand why Othello has called her a whore: "I do not know; I am sure I am none such" (4.2.122). In this scene, and in the rest of the play, ambiguity in language is used to Iago's advantage (such as the silences Othello interprets) and to Desdemona's disadvantage (as when she pleads for Cassio) because the resulting images are controlled and subsumed by the male gaze. In this case, Desdemona is trying to interpret the male gaze as in the Lacanian theory of *I saw myself seeing myself*. To do so, she steps out of her role as innocent woman and looks at herself through Othello's eyes to see herself as an unfaithful wife as he does. However, when she compares Othello view of her to her own perception, she questions his gaze. She is able to see the different positions of wife, adulteress, and "cunning whore of Venice" (4.2.93) Othello constructs for her but she cannot change his negative construction of her. She does, however, recognize the consequences of his gaze and prepares herself for death by singing the Willow Song (4.3.38-50) and having her wedding/winding sheets¹⁷ placed on the bed (4.3.21; Vanita 344; Garner 248; Ronk 55).

¹⁷ Neill sums up the dichotomy of the wedding/winding sheets as "a peculiarly feminine defiance of mortality, one in which perfected identity could be resurrected, paradoxically enough, only through the extreme act of self-abnegation" (165).

Although the audience is privy to Desdemona's self-construction and knows that Othello is relying heavily on Iago's construction of his wife, it is also clear that Othello is not fully convinced in 3.4 that Desdemona is unfaithful. At least he is seeking evidence to that effect, which is why he asks Desdemona where her handkerchief is. He then constructs what Desdemona says through what Iago has told him.

Desdemona: I say it is not lost.

Othello: Fetch't let me see't.

Desdemona: Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now. This is a trick to put me from my suit. Pray you let Cassio be received again.

Othello: Fetch me the handkerchief. My mind misgives.

Desdemona: Come, come, you'll never meet a more sufficient man.

Othello: The handkerchief.

Desdemona: A man that all his time hath founded his good fortunes on your love, shared dangers with you—

Othello: The handkerchief. (3.4.84-95)

This dialogue between Desdemona and Othello shows three aspects of the influence of Iago's language. First, Desdemona's change to a negative position in Othello's gaze means that she is now completely powerless, particularly as she is unaware of the change in her husband. Garner writes, "Desdemona's powerlessness lie[s] within herself. She idealizes Othello and cannot recognize that he is as susceptible to irrationality and evil as other men" (246). Desdemona wonders at Othello's outburst about the handkerchief and cannot understand it. It is Emilia who wisely remarks on Othello's changing nature:

“They are all stomachs, and we but food; / They eat us hungrily, and when they are full, / They belch us” (3.4. 98-100), a wisdom gained through her experiences with Iago.

Garner, though, is only partly correct when she notes that “Desdemona’s powerlessness lie[s] within herself” as it is Iago who has taken any power Desdemona might have had as Othello’s wife and transferred it to himself as is evident in the “mock wedding” in 3.3.

Second, Othello’s obsession with keeping Desdemona’s gaze on the handkerchief can be seen as representative of Othello’s desire to divert her gaze from Cassio to him. As Desdemona’s husband, Othello holds the power in the relationship and is far more successful in turning Desdemona’s gaze to the handkerchief than Desdemona is in turning his gaze to Cassio. Third, and most importantly, Othello fails to listen to what Desdemona says but instead hears what Iago has told him and constructs Desdemona’s language, and Desdemona herself, through that. This occurs because Desdemona, unlike Iago, does not echo Othello’s thoughts. Othello and Desdemona are not speaking the same language, so when Desdemona tries to turn Othello’s gaze to Cassio, Othello believes this is because she associates the handkerchief with Cassio and their affair.

Initially constructed by Iago as inviting the male gaze, Desdemona becomes a picture to trap the gaze; however, she is not alone in this position. Lacan states that “[a] picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 89), and Iago captures Othello’s gaze through the “picture” he constructs of both Desdemona and Cassio. When Iago has Othello’s gaze on Cassio in 4.1, he tells Othello to stand apart before telling the audience what he intends to do:

Now I will question Cassio of Bianca

A hussy that by selling her desires
 Buys herself bread and cloth
 [. . .]
 And he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;
 His unbookish jealousy must conster
 Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviours
 Quite in the wrong. (4.1 92-94, 99-102)

While the audience is aware of Iago's intentions, Othello is not and quickly falls into Iago's trap. By trapping Othello's gaze on Cassio, Iago makes Othello reconstruct his gaze on Desdemona and see her as an adulterous wife so that "Othello then construes all of Desdemona's actions as evidence of her guilt" (Gruber 103). In essence, Othello's murderous perception of his wife, "Let her rot and perish, and be damned / tonight, for she shall not live" (4.1.177-178), results from his gaze on Desdemona being filtered through Cassio and Iago, as Iago intended all along: "As he [Cassio] shall smile, Othello shall go mad" (4.1.100). Desdemona is constructed by this male gaze controlled by Iago for most of the play; however, this construction is challenged in the later scenes. Most fittingly, it is Iago's wife, Emilia, who delivers the alternative perspective to his gaze. In this sense, they are perfectly balanced: Iago controls the on-stage gaze on Desdemona in the first three acts, while Emilia goes from mimicking the male gaze for her own safety to creating a proto-feminist gaze and reconstructing Desdemona and herself in the last two.

In 3.3, Emilia exemplifies Lacanian mimicry. Under Iago's command, her gaze is trained on Othello and Desdemona as is evident when she steals the handkerchief for

Iago. However, Emilia is a complex character in that she steals under the direction of Iago and then, when she recognizes the result of that theft, identifies him as the perpetrator of the accusations against Desdemona. Emilia is placed in a shifting position where she is commanded to obey, but has the desire to rebel against this direction, which she later fulfils.

She so loves the token—
 For he conjur'd her she should ever keep it,—
 That she reserves it evermore about her
 To kiss and talk to, I'll ha' the work ta'en out,
 And give't Iago. (3.3.297-300)

Even as Emilia acknowledges Desdemona's attachment to the handkerchief, she looks at it through Iago's eyes and fulfills his desire for it. This can be considered mimicry, adopted by Emilia so that Iago does not see her and she can survive in her relationship with him. As Rutter states, "She need[s] intelligence in order to survive in a world where her reality was entirely the mad construct of male imagination, Iago's 'fantasy'" (163). After she steals the handkerchief Emilia tells the audience the reason for her actions:

I am glad I have found this napkin.
 This was her first remembrance from the Moor.
 My wayward husband hath a hundred times
 Woo'd me to steal it" (3.3. 294-297).

While "wooing" normally refers to a romantic act, here it stands in ironic contrast being used to refer to the perpetration of a crime. Emilia's words and actions also reveal to the

audience how she is controlled by Iago even when he is not present. She plays the role of the perfect, obedient wife who follows her husband's orders, even when he is absent and she does not agree with or understand his demands.

The change in Emilia's gaze comes in 4.2 after Othello has called Desdemona a whore: He asks, "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write 'whore' upon?" (4.2. 73-74). Up to this point Emilia has been mimicking Iago's gaze for her own survival and because she is blind to his manipulations due to the "false" gaze he has constructed. At the beginning of 4.2., Emilia is still watching Desdemona for Othello and Iago, but her gaze changes after Othello comes in and "pays" for his "whore." She observes, "Here's a change indeed" (4.2.109), not only acknowledging the shift in Othello's perception of Desdemona, but also the change in her own gaze on Desdemona and Othello. Emilia recognizes Desdemona as another abused wife: suddenly they have something horrible and binding in common. Rutter addresses this when she writes, "Emilia seemed to be recognizing Desdemona for the first time. She knew that violence. It made Desdemona suddenly, horribly familiar" (166). Emilia recognizes the violence in Othello's gaze on Desdemona, because of Iago's earlier suspicions that she had been false with Othello which led to physical abuse, and offers an alternative, negative view of him (and later of Iago as well). Emilia sees this abhorrent treatment of Desdemona as criminal and worthy of capital punishment for the offender. She declares,

A halter pardon him, and hell gnaw his bones!

Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company?

What place, what time, what form, what likelihood?

The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave. (4.2.140-143)

She also suspects that Othello is being influenced by someone. However, because Emilia is still controlled by Othello as her employer and Iago as her husband, she cannot reconstruct anyone's gaze but her own. Emilia is also subject to Iago's misdirection of her gaze so that she does not initially see him as the "knave."

Emilia's proto-feminist gaze causes her to be suspicious of Othello's motives when he tells Desdemona to dismiss her maid. Although Emilia does not voice her concerns outright, they can be heard in her questioning of Othello's order: "Dismiss me?" (4. 3.13). With her newly constructed gaze, Emilia sees Desdemona as a wife who still loves her abuser, and realizes, possibly through her own experience, that this relationship with Othello will bring nothing but heartache to Desdemona. She says, "I would you had never seen him" (4.3.17), and attempts, unsuccessfully, to reconstruct Desdemona's gaze. Desdemona replies, "So would not I. My love doth so approve him" (4.3.18). Emilia then presents an alternative female gaze on men, claiming that men and women are equal: "Let husbands know / their wives have sense like them" (4.3. 92-93). Emilia speaks in a jaded and bitter tone which stems from the harsh treatment she has received from Iago: "Or say they strike us [...] / Why, we have galls; and through we have some grace, / Yet we have some revenge" (4.3. 91-92). Just as Brabantio cautioned the men in the audience to keep an eye on women, Emilia offers a challenge to them, telling them, "Then let them use us well, else let them know / The ills we do, their ills instruct us so" (4.3. 101-102). Emilia's speech demonstrates the change in her gaze. By removing herself from the position of Iago's doting wife, who does not inquire as to her husband's designs for

Desdemona's handkerchief, she is able to adopt a proto-feminist gaze criticizing men for their abuse and lack of restraint.

The final scene of the play reveals the desire in the male gaze for something unattainable. In this case, the unattainable object Othello desires is a living, obedient Desdemona that he can trust. Initially, Othello loves Desdemona because she listens to him and then elopes with him. However, once he marries her, he desires her to be the perfect wife: chaste, silent, and obedient. Unfortunately, this is impossible because Othello believes, with Iago's encouragement and Brabantio's warning, that she has not been obedient or silent. In turn, because of the association of obedience and silence with chastity, Othello constructs Desdemona as unchaste and disobedient. This is not because of any wrongdoing, but simply because Desdemona speaks, and particularly because she speaks to contradict Othello's construction of her as unfaithful (5.2.58-61). As mentioned earlier, there is a strong link between a "loose tongue" and a "loose woman" in the early modern period. Asleep, Desdemona is silent and, therefore, Othello may view her as an image of chastity; however, he knows that when she wakes, she will speak and return to the position of "that cunning whore of Venice" (4.2.88). Fixed in the male gaze as she sleeps, Desdemona does not seem to be aware that Othello is watching her, although Lacan would argue that the female is always aware of the male gaze. Lacan states, "at the very level of the phenomenal experience of contemplation, this all seeing aspect is to be found in the satisfaction of a woman who knows that she is being looked at, on the condition that one does not show her that one knows that she knows" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 75). This mutual denial of the male gaze

grants power to the male spectator. Lacan also notes that men view themselves in a dominant position in order to gaze on and desire a woman. While the woman is sleeping, the male gaze shows desire for her, a desire that the woman must appear not to acknowledge, while the man must appear to ignore her unexpressed acknowledgement. Othello expresses his desire for Desdemona when she is sleeping, giving a long list of her attributes that he does not want to extinguish. However, he believes he must kill her to achieve justice, and protect the male gaze and patriarchal society: “O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword” (5.2. 16-17). When Desdemona wakes, she does not acknowledge Othello’s desire for her, but rather asks *if* he desires her: “Will you come to bed, my lord?” (5.4.24). He, too, does not acknowledge his prior desire, or suggest that she may have been aware of it, by answering her question with one of his own: “Have you pray’d tonight, Desdemona?” (5.2.25). When she awakes, the silent, obedient Desdemona Othello wants is unattainable.

In this scene, the audience’s gaze is shaped in one of two ways. It can either see Othello’s “sacrifice” as Desdemona’s punishment for defying her father, or it can see her “murder” as the killing of an innocent woman. If the audience adopts the first gaze it can be considered that social order will only be restored through Desdemona’s death. By dying, she will be pardoned for breaking the male gaze and stepping out of her preordained role as a silent, chaste and obedient woman in a white patriarchal society. If the audience sees the killing of Desdemona as the murder of an innocent woman, they will see a white woman who has been falsely murdered by her black husband who has been easily led astray. As Bell argues, “Othello’s collapse into murderous violence would

seem to be an illustration of the way, according to the racist view, the coating of civilization must slide readily off the ‘savage’ personality” (11). In the first case, Desdemona is the Other (due to her gender and marriage to a foreigner) who went outside of her preordained societal position and who needs to be punished. In the second case, Othello is the Other (because of his colour) who, according to Loomba, exemplifies all stereotypes of the primal black man (94-95), and who has made a grave error. In both cases the Other is viewed negatively.

It is Desdemona’s double Othering (female and married to a black man) that causes Othello’s positive gaze on Desdemona to cease when she wakes and begs for her life. As stated above, because of the triad of silence, chastity and obedience, when Desdemona wakes, Othello also believes her to be capable of infidelity and disobedience because she is no longer silent. Therefore, he no longer desires her and his gaze becomes negative. He declares, “O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart, / And make me call what I intend to do / A murder, which I thought sacrifice” (5.2. 68-70). Othello’s reference to Desdemona being perjured demonstrates how she has been constructed by language—the ambiguous language—of Iago. To say that someone is perjured is to say that they have been lied about. To say that someone perjures is to say that they are lying. Othello calls Desdemona “perjured” which is true—Iago, by implication, has been lying about her; ironically, what Othello actually means is that Desdemona is lying. A similar thing happens when Iago tells Othello of his bedtime chat with Cassio. When Iago reports what Cassio said, he says, “I know not what he did . . . Lie—” (4.1.32, 34) suggesting that Cassio was lying, when in fact Iago is lying as he speaks. When Othello voices his

cuckolded conclusion, Iago feeds his fear by saying, “Lie [...] /with her, on her, what you will” (4.1.33-34). Iago is playing with the meaning of “lying on her” which could mean lying on top of Desdemona or lying about her, thus implying that lying with someone, lying about someone or lying on top of them amounts to sexual intercourse. The irony in his statement, however, is that he is lying about Desdemona at that moment. Desdemona is indeed a perjured woman, perjured by Iago and his prevaricating language. Speaking and suspected of lying both verbally and sexually, she is undoubtedly disobedient. It is with this in mind that Othello becomes violent, and he kills Desdemona in a fit of rage because he once again misconstrues what she says, his thoughts still being influenced by Iago words. To make matters worse, Desdemona declares, “Alas, he is betrayed and I am undone” (5.2.83) when she hears of Cassio’s death, an ambiguous statement that indicates her lack of awareness of how her language will be interpreted by her husband.

Although Othello sees Desdemona as “that cunning whore of Venice” he wants her to die well. As noted earlier in the chapter, Desdemona starts this process by singing the Willow Song and requesting that her wedding/winding sheets be placed on the bed (4.3). Othello continues the process of readying Desdemona for death when he enters the room and refuses to kill her in her sleep. When she awakens, Othello questions if she has performed her prayers, “Have you pray’d tonight, Desdemon?” (5.2. 25), so that her soul may go to heaven. Unlike Hamlet who wants to kill Claudius when he is not praying so that his spirit will go to Hell, Othello refuses to kill Desdemona’s unprepared spirit so that she may at least die a “good death.” Desdemona, however, does not cooperate with this line of thought once she realizes that Othello is going to kill her. Instead of

submissively praying and then lying down for Othello to smother her, she begs for her life repeatedly:

O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight!

But half and hour! (5.2. 79, 81, 83)

Each plea becomes more desperate causing the construction of her death to change from “good,” accompanied with preparation and prayer, to “bad” because she resists death and the command of the patriarchal order. This resistance along with Othello’s negative construction of the living, speaking, breathing Desdemona fashions her death as a “bad” death at this point in the play.

When Desdemona stops breathing and is silent, Othello’s gaze changes once again to a positive construction as she is no longer resisting him. However, now he hopes that she will live: “I think she stirs again. No. What’s best to do? / [...]. My wife, my wife! What wife? I ha’ no wife. / O insupportable, O heavy hour!” (5.2.104,106-107). Othello desires the unattainable: a living wife, who is completely silent and obedient. Othello’s positive construction of Desdemona, based on her silence and Emilia’s later reconstruction of her as a guiltless wife, results in his guilt and eventual suicide. Joan Holmer notes that Othello learns of the truth and changes “his view of Desdemona from damned to saved as he simultaneously changes his view of himself from saved to damned” (140). Nonetheless, regardless of whether Othello’s gaze is positive or negative, Desdemona remains objectified, viewed as either an object of desire or an object of denigration, and is never seen as a thinking, speaking subject. As Ronk writes, “Othello

recreates Desdemona as an object in death, perfect as a marble statue” (Ronk 70). He grasps this beautiful image of perfection, lamenting the loss of his wife and his own gullibility:

Cold, cold my girl,
Even like thy chastity. O cursed, cursed slave!
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight.
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O! (5.2.283-288)

Even before he constructs Desdemona as a marble statue, Othello’s desire for her is so strong that he has no language with which to express his grief and desire. This fits with Butler’s view that “desire is the moment in which the limits of language are incessantly problematized” (*Subjects of Desire* 199); Othello cannot speak but neither can he be silent as is evident with his grief stricken “O! O! O!” (5.2.197).

When Othello regains control of his speech, however, he struggles not just with his construction of Desdemona, but also with his view of himself as he has difficulty seeing or speaking about himself as a murderer. As a result, he once again blames his wife for his actions: “O, she was foul!” (5.2.199), until he learns from Emilia that “she was chaste; she loved thee, cruel Moor” (5.2.247). This truth makes him desire the living Desdemona once more and leaves him without words: “O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!” (5.2.279). At this point, both Desdemona and Emilia are lying dead on the

bed, and Othello's complimentary gaze draws attention Desdemona's silence (and chastity) as he praises her for her stillness. This is not, however, the only time in this scene that silence is invoked, not only in connection with Desdemona, but also with Cassio and Emilia. Othello refers to the silence of Cassio in death with "his mouth is stopped" (5.2.72) and praises Iago for his deed, but this is not the main focus of the male gaze. Emilia, on the other hand, is commanded to be silent throughout the scene because her speech has negative connotations for the male gaze onstage (5.2. 160, 182 and 217), especially Othello's gaze which has been constructed by Iago's language.

The reason for Othello's complimentary gaze is twofold. First, dead and therefore silent, Desdemona cannot rebel against Othello; second, dead and redeemed by Emilia's revelations, she is now the chaste wife he desired. She is the completely silent, obedient, and chaste Desdemona he desired, only he now also wants her alive. Othello's desire for the unattainable, a chaste, silent, and obedient living Desdemona reflects Lacan's argument that desire is always directed to the unattainable as denoted by *objet petit a*. Butler, responding to Lacan's theory, writes, desire is "the expression of a longing for the return to the origin that, if recoverable, would necessitate the dissolution of the subject itself" (*Subjects of Desire* 187). Butler is expressing the need to return to a utopian state; for Othello and Desdemona this would be a return to the beginning of their relationship when Desdemona was still silent, chaste and obedient (to Othello, if not her father). However, Butler continues by saying that even if this state could be reached, the object would be negated because of its current state (188). This means that even if the subject and object reach this utopian state, the object would be worthless because of its current

position in death. Moreover, because of the hold desire has on its subject, it can transform that subject's language (188). In essence, Othello's negative language, "down strumpet!" (5.3.86), converts to positive language, "so good a wife" (5.2.241) since Desdemona is denied to him through death, and his desire—now that he cannot have her—converts both his gaze and his language. In order to make this possible, though, Desdemona, as the object of Othello's gaze, must be present the entire time in order to fix her dead, unseeing gaze upon Othello. He therefore equates Desdemona's gaze with the gaze of heaven that is judging his soul because of his actions. This heavenly gaze holds the power to condemn Othello's soul to hell and he sees his own demise in that gaze. After all has been revealed, he declares "how dost thou look now? [...] / This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven / And fiends will snatch at it [...] / Whip me ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight" (5.2.270, 272-273, 275-276). Although Othello wants to escape Desdemona's dead, unseeing gaze, he cannot. This just gaze, unlike his own, ignites his guilt and what he once shaped now shapes him. As quickly as Othello believes he is close to attaining his desire, his *objet petit a*, he discovers it is not what he wants, and "dead Desdemona" lies there to remind him of this.

Desdemona's unseeing gaze is not the only gaze of which Othello is aware. Emilia, with her proto-feminist gaze, is also present and reconstructs Othello and Iago for their final scene much like a picture. Emilia now embodies the outside gaze that can affect change in all the characters on stage and the audience. Lacan argues that this gaze is "what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its

effects” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 106). Emilia’s gaze on Othello becomes increasingly negative, starting when she changes her gaze on him in 4.2, and culminating in her realization that he has murdered Desdemona, when she regards Desdemona as “the angel . . . and [Othello as] the blacker devil!” (5.2.140). By referring to Desdemona as an angel, Emilia returns her mistress to the positive position she held before Othello had his gaze reconstructed by Iago’s language. Since Desdemona has been silenced by death, she can only be heard through Emilia’s vocal proxy.

Emilia is able to reconstruct Othello’s gaze and defend her mistress by echoing him, in the same way as Iago previously controlled Othello’s language (Rutter 151). Emilia forces Othello to recognize that Iago’s language is “false”; she is then able to reconstruct Iago through her language. With her repetition of “husband,” Emilia echoes Othello as Iago does in 3.3. and it can be argued that Othello hears Emilia because she speaks like Iago. However, even as she speaks like her husband, her gaze on him changes at line 140. As Rutter notes, “[she] finally does betray her husband, and in the very terms he imagined, capitulating from model housewife—the silent ‘her indoors’—to extravagant...stranger’, ‘unhoused’ by her decision to ‘be in speaking, liberal as the air’” (l. 147). Erupting with rage and sadness at being deceived and unknowingly helping in the death of her friend and mistress, Emilia does not hesitate to transfer her allegiance:

Emilia's “theft” of Desdemona’s handkerchief to please her husband Iago, as well as her deliberate silence about this impropriety despite her intuitions of Othello’s jealousy and her firsthand witnessing of Othello's anger and Desdemona’s distress about the missing handkerchief, do not

deter Emilia's hope for salvation as she transfers her allegiance from her 'pernicious' husband to her 'heavenly true' mistress and tells the truth, and nothing but the truth. (Holmer 142)

Emilia speaks to the dead Desdemona, revealing Iago for the villain he is: "O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with love!" (5.2.150). Although she has not mimicked Iago's gaze since act four, she remains blinded by Iago's "false" gaze. It is Othello's revelation, "Thy husband knew it all" (5.2.140), that makes Emilia realize Iago is the knave she cursed in 4.2: "My husband say that she was false? / [...] If he say so, may his pernicious soul / Rot half a grain a day!" (ll. 151, 154-155). With this exclamation Emilia echoes Othello's curse on Desdemona in 4.1, "let her rot and perish" (4.1.177); claims her proto-feminist gaze as valid for a short time before her death; and reconstructs the characters of Desdemona, Othello, and Iago for those on stage (5.2). Once again, Emilia is using mimicry in her favour, but this time to reconstruct Desdemona by resisting the male gaze.

Now that Emilia has momentary control of the gaze, she refuses to be silenced and insists on having a voice for both herself and Desdemona, even though Othello and Iago both attempt to silence her with the threat of death:

Othello: Peace, you were best.

Emilia: Thou hast not half the power to do me harm

As I have to be hurt. O gull, O dolt,

As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed—

I care not for thy sword.

[. . .]

Iago: Go to, charm your tongue.

Emilia: I will not charm my tongue. I am bound to speak. (5.2.168-72,
190-191)

Emilia reconstructs Desdemona, Iago, and Othello with her proto-feminist gaze until she is murdered and thereby silenced by Iago. What is interesting is how she gains access to this gaze. It is Desdemona's cry on her deathbed that alerts Emilia of the situation. As mentioned earlier, because Desdemona speaks and begs for her life instead of being submissive, her death is constructed as "bad." This cry alerting Emilia would also be viewed along the same lines; however, it is this cry—uttered after Desdemona appears to have died—that allows Emilia to revision Desdemona and reconstruct her death from being "bad" because of her speech to "good" because of her innocence, thus showing how Shakespeare further complicates the early modern ideas of "good" and "bad" deaths. Even though Iago and Othello try to return Emilia to her "proper place" within early modern society, she clings to her proto-feminist gaze, reconstructing Desdemona for Othello with her dying breath. Aware that she is defying the boundaries on women's speech and wifely obedience, Emilia appeals to the other gentlemen, "'Tis proper I obey [my husband], but not now. / Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (5.2.203-204). Gruber notes that in this statement Emilia "affirms a husband's right to control his wife's speech, noting that only exceptional circumstances compel her to disobey" (100). However, Emilia cannot tell the truth if she remains in her place as a respectful, dutiful wife, and Emilia's testimony is seen as truth because "no other character's testimony could be so decisive as this archrealist's" (Adamson 179). The audience, who has seen all

the characters behind the “false” gaze, is able to recognize the truth in Emilia’s proto-feminist gaze in this last scene and in the way she constructs Desdemona, Iago, and Othello as she sees them. The audience now sees “Emilia, not Iago, as the play’s principle observer” (Rutter 161). Although validating a woman’s gaze is radical in a society that emphasizes the male gaze, it happens in *Othello*. It is Emilia’s “’twill out!” and speaking “liberal as the North” that reveals the secrets of the play. She is now “deeply dangerous [and] would tear down patriarchy with her bare hands” (Rutter 175). Now that the audience and those on stage jointly assume Emilia’s gaze, they see Desdemona as “falsely, falsely murdered.”

Throughout this scene Desdemona’s body is on display and when Emilia dies she is also placed on the bed to be gazed upon. This spectral scene of Desdemona and Emilia shows “how [a] great lady and ordinary gentlewoman are equally defenceless as wives, yet retain their dignity in death” (Vanita 12). It is not until Othello dies that the bed curtains are closed and the bodies are cut off from view. When Othello dies, the predominant male gaze does not find his body a desirable object to view in contrast to the bodies of Emilia and Desdemona. Because of his actions and his self-imagined cuckoldry Othello reminds the male gaze of how it can be manipulated and fail, which is not something the on-stage or off-stage male audience want to be reminded of. The mistakes that Othello makes and the shame he brings to men must therefore be quickly covered after his death by drawing the bed curtains (Berry 101). Directly before this, though, the last thing Othello does is to draw attention to his desire for Desdemona in death: “I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this: / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss” (5.2.368-369).

This parallels Romeo's desire in *Romeo and Juliet*, discussed in the previous chapter, when he says, "Thus with a kiss I die" (5.3. 120). Both Romeo and Othello's "desire is directed toward ideal representations which remain forever beyond the subject's reach" (Silverman 176). As mentioned above, Desdemona is now forever out of Othello's reach, but he makes sure that the male gaze finds her one last time before he dies, so that, despite the intervention of Emilia's proto-feminist gaze, Desdemona remains in the male gaze, from the opening lines of "look to your house, your daughter, and your bags. Thieves, Thieves!" (1.1.80) to "No way but this: / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (5.2.368-369).

Desdemona's position within the play depends on who controls the gaze upon her and how it is constructed. First controlled by her father's gaze, Desdemona escapes this only to have Othello, her husband, control the gaze when her father transfers it to him. This transfer foreshadows how Desdemona will be viewed by Othello for the remainder of the play. Relying on Desdemona to echo his language, Othello holds her in positive regard until his gaze is reconstructed by Iago, who forces Othello to place Desdemona in the negative position of an adulterous wife. Iago's language then controls the male gaze until it is challenged by his wife's perceptions. Once Emilia stops mimicking Iago and is no longer blinded by his false gaze, she is able to adopt and verbalize a proto-feminist gaze. By speaking for Desdemona after her death, Emilia uses her gaze to demonstrate the falsity of the male gaze and return Desdemona to the positive position of virtuous wife. Desdemona's death and reconstruction make her both a desirable and unattainable object to Othello. Emilia's words reproaching Othello highlight his gullibility, guilt and

Desdemona's innocence, once again drawing attention to her mistress's eye and the gaze:

"Nay, lay thee down an roar, / For thou hast killed the sweetest innocent / That e'er did
lift up eye" (5.2.205-207). Desdemona is thus returned to her original position of
innocence and desirability, but only after her spirit and voice are silenced.

Chapter Three

“I have Immortal longings in me.” Cleopatra: Doubly Gendered in the Gaze

As in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the body, language and the Lacanian male gaze figures heavily in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. Like Juliet and Desdemona, Cleopatra’s body and the Lacanian gaze upon it is shaped by the language spoken by male characters looking at her. Enobarbus’s renowned description of Cleopatra exemplifies this gaze and its language even as he claims he has no words to describe her:

For her own person,
It beggared all description. She did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O’er-picturing that Venus. (2.2. 204-207)

Cleopatra is not the only character subjected to the gaze. Throughout the play, characters find themselves in the gaze as they are judged by one another; however, none of them trusts that judgement. One aspect of the gaze that does not appear in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Othello* is the reversal of the masculine and feminine roles, specifically with Cleopatra and Antony. This leads to the gaze being resisted by Cleopatra and allows the gaze to be placed upon Antony. Antony is subjected to Octavius’s gaze (representing Rome and the West), and this places him in an object position. Antony is also gazed upon by Cleopatra and Enobarbus, but they lack the power of Octavius because of their own object positions. Like Juliet and Desdemona, Cleopatra repeatedly finds herself in the gaze. Before she even steps onto the stage, male characters are discussing her physicality.

Cleopatra, though, not only realizes her position in the gaze but attempts to reshape the gaze on her. Her object position prevents this reshaping from being successful, despite Cleopatra's gendered role reversal. Cleopatra finds herself most often gazed upon by Antony, Enobarbus and Octavius, who shape her body with their gazes, eventually leading to her death and the final construction of her in death. Their view of Cleopatra serves to highlight the relationship between gender roles and the gaze, and the impact of both on language and the construction of the body.

In order to understand the impact of gender role reversal in the gaze on Cleopatra, it is helpful to explore Antony's gender role and the gaze on him. Early in the play, Cleopatra draws the gaze by reminiscing about Antony wearing her clothes when she wore "his sword Philippan" (2.5.23). By mocking Antony's masculinity, Cleopatra affects the perception of the two of them and how language constructs them for the remainder of the play. Antony finds himself an object of the male gaze because of his effeminization and figurative castration and moves into a subservient role in his relationships with Cleopatra and Octavius because of this. In contrast, Cleopatra is constructed as unwomanly, but she is also an object of the gaze because she is a public figure, Othered by her race, and sexualized by her gender. She is constructed both positively and negatively through the gazes of Octavius, Antony, and Enobarbus: Octavius viewing her in a mainly negative gaze, Enobarbus in a mainly positive construction, and Antony oscillating between the two because of his divided loyalty to Rome and Cleopatra. Cleopatra is shaped and sexualized by the male gaze of these characters. This, in turn, affects how she stages her death, in which she is both

submissive and defiant. She attracts and shapes Octavius's gaze by creating a picture that embodies her royalty, her power and her beauty. The problem with this act of defiance is that even as the picture portrays her power, she has lost that power in death. Therefore, she has answered Octavius's wish for her to be submissive and to cede her kingdom to him. These interlocking themes of sexuality, femininity and the Other bring to light the male gaze and its power.

One of the most notable scenes in the play, where both the lavishness of Egypt and the gender reversal of Antony and Cleopatra are displayed, is 2.5. The scene starts with Cleopatra speaking lines reminiscent of Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*: "Give me some music—music, moody food / Of us that trade in love" (2.5.1-2), as servants attend her every whim. Calling herself an actor, Cleopatra attempts to command the stage with her language, clearly putting herself in the gaze of both her onstage and offstage audience. She does not cower under the gaze, but embraces it as she tells her tale. She even arranges her narrative as a play, having a eunuch portray Antony: "As well a woman with an eunuch played / As with a woman. Come, you'll play with me, sir?" (2.5.5-6). Once she sets her scene, she regales her servants and waiting women with what has made her unwomanly and unmanned Antony:

I laughed him into patience, and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
Then put his tires and mantles on him whilst
I wore his sword Phillipan. (2.5.20-23)

This bedroom cross-dressing is not just play, but has widespread connotations and repercussions. The line “I wore his sword Phillipian” is especially telling since, as pointed out in the Introduction, daggers and swords are representative of the phallus. Even though “the sword” loses some of its masculine association when possessed by a female it is still overall representative of the phallus. Therefore, Cleopatra is associated with the masculine when she possesses Antony’s sword. Neill argues “the process of psychological emasculation that ‘robs’ the hero of his ‘sword’ is inextricably linked [...] to discover[ing] an identity that is never self-identical, a self that always seems to be slipping away from itself” (160). The encounter between Antony and Cleopatra therefore unmans him fully, dressing him in Cleopatra’s clothes and Roman society viewing him as “womanish” and weak. According to Laurence Kirmayer, “These ‘dismantlings’ occur not just in sexual encounters but in any situation evocative of the ‘male wound’ [or sexual weapon]” (144). Cleopatra sees herself as having a sexual weapon which allows her to be the dominant partner in the relationship, as is evident in 2.5 by her proclamation of ownership and her psychological castration of Antony (Charney 93). While advantageous for Cleopatra, Antony’s submission to her is detrimental to his reputation and standing as a Roman. Indeed, their gender reversal carries over to their respective nations and the political relationship between the two countries. Loomba states that this gender reversal “becomes an aspect of Egypt’s relationship with Rome. By effeminizing Antony, Cleopatra threatens the hierarchy between imperial Rome and its dominion, Egypt” (120). Octavius sees the effeminization of Antony to be detrimental not only to a

general who has always been loyal to Rome, but also to the subject and object positions of the countries themselves and, ultimately, to his position as ruler of Rome.

In Octavius's eyes, Antony has become soft and womanish, and he attempts to bring Antony back to the masculinity of Rome through marriage to Octavia. However, the more time Antony spends in Egypt, the more Octavius fears that Antony is no longer a masculine Western Roman, but a femininized, Eastern Egyptian. Dubrow notes that in the early modern period the home was considered the woman's space, but if the male took on a household role, his body "was associated with male subjectivity and [...] could reverse male and female subject positions (Dubrow 12). In relation to this, Antony's position in Egypt (Cleopatra's "domestic" sphere) leads him to become an object of the gaze and comes to the point where Octavius feels that Antony has become Othered through his association with Cleopatra. Carol Rutter argues that Octavius attempts "to 'negrify' Antony, to imagine the lean, hard body softened with 'lascivious wassails' and inexhaustible erotic indulgence" (67). In the mind of the Romans, Antony is now how they imagine Cleopatra: soft, womanly and pliable. What is interesting, however, is that although Antony is Roman, it is Cleopatra who acts and speaks in the stoic manner associated with Romans. This leads the audience to a paradox: the lasciviousness of Egypt, personified by Cleopatra, with its spices and luxury is paired with the hard and decisive stoicism of the Roman world. Robert Ornstone explains this paradox:

The patterns of imagery insist that Egypt is a Circean land of mandragora and lotus-eaters, where sensuality breeds forgetfulness of Rome and duty.

But the action shows us that it is Cleopatra, the Serpent of Old Nile, not

Antony, who would hear the Roman messengers; and it is Cleopatra, not Octavia, who demands her place in the war by Antony's side. Thus it may not be completely ironic that the finest Roman words of the play are spoken by Cleopatra to Antony in Act 1, scene 3. (88)

In 1.3, Antony comes to Cleopatra with the news that his wife, Fulvia, is dead. Cleopatra does not greet this news emotionally, but with pragmatism. She questions Antony's lack of tears and wonders if this will be his reaction to her own death:

O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be. (1.3.62-65)

Cleopatra then tells Antony to honour his wife by at least playing the mourning husband even though it is the last thing he wants to do:

I prithee turn aside and weep for her
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
Belong to Egypt. Good now, play on scene
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look
Like perfect honour. (1.3.76-80)

Cleopatra continues to remain cold and distant from Antony for the rest of the scene, driving him away with her body language and her vocal language:

Your honour calls you hence,
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,

And all the gods go with you. Upon your sword

Sit laurel victory, and smooth success

Be strewed before your feet. (1.3.98-102)

Cleopatra's language and demand that Antony mourn his wife in the Roman fashion show the gendered and cultural reversal between Cleopatra and Antony. As Juliet Dusinberre notes, Antony "occupies a [...] position almost always culturally reserved for women, and in relation to a Cleopatra who occupies a position almost always reserved for men" (60). The subject position that Cleopatra is attempting to fill is advantageous for her, but the fear of not being able to control the gaze fuels her gender reversal.

Although Cleopatra is automatically an object of the gaze because of her gender and race, it is the role reversal of the "lusty Egyptian" and the "proud Roman" that causes Antony to be an object of the gaze as well. This reversal is best explored in terms of the Lacanian mirror stage: "The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation...the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 4). By reversing their gender roles Antony and Cleopatra are fulfilling their fantasized self, identified in the mirror stage, through the other person. In order to protect this idealized self, Antony and Cleopatra project their desires upon each other and therefore don the characteristics of the Other, thus leading to a misrepresentation of "self." Othered in the eyes of the Romans by his relationship with Cleopatra, Antony flees their disapproval and seeks the safety of Egypt with her. Being defined as Other pushes Antony deeper into the relationship, leading him to an anticipation of fulfilment in

Egypt that he cannot find in Rome. This insufficiency and anticipation refers not only to Antony's relationship with Egypt and Rome, but also parallels his relationships with Cleopatra and Octavius.

Antony's effeminization and gender reversal leaves him in an object position, unable to control the way others perceive him, for much of the play. In the very first scene, Antony's soldier friends sketch out their gaze for the audience, describing him as "The triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see" (1.1.13-14). The reference to the "triple pillar" is especially telling as it is echoed in Antony's "triple turn'd" insult of Cleopatra later on. However, where "triple turn'd" is a negative construction, the "triple pillar" refers to Antony's triumvirate with Octavius and Lepidus, and their military and political conquests. These soldiers immediately colour the audience's perception of Antony and Cleopatra's affair. Allan Bloom suggests that "these men are all admirers of Antony, which is one of the main reasons we are disposed in his favour [...] They know him best, and you can judge a man by his friends. Their opinion is most certainly that Antony is being destroyed by his affair" (34), and they disparagingly refer to him as "the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (1.1.10-11). In other words, the soldiers believe that Antony is simply a tool by which Cleopatra satisfies her own desires.

Antony continues to be gazed upon throughout the play, most particularly by Enobarbus, Octavius, and Cleopatra. Enobarbus repeatedly observes Antony, and his snide comments show his disapproval. This is hinted at in 2.2 when he begins to gossip in frustration about Antony. Lepidus notes, "Your speech is passion / But pray you, stir no

embers up” (11.12-13) before he is interrupted by Antony’s entrance. Enobarbus’s disapproval of Antony is also shown in 2.6, when he and Menas discuss Antony’s marriage to Octavia. He also prophesies Antony’s return to Cleopatra and Octavius’s anger. Enobarbus believes Antony is a fool who will dismiss a loyal and chaste wife for the exotic embraces of a seductive foreigner. He knows this will lead to war as both Cleopatra and Octavius will demand Antony’s loyalty.

The emotional tug-of-war played by Cleopatra and Octavius explains their opposing views of Antony throughout the play. Octavius reflects on the perfect Roman soldier Antony used to be in 1.5:

When thou once
 Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew’st
 Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
 Did famine follow, whom thou fought’st against
 [...]
 And all this—
 It wounds thine honour that I speak it now
 [...]
 Let his shames quickly
 Drive him to Rome. (1.5.56-59, 68-69, 73-74)

This description only serves to highlight the difference between the man Antony once was and the man he has become in his revels with Cleopatra. Time after time, the softness of Antony and the newfound set of values he has borrowed from Cleopatra’s court shatter

his Roman stoicism. The new Antony is uninterested in the militaristic things the old Antony did, and his change of character is evident in Cleopatra's gaze on him. She sees Antony as being full of life and disposed to mirth, and it is only when "a Roman thought hath struck him" (1.2.77) that he becomes serious. She also sees Antony as a demi-god, someone able to span great oceans in a single bound: "The demi-Atlas of earth, the arm / And burgonet of men" (1.5.23-24). Antony is larger than life for Cleopatra: Ornstein writes, "In her mythopeic imagination Antony bestrides the ocean, making cities on the waves, and creating empires through a divinely prodigal carelessness--he drops realms and islands out of his pockets" (97). She sees Antony as a man greater than Octavius, whom she considers a boy, whereas Octavius sees Antony as being unmanned by Cleopatra.

In Cleopatra's gaze, when Antony becomes Eastern he is not unmanned, but an immortal demi-god. Just prior to her death Cleopatra imagines that she can see and hear Antony calling her; in her eyes, Antony is not dead but a god who will live forever to be with her.

Yare, Yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear

Antony call: I see him rouse himself

To praise my noble act. (5.2.283-285)

Cleopatra's being able to see and hear Antony in the afterlife would have been the natural view of an Egyptian considering the belief in the god Osiris.¹⁸ Cleopatra's gaze on Antony is not just that of hero worship, but is extremely sexualized (particularly in death)

¹⁸ See the Introduction for more information on Osiris.

much like the gaze on her. First, in 1.5, she lewdly alludes to being in the place of Antony's horse: "O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!" (l. 21). This brings to mind Juliet's line of "O happy dagger" (5.3.169-170). Just as the dagger has sexual connotations so does Cleopatra wishing to bear the weight of Antony. Later, in 2.5, Cleopatra thinks back to her bedroom games with Antony. She compares her treatment of Antony to fishing and catching him with her winsome hooks. The whole passage is riddled with sexual allusions: "My bended hook shall pierce / Their [the fishes] slimy jaws, and as I draw them up / I'll think them every one an Antony" (ll.12-14). It is later in this scene that Cleopatra says that she "wore his sword Philippan" (ll. 23), a reference to Antony's manhood and sexual intercourse and a sign of gender role reversal as noted earlier.

At the monument, Cleopatra maintains her sexualized gaze on Antony, saying, "Here's sport indeed. How heavy weighs my lord!" (4.15.33). "Sport" is a reference to previous sexual encounters (Charney 92) in which Cleopatra has borne the weight of Antony. Even after he dies, Cleopatra keeps up her bawdy talk, kissing Antony and saying, "Die where thou hast lived / Quicken with kissing. Had my lips that power, / Thus I would wear them out" (4.15.39-41), ensuring that Antony will, much like Othello and Romeo, "die upon a kiss." As Robert Ornstein notes, "the injurious gods cannot cheat Cleopatra as the stars cheat Juliet, because she has known years of love and revelry with Antony. Even the sorrow she feels in bearing his dying weight is transmuted by the memory of their earlier dyings" (86). This sexualized death reflects the connection between "little death" (orgasm) and "big death" (actual death) as discussed in the

Introduction. It is unusual, however, for a man to be in this sexualized position in death. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet is left lying on the stage, shielding Romeo's body from the gaze of others, but exposing herself to it for the majority of act five. In contrast, in *Othello*, the moment Othello falls onto the bed after his suicide, the curtains are closed and he can no longer be gazed upon. This is because the sight of Othello's dead, male warrior body is not a suitable object for the male gaze. Antony's body, though, effeminized by Cleopatra in both life and death, is open for viewing, particularly as it becomes a prop when Cleopatra stages her own death. What is normally deemed a taboo sexual gaze is normalized for Antony as the gaze shifts to Cleopatra who has been a constant object of the sexualized male gaze.

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, Antony is an object of the gaze due to his effeminization; however, the gaze does not penetrate him in the same way that it does Cleopatra. She fills the male gaze in a variety of ways and although Cleopatra normally embraces and attempts to shape the gaze on her, there are times when she fears the gaze because of gender reversal. For example, she is terrified of being taken captive by Octavius and paraded through Rome to celebrate his conquest. She says, "[M]echanic slaves / [. . .] shall / Uplift us to the view" (5.2.205-7) and "The quick comedians / Extemporal will stage us [. . .] and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore" (ll. 212-213, 215-217). These lines draw attention to the boy actor playing Cleopatra and speaking these lines, causing the audience to focus on the boy beneath the mask of the female character Cleopatra. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, there was a belief at the time Shakespeare was writing that a person's

gender changed when she/he donned the clothes of the opposite sex. One of the most vocal and influential preachers of the period, Stephen Gosson, claimed that “the law of God [...] forbids men to put on woman's garments,” and to do so would cause a man to “falsifie, forge and adulterate” (E3V). This idea is also expressed in *Hic Mulier* (*That Woman*) published in 1620. This work, which was well circulated, reminded readers that “your Maker made... a coat for the man and a coat for the woman...the man's coat fit for his labour, the woman's fit for her modesty” (*Hic Mulier* 14), and to “switch coats [was] to undo the work of heaven” (Howard 422). This stands in contrast to Juliet Dusinberre's claim that “the male body of the boy actor playing Shakespeare's Cleopatra in the theatre becomes as insignificant as the biological maleness of the adult players who performed in the mystery cycles” (Dusinberre 52). Nonetheless, it does appear that Shakespeare is drawing attention to what is behind the scenes, or beneath the costume, as he does in many of his plays.¹⁹

For the majority of the play the male gaze is not focused on a “squeaking Cleopatra,” but rather on Cleopatra's imagined body: an Eastern black female body Rutter describes as “loose, sensuous, irrational, primitive, ‘natural’--a lazy lascivious body whose failure of abstinence figures savagery or incontinent sexuality” (66). This body and the gaze on it is seen in Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Enobarbus begins by describing her lascivious surroundings and then moves into a description of Cleopatra herself, despite his claim that Cleopatra is indescribable: “For her own person, / It beggar'd all description” (2.2.201-202). He

¹⁹ See *Hamlet* 2.2, 3.2; *Henry V*, Prologue; *As You Like It*, 2.7; *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue; and *Twelfth Night*, 3.4 for examples.

paradoxically then attempts to describe her to his companion. Maurice Charney calls the description “a pictorial set piece, but remarkably little is said about Cleopatra herself...Enobarbus uses the familiar Marlovian trick of invidious comparison: Cleopatra’s beauty goes beyond even the painting of Venus herself” (90). Enobarbus sees Cleopatra “In her pavilion,—cloth-of-gold of tissue,— / O'er-picturing that Venus” (2.2. 203-204). This description is nearly word for word identical to Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s description of Cleopatra in his *Lives of Greek and Romans*: “Now for the person of her self: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus, commonly drawn in picture” (Plutarch, *Volume IX* 34). It appears that Shakespeare is borrowing heavily from his source, a text that would have been familiar to many of his audience, to lend as much authenticity to Enobarbus’s report as possible.

As in Plutarch’s account (34), Enobarbus’s description of Cleopatra continues beyond this glorified description to note that she can capture the gaze more readily than Antony. He claims, “Antony, / Enthron'd i' the market-place, did sit alone, / Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy, / Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra” (2.2.219-222). Cleopatra is able to draw the gaze with her Eastern exotic beauty, a contradictory compliment to her Otherness. These lines not only draw the audience’s attention to Cleopatra at Antony’s expense, but also show her positively constructed by the male gaze. However, this positive construction does not transfer to Enobarbus’s listener, who exclaims, “Royal wench! / She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed: / He ploughed her, and she cropp'd” (2.2.231-233). Here the gaze is sexualized in negative terms as she

is described as property to be harvested. This leads to Enobarbus giving Cleopatra backhanded compliments:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
 Her infinite variety: other women cloy
 The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
 Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
 Become themselves in her; that the holy priests
 Bless her when she is riggish. (2.2.239-244)

The passage starts out complimentary and is one of the most used quotations to describe Cleopatra in literature and criticism today. Ornstein notes, “Enobarbus describes her lightness, her artfulness, her wit, and her infinite variety,[but] the other Romans, like so many modern critics, can picture her only in the conventional posture of a whore, drugging Antony with cloying lascivious wassails” (Ornstein 90). Enobarbus’s claim that Cleopatra possesses “infinite variety” can also be seen as double-edged sword as he is drawing attention to Cleopatra as Other and unlike Roman women, a contrast also made later when she is compared to Octavia after Antony’s marriage. Enobarbus’s barbed compliments go further when he says that Cleopatra does not “cloy [t]he appetites” of her lovers, but rather “makes hungry where most she satisfies.” Initially this sounds positive as Cleopatra satisfies her lovers; nonetheless, it is negative as she never fully satiates their sexual appetite.

In addition, Enobarbus states that the “vilest things become themselves in her” which is certainly not complimentary. He may make this statement because of the

Othered, sexualized and racialized gaze in which he holds Cleopatra. The description highlights Cleopatra's exotic Otherness which Enobarbus finds attractive and enchanting despite his Western judgement. Octavius would consider this complimentary gaze vile and unworthy of one of his soldiers, and the struggle Enobarbus faces is evident because in the next statement he simultaneously insults and compliments Cleopatra, noting, "that the holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish" (2.2.243-244). The word "riggish" and the "vilest things" beforehand are sexualized statements. To be riggish, according to early modern standards, was to be "wanton or horny, a... strongly sexualized word" (Charney 91). In other words, according to Enobarbus, Cleopatra is so good at being riggish or wanton, that she can even seduce the priest's blessing. These last few lines sum up the dichotomy of the male gaze on Cleopatra and make the audience aware of "those 'vilest things' that realize their apotheosis in Cleopatra. She is a strange mixture of opposites" (Charney 91) that beguiles the senses and draws the gaze. It is this strange mixture of positive and negative that both attracts and repels Antony throughout the play, affecting his gaze upon Cleopatra.

In contrast to Octavius, who spends little time gazing at Cleopatra, Antony's gaze is the most constant in Cleopatra's life, though he fluctuates between a positive and negative view of her, as mentioned previously. The internal struggle that Antony faces is shown in 1.2: "I must from this enchanting queen break off: / Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch" (1l.129-131). He realizes that his relationship with Cleopatra will cause problems for him both politically and personally, but he is so drawn to her charms that he elects to stay with her regardless of the cost.

Scholars have repeatedly commented on Antony's willingness to be ensnared, saying that "he is acutely aware of his dotage in love" (Charney 95). He continually refers to her as his Queen when speaking to her and gives her high praises when sending messages or gifts to her:

Say, the firm Roman to great Egypt sends
 This treasure of an oyster; at whose foot,
 To mend the petty present, I will piece
 Her opulent throne with kingdoms; all the east,
 Say thou, shall call her mistress. (1.5. 43-47)

Here, Antony refers to Cleopatra as "great Egypt" and sets her above himself as the "firm Roman." He sends her a gift worthy of a Queen and a wife in the costly pearl, but also says that this is a "petty present" and that she deserves much more than that. Antony also claims that the entire East shall call her mistress, though it is worth noting that he does not say the entire West (i.e. Rome), the name he uses to refer to himself, will do the same. Antony may be lost in his dotage but he still sees Rome as the conqueror and Egypt as the conquered.

Antony's political view on Rome as the subjugator becomes most apparent when Antony's gaze is negatively reshaped by Octavius and he believes Cleopatra has betrayed him. Although he calls Cleopatra his queen and uses the language of a lover, Antony quickly tosses that aside to do Caesar's bidding. When the question of a political marriage for Antony is discussed, Octavius manipulates Antony by claiming he is already married to Cleopatra in Egypt. Antony just as quickly dismisses this notion by saying, "I

am not married, Caesar: let me hear / Agrippa further speak” (2.2.169-170). When away from Cleopatra and Egypt, Antony assumes the Roman perspective of the country and its queen. When in Rome, Antony no longer gazes on Cleopatra as his wife but rather as his “Egyptian dish.”

The most violent gaze in which Antony holds Cleopatra is when she withdraws her ships at the Battle of Actium. His contempt and abuse hearkens back to Othello’s treatment of Desdemona. Both men use the same terminology: Othello refers to Desdemona as being able to “turn, and turn, and yet go on, / And turn again” (4.1.255-256), and Antony refers to Cleopatra as being a “Triple-turn’d whore”(4.13.13), referring to her affair with Julius Caesar, himself, and, because of her decisions in battle, his belief that she has also found Octavius’s bed. Both insults have the same meaning, which is that the woman has been sexually promiscuous and has visited (or turned) other men’s beds. Turning also refers to women’s proverbial inconstant nature and propensity to change. Ania Loomba draws on this parallel to highlight why Antony feels that he cannot trust Cleopatra much as Othello feels he cannot trust Desdemona:

Antony’s predicament echoes Othello’s--both are soldiers who have given themselves excessively to women who anchor them to a new but fraught cultural identity, but also lay them open to charges of unmanliness.

Antony’s passion makes him oscillate between his Roman martial self and a newly acquired ‘Egyptian’ identity, which appears incompatible with military valour. Cleopatra’s followers are either women or eunuchs, and an ‘unmanned’ Antony joins their fawning assembly. (Loomba 126).

The “fawning assembly” that Antony has joined frustrates him to the point where he lashes out at Cleopatra not only by calling her a “triple turn’d whore,” but also referring to her as “this foul Egyptian” (4.13.10), “false soul of Egypt” (4.13.25), “this grave charm” (4.13.25), “a right gipsy” (4.13.28) and “thou spell” (4.13.30). When Cleopatra enters, she is not expecting Antony to be upset and is clearly confused and distressed by the way he treats her. She asks, “Why is my lord enraged against his love?” (4.13.31). Antony continues to abuse her and hold her in a negative gaze: “Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot / Of all thy sex; most monster-like” (4.13.35-36). Like Shakespeare’s Moor, Antony misinterprets the scene and does not hesitate to abuse the one he claims to love.

Unlike Desdemona, however, Cleopatra does not even attempt to reshape that gaze into a positive construction when Antony heaps the abusive construction upon her; rather, she bows under the strain and exits, unknowingly strengthening Antony’s negative perception of her. As a result, Antony goes further and claims he would have killed her if she had stayed:

'Tis well thou'rt gone,
 If it be well to live; but better 'twere
 Thou fell'st into my fury, for one death
 Might have prevented many. (4.13.39-42)

Antony’s words once again echoes Othello’s reason for killing Desdemona. Antony does not see killing Cleopatra as a murder but rather as a sacrifice to save lives, just as Othello sees Desdemona’s murder as a sacrifice so she will not tempt other men. Antony

continues, calling on his Roman ancestors to give him strength because “the witch shall die” (4.13.47). He is fully engaged in the Roman male gaze and Cleopatra is powerless to change his perception. Wisely, she does not attempt to alter his view herself but sends her eunuch to bridge the gap. She tells Mardian, “[G]o tell him I have slain myself; / Say, that the last I spoke was 'Antony,'" (4.14.7-8). As a eunuch, Mardian is under Cleopatra’s control and must do her bidding; however, he was also born male and may be more capable of reshaping Antony’s gaze than she would be. This attempt at reshaping the gaze, although resisted at first by Antony, is successful and results in his gaze shifting positively to Cleopatra for the remainder of the play.

While Antony’s gaze on Cleopatra oscillates at an alarming rate, the other male characters most often create a negative construction of her. Although Enobarbus’ original gaze is positive, he views her negatively not long after he describes her as Venus. Discussing Antony’s marriage to Octavia with Menas, he insults Cleopatra by referring to her in a derogatory sexualized manner; he also foreshadows the trouble Antony will have with Octavius because of his affair with Cleopatra: “He will to his Egyptian dish again: then shall the / sighs of Octavia blow the fire up in Caesar” (2.6.123-124). This comes true as Enobarbus predicts and is one of the reasons that Octavius views Cleopatra negatively. Logically, this makes sense as Octavius is Octavia’s brother and the leader of Rome. He would first object to Cleopatra as the ruler of Egypt since he wants to gain control of the country. He would also object to Cleopatra drawing Antony away from his sister. He states as much in 3.6: “No, my most wronged sister; Cleopatra / Hath nodded him to her” (ll. 65-66). Nonetheless, this second reason is more of a cover for his designs

on Egypt because Octavius does not hesitate to give Octavia in marriage to Antony when he knows of the affair with Cleopatra, but considers Antony an ally. When Agrippa mentions that Antony should marry Octavia, Octavius notes that Cleopatra will be displeased by Antony taking a bride: “If Cleopatra heard you, your reproof / Were well deserved of rashness” (2.2.126-127), clearly showing his knowledge of their affair. It is only when Octavius decides that Antony is a threat that he looks to Cleopatra as the reason for Antony’s betrayal and refers to her as Antony’s “lust” and “whore” (3.6.59, 67). Although Octavius always views Cleopatra negatively, he actually holds Antony in his gaze more than Cleopatra. Bloom notes, “Only a dry or utterly unerotic man, like Octavius, would fail to have at least a fugitive attraction to her, if only to crush it for the sake of more urgent considerations” (38). All the other male characters seem to have some attraction for Cleopatra or at least to realize the extent of her charm, but Octavius’s only goal is to make Cleopatra submit to him. However, Cleopatra’s death allows her to have one final act of defiance while performing the ultimate submission.

The death of Cleopatra is a careful pantomime intended to draw the male gaze with the only weapon Cleopatra has available to her: her body. As Lacan points out, “from the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 83). In regards to Cleopatra’s death, she is aware of the gaze and tries to adapt to it by preparing for death on her own terms. However, because of her object position, her resistance ultimately becomes an invitation for the gaze, leading to her death and the final Roman

gaze upon her. What Cleopatra does not understand is that “of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as un-apprehensible. That is why it is, more than any other object, misunderstood (*meconnu*)” (83); Cleopatra is powerless to fully apprehend or understand the gaze, therefore she cannot become a subject of the gaze. Never one to give up, Cleopatra looks for an escape and “manages, fortunately, to symbolize [her] own vanishing and punctiform bar (*trait*) in the illusion of the consciousness of seeing oneself see oneself, in which the gaze is elided” (83). However, as was noted with Desdemona, an object can never truly “see oneself see oneself” as it is a false escape that leads the object directly back into the gaze.

Shakespeare portrays Cleopatra as understanding this concept, of the pull between the gaze, the body, and desire, better than any other character in the play. It is therefore only natural that she uses her understanding of this to her advantage in the final scenes of the play. Cleopatra is well aware that Octavius will see her after death and creates a scene to draw the Roman male gaze one last time. She sets up a picture in her last attempt to control the gaze after having lost to Octavius in every other way. Lacan calls this type of picture “simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 89). As Cleopatra stages her death, it is not desolate like Juliet’s plaintive plea for some kind drop of poison or Desdemona’s cries of innocence. Charney points out that Cleopatra’s “death scene is made as aesthetically beautiful as possible, as she dies grandly in full regalia. [...] The speech sounds like

impressive organ music as it rolls mellifluously from Cleopatra's lips" (96). Cleopatra's speech is certainly reminiscent of her earlier play acting with her eunuch: "Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch / My best attires" (5.2.223-224). Cleopatra, queen of the stage, is dressing for her last performance: "Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have / Immortal longings in me (5.2.275-276). Cleopatra's creation of a picture is not only for Octavius, but also for Antony when he sees her in the afterlife. This adds a sexualized element to her death as shown through her language when she speaks of "immortal longings" and mentions Antony "rousing himself." Cleopatra's death becomes an "erotic, domestic, and aesthetic fulfilment for her" (Charney 96). Cleopatra's death holds the same morbid excitement associated with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Once Romeo has died, it seems only natural that Juliet will join him by performing a sexualized death, impaling herself on his phallic dagger.

Cleopatra follows this tradition because even the serpent she chooses to die with is sexualized. Nonetheless, she approaches death in a stoic manner, unlike Antony's botched suicide which shows his weakness and what the white, Western gaze would consider "feminine" traits. Cleopatra bravely places the asp to her breast without hesitation and treats it as a baby. This suckling image not only shows her literal embrace of death (much like Juliet) but also conjures up images of her sexual encounters with Antony: "Doth thou not see the baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.304-305). Cleopatra is fluid and-ever changing even in death. Ornstein states,

She is Antony's mistress and his wife, the graceful courtesan and the tender mother, the great queen and the simple lass. Her drowsiness is at

once sensual, maternal, and child-like, for though she nurses her imaginary babes, she is, as so many times before, very like a child, who plays now at being mother, and who is dressed in a royal costume to surprise Octavius. (95)

The real reason for this show is to highlight the sensuous, fluid, loose feminine Eastern gaze with which Cleopatra is associated and not the hard, white, masculine gaze associated with Octavius. The death of her maid, Iras, is also sexualized and feminized as she commits suicide by kissing Cleopatra (5.2.291-292).

As mentioned before, “suicide was the ultimate Early Modern bad death” (Becker 88) and Cleopatra’s death is clearly a suicide, which should therefore make it a “bad death.” On the other hand, Cleopatra’s detail in planning her death and her deathbed speech would lead an Early Modern audience to associate her death with a good death. A “good death” required “a woman to be prepared, well versed in her spiritual role on the deathbed and strong enough to cope with the physical and spiritual rigours of that state” (Becker 91). Cleopatra is all of these things and more; in fact, she welcomes death and does not hesitate to embrace its charms. This begs the question of whether Cleopatra dies a “good death” or a “bad death.” Lucinda Becker answers this perplexity best:

Cleopatra’s demise is brought about by political circumstances, and her decision is based largely upon the loss of her power*base and regal position. Her death in the play is necessary both for the sake of historical accuracy as a dramatic catalyst, but her suicide is nevertheless the action of a woman mourning the loss of her lover, and the sexualized and

feminized description of the act serves to emphasize the feminine excess that has driven her to such a point. (90)

According to early modern thought, it is, strictly speaking, a “good death” because Cleopatra is prepared for death, says all the right words and is spiritually ready. Even though she makes her death a picture to trap the gaze, this was acceptable by early modern standards as women were to be surrounded on their deathbed and gazed upon. In fact, Cleopatra’s death embodies her royal status and, ironically, the quintessential Roman trait of stoicism—a trait that Antony fails to show in his death. By being stoic, Cleopatra’s death is further constructed as being “good.” What complicates this idea of Cleopatra dying well is that the picture she creates to trap the gaze is sexualized. As Becker points out, the image emphasizes the sexual female body which could not be accentuated when a woman died well. By staging her death, Cleopatra succeeds in capturing the male gaze, but in doing so, she cannot be considered to “die well” by Early Modern standards because of her sexualized death. Once again Shakespeare toys with the audience and their perceptions of what it means to die well, while he also explores the connections between theatre, life and death.

Cleopatra constructs her final image primarily for Octavius who, through his personality and position as the leader of the Roman world, is her polar opposite. Cleopatra is well aware of the effect the body can have on the male gaze because, as Judith Butler writes, “the body is not a substance, a surface, an inert or inherently docile object” (*Bodies and Power Revisited* 2). The body is not only shaped by the male gaze but, as Cleopatra proves, it can be subservient while also shaping the gaze in some

situations. As Cleopatra has been Octavius's opponent throughout the play, it is strange yet fitting that this death scene is directed at him. Knowing that Octavius has defeated her army, Cleopatra rejects the image of being led through Rome in chains if Octavius conquers her, to be gazed upon by "mechanic slaves / with greasy aprons, rules, and hammers" (5.2.209-210). What Cleopatra fears the most is her inability to control the gaze of the people who will see her in Rome. She realizes, as Loomba correctly theorizes, that "once she has lost political power, and knows she will no longer be able to control the terms of the performance, she stages her suicide, the last performance she can script" (133-134). Cleopatra's death and the picture she creates of herself as Mother Egypt is her final act of resistance as well as an act of submission to the Western male gaze and its ideal of a compliant woman. Cleopatra is arrayed in her finest robes in the monument of Isis and is surrounded by all things Egyptian so Octavius can see that she *is* Egypt, as Antony refers to her many times. Octavius is unable to bend her to his will and she goes to her grave an Egyptian queen, not a Roman slave. While Octavius wants nothing more than to make Cleopatra submissive to him, it is paradoxically through Cleopatra's act of rebellion that his desire is finally fulfilled. As Butler points out, "Desire is always linked with a project of impossible recovery, where what is to be recovered is both the repressed libidinal field constitutive of the unconscious and the 'lost object'" (Butler, *Subjects of Desire* 193). Octavius's desire, the *objet petit a* that Lacan discusses, is a submissive Cleopatra, and he no sooner gains what he seeks—having Cleopatra bend to his will—than he loses it again. He may order Cleopatra to submit but, dead, she can no longer comply. Consequently, Octavius chooses to praise her for being Antony's lover, but does

not mention that she was Egypt's queen: "She shall be buried by her Antony: / No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous" (5.2.359-360). Ultimately, the gaze that rests on Cleopatra is positive and Octavius's speech echoes that made by the Prince at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*: praise for the lovers and the life they lived but little mention of the feud that happened beforehand. This positive construction happens because, in death, Cleopatra can no longer resist the male gaze and therefore is not longer a threat to it.

In conclusion, the Lacanian gaze and its effect on language and the body is seen in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The gendered role reversal of Antony and Cleopatra early in the play affects how the gaze rests upon them and how they are constructed through language for the remainder of the play. Antony's figurative castration and effeminization results in him often being constructed in a subservient role in his relationships with Cleopatra and Octavius. He becomes identified with the Eastern, feminine Other because of his relationship with Cleopatra, and this allows the male gaze to fall on him even though he is white, Western, and male. Equally, as a result of the gender-role reversal, Cleopatra is constructed as "unwomanly." In addition, she attracts the gaze because she is Othered by her race, sexualized by her gender, and in a place of public significance because of her queenship. Any one of these categories would be enough for the male gaze to focus on Cleopatra, but because she falls into all three categories she is triply cursed. Nonetheless, the audience sees her constructed both positively and negatively because of the diverse perceptions of Octavius, Antony, and Enobarbus. Enobarbus normally views Cleopatra positively; Octavius constructs her negatively, and Antony oscillates between the two: between his loyalty to Rome and his loyalty to Cleopatra. Both Cleopatra and

Octavius are aware of the tension Antony experiences and attempt to win him for themselves. Octavius's goal is to make Cleopatra submit, and her death is both her final act of defiance and an unwilling act of submission as Octavius now dictates what happens to her country and her body. She attracts and shapes Octavius's male gaze through the image she creates with all her regal trappings of herself as Egypt. The problem with this act of defiance is that even while it captures Octavius's gaze, Cleopatra is dead and no longer able to defy him. She has answered Octavius's wish for her to submit and hand her kingdom over to him. Cleopatra is a wise queen, a faithful lover (which is more than can be said for Antony) and defiant to the end. However, as a woman, her power is limited, and she remains an object shaped by the gaze; she cannot change its impact even though she a female ruler. Rather she submits and becomes chaste, silent, and obedient in her final act of defiance.

Conclusion: Dying Well is Hard to Do

When Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze along with Judith Butler's theories of language and the body are applied to the representations of female death and dying in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, it becomes evident that Shakespeare is challenging social expectations of women on their death bed. Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra are subject to the male gaze as defined by Lacan, attempt to exert control over that gaze, and are external embodiments of desire, of someone's intrinsic lack or *objet petit a*, particularly at the moment of death. In addition, all three challenge the idea of what is required for a woman to die well or have a good death at the turn of the seventeenth century.

The male gaze is manifested in different ways in all three plays, though there is much overlap in how it is applied to Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra. The first gaze present in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* is that of a father looking on a disobedient daughter. Juliet and Desdemona are both attempting to escape their father's gaze through varying means: Juliet fakes her death so that she is unmarriageable, and Desdemona elopes with Othello in the middle of the night. Although both daughters are successful in escaping their father's gaze, their actions ultimately lead to their deaths, which can be seen as the punishment for defying the patriarchs.

The second male gaze present is related to this, a husband gazing on his errant wife. After the daughter leaves the gaze of her father, the responsibility of keeping the woman under observation falls to her husband. This is clearly seen in *Othello* when

Brabantio explicitly transfers the gaze to Othello by saying, “Look to her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father and may thee” (1.3. 289-290). In contrast, Capulet does not transfer the male gaze to Romeo as he does not learn of his daughter’s marriage until after her death. One could, however, consider *Othello* as an examination of what may have happened if Capulet had learned of Juliet’s elopement with Romeo. In Desdemona’s case, her filial disobedience causes Othello not to trust her. Male mistrust of women is also apparent in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as Antony, even though he is not Cleopatra’s husband, still questions her loyalty and obedience, much as Othello questions Desdemona’s. In fact, Antony’s abuse of Cleopatra, after she withdraws her ships at the Battle of Atticum, echoes Othello’s treatment of Desdemona. Both men accuse the women of “turning,” or being sexually promiscuous, having visited (or turned) other men’s beds. Turning also refers to women’s proverbial inconstant nature, which would make it imperative that a husband fix his gaze on his wife.

The male gaze never leaves these characters, even in death. In fact, desire for them increases after their deaths as is shown in the case of Juliet and Desdemona. Cleopatra is a little different for while Octavius’ desire for a submissive, *living* Cleopatra is increased after her death, Antony is already dead. Indeed, Antony finds himself desired by Cleopatra, a gendered role reversal that leads to his effeminized position which then allows him to be gazed upon when dead and desired by Cleopatra. All three women, however, are the external embodiment of another character’s *objet petit a*, the focus of a desire that is close to being fulfilled at the point of death. It is then that the desire is unattainable, creating an even greater desire for these women to live once more. When

Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra are alive, they have limited power to control the male gaze on them, depending on their social status and the degree of agency the men surrounding them decide to give them. As mentioned above, Juliet and Desdemona are successful in escaping the gaze of their fathers; however, this rebellion leads to their demise. Cleopatra, on the other hand, does not attempt to escape the gaze at all. Instead, she embraces it and attempts to control it, though not always successfully. Instead of rejecting the gaze, she acknowledges it and attempts to gain control from that position. However, because of her object position she interprets the gaze falsely and remains powerless.

When these female characters come to the realization that they cannot escape the male gaze, they try another tactic and attempt to reshape the male gaze on them. Juliet attempts to reshape Romeo's gaze in 2.1, the balcony scene, when he tries to shape her into the ideal Petrarchan mistress. She is somewhat successful in her attempt for two reasons: first, she is still under the gaze of her father because she has not yet married Romeo; second, because she refuses to answer his language of a courtly lover and forces him to change his language before it shapes her. Desdemona also attempts to reshape Othello's gaze but, unlike Juliet, she is unsuccessful as Othello's gaze is being shaped by Iago's language. Othello attends to what Iago says because it echoes his own thoughts and language. Desdemona has her power stripped away by Iago as he takes her place as symbolized in the mock marriage scene, leaving her defenceless within the male gaze. Cleopatra is also stripped of her power when Antony believes she has "turned," but she does not attempt to reshape Antony's gaze because she knows she is powerless within the

Roman, male gaze. Instead, she sends someone who was born male (her eunuch Mardian) to bridge the gap and hopefully reshape Antony's murderous gaze on her. Because of his masculine connection, Mardian is successful in reshaping Antony's gaze where Cleopatra in her Othered object position would have failed.

Another way these characters are able to control the gaze on them is with their bodies; however, this is a double edged sword because their sexuality can also be used against them. Juliet and Cleopatra set themselves up as a picture to trap the gaze, while Desdemona is set up by Iago to trap Othello's gaze. In the case of Juliet, she sets up a picture with her feigned death to simultaneously trap and escape the gaze. She traps the gaze on her presumably dead body so that she is seen as no longer a suitable bride for Paris. This picture is sexualized though, as Lord Capulet blames Death for deflowering his daughter on the eve of her wedding, a time when a very different sexualized gaze would be upon her. Like Juliet, Cleopatra sets up a picture to trap the gaze of Octavius. Unlike Juliet, however, she knows that the gaze upon her will be sexualized because of her gendered and racial Otherness. Nonetheless, she sets up the picture of herself as Queen of Egypt as her final act of defiance, even though her death results in Octavius having the final say about what happens to her body. In contrast to Juliet and Cleopatra, Desdemona is powerless in the male gaze because of Iago's language and his ability to misdirect and fashion Othello's gaze. By creating the scene with Cassio and Bianca and encouraging his master to imagine Desdemona with Cassio, Iago encourages Othello to see his wife as adulterous. By setting Desdemona up in this way, Iago orchestrates her death and Othello's downfall.

When Desdemona and Cleopatra see their own downfall coming as a result of being in the male gaze, they try to resist how it shapes them. Juliet controls her situation by feigning her death, but when her actual death is imminent she chooses to die with Romeo; thus, resisting one way the male gaze has shaped her (as a helpless female incapable of decisive action). Still, because of Desdemona's and Cleopatra's racialized, sexualized and Othered positions, they cannot correctly interpret the male gaze and their position in it. Desdemona's attempt to reshape Othello's gaze on her is unsuccessful because of her language. While Othello pays attention to what Iago says, he refuses to listen to Desdemona because she rejects his view of her as adulterous; however, she does resist this gaze up to, and even after, her death. Cleopatra can resist some facets of the gaze because of the power she possesses as shown by her gendered role reversal with Antony; however, she also recognizes her object position within Octavius' gaze and correctly fears that she will not be able to control his gaze.

When the characters can no longer control the gaze in life, they turn to controlling what they can of their death. Cleopatra, as stated before, orchestrates her death as a picture to trap the gaze and as her final act of defiance. She embraces death, literally, by cradling the asp to her breast; thus creating a sexual and maternal image. Arrayed in her royal robes, she intends that her final position in the gaze will be one of a defiant queen, even though she accepts, and perhaps wants, the gaze upon her to be sexualized as well. Desdemona's death is also sexualized as she asks for her wedding sheets to be placed on her bed, noting that these may well become her winding sheets. In 4.3, she recognizes the consequences of being in the negative gaze of Othello, created by Iago, and prepares for

death by singing the melancholy Willow Song and unburdening herself to her handmaiden, Emilia. Juliet goes through a similar process when she feigns her death, but does so alone. There is little preparation for her actual death, though, as it is an act of passion.

In their deaths, all three characters find themselves as the external embodiment of *objet petit a*. Lacan argues that the *objet petit a* is always in a position of flux, related as it is to the desire of that which is denied. Therefore, the moment that the desire for the external embodiment of *objet petit a* is about to be fulfilled, the desire changes. Juliet is the external embodiment of Romeo's *objet petit a*, who sees himself as a courtly lover and wants a woman to adore. Originally, Juliet is denied to him physically by the balcony and relationally by the fact that she is a Capulet, the sworn enemies of his family. The latter only increases Romeo's desire for Juliet, and it is because of her family ties that Juliet is never fully Romeo's. Only through exile or death does he have a hope of fulfilling his desire as Juliet would no longer be tied to her family. Returning from exile to find Juliet apparently dead, Romeo then desires to possess a living Juliet.

While Desdemona is alive, Othello's desire, the external embodiment of his *objet petit a*, is for a silent, chaste and obedient wife. Even though Desdemona is all these things, Iago's language poisons Othello into believing this is not so. When Othello kills Desdemona, she is perfectly silent and chaste and is restored to her former innocence by Emilia's revelation. Immediately, Othello wants Desdemona to live once again and to return to the utopian state at the beginning of their relationship when she was chaste, silent and obedient to him. The flux surrounding Othello's *objet petit a* is simple, though,

compared to its more complex embodiment in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Essentially, Antony and Cleopatra have an intrinsic lack fulfilled by the person of the other gender, the resulting gendered role reversal emphasizing how *objet petit a* is linked to the mirror stage in Lacan's theory. They project their desires onto each other and don the characteristics of the Other, eventually leading to a misrepresentation of "self" and where they are located in the male gaze. To further complicate matters, Cleopatra also represents Octavius' *objet petit a* as he desires a submissive Cleopatra, something he gains with her death. However, the external embodiment of his desire then shifts because, although Octavius can now order Cleopatra, she can no longer comply.

The deaths of Juliet, Desdemona and Cleopatra also allow for an assessment of whether they died well according to early modern standards.²⁰ As mentioned earlier, Becker outlines a code of conduct which dying women in the early modern period had to follow. This code encouraged a life of piety, bearing many children, staying in prayer upon their deathbed, and making an oral will. Women's readiness to accept death with a clear conscience was a demonstration of their piety. They were expected to remain in a state of tranquility and peace even when in great pain, and to approach death meekly and with penitence. One of the most important aspects of a woman's death was her willingness to liken herself to a child in order to surrender completely to God's will.

It can be argued that, in the deaths of Juliet and Desdemona, few, if any, of these requirements are met. Although Juliet fulfils the criteria for dying well when she feigns death, her actual death is an act of passion with no preparation, rituals or family nearby to

²⁰ As defined by Lucinda Becker in *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (2003).

witness her act. By these standards, Juliet would have been deemed to have died improperly. In the case of Desdemona, although she begins to prepare for death by singing a death song and placing her winding sheets on the bed, she resists death once it is near. This resistance suggests that she is not relying on God, bringing her piety into question. In addition, she does not take the opportunity to pray and prepare her spirit for death when Othello offers it to her, revealing further impiety. Cleopatra, on the other hand, appears to die an acceptable death by early modern standards. Her death is not unexpected; she prepares for it with the proper rituals of the Egyptian faith (to the extent that she dies in the temple of Isis), and her handmaids are there to help her prepare for death and to witness it. Shakespeare complicates this surface analysis of these characters' deaths with other factors with which an early modern audience would be familiar.

It was commonly taught that a woman could die without the requisite rituals and piety, but still be used as an example of "what not to do" so that other women would not be tempted to follow in her footsteps. If a woman's death could provide moral instruction, it could then be viewed as positive, even though none of the traditional requirements were met. It is just so with the deaths of Juliet and Desdemona. Juliet's death can be deemed beneficial as it, along with Romeo's death, seemingly brings an end to their parent's feud. Equally, Emilia's proto-feminist gaze refashions Desdemona's death as undeserved and her innocence is revealed, thus showing her piety and that she was indeed prepared for death as she had no sins to confess. Even when a character seemingly dies well, Shakespeare complicates the death. Cleopatra's "good death" is complicated by its sexual overtones, due to her racial otherness and the way she commits

suicide. Both of these elements would suggest an improper death, yet Shakespeare complicates such a reading. The patriarchal playworlds these characters inhabit, and the society of early modern England cannot incorporate female resistance, and the defiance of these characters is rewritten as faithfulness in the case of Juliet and Cleopatra, and as chastity in the case of Desdemona.

These five main areas that connect theory and texts: the Lacanian male gaze, the feminine control of the gaze, the fluctuating position of the *objet petit a*, desire in death and fulfilling the requirements for dying well reveal the applicability the theories of Lacan and Butler to the works of Shakespeare. By investigating the representations of female death and dying in Shakespeare's plays through these theories, it is possible to draw conclusions about some of the social expectations and constructs Shakespeare challenges through his writing. One of the most important conclusions drawn by this thesis is the inconsistencies in Shakespeare's representations of female death and dying in relation to the societal expectations of the time. As stated above, Juliet and Desdemona do not die well, but their deaths are reconstructed as good deaths, whereas Cleopatra dies well but is sexualized by the gaze complicating her death. In turn, these events reveal the historical discrepancies in what was considered an acceptable death for a woman. Most significantly, in relation to this thesis and feminist theory, Shakespeare reveals how women who defied patriarchal demands when they died, had their deaths refashioned to depict female faithfulness, chastity and obedience; the female triad of dying well.

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