4-25-2023

"Cabined, Cribbed, Confined": Tyrannical Anxiety and Maternal Power in Shakespeare

Elle J. Nieuwsma

“Cabined, Cribbed, Confined”: Tyrannical Anxiety and Maternal Power in Shakespeare

Elle Jordan Nieuwsma

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

Department of English

April 2023

Thesis Approval Form

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

The signatories of the committee below indicate that they have read and approved the thesis of Elle Jordan Nieuwsma in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

Jo E. Miller, Thesis committee chair — Date: 3/24/2023

Kathleen Blumreich, Committee member — Date: 3/24/2023

Lindsay Ellis, Committee member — Date: 3/24/2023

Sherry Johnson, Graduate Program Director — Date: 3/24/23

Accepted and approved on behalf of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Dean of the College

3/30/2023

Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of Graduate Faculty

Dean of The Graduate School

4/25/2023

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my profound appreciation to the following people who have walked with me through the past four years of graduate school. To my supervisor, Dr. Jo Miller, I am beyond thankful for your attentive and wise guidance on my thesis work from conception to completion. To my committee members, Dr. Kathleen Blumreich and Dr. Lindsay Ellis, I am greatly appreciative of the time and energy you have invested in this project. To my professors at Grand Valley State University and my advisor, Dr. Sherry Johnson, I am thankful for the rich environment you've provided for academic exploration and discussion. Most importantly, I need to thank my husband, Dave, for the many Saturdays and evenings you have spent single parenting while I've been in class and at the library. I would not have made it without you.

ABSTRACT

The tyrannical king, a common trope in Shakespearean plays, is on the surface a powerful and confident character. He is motivated, though, by overwhelming anxiety and fear about losing his power and the freedom he experiences through it. In other words, he suffers from a metaphorical claustrophobia and is terrified of being confined to physical, social, and sexual inadequacy. In order to protect himself and maintain his freedom, the tyrant must project his anxiety onto someone else, and interestingly, the Shakespearean tyrants choose a shared target: mothers.

Through a series of close-readings and analysis, this article explores how several different Shakespearean kings—the titular Richard III and Macbeth, Leontes of *The Winter's Tale*, and brothers Claudius and Old Hamlet of *Hamlet*—fulfill the role of tyrant, experience anxiety about losing their power, and project that anxiety onto the maternal figures in their midst. Additionally, I explore the various reasons why these oppressive rulers choose mothers as surrogates for their anxiety, and how, ultimately, tyranny as an expression of power is unsuccessful and undesirable: in the end of each play, it is the mothers who emerge from confinement and, by expressing their maternal power, achieve the freedom and flourishing that their oppressors longed for.

Shakespeare's presentation of maternal power as an alternative to tyrannical power promises a world that is in stark contrast to the world of tyranny: a world that nurtures others, considers future generations, and is willing to sacrifice. Ultimately, I argue that *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale* promote "Motherwork" as a tool for far more than traditional mothers or even women: it is for everyone who wishes to live in a world free of tyranny.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE..... 1
APPROVAL PAGE.....2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....3
ABSTRACT.....4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....5
ABBREVIATIONS.....6
INTRODUCTION..... 8
CHAPTER 1: TYRANNICAL KINGSHIP: POWER AND FREEDOM.....17
CHAPTER 2: THE MOTHER AS TARGET OF TYRANNICAL PROJECTION.....30
CHAPTER 3: MATERNAL POWER HAS THE LAST WORD..... 46
CONCLUSION.....62
WORKS CITED..... 69
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....73

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations indicate frequently cited plays by William Shakespeare throughout this thesis. All plays are cited from the Third Edition of The Norton Shakespeare.

Ham. Shakespeare, William. “Hamlet." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 1751-1853.

Lr. —. “King Lear." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2494-2570.

Mac. —. “Macbeth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2709-73.

R3 —. "Richard III." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 555-647.

3H6 —. “The Third Part of Henry the Sixth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen,Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 276-342.

WT —. “The Winter's Tale." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 3121-204.

INTRODUCTION

A writer's world can't help but seep into the pages of his work; the literary masterpieces of acclaimed British playwright William Shakespeare are no exception. For the past 400 years, critics have read and studied Shakespeare's plays through numerous literary lenses and theories, often paying special attention to the environment in which Shakespeare was writing: Britain at the turn of the 17th century. Elizabethan England, in many respects, was the "Golden Age" of England, capping the British Renaissance and providing a rich artistic environment for playwrights like William Shakespeare to thrive. It also, however, was a time of underlying social unrest. While a popular ruler overall, Queen Elizabeth I raised concerns about women's power and its perceived threat to masculinity. Queen Elizabeth's unwillingness to marry and bear an heir, in particular, prompted political anxiety "about her gender" and "about the uncertain succession" (Moulton 253).

Given his historical context, it is unsurprising that the intersection of power and gender appears time and time again in Shakespeare's work, specifically in his plays dealing with political royalty. It is a pattern, while addressed in differing tones, that transcends genre; many of his histories, dramas, and even comedies portray the dangerous clash between masculine rulers and the women in their lives. Mothers, especially, appear as a source of tension for these kings. One cannot help but draw parallels between this friction in Shakespeare's plays and in Elizabethan England. Something about the regenerative power of mothers—their control in producing life, and in Queen Elizabeth's case, the political life and future of a nation—antagonizes the traditional power of men. Shakespeare revisits this scenario of powerful men threatened by powerful women over and over again, and in many cases, the masculine response is consistent: tyranny.

Shakespeare began his career as a playwright by frequently writing English History plays that dealt directly with national political figures and topics. These plays would have set up for Shakespeare's "contemporary audiences…the pleasure of recognition, of being in the know about allusions, in particular daring or satirical ones" that drew to mind the political world in which they themselves lived (Frazer 507). In her 2007 book *Shakespeare and the Political Way* and her 2016 article titled "Shakespeare's Politics," political theorist Elizabeth Frazer explores the diverse political readings that Shakespeare's plays have undergone since their first performances and argues that readers should focus on "how Shakespeare plays with numerous styles of political action and role" rather than on "whether he was broadly republican or monarchist, protofeminist or a patriarchalist" (Frazer 503). Frazer's work aims to consolidate centuries of political criticism of Shakespeare's plays and urge scholars toward analysis that aims beyond Shakespeare's personal political views.

Critical analysis of tyranny as a specific political topic in Shakespeare's plays is a wide field of its own. Spanish scholar Keith Gregor edited a 2014 collection of essays on tyranny in Shakespeare titled *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond*, noting in his introduction that "Indian critic V. Aravindakshan…was one of the first to reflect on an abiding and, at times, implacably realistic concern in Shakespeare with the nature and consequences of tyranny" (Gregor 1). Indeed, Aravindakshan's 1976 article "Shakespeare's Treatment of Tyranny" is a foundational exploration of authoritarian rule in *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. Aravindakshan places distinct emphasis on how Shakespeare's tyrants grapple with "order versus rebellion" in their respective kingdoms (43).

Since Aravindakshan's scholarship in the 1970s, the most prevalent voice dealing with tyranny in Shakespeare is American critic and historian Stephen Greenblatt. In addition to establishing New Historicism, Greenblatt is a significant force in Shakespeare studies as the general editor of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and of the *Norton Shakespeare*. He also has contributed a wealth of scholarship by authoring academic articles and books, the most popular of which is *Will In The World*, a biography that roots Shakespeare and his plays in the context of their historical world. Greenblatt's recent book, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (2018) is an evocative examination of the psyche of Shakespeare's oppressive leaders, expressly Richard III, Macbeth, King Lear, and Coriolanus. What is so powerful about *Tyrant* is how Greenblatt uses close reading to extract these rulers from the pages of Shakespeare and into modernity through thinly veiled references to real-world leaders of today and of the recent past.

Besides studying the work of Shakespeareans, this project examines the scholarship of political scientists and historians and their analysis of what tyranny is, how it comes about, and its repercussions. For early understandings of the government form, I have relied on the Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, who discussed it at length in *The Republic* and *Politics*, respectively. 20th and 21st century scholars, including American political scientist Betty Glad, have since expanded the literature on tyranny and begun to explore the connections it has to psychology and gender studies, particularly the psychology of masculinity. In her 2002 article "Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power," Glad examines historical and contemporary oppressors, their psychology, and how, she argues, they "undermine themselves once in power" (1). Mark Breitenberg and Allison Levy take a distinctively gendered approach to tyranny in their scholarship, both arguing that masculine anxiety is what feeds authoritarian rule

in *Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England* (1993) and "Good Grief: Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety in Early Modern England" (2003), respectively.

Breitenberg and Levy begin to bridge the topics of tyranny and gender in Early Modern times, but very few scholars have meaningfully explored this intersection in Shakespeare studies. Ian Frederick Moulton is one of these unique individuals. His analysis of Richard III in "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III" (1996) is a gem of specificity in a sea of scholarship; he close-reads the first tetralogy (Parts 1-3 of Henry VI and Richard III) within the patriarchal context in which Shakespeare was writing, placing emphasis on Richard III's relationship with the women in his life and how those relationships intersect with his quest for ultimate power.

Political lenses have shaped Shakespearean criticism for years, but scholars including Lynda Boose, Jean Howard, Carol Neely, Karen Newman, and Madelon Sprengnether contributed to feminist readings and scholarship in the late 20th and early 21st century through their discussion of wives, lovers, daughters, and mothers in Shakespeare's plays. Janet Adelman, however, serves as a dominant source of Shakespearean maternal scholarship. Her book *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (1992) is a foundational text in feminist Shakespeare readings, exploring maternal power in 18 of Shakespeare's 38 plays. She compares maternal representation across his tragedies, comedies, romances, and histories, and, in her final three chapters, initiates a conversation about the interplay between motherhood and masculinity, particularly in Shakespeare's depiction of mothers and their sons.

More recently, Felicity Dunworth expands the conversation about motherhood as seen in Elizabethan and Jacobean British theater in her book *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern*

English Stage (2010). Her focus is on the mother's narrative value in mid-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century plays and "her relationship to domestic and civic spaces, to the economies of society and household" (Dunworth 167). Additionally, she takes a special interest in the recurrence of dead mothers as a plot device in these plays, specifically through the character of Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Dunworth's scholarship is more generalized than Adelman's and covers playwrights beyond Shakespeare; in fact, the only Shakespeare productions she explores in depth are *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Winter's Tale*. What is significant about Dunworth's work, though, is the way she examines a wide range of playwrights, both popular and relatively unknown, to build a sense of historical consistencies of motherhood as portrayed on the British stage during the Early Modern period.

The abundance of Shakespearen criticism and scholarship in the world is undeniable; however, there is ample space for fresh discovery through meaningful close-reading and the merging of scholarship from a variety of disciplines. The literature on tyranny and on motherhood in Shakespeare is expansive, but the two rarely intersect in meaningful ways, and therein lies the gap that I wish to explore. In this thesis, I will bring these topics together to better understand Shakespeare's tyrannical kings, their understanding of power, and their relationship with the mother-figures in their lives. This unique convergence of topics is ripe for exploration because Shakespeare sets up the tyrant king and mother relationship again and again in his plays, particularly in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

By analyzing these four plays alongside one another, I am able to trace Shakespeare's depiction of tyrants, mothers, and the power between them across genres and from early to late in his writing career. Aravindakshan writes that "in all comedies, tragedies, and histories, and in all the phases or stages of his career, Shakespeare points his finger at the struggle for power," so

including a range of genres—a history, two tragedies, and a romance—is important for a well-rounded analysis (39). I have made one key omission, though, and that is not to include a comedy. While I understand that the comedies are rich grounds for analysis of power, they simply do not include the specific pairing of tyrannical kings and mother figures. In fact, there isn't a single Shakespearean comedy that includes both of these archetypes. One comedy comes close: *Measure for Measure*. It includes a tyrannical Lord, Angelo, and a young pregnant woman, Juliet, but the two fall outside the technicalities of "king" and "mother." Additionally, Juliet is such a minor character that she only speaks seven lines in the entirety of the play, leaving little space for close reading and analysis. Overall, the comedies are marked by a stark lack of mothers. Mary Beth Rose notes in her 1991 article "Where Are The Mothers In Shakespeare?" that "in the six most celebrated romantic comedies (*Love's Labor's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *Twelfth Night*) no mothers appear at all" (292). Meanwhile, the rulers in Shakespeare's comedies, while at times difficult, rarely qualify as tyrants. It would be an interesting extension to explore why this is, but for the purposes of this piece of scholarship, I will not be discussing a Shaksepearen comedy.

Richard III first drew my attention to the clash between tyrants and mothers in Shakespeare; as a character, Richard III embodies all of the classic tropes of the tyrannical king. He is also surrounded by active mother figures: four, to be exact. While other histories portray autocrats alongside mother-figures, *Richard III* does so to a degree that is simply unparalleled, and in order to diversify play selection, it is the only history included in this study. Shakespeare's tragedies are also rich in tyrant-mother dynamics, and many plays within the genre would be worthy of analysis: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, perhaps even *Julius Caesar*. *Hamlet* and

Macbeth, though, quickly rise above the others, offering unique and compelling portrayals of oppressive kings and maternal figures. In *Hamlet* we see the rare occurrence of two tyrants: Old Hamlet and his brother, Claudius. Both kings exercise absolute rule, and the mother figure of the play, Gertrude, is their shared wife; she is also mother to the titular character, Prince Hamlet. While she is not the tyrants' mother, her primary role in the play is mother to Prince Hamlet, which asserts her as an unmistakably maternal figure to her husbands and kingdom. Unlike the outspoken women in *Richard III*, Gertrude appears submissive. Including Gertrude is critical to this analysis because she offers a contrast; she is not a cursing Queen Margaret (*Richard III*) or a murderous Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*), and yet she fights against authoritarianism and asserts her power in her own way, which is worth examining. In *Macbeth*, by contrast, Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth, who in many ways functions opposite to Gertrude in her response to and use of power. Lady Macbeth is arguably the instigator of brutality until she is pushed out by her husband as he grows in confidence and malice. The tyrant-mother dynamics in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are completely different, but both pivot on the same axes of power, control, and freedom.

In *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, the king is unreformed at the end of the play; that is why Shakespeare's romance *The Winter's Tale* is such an important addition to this piece of scholarship. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare crafts the character of King Leontes, who is as cruel a leader as any for the first three acts, but undergoes a transformation at the hands of the mothers, Hermione and Paulina. Shakespeare's departure from his tyrant tropes is fascinating in this play, and it reveals the influence of maternal power over even the strongest of oppressors.

The four plays included in this analysis are not the only titles in the Shakespeare library that portray brutal kings and mother figures, but they are solid representations of Shakespeare's

lifetime of work and the diversity of genres and character dynamics with which Shakespeare plays. They also represent the beginning, middle, and end of Shakespeare's writing career. While the exact composition dates are unknown, we do understand *Richard III* to be one of Shakespeare's earliest plays (written in 1592 or 1593) and *The Winter's Tale* to be one of his latest (written in 1610 or 1611), while *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* were likely authored in 1600 and 1605, respectively. To preserve chronological integrity, I will discuss the plays in composition order, beginning with *Richard III* and proceeding through *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*. This order also allows for side-by-side analysis of the two tragedies and concludes with analysis of *The Winter's Tale*, which departs from the power tropes found in the other plays.

Through these four plays—*Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*—Shakespeare offers varied dynamics between tyrants and mothers, but the theme is consistent: everything is about power, and the fear of losing it is what drives the kings to suppression and cruelty. We are left to wonder if some uses or expressions of power are more beneficial to humankind than others. While expressions of power vary, the definition of power is constant: it is "the ability to act" ("power, n1"). In other words, power is the *freedom* to exercise *agency*. Here, the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault and his discussion of power in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) is particularly enlightening. For Foucault, power is not strictly concentrated in an individual, class, or institution; instead, it is "spread throughout a society: families, workplaces, everyday practices, and marginal institutions" (Gutting & Oksala). It is the "diverse but intersecting networks" of power that constitute power in society (Gutting & Oksala). These various expressions of power "confront, transform, strengthen…reverse" each other; they can either support one another, "forming a chain or a system," or, by contrast, they can reveal

"the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate [these expressions of power] from one another" (Foucault 92).

In the case of these plays, the kings appear to over rely on the expression of power through domination, which Foucault calls "only the terminal form power takes" (92). The kings misunderstand the idea that "power is not something that is acquired, seized….something that one holds on to or allows to slip away" (Foucault 94). It is not something that they can keep entirely unto themselves or isolate others from, especially when individuals stand up to the tyrants' oppression. As Foucault explains, "where there is power, there is resistance," and "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power"; in other words, the resistance, which can manifest in "the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations," is involved in the power dynamic, with its own capability and strength (95). As much as the rulers try to hold onto their prestige by exiling maternal power, they simply cannot do it. In all four of these plays, the kings and the mother figures are caught in a cycle of expressing their power over and resisting against the power of the other. The implications of this thesis for our modern society are vast. What are we to do with tyrannical leadership on the international stage as it relates to oppression over minority populations? Or with tyrannical leadership on our city councils and local school boards? How might we channel our various expressions of power to combat the devastation tyrants exercise through their domination and abuse of power? These plays open the door to a rich analysis of despotism and masculinity, maternity and femininity, that spans far beyond a 17th century stage.

CHAPTER 1
TYRANNICAL KINGSHIP: POWER AND FREEDOM

Our modern understanding of tyranny is closely linked to the Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle, who discussed the governing form at length in *The Republic* and *Politics*, respectively. In short, the two define a tyrant as "one who (1) rules without law, (2) looks to his own advantage rather than that of his subjects, and (3) uses extreme and cruel tactics—against his own people as well as others" (Glad 2). Shakespeare contemporary and academic George Buchanan adds that while "a king rules over willing subjects," a tyrant rules "over unwilling" (Greenblatt 1). These definitions expose a common psychological trait amongst these leaders: a larger-than-life view of self. Both Glad and Greenblatt go on to argue that an autocrat's inflated ego is fueled by a desire to hide and overcome "underlying feelings of inferiority," which cause him deep paranoia and limit his ability to engage in "genuine human relationships" (Glad 6).

Tyranny is also unequivocally linked to masculinity. "Masculine aggressivity, violence, and self-assertion" are at the structural base of patriarchal societies, and it is these traits that, when left unchecked in powerful men, evolve into cruelty and oppressive rule (Moulton 251). While power-hungry female leaders can be found in world history and literature—including Shakespeare—they are rarities, and the word "tyrant" is almost never attached to them. The reason for this is likely due to the ideological limitations of binary patriarchal thinking which pairs masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity. Elizabethan etiquette books, and even certain interpretations of Biblical scripture, perpetuate the idea that men are meant to be active and women passive. Women were instructed to "learn in silence with all subjection," to "never usurp authority over the man," to "be temperate, chaste, keeping at home, good and subject unto their husbands" (*The Bible: 1599 Geneva Bible* 1 Timothy 2:11, 12, Titus 2:5). Shakespeare extends the idea of feminine passivity in his plays as well; one particularly

compelling example is when King Lear equates tears to "women's weapons" (*Lr* 2.4.279). This comparison emphasizes the passivity of women by diminishing their agency to crying. At the same time, it presents emotion as anti-masculine by suggesting that it is solely the tool of women. By historical definitions, femininity equated to passivity; in direct contrast, masculine activity was necessary for tyranny to materialize.

It is also important to note that not all patriarchal societies are led by oppressive rulers; in fact, many leaders subvert and overthrow even the "traditional patriarchal power structures and lines of succession," as we see in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Macbeth* (Moulton 255). This drastic action may be a means to fulfilling their self-serving goals, but it also is the result of their fear of losing power and influence. They exude confidence to the public, gloating in their freedom to act with total agency and control, but there is always an anxious reality lurking just below the surface: their power may not last forever. "This anxiety is paradoxically both a cause and effect of the patriarchal system," making "masculine anxiety…both inevitable and necessary" to tyranny (Levy 152).

On the surface, it is baffling why a man would abandon all human decency and overthrow the very system that promotes his superiority, but the reason becomes clear once we recognize that the appeal of tyranny has everything to do with "enjoy[ing] the fruits of power…and retain[ing] them" for oneself (Aravindakshan 39). Once a leader tastes the "fruits" of his power, he discovers that it provides him with ultimate freedom; in Michel Foucault's words, exercising power in the form of domination allows the tyrant to "reduce his own sense of chaotic disproportionateness" (Greenblatt 59). He is obsessed with holding onto power because it is not only intrinsically linked to his agency as a ruler but to his agency as a man. The freedom he experiences through authoritarianism gives him leverage over his personal insecurities, be

they physical, sexual, or material. His tyrannical rule allows him to "construct a world that provides him with temporary relief from his internal conflicts" (Glad 25). The personal invulnerability that he sees fulfilled by exercising unchecked power is a delusion, of course, and beyond the scope of what is humanly possible, but the fantasy is desirable enough to compel him to hold on to his prestige with a tight fist. If he loses it, he not only risks his political kingdom, but he risks impotence; he risks falling into passivity that renders him trapped in a metaphorically claustrophobic state in all aspects of his life. The tyrant's actions, then, are driven from a deeply anxious, emotional space of fear. If he wants his freedom, he *must* maintain absolute power.

This obsession with freedom—and fear of losing it—is universal across Shakespeare's tyrannical kings, but is particularly prevalent in Richard III (*Richard III*), brothers Claudius and Hamlet Senior (*Hamlet*), Macbeth *(Macbeth)*, and Leontes (*The Winter's Tale*). All five of these men cling to their power—and by extension, their freedom—because they feel trapped by a variety of physical, sexual, and material inadequacies; they are all haunted by what Greenblatt calls "a constant, all-consuming anxiety," and it's exhausting (103).

Ever since birth, it seems, Richard seeks freedom from the confines of his deformed body. He sees himself as "rudely stamped," "Deformed, unfinished, sent before [his] time / Into this breathing world, scarce half made up" (*Richard III* 1.1.16, 20-21). He is trapped in his physical form, and he spends the entirety of the play trying to escape from "the stories of his difficult birth and the repellent signs on his body" (Greenblatt 56). Richard goes so far as to say in Shakespeare's earlier play *3 Henry VI* that "love forswore [him] in [his] mother's womb," connecting his anxieties back to the earliest form of entrapment one can experience, even prenatally (3.2.169).

Richard III's "physical monstrosity" also "manifests itself as social monstrosity," which is more limiting than Richard realizes (Moulton 261). In his mind, it is his deformed body that keeps him from finding favor with women and from advancing to the British throne; in reality, it is his deformed mind that is a much bigger factor in keeping him from achieving his personal and political goals. Richard "actively wills his mind to match the stigmatized crookedness of his body" (Greenblatt 56). In the closing moments of *3 Henry VI*, as he is killing Henry VI, Richard proclaims, "since the heavens have shaped my body so, / Let hell make crooked my mind to answer it" (5.6.78-9). This event occurs before Richard's rise to kingship and his tyrannical reign, but we see the seeds of physical and mental insecurity growing in this moment that will motivate his desire for the freedom that power can offer him.

In Act 1 Scene 2 of *Richard III* we see one of many examples where Richard's depraved actions lead to his romantic and political failures far more than his physical appearance does. In this scene, Richard, currently the Duke of Gloucester, attempts to woo Lady Anne after he has killed her father-in-law, Henry VI, and her husband, Prince Edward. In their conversation, Lady Anne torments Richard with harsh words, many of which sound like insults to his physicality on first reading. She calls him a "lump of foul deformity," and a "hedgehog" (*R3* 1.2.55, 100). The context of these insults, however, is key. She clarifies that the deformity she refers to in line 55 is the "deed, inhuman and unnatural" that he has committed, not his physicality (*R3* 1.2.58). Additionally, the "hedgehog" insult was most commonly used as "a term of abuse applied to someone who pays no attention to others' feelings" (*R3* 1.2.100n1). That Richard lacks empathy is beyond doubt: the entire conversation takes place beside the dead body of Lady Anne's father-in-law and mere days after Richard has killed her husband, and yet Richard has the audacity to tell the mourning Lady Anne that he only murdered her husband "to help thee to a

better husband," meaning himself (*R3* 1.2.137). He then goes on to blame her for the murders, telling her that it "'twas thy beauty that provokéd me / …'twas thy heavenly face that set me on" (1.2.166, 168). It is evident that her anger in this scene is in response to Richard's horrific actions and disturbing mental state, not simply his deformity. This scene illustrates the fruition of Richard III's vow to "make crooked [his] mind," and that his physical insecurity has become an all-consuming liability that dictates all aspects of his life (*3H6* 5.6.79). Going forward, it should be unsurprising that Richard III relentlessly pursues personal freedom from this anxiety through tyrannical power.

Any personal perception of limitation keeps the tyrant from embodying the all-encompassing power that he desires, but anxiety brought on by physical incapability is uniquely prevalent. Much like Richard III, the deceased King Hamlet (*Hamlet*) is tied to an undesirable physical state. Trapped between earth and the afterlife in the form of a ghost, he explains to his son, Prince Hamlet, his reality:

> I am thy father's spirit,
> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
> And for the day confined to fast in fires
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away. (*Hamlet* 1.5.9-13)

The former king's language is clear: he is "doomed" and "confined" in his otherworldly form. He even calls his ghostly state his "prison house" (*Ham.* 1.5.14). His bodily prison keeps him a slave to time, and he is forced to limit his pivotal conversation with young Hamlet as he "scent[s] the morning air" approaching (*Ham.* 1.5.58). It isn't simply King Hamlet's ghostly state that is a source of his anxiety, though; when explaining his death by poison, his story is steeped in

claustrophobic language. Before he is poisoned by his brother, Hamlet Senior describes himself "sleeping within [his] orchard…upon [his] secure hour" (*Ham.* 1.5.59-61). Hamlet Senior is not alone in his vision of sleep as a significant symbol of security and freedom; both Macbeth and Leontes echo this sentiment in *Macbeth* and *The Winter's Tale*. King Hamlet goes on to describe the poisoning, which involves Claudius pouring the liquid "in the porches of [his] ears," which quickly "courses through / The natural gates and alleys of the body," only to "possess / And curd" (*Ham.* 1.5.63, 66-7, 68-9). While his account is unendurably oppressive on its own, it leads to the worst form of entrapment of all: his entrapment in sin. Death by murder denies him his deathbed confession, so he is "sent to [his] account / With all [his] imperfections on [his] head" (*Ham.* 1.5.78-9).

To fully understand the weight of what Claudius has done in this scene, at least as the Ghost of Old Hamlet describes it, it is important to note the language that evokes the sacrament of confession, a tenet of Catholicism. Confession of sins to a priest in order to receive absolution from sin (or forgiveness) is a standard and well-known practice of the Catholic faith, but is particularly important before death. By killing his brother in this manner, Claudius is sending Old Hamlet "to the Last Judgment liable for all [his] faults," without "extreme unction, the ritual anointing of those who are close to death" (*Ham*. 1.5.79n3, 1.5.77n2). Old Hamlet knows that this is why he is trapped in purgatory and in his ghostly form. He proclaims that at the hand of his brother he is "Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched, / Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled" (*Ham.* 1.5.75-7). His repetition of negatives beginning with "un" and "dis" emphasize the deep deprivation of and disconnection from power that he feels. There is an emptiness to his language, and an inability to move forward.

Ironically, it is the very act of murdering his brother that has left Claudius trapped in his sin, too. In his soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 3, Claudius explains that his sin weighs on him so heavily that he cannot pray or move forward in any action at all. His guilt keeps him "to double business bound," and he is left to "stand in pause where [he] shall first begin" (*Ham.* 3.3.41, 42). Claudius realizes that by killing his brother, he has lost the very thing he was trying to achieve: his freedom. In one of his more transparent moments, the new king expresses his current situation:

> …What rests?
>
> Try what repentance can–what can it not?
>
> Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
>
> Oh, wretched state; oh bosom black as death;
>
> Oh, liméd soul that struggling to be free
>
> Art more engaged! (*Ham.* 3.3.64-69)

We see the king weighing his options: repent or proceed in tyrannical action? He desires freedom from the entanglement of his sin so much that he entertains confessing all of his misdeeds. But he can't; he is stuck. The image of his "liméd soul" is compelling here. He is referencing birdlime, a sticky material that is used to catch small birds when it is spread on tree branches. Not only is the lime-caught bird a metaphor for his experience of captivity in sin, but the image also alludes to his feelings of inferiority and fragility as a ruler. In this moment he has lost all semblance of powerful kingship: instead, he has become a fragile bird stuck on a tree branch. And he isn't simply caught in the lime: he is waiting to be defeathered, cooked, and consumed for supper (Harting). The metaphor piles passive entrapment on top of itself until it is clear that Claudius feels stripped of all agency. According to the dichotomy of Activity vs. Passivity and

the correlating dichotomy of Masculinity vs. Femininity, Claudius's anxiety surrounding his sinfulness has expanded to an anxiety over emasculation. If he doesn't find an outlet for these anxieties, he is at risk of losing his power as a ruler and as a man.

This fear of emasculation is a theme that echoes from tyrant to tyrant, but in none more clearly than Macbeth. At the hands of his wife, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's manhood is degraded time and time again, and that, paired with his plans continually falling through, pushes him to extreme measures of pursuing open space, both literally and physically. Of all of Shakespeare's autocrats, Macbeth expresses his fear of being "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in" the most explicitly (*Macbeth* 3.4.25). Whenever he finds himself boxed in or limited in his quest for power, he consistently acts in the interest of his personal freedom: mentally, physically, and sexually. Macbeth voices his claustrophobic anxiety soon after he becomes king, when he receives news that the murderers he's hired to kill his friend Banquo and Banquo's son, Fleance, have only half fulfilled their duty. Macbeth spirals, wishing that he felt "as broad and general as the casing air" (*Mac.* 3.4.24). In order to feel secure and active in his manhood, he needs to have unconstrained space. Macbeth's desire here is an impossibility; as a human, he will never fly weightless through space. What he's dreaming of, then, is something other than, something *more* than, the lived human experience. It makes sense, therefore, that this unconstrained space that Macbeth yearns for often presents itself as an escape in sleep or even a longing for death, which he expresses eloquently in Act 2 Scene 2 after murdering King Duncan. He worries that in killing Duncan he has "murder[ed] sleep," because only "the innocent sleep," and he is not innocent anymore (*Mac.* 2.2.39). He rhapsodizes about sleep, calling it "sore labor's bath, / Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, / Chief nourisher in life's feast" (2.2.41-43). He also begins to link sleep to death by calling sleep "the death of each day's life" (2.2.41).

The parallel that Macbeth draws between sleep and death only strengthens as the play progresses. The use of sleep as an euphemism for death predates Shakespeare, so the connection would have been well-established in his contemporaries' minds already. When Macbeth expresses a desire for escape in sleep and then quickly jumps to a desire for death, it is because he sees death as the ultimate *sleep:* the ultimate release and freedom and *space*. After killing King Duncan, Macbeth reflects:

> Better be with the dead,
>
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
>
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
>
> In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave
>
> After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
>
> ...Nothing can touch him further. (*Mac.* 3.2.19-23, 26)

Macbeth admires Duncan's peace in death. He voices this sentiment again directly after he hears about Banquo's death, which he asks about in the strangest way: he asks if Banquo is "safe." Through this statement, we see that death and safety and freedom are closely connected in Macbeth's mind, and all are connected to what Macbeth longs for in sleep. For Macbeth, sleep is the space in which he can lose his self-consciousness and relax, away from the constant pressure to achieve domination. It makes sense that he'd find this world "unendurably claustrophobic," as Stephen Greenblatt claims in *Tyrant* (105).

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' nightmare consists at least partly of not being able to escape his sexual and social anxieties and diseased mind; lack of rest in this play, like lack of sleep in *Macbeth*, has become the tyrant's greatest source of pain. After accusing his wife of becoming pregnant with King Polixenes's child, Leontes laments, "Nor night nor day, no rest"

(*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.1). He is anxious about being trapped into fathering a baby he doesn't believe is his own, or worse, being trapped in a marriage where he believes his wife is unfaithful to him. Secondly, he's anxious that his friends, knowing about his wife's supposed infidelity, will "laugh at [him]" and "make their pastime [his] sorrow" (*WT* 2.3.24). He simply wants to escape and be free of it all: he wants to sleep. As he contemplates these woes, he is interrupted by Paulina, who enters carrying his and Hermione's newborn daughter. She presses him to accept the child and reconcile with his wife, but his anxiety is overwhelming. He repeatedly lashes out, protecting his physical space and yelling variations of "Out of the chamber with her!" nine separate times over the course of the scene (*WT* 2.3.121). Despite his authoritarian commands, Paulina continues to advocate for Hermione and the child, asserting her allegiance to Hermione's power as mother and queen, rather than to Leontes; she argues, "commit me for committing honor—trust it, / He shall not rule me" (2.3.48-9). By saying this, Paulina denies the legitimacy of Leontes' use of power through domination and exposes the reality of other forms of power beyond Leontes' sphere of control. The scene begins with Leontes already feeling sexually and socially inadequate, and Paulina's open defiance makes him feel even more vulnerable. His solution is to resist the maternal power that Paulina represents by expressing his power even more: he has her forcibly removed from the room and maintains his physical space. We see Leontes assert his power by maintaining his space again when he holds his wife's trial in an open air court, free of any physical restraints. At the beginning of the trial, he proclaims that he will be "cleared / of being tyrannous, since we so openly / Proceed in justice" (*WT* 3.2.4-6). His diction, specifically words like "cleared" and "openly," reveal his obsessive desire to be free of blame or suspicion and his claustrophobic preoccupation with needing space.

Above all else, Shakespeare's tyrannical kings "long to possess...the pervasiveness, invisibility, and unlimited extension of air," or the freedom that comes with open space (Greenblatt 105). They find this open space by exercising cruel and unchecked leadership. But, the fear of losing their freedom is palpable. They are threatened on all sides by people and situations determined to overthrow them. These kings, then, need to find a way to relieve their mounting fear and exhaustion, and, predictably, they all attempt to do so in the same way: by projecting their anxiety onto other people. In her article on the psychology of tyranny, American political scientist Betty Glad explains that projection is so effective in tyrannical rule because it pairs perfectly with the tendency to "create enemies where there had been none" (30). These enemies are now the subjects "upon whom [the tyrant] can externalize his inner conflicts" (Glad 30).

Projection is a defense mechanism originally described by psychologist Sigmund Freud in the early 1900s. Although many Freudian theories have since been debunked, the evidence that individuals want to protect themselves against unwanted thoughts and fears to "protect self-esteem" is "abundant" (Baumeister et al. 1082). In her book *Protecting The Self: Defense Mechanisms In Action*, psychologist Phebe Cramer explains that projection protects an individual "from disruptive anxiety by attributing unacceptable feelings, wishes, and impulses to someone else"; in other words, the individual "attaches" these thoughts to others (70). In the case of Shakespeare's tyrannical kings, we see them projecting their fear of losing the freedom that comes with their power. They believe that it is unacceptable to feel limited and caged, and, as unrealistic as this belief is, they have to deal with it. Their twisting of reality is what makes projection so powerful and dangerous; after a while, it does not matter what is actually true to these kings because they have established an alternate reality where the targets of their projection

actually possess the projected trait and, in the most extreme cases, deserve punishment. This pattern is particularly apparent in *Richard III* and *The Winter's Tale*, where we see Richard constructing an alternate reality for Lady Anne and Leontes doing so for his wife, Hermione. Although she is accused by Richard, Lady Anne is truly not responsible for her husband or father-in-law's deaths or for encouraging Richard romantically, and Hermione, contrary to Leontes' paranoia, has not been unfaithful. In both of these cases, the tyrant seems to project his own sexual and relational anxiety onto another, regardless of truth or evidence.

Tyrannical kings are susceptible to exercising projection because they perceive that they are under attack by "threatening external forces," real or imagined, which leads them to "attempt to protect [themselves]" (Cramer 73). The patriarchal rulers in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale* are all worried about achieving and maintaining power, whether it be political, sexual, or psychological, and when they feel that control slipping away and find themselves more and more confined, they jump to projection, and interestingly, they all project onto similar targets. These targets are consistently feminine, but more specifically, maternal. In her book entitled *Suffocating Mothers*, Janet Adelman notes that Shakespeare's tyrants embody this concept over and over again: they "move women from positions of power and authority to positions of utter powerlessness," sometimes "moving them off the stage altogether" (Adelman 9). Most of the women involved in these projection fantasies are literal mothers; others have not physically borne children but are deeply connected with motherhood through their language and actions. Regardless, the kings seem to believe that boxing in maternal figures—"the wives, lovers, daughters, mothers and stepmothers," or any woman who "has the power to shake [their] manhood"—is the cure for their masculine anxiety (Adelman 35). Although this projection onto

maternal figures is undeserved, it is unsurprising; motherhood puts one in a vulnerable position, and a tyrant feeds on vulnerability in a race to escape his own.

CHAPTER 2
THE MOTHER AS TARGET OF TYRANNICAL PROJECTION

Motherhood was an incredibly claustrophobic experience in Elizabethan England. While class certainly would have affected a woman's prenatal, labor, and postpartum experience, her vulnerability throughout the process transcended social status. Alysia Kolentsis explains in her 2007 article "Narrative Abbreviation and the Anxiety of Reproduction in 'The Tempest' and 'The Winter's Tale'" that pregnancy was "frequently associated with enclosure or entrapment" and put a woman in a fragile, limited state (39). Then, without modern medical treatment, the birth process was painful, dangerous, and demanded complete dependence on others. The birthing room was a secret "woman's" sphere, and "a place of enclosure...a kind of womb" itself (Reynolds 32). By default, it was a space that excluded and eluded the understanding of men. After giving birth, the new mother would then be rushed into a time of confinement after giving birth, and the physical and emotional toil of postpartum recovery weighed her down. Crucially for our purposes, even though she may have loved her child, having freed it from her womb and given it life, the child did not belong to her: it belonged to her husband. All of her security was bound to him, and later in life if her husband died, she could face incredible instability as a widow. In the words of Queen Margaret in *Richard III*, motherhood was "bearing...a burdened yoke," and women were left with a "weary neck" (4.4.105).

In the *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, Andrea O'Reilly, the founder of the academic discipline of Motherhood Studies, explains that in most societies prior to the 20th century, mothers were subject to "domination and oppression, and the subsequent inequalities that followed" due to their social and physical vulnerability (721). The mother, therefore, embodies the tyrant's fear of losing power, which we witness in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*. The tyrant sees his claustrophobic anxieties in the mother figure, and maybe some

of his earliest claustrophobic associations, such as the enclosed womb, his dependence on breast milk, and the comments made to him in childhood that may have framed his psyche and understanding of himself. This certainly seems to be the case for Richard III, who sustained "traumatic and lasting damage to [his] self-image…[tracing] back to early experiences...to the responses of nurses and midwives," and most importantly, his own mother (Greenblatt 62). From a psychological perspective this holds true: psychologist Phebe Cramer notes that "during the early months of life, the infant is repeatedly forming memory traces of his experience, many of which occur in connection with his mother" (80). Each of these kings began life by literally feeding off of his mother, or an indistinguishable surrogate nurse maid, and sucking milk from her breast; he was completely dependent on her, unable to survive apart from her nourishment. In her book *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988), Jessica Benjamin emphasizes this dependent dynamic between mother and child: "the mother [is] the baby's vehicle for growth, an object of the baby's needs…the baby's first object of attachment" (23). In adulthood, it could follow, even subconsciously, that mothers are supposed to be used—perhaps even deserve to be used— for personal gain. Benjamin attempts to explain this complicated relationship between mother and son as an interplay of dependence and independence where the son seeks acknowledgement from his mother by using her "as a vehicle for self-certainty" (33). This can lead to an attitude of domination as the child tries to affirm the idea that "everything is an extension of me and my power," leaving the mother as an inevitable threat (Benjamin 33).

In childhood, individuals see their parents as "responsible for what happens" to them, and after this "long period of dependence… the parents contribute to the child's attribution of responsibility to others—responsibility for his specific thoughts, actions, and feeling states"

(Cramer 82). The initial period of dependence a child would have upon its mother, or a mother figure like a wet-nurse, was more drawn out for children in Elizabethan England than today, which Adelman explores in her book, *Suffocating Mothers*. This "prolonged infancy" would have consisted of breastfeeding for two to three years; for many children, their lack of solid food also led to delayed mobility, specifically the inability to walk, until the child was about three years old (Adelman 5). Adelman wonders "how much more difficult and anxiety-ridden the process [of differentiating self from mother] must have been if the period of infantile dependency–with all its pleasures and dangers–was prolonged," as was the case for the tyrant kings (7). This may be the most compelling reason that Shakespeare's patriarchs project their fear of confinement onto mother figures: they may see them as responsible for cultivating it. It is a twisted view of motherhood to be sure, but for an individual who thrives on "the breakdown of basic values...and human decency" as a tyrant does, seeing his mother as responsible for his phobia and deserving of his projection is simply too believable (Greenblatt 47). Again and again, we see the kings refusing to "bear their burdens alone," and instead "pass[ing] them on to the women, who must pay the price for the fantasies of maternal power invested in them" (Adelman 10).

In his 1996 article "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III," Professor Ian Frederick Moulton explains that Richard III's "hatred, scorn, and fear of the feminine are fundamental to this character" (266). Of all the tyrants, Richard III draws the most obvious connection between his inadequacies and motherhood: he blames his physical deformity and his soiled reputation on his mother. He says he was "unfinished" in the womb, and that he was sent "before [his] time / into this breathing world scarce half made up" (*R3* 1.1.20-21). His mother, the Duchess of York, consistently laments the "anguish, pain, and agony" she endured in

birthing Richard; in fact, her traumatic birth experience becomes "a reproach leveled against [Richard]" by others throughout the play (*R3* 4.4.156; Greenblatt 56). Richard's insecurity and claustrophobia is closely tied with maternal figures, and, as fate would have it, he is surrounded by them in adulthood: The Duchess of York; Queen Elizabeth, his brother's wife; Queen Margaret, the widow of King Henry VI; and even Lady Anne, whom Richard targets as the future mother of his children and, by extension, the nation. The convergence of maternal bodies around Richard III "is the origin of his aggression" and provokes the claustrophobia he associates with them, thus setting the stage for Richard's relentless projection of that anxiety upon all four women (Adelman 2).

One of Richard's earliest acts of suppression, even before he becomes king, is when he bars Elizabeth from her two sons, whom he has imprisoned. Elizabeth goes to The Tower of London to see her children, and when she is rejected by the guards she wails, "Hath he set bounds betwixt their love and me? / I am their mother. Who should keep me from them?" (*R3* 4.1.16-17). Elizabeth's use of the word "bounds" in this context means "barriers"; she clearly sees Richard's decision as a way to limit her. Elizabeth is met at the tower by the Duchess of York and Lady Anne, all of whom voice similar reactions to being blocked from the young boys; significantly, all present themselves in a maternal role as protectors and nurturers, thus asserting their power as women. The Duchess of York claims, "I am their father's mother. I will see them," to which Lady Anne responds, "Their aunt I am in law, in love their mother" (*R3* 4.1.18, 19). When the guard still refuses to let them in, Queen Elizabeth laments Richard's decision to keep her from her sons, saying that she needs to have her bodice cut so that her "pent heart" has "scope to beat, or else [she] swoon" and die (*R3* 4.1.29, 30). In this moment, Richard's fear of

suppression is projected directly onto Queen Elizabeth's shoulders, and she is now both physically and psychologically trapped beneath Richard's tyranny.

Immediately after these sorrowful speeches from Queen Elizabeth, Lady Anne mourns her rushed marriage to Richard and coronation. As for her marriage, she says she "grew captive to his honey words," and now she has "never yet one hour in his bed / ....enjoyed the golden dew of sleep" because of "his timorous dreams" (*R3* 4.1.74, 77-78, 79). Richard, much like Leontes and Macbeth, is unable to experience the freedom of sleep, but he also keeps Anne from that escape, projecting his anxieties on to her. In regards to her coronation, Lady Anne calls the crown "the inclusive verge / of golden metal that must round [her] brow" (*R3* 4.1.53-54). "Inclusive verge" literally means "enclosing rim"; this life as Richard's queen, as mother of a country, has trapped her. And she sees no end to this entrapment: she says the crown is made of "red-hot steel" and that it "sears [her] to the brain" (*R3* 4.1.55). Richard's projection has permanently marked her both physically and psychologically, just as it has Queen Elizabeth, and she is locked into an undesirable marriage and queenship. Lady Anne is not alone in feeling hopeless and stuck: as we enter the final moments of Act 4, the three other women also enter spaces of confinement, either physically or psychologically: Elizabeth seeks sanctuary, confined to a church; the Duchess of York envisions herself buried in a grave; and Queen Margaret laments the "confines" where she lurks in the castle (*R3* 4.4.3). Richard's long-reaching arm of tyranny is taking effect.

Similarly, Queen Gertrude, the only mother figure in *Hamlet*, is constricted in her ability to speak and act freely under her suppressors. As Prince Hamlet's mother, she is unquestionably seen as a maternal figure by Prince Hamlet's father and uncle, the tyrants of the story. Throughout the play, both Old Hamlet and Claudius try to distance themselves from their own

entanglement in sin by casting their guilt on a convenient object: Gertrude. In his primary encounter with his son, the ghost of King Hamlet urges Prince Hamlet not to punish his mother for her hasty remarriage. This would sound like grace from the deceased king, if it weren't followed with a sinister alternative: "leave her to heaven / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her" (1.5.86-8). All semblance of kindness disappears with King Hamlet's vision of retributive justice as he projects his personal feelings of betrayal and confinement onto Gertrude.

To understand why King Hamlet would urge his son to leave vengeance to heaven concerning his mother, one must consider how much he knows of her involvement in the "damned incest" (*Ham.* 1.5.83). There are only three options: King Hamlet knows Gertrude *was* a co-conspirator, he knows she *was not* a co-conspirator, or he doesn't know either way. If he knows her to be involved, his language here is not grace for the Queen: it merely softens the blow to his son. It does not take anything off of his former wife's shoulders: he still condemns her to eternal damnation, and as a ghost stuck in purgatory, he would know that that is a far worse punishment than anything she could endure on earth. In this scenario, he projects his immediate fears of the afterlife onto the Queen. He is not even saving Gertrude from earthly punishment with his statement; he has sowed the seeds of doubt in Prince Hamlet's mind, and as a result, we see the young man consumed with what Mary Beth Rose calls, "cosmic bewilderment and sexual nausea" in the presence of his mother for the remainder of the play (304). Conversely, if King Hamlet knew his wife to be faultless, his words are even more sinister. In this scenario, he creates an "ambiguity that surrounds Gertrude's guilt, knowledge, and collusion" in Claudius's schemes (Rose 305). This would be tyranny in action: hinting just enough at a false narrative that it leads to a shroud of sexual shame over Gertrude for the

remainder of her life. The same holds true if the King was unsure of the Queen's involvement. Regardless, Old Hamlet twists reality to assert his own power and diminish Gertrude's power as a mother and a sexual being

Gertrude conveniently shoulders Claudius's projected anxieties of confinement as well. Ultimately, Claudius uses the Queen as a vehicle to keep Denmark from dwelling on the untimely death of King Hamlet. From his opening monologue, the newly crowned Claudius refers to the woman he's "taken to wife" as "th' imperial jointress" who will move the country forward "with an auspicious and a dropping eye" (*Ham.* 1.2.14, 9, 11). In other words, he relieves the sorrow of the nation and any speculation about foul play in the former king's death by giving them all something to hope in and celebrate. Gertrude is excluded as an active participant in this scheme, though. Claudius denies her active participation throughout the monologue: she is "taken to wife," and the "we" pronoun that Claudius uses throughout the speech is the royal "we," meaning he is simply referring to himself and not the couple moving forward as a united front (*Ham.* 1.2.1n1). This is clear from the first line of his speech when he references Old Hamlet's death as "our dear brother's death," which both excludes Gertrude and establishes his use of plural pronouns to refer to himself (1.2.1). Claudius's view of Gertrude as a possession continues throughout the play; we see it again in Act III when he lists her as an item alongside the other things he stands to lose if his villainy is uncovered (*Ham.* 3.3.55). His dominion over her is also evident in the way she obeys his every command; she leaves four of her nine scenes after Claudius utters a variation of "Madam, come," and each time without a final word herself (Maxwell).

Claudius's most disastrous act of claustrophobic projection is his separation of Gertrude from her son, Hamlet. In a situation that echoes Richard III's separation of Elizabeth from her

sons, Claudius banishes Hamlet from his mother and from his kingdom. Up until this pivotal decision, Claudius has at least feigned interest in his wife's opinion on matters, such as the source of Hamlet's melancholy (*Ham.* 2.2.149-50). Additionally, Claudius and Gertrude have never been on stage without each other until we see Claudius decide to send Hamlet away at the end of Act 3 Scene 1. In this scene, the King enters without his Queen for the first time, and is instead flanked by Polonius, with whom Claudius shares his plan to send Hamlet "with speed to England" (*Ham.* 3.1.166). He makes this decision without consideration for Gertrude's feelings on the matter. His disregard for the Queen is made even more glaring when Polonius tactfully urges the king to "do as [he] pleases" but to do so humanely by "let[ting] his queen-mother" in on the scheme, and allowing her a chance to speak with her son (*Ham.* 3.1.177, 179). Although she has agreed to help figure out what is wrong with Hamlet, she never agrees to his exile. In their final moments together before he is banished, Hamlet reminds his mother that he "Must to England," and Gertrude's reply tells all: "Alack, / I had forgot; 'tis so concluded on" (*Ham.* 3.4.201, 202-3). Her use of passive voice in this moment makes it clear: Claudius has made the decision, not her. When her son is banished, her power is diminished and Claudius's is strengthened. In other words, Claudius's projection has caused a transfer of power; he takes what power Gertrude has as a mother and usurps it for himself by abusing his dominance.

Outside of Gertrude's subtle admission of powerlessness when Hamlet is banished, *Hamlet* is unique in that we don't hear directly from the maternal figure about feeling suppressed at the hands of the tyrant(s). The potential reasons for this are varied, but it may simply be due to logistics: Gertrude speaks very little in the play to begin with. She only has 157 lines, which is less than every other maternal figure referenced in this essay, excluding the Duchess of York from *Richard III*, who totals 142 lines. Compared to Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, who speaks

twice as much (332 times) in a play with 5,000 fewer words than *Hamlet*, or Lady Macbeth who speaks 259 lines in a play nearly *half* the length of *Hamlet*, Gertrude is limited in her opportunity for personal reflection. Beyond her narrow speaking role, though, Gertrude has long been read in one of two ways: either as a weak woman driven into marriage by lust, or as a resourceful woman driven into marriage by political convenience. If she is the woman of the first reading, it is unlikely that she would even see her imprisonment at the hands of the king due to her blinding passion. This appears to be the way Hamlet views her in the play. If one holds to the second reading, she is savvy enough to keep any thoughts of confinement to herself; additionally, we never see Gertrude on stage by herself, so the opportunity for her to voice any resentment, even if she wished, is limited.

Unlike Gertrude, Lady Macbeth has no shortage of speaking opportunities in *Macbeth*. She is, however, unique as a mother figure because we never see her embody this role during the action of the play. Her children are not characters during the action of the play, and it is almost impossible to imagine a scenario where the Macbeths could logistically have living children without them playing into the movement of the story. Throughout the play, though, there are clues that Lady Macbeth has a deep knowledge of motherhood and that she may have mothered a child in the past. Most notably, she tells Macbeth that "I have given suck and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (*Mac.* 1.7.54-55). Given her nobility, it is unlikely that Lady Macbeth would have served as a wet-nurse to anyone, so if she speaks from experience, she has born and lost a child (or children). According to Alice Fox, at least "one [Macbeth] child lived long enough to have nursed" (128).

What is perhaps more compelling than the maternal language surrounding Lady Macbeth, though, is the motherly role that Lady Macbeth plays to her husband. Words and actions from

both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth reveal a strange power dynamic between the two, setting up Macbeth to be "an infant vulnerable to [Lady Macbeth]" (Adelman 137). A compelling instance of this is when the couple enacts their murder plot against King Duncan. After Macbeth has committed the crime, he exits Duncan's chamber, and is immediately met by his wife, commanding him to "go get some water" and wash his hands (*Mac.* 2.2.49). Her motherly comments continue: "Why did you bring these daggers from the place? / They must lie there…" (*Mac.* 2.2.51-2). She scolds him like a child for forgetting to leave the murder weapons in place, and when he refuses to go back in, she completes the task herself, but not without berating him further: "The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil" (2.2.57-8). Lady Macbeth equates her husband's fear to the fear of a child, creating a direct allusion to their mother-child dynamic. The same relationship dynamic surfaces in the banquet scene, when Lady Macbeth shames Macbeth after he sees Banquo's Ghost. She pulls him aside and asks him, "Are you a man?" (3.4.59). She then goes on to say that his fear is "shame itself" and as ridiculous as the fear displayed by women "at a winter's fire" (3.4.67, 66).

In these examples, Lady Macbeth appears to have the upper hand; like a domineering mother, she directs Macbeth in the direction she wishes him to go. However, this dynamic does not last. As soon as Macbeth recognizes the freedom that he gains through his power as King, he stops acting as an obedient son and instead starts to use his mother figure—his wife—as a target of projection. Unlike Richard III and the kingly brothers in *Hamlet* who present as tyrants from the beginning of their respective plays, Macbeth transforms into one over the course of *Macbeth*. His wife is a willing accomplice (and at times, perhaps instigator) in their early plans, but as he gains power and feels more and more trapped beneath his wife's emasculating comments and

stuck in the murderous plot he now has to carry through, he begins to cut Lady Macbeth out of his inner circle of power.

Macbeth's process of excluding Lady Macbeth begins with his plan to have Banquo and Banquo's son, Fleance, murdered. Once he sets the scheme in motion, he is crushed with anxiety, overwhelmed with feelings of claustrophobic enclosure as he realizes that there is no going back. Macbeth explains to his wife that it would be better to be dead, because then he would "gain peace," rather than live "in restless ecstasy" (*Mac.* 3.2.20, 22). In this moment, he decides to go forward alone, leaving his wife out of what had previously always been a joint venture. When she inquires about the next step of their plan, he tells her to "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" (*Mac.* 3.2.44). This moment reveals the inversion of the old mother-son dynamic; Lady Macbeth is no longer the powerful mother. In one word, Macbeth minimizes her to a "chuck": a chick, a baby. He then calls upon the "seeling night" to "scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day" (*Mac.* 3.2.45, 46). He pairs his decision to annex his wife to innocence with images of sealed eyes and blindfolds, two incredibly vulnerable images. Some see Macbeth's decision to keep Lady Macbeth ignorant of the plan as a protective measure motivated by love, but even if it is, the result is the same regardless of motive: she *is* left out of the plan, and she is forced to finish out the play blindly, stumbling forward into madness. A more probable reason for his decision is in keeping with tyrannical psychology: "the acts the tyrant performs in coming to power increase his feelings of fear" and lead to "his isolation from other human beings" (Glad 27). Macbeth has already voiced anxiety in response to his villainous actions on his quest for power; psychologically, his logical next step is to disconnect from those closest to him, and in doing so, separate them from the power of his throne. Adelman expands on this idea in her exploration of Shakespearean mothers and sons called *Suffocating Mothers*; she writes that

"heroic masculinity turns on leaving the mother behind," which is exactly what happens between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (130). He leaves her behind by leaving her out, but he also psychologically distances himself from her by trying to remove her as a mother-figure and view her instead as a child.

Now that Lady Macbeth is cut off from Macbeth's power, she has lost her power and her freedom. Much like Lady Anne in *Richard III*, she doesn't even get to experience the freedom of peaceful sleep, which we see play out in her famous sleepwalking scene in Act 5. It is important to recall Macbeth's deep desire for sleep in context with the sleepwalking scene as well. He does not directly oversee his wife's restless sleep, but it is yet another example of the maternal figure living out the tyrant's anxieties. Macbeth, meanwhile, hurtles forward in a rampage, invigorated with a new sense of power after unloading his burdens onto the maternal figure nearest him. This cycle of victimizing mothers continues: shortly after annexing his wife, he orchestrates the onstage murder of Lady Macduff and her children (*Mac.* 4.2). The mother-child relationship appears to be particularly triggering to the tyrant; interactions between Elizabeth and her sons (*Richard III*), Gertrude and Hamlet (*Hamlet*), and even the minor characters of Lady Macduff and her children, threaten the various tyrants; perhaps this is because these relationships exhibit the power of maternity. If the tyrant's goal is to consolidate power for himself and strip others of theirs, it is unsurprising that in each of these instances, the mothers are separated from their children or eliminated completely, often as brutally as possible.

For Leontes of *The Winter's Tale*, maternal power is on full display in Act I through his pregnant wife, Hermione, and he becomes yet another king who resorts to severe cruelty against maternal figures and their children. Leontes' cruelty, though, appears even more heinous than the other plays because he tears his wife away from their shared children. Hermione is one of the

very few Shakespearean women to appear pregnant on stage. Dr. Felicity Dunworth, a specialist in the representation of motherhood in English literature, explains in her book *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage* that Hermione's "body, pregnant, lactating, maternal, is one of the dominant images of the play" (204); it is impossible for the audience, and Leontes, to ignore. He is confronted with it daily, but instead of anticipating his new child's arrival, he is consumed with the fear that Hermione has been unfaithful. His paranoid anxiety is clear: he sees his wife engaged in friendly interactions with his friend and neighboring King of Bohemia, Polixenes, and quickly jumps to suspicions of infidelity. This is early evidence of Leontes's anxiety. He cannot help but see Hermione's pregnant body as "evidence of corruption" because he feels his power threatened by it (Dunworth 206). The chance that this child isn't his endangers his reign and his masculinity, and once he has considered the possibility, he can't return to social security. There is a layer of anxiety beyond infidelity concerns for Leontes, though: Janet Adelman suggests that Leontes fears that Hermione's pregnancy, regardless of who the father is, will "disrupt [his] male haven…disrupt[ing] male bonds and male identity" (220). The attention that Hermione and her maternal body demand takes attention away from Leontes and his male friendships, and he is jealous. So, he "makes her—rather than himself—nothing and secures his 'rest' by giving her to the fire" (Adelman 224). This is tyranny; in order to preserve the power and attention he gains as king and from his masculine social circles, he locks Hermione away and diminishes her maternal power.

Leontes begins to strip Hermione of her power by sending her to prison, where she gives birth. This is confinement at its most literal, and Leontes most certainly sees it that way: in the trial that he forces Hermione through, mere hours after she has given birth, he simply refers to her as "prisoner" (*WT* 3.2.8). Hermione is very aware of what her husband is doing. In one of her

lengthy defenses of herself, Hermione addresses the other ways that Leontes has stripped her of agency and filled her life with metaphorical claustrophobia, so that he can live out his tyrannical rule. First, she is separated from power—isolated—because she is "barred" from her son, Mamillius, just as Elizabeth and Gertrude are in *Richard III* and *Hamlet*, respectively (*WT* 3.2.96). Then, she describes herself as "myself on every post / Proclaimed a strumpet" (*WT* 3.2.99-100). She may be referencing pamphlets posted around town, but this phrasing evokes the image of her actual self strapped to a post. To appease the King's desire for mental and emotional freedom, Hermione is isolated, "barred," and strapped down.

Paulina, meanwhile, is also a maternal target for Leontes' projection. Similarly to Lady Macbeth, there is no textual evidence to prove that Paulina is a literal mother; she is, however, a highly maternal figure. Dr. Murray Schwartz, a specialist in Shakespeare and psychoanalytic critical theory, argues that ultimately Paulina "assumes the role of the maternal super-ego" for Leontes throughout the play (147). Paulina also acts as a metaphorical midwife when she "delivers" Leontes' new daughter to him for the first time. When she brings him the baby, Leontes lashes out at her. He "phobically drives Paulina off the stage" and demands she be barred from the room (Adelman 227). Nevertheless, she persists, and pleads with him to reconcile with his wife, which Leontes perceives to be a mother's action of "emasculating control" (Adelman 219). In response, he demands that one of his lords, Antigonus, "rule her," "force her hence," and "push her out," attempting to gain back the control that Paulina threatens to exercise over him (*WT* 2.3.46, 61, 73). Leontes yells that Paulina is in "a nest of traitors," evoking the image of a tight space and projecting her into it (*WT* 2.3.81). Hermione and Paulina are the only two maternal figures in *The Winter's Tale*, and they are the only characters that Leontes confines as surrogates for his own feelings of claustrophobic inadequacy.

Janet Adelman argues that *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's climactic work of mother-son dramatics:

> Shakespeare floods the play with the fantasies that have haunted his male protagonists since *Hamlet*, articulating with astonishing economy and force the anguish of masculinity that conceives of itself as betrayed at its point of origin, a masculinity that can read in the full maternal body only the signs of its own loss. (222)

While I would argue that these fantasies begin before *Hamlet* with the first tetralogy, and, in particular, *Richard III*, her analysis holds. Shakespeare's tyrannical kings are intensely threatened by maternal figures; there is an intrinsic tension between the masculine power that they wield and the undeniable feminine power of mothers in bringing forth life. The kings see their vulnerability in maternal figures, and this heightens their insecurity and paranoia. The mothers are suddenly "suspected as their rivals" because they threaten power (Aravindakshan 40). This is in keeping with Foucault's theory that "where there is power, there is resistance" (95). It goes both ways: the tyrants and mothers push against one another, asserting their own and resisting each other's power as they struggle to achieve their ultimate goals of freedom and flourishing. Their differing definitions of freedom and flourishing, however, are perhaps why we see the clash between tyrants and mothers again and again in Shakespeare's work: they are completely at odds with one another. Political Scientist Betty Glad explains that authoritarian power "looks to [one's] own advantage," while maternal power "seeks the good of the other party" (2, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 722). Authoritarian power "uses extreme and cruel tactics" to succeed with little regard for future generations, while maternal power considers what is best for "preservation and nurturance" (Glad 2, *Matricentric Feminism* ch. 3). Tyranny limits an individual from engaging in "genuine human relationships," while "strong emotional, intimate

and long-term bonds" are at the heart of maternal power (Glad 6, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 722). It is no wonder that this clash occurs. In the presence of maternity, tyrants see their ultimate personal freedom slipping away, so they resist by using the methods they know best: suppression and domination.

CHAPTER 3
MATERNAL POWER HAS THE LAST WORD

Shakespeare's tyrants cultivate a bleak and oppressive environment, especially for the maternal figures in their lives, but the tyrants in these plays never have the last word. They may be master manipulators, but the "inward bitterness, disorder, and violence that [drives] them forward" blinds them from seeing others, specifically those they view as vulnerable, as complex human beings (Greenblatt 62). It is this blindness, this limited ability to see reality, that is "apt to lead them into behavior that turns out to be self-defeating," and in the end, they "win nothing but negation, emptiness, isolation" (Glad 7, Benjamin 35). Ultimately, authoritarians underestimate others, particularly mothers. They see mothers as powerless pawns to be used in their schemes, but ultimately, their projection fails, and they are left unable to escape their claustrophobia. No amount of projection can keep the kings from feeling "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in" (*Mac.* 3.4.25). The maternal figures in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*, by contrast, prove themselves to be agents in their own right, with ample power to exercise. In fact, the maternal figures in these plays eventually achieve the power and the freedom that the king risked everything for in the end.

Of all the plays where we see the pattern of matriarchal triumph, it is most prevalent in *Richard III* due to sheer numbers: four mother-figures take back their power from King Richard. Queen Margaret, the widow of Henry V, and the Duchess of York, Richard's mother, use their "last words" to speak harsh truths to their oppressor. Their moments of triumph come before Richard's demise when they both lay prophetic curses on Richard, all of which come to fruition by the end of the play. Queen Margaret's curses are dark and great in number, particularly in Act 1 Scene 3 of *Richard III*. In the midst of the scene, she wonders if her maledictions can "pierce

the clouds and enter heaven" and if they can, she pleads, "give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses" (*R3* 1.3.191, 192). These lines reveal Margaret's awareness of the power of her voice; she trusts that her curses will come to pass, and even calls on God to hasten Richard's suffering. And, amazingly, she foretells of both Richard's nightmare in Act 5 Scene 3 and his eventual death. She says, "No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine, / Unless it be whilst some tormenting dream / Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils" (1.3.221-3). This is exactly what Richard experiences the night before he is killed, as he is caught in a fitful sleep, taunted by all of the people that he has murdered.

Queen Margaret not only prophesies to Richard, though: she has words for his counsel, too. Before leaving the room in Act 1 Scene 3, she turns to Buckingham, Dorset, Rivers, Grey, Stanley, and Hastings and delivers a foreboding message: "...remember this another day / When [Richard] shall split thy very heart with sorrow, / And say poor Margaret was a prophetess" (*R3* 1.3.295-7). She owns her power, and Richard's allies come to recognize it by the end of the play. As Buckingham is led to his execution, he laments, "now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head… / Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame" (5.2.25, 29). Margaret's words overshadow Richard and his co-conspirators' fall from grace; her words echo over the play from her first appearance in Act 1 Scene 3 until the curtain closes. This woman, who was pushed into the shadows and left to lurk in the "confines" of her castle, is finally acknowledged for her powerful voice and freed from the tyranny of Richard (4.4.3).

Throughout *Richard III*, the Duchess of York is more sparing in her taunts toward Richard than Margaret, but her intent is clear when she addresses Richard as he prepares for battle against Richmond's army. Her scathing comments build to a curse of death:

…take with thee my most heavy curse,

Which in the day of battle tire thee more

Than all the complete armor that thou wear'st.

My prayers on the adverse party fight,

And there the little souls of Edward's children

Whisper the spirits of thine enemies

And promise them success and victory.

Bloody thou art; bloody will by thy end.

Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend. (*R3* 4.4.177-85)

With these parting words, the Duchess of York exits the stage for the final time. Her words reflect her profound resentment toward her son: she not only wills death upon him, but a *shameful* and *bloody* death at the hands of his greatest enemy, to whom she professes her allegiance.

By Act 5, Richard has arrived on the battlefield, and it is here that he is subject to Lady Anne's power. She appears in the form of a ghost as Richard is trapped in a terrifying nightmare. It is the eve of Richard's final battle, and he lies down in his tent to rest before the fateful day, only to be visited by a procession of ghosts of the people that he has killed. One of these ghostly visitors is Lady Anne, his wife. Richard had her casually murdered offstage during Act IV, with little more than a mention of the act as he prepares to marry a new bride. Up until Act 5 Scene 4, it appears that Richard has succeeded in stripping Anne of her power and confined her to her grave. But everything changes in Richard's nightmare scene. She arrives with this message:

Richard, thy wife, that wretched Anne thy wife,

That never slept a quiet hour with thee,

Now fills thy sleep with perturbations.

Tomorrow in the battle think on me,

And fall thy edgeless sword. Despair and die. (*R3* 5.3.157-61)

Turning to Richard's nemesis, Richmond, who is asleep in his own tent, she adds, "Thou quiet soul, sleep thou a quiet sleep. / Dream of success and happy victory. / Thy adversary's wife doth pray for thee" (*R3* 5.3.162-4).

In a mere eight lines, Lady Anne accomplishes a great deal by playing on Richard's greatest anxieties. She reminds him that she is literally filling his sleep—which is supposed to be restful and free from the weight of the world—with "perturbations," or anxiety. To begin, her use of the word "perturbations" is interesting; it is the only lengthy word used by any of the ghosts in this scene, and it is wielded by the only woman ghost. The word itself addresses Richard's "fear of the feminine": their power, their control, their minds (Moulton 266). Richard's primary anxiety that Lady Anne speaks to in this passage, though, is his sexual anxiety. After Richard's many lewd addresses throughout the play and Lady Anne's repeated refrain that he never allows her sleep, Lady Anne tells him to think about her and their sexual encounters, and then "fall thy edgeless sword" (*R3* 5.3.160-1). An edgeless sword is a useless tool on the battlefield; it is also symbolic of useless manhood in the bedroom. In these lines, Lady Anne is willing death on her husband and making him impotent. Lady Anne renders Richard passive as a man and as a king; and, if willing his death wasn't enough, she also empowers his greatest enemy with prayers of triumph. It is with Anne's final words ringing in their ears that Richard and Richmond enter into a battle that results in Richard's death and Richmond's reign. While the fact of Lady Anne's death remains, she manages to be a key force behind Richard's undoing, even from beyond the grave. It is her voice that contributes to the "fearful drops stand[ing] on [Richard's] trembling

flesh" (*R3* 5.3.179). In the end, Richard is unable to suppress Lady Anne's voice, and she wields her feminine power to strip him of his.

Richard is stabbed unceremoniously on the battlefield, and Richmond rises to power and marries Queen Elizabeth's daughter, Young Elizabeth. Together, the two promise a future of "smooth-faced peace, / With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days" (*R3* 5.5.33-4). It is through this marriage that the widowed Queen Elizabeth asserts her power. Her strength is remarkable; even after a period of significant loss, hopelessness, and powerlessness at the hands of Richard, Queen Elizabeth maintains her resourcefulness and collaborates with Richmond to orchestrate his marriage to her daughter (*R3* 4.5). In doing so, she ensures her own future security and the security of her nation against Richard. The union of Richmond and Young Elizabeth "unite[s] the white rose and the red" (*R3* 5.5.19); in other words, the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions are finally bound together. By "heartily consent[ing]" to this marriage, Queen Elizabeth plays an essential role in ending the thirty years of violence of the Wars of the Roses (*R3* 4.5.17). It is a power move that will ripple into generations to come, and a legacy that will far outlast Richard's brief turn as tyrant of England.

When compared to the women of *Richard III*, Gertrude achieves her freedom and power in great subtlety; it is, nonetheless, significant. She acquiesces to Claudius's will and words, at least until the end of Act 4. Abigail Montgomery writes in her 2009 article "Enter Queen Gertrude Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet" that at this point in the text, we start to see "Gertrude developing and changing, preparing to challenge Claudius outright" and reclaim her own "rich dramatic personhood" (100). Her transformation from submissive wife to agent of her own destiny is first apparent when Gertrude is confronted with Ophelia's tragic death in Act 4 Scene 4. At this moment, it is

Queen Gertrude who steps up to deliver the eulogy. It is Queen Gertrude, the woman who typically speaks in one or two line phrases, who confronts Claudius and Laertes with the horrific news in an 18-line speech; it is her voice that makes the news "known to the community and provide[s] the first interpretation of it" (Montgomery 108). And her interpretation is compelling.

As Hanna Scolnicov notes in "Gertrude's Willow Speech: Word and Film Image" (2000), Gertrude begins her eulogy with a rich description of nature that contrasts the stark, "claustrophobic closeness"of Elsinore; her feminine and "floral world serves to set off the stark and somber nature of the male struggles in the play" (105). She describes the willow under which Ophelia sits, and the "fantastic garlands" she makes "of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples," evoking a sense of natural freedom and wildness that contrasts the stone corridors and hard edges of the castle (*Ham.* 4.4.167, 168). By choosing to speak in this manner, Gertrude is already breaking free of the world in which Claudius and Old Hamlet have confined her. Claudius has pushed nature out of his kingdom, and when it *is* referenced, it is "rank and gross" and bursting with weeds; roses are "blisters" and violets, like love, are quick to die (*Ham.* 1.2.136, 3.4.44). Gertrude breaks from all of this to offer a vision of flourishing and beauty at the most unlikely of times. Even when Ophelia falls into the water, Gertrude depicts her as a part of the natural scene: she is "mermaid-like," a "creature native and endued / Unto that element" (4.4.175, 178-9). Gertrude's language gives Ophelia feminine agency to belong outside of "male power struggles" and "deliverance from the pressures of life in the conflict-ridden environment of Elsinore" (Scolnicov 105, 106). The other critical move Gertrude makes in this speech is her affirmation that Ophelia's death was an accident, not a suicide. According to Gertrude, Ophelia "fell into the weeping brook" when "an envious sliver broke" and was pulled under by the weight of her clothing (*Ham.* 4.4.174, 172). Whether this is truly what Gertrude saw happen or

not is debatable, but by reporting Ophelia's death as an accident, she grants Ophelia funeral rites that she would have been denied in the case of a suicide. Gertrude exercises her power to free Ophelia's soul, and by extension, her own, as Gertrude "enters imaginatively" into escape from masculine control (Scolnicov 106).

Gertrude may use the willow speech to *imagine* her escape from masculine control, but she enacts her escape in Act 5 Scene 2. Claudius has poisoned a cup for Hamlet to drink at the fencing match, and when Gertrude reaches for it, the king commands, "Gertrude, do not drink" (*Ham.* 5.2.267). Gertrude has obeyed every command from her domineering husband up until this point; but now, she makes her own decision: she lifts the cup to her lips, defies her husband, and drinks. As she dies from the poison, she repeats "the drink" over and over, which "brings our focus to the poisoned libation" and Claudius's malicious role in the plot; even though it takes Gertrude until the final scene of the play to fully embody her agency, she finally uses her voice to entrap Claudius in his schemes, "challenge his will, and expose his lies" (Montgomery 111, 112).

Gertrude's death is blameless and even honorable because of her insistence upon identifying her poisoner. She has harmed no one. Claudius, on the other hand, is identified, and everyone turns on him: Laertes proclaims that "the King's to blame," and Claudius's lords do not defend him against the enraged Hamlet. As a result, Claudius suffers a death reminiscent of his tyrant brother, Old Hamlet: both men meet their end in a deeply passive and entrapped manner. Old Hamlet is "possessed" by Claudius's poison poured into "the porches of [his] ears" while he sleeps (*Ham.* 1.5.68, 63). Claudius is possessed in his own way by Hamlet. In this final scene, Hamlet inverts Claudius's murderous plot and stabs his uncle with the sword his uncle meant for him; then, he forces the remains from Gertrude's poisoned glass—again, a tool meant to murder

Hamlet— down Claudius's throat. It is an incredibly infantilizing death; one cannot help but see Claudius as a baby in his final moments, feeding on poison as a child feeds at a bottle. Ultimately, Claudius lives his final moments without any dignity, stripped of his power and his freedom. Just as in *Richard III*, the king dies without agency, and maternal power is re-established. Even in her death, the mother is triumphant in these plays; she has resisted and overcome tyranny, while also exercising her maternal power "to create social change and social justice" for future generations (*Matricentric Feminism* Introduction).

Macbeth follows a similar arc; in the end, the tyrant's power disintegrates and the mother figure's power is recognized; however, Lady Macbeth's power is established in a very different way than the women in *Richard III* and *Hamlet*. After barring Lady Macbeth from participation in his treacherous action in Act 3 Scene 2, Macbeth attempts to move forward without her. He quickly realizes, though, that he is lost without her powerful influence. His first major decision after breaking their partnership—the killing of Banquo—ends in the infamous banquet in Act 3 Scene 4. Upon seeing Banquo's ghost, Macbeth loses all sense of kingly dignity and deteriorates into madness in front of his friends. Lady Macbeth continually tries to cover his shame, but he pushes her away, affirming that he is "a bold [man]" indeed, and accusing Lady Macbeth that it is she who "Makes me strange / Even to the disposition that I owe" (*Mac.* 3.5.60, 114-5). Macbeth sees himself as a brave warrior and his wife as the stumbling block that keeps him from fulfilling his powerful reign. He fails to understand that it is his wife and her bravery that empowered him and continues to do so, even as he tries to suppress her. His blindness to his wife's power is apparent in Act 4, where Macbeth moves forward in tyrannical action while Lady Macbeth does not make a single appearance.

Unlike the mother-figures of *Richard III* and *Hamlet* whose power is confirmed through their actions, Lady Macbeth's power is primarily and paradoxically confirmed through her inaction in the second half of the play. When Macbeth strips Lady Macbeth of influence and agency, separating her from his power, *his* rule falls apart. In other words, Lady Macbeth's voice is revealed to be the backbone of Macbeth's power, and when he unravels without her influence, her power is confirmed.

Of course, the powerful Lady Macbeth is not without some action in the final scenes of *Macbeth.* In Act 5 Scene 5, Macbeth is mid-battle and preparing for his final stand against Macduff when he hears screaming from within the castle. His servant, Seyton, assesses the situation, only to report back to his master that Lady Macbeth has died by suicide (*Mac.* 5.5.16). Macbeth responds callously, commenting that "she should have died hereafter" in a more peaceful, convenient time (5.5.17). After this line, Macbeth begins his "tomorrow" speech (5.5.18-29). In this speech, Macbeth reflects on the meaninglessness of life, disjointedly jumping from image to image—time, candles, shadows, actors, idiot's stories—all of which compound to present a desperate, unhinged man very unlike the man who expressed remorse in response to his early murders. Macbeth's despair in this scene appears to have been brought on by the news of losing Lady Macbeth.

As Macbeth concludes the "tomorrow" speech, he is informed that the trees in Birnam Wood have uprooted and are advancing as a united army against him. According to a prophecy by the witches in the previous Act, "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him" (4.1.91-3). The dreaded prophecy unfolds before Macbeth, and instead of "taint[ing] with fear," as he claims he will mere moments before if this scenario comes to pass, he enters into a mindset of denial, calling the messenger a

liar and preparing for battle anyway (5.3.3). This is a drastic shift from his attitude preceding the news of Lady Macbeth's death. Before, he acknowledges his fears, lamenting that he is "sick at heart"; after, he emotionlessly proclaims, "at least we'll die with harness on our back" (5.3.19, 5.5.52). He charges forward without strategy, resigned to a single outcome without questioning it and without assessing alternate options.

Something has caused his emotional state to shift, and the logical source is the news of Lady Macbeth's death. Perhaps he finally realizes his weakness without his wife, or perhaps he is envious of her; unlike him, she will no longer be "troubled with thick-coming fancies / That keep her from her rest" (*Mac.* 5.3.38-9). Regardless, one cannot help but imagine that Lady Macbeth has intentionally timed her death. She has proven herself to be meticulous and ruthless; why should her suicide be any different? In some twisted way, could suicide be her ultimate power move, the action that frees her from all worldly bondage *and* taunts her husband by reminding him of his greatest fear: that he is "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in" (3.4.25)? By carrying out her own death, Lady Macbeth forces Macbeth to construct a "fantasy of escape" as he is "increasingly hemmed in by enemies" (Adelman 131). He repeats and repeats the witches' prophecy that none "of a woman born" shall harm him as a charm of protection, but he is vulnerable and ultimately unable to fulfill "the fantasy of escape from the universal [experience of the womb]" (*Mac.* 5.7.3, Adelman 131); he never can be an autonomous male; he will always be influenced by maternal power. In these final moments, Lady Macbeth leaves Macbeth powerless with an army closing in on him, and as a result, he dies without honor, proclaimed a tyrant and usurper. Even though she does not make it out alive, Lady Macbeth's power is reasserted by the end of the play because we see that without her influence, the kingdom and its leader, Macbeth, fall apart.

The maternal figures in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies *do* regain their power and ultimately have the "final word" in their respective plays; however, gaining power does not always result in a future of personal flourishing for these women. Oftentimes, the women in these plays regain their power at the cost of their own lives, and while that may not seem like power, it is. Andrea O'Reilly explains that a mother will "make her power redundant" if it means her sacrifice will lead to the "preservation and growth" of the future (*Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 722). She is able to look beyond herself, and flexibly shift her expression of power, depending on the circumstance, for the good of the whole. Maternal power is not about domination; it is about transformation. While the tragedies and histories are full of women who assert their maternal power through sacrifice, that is, thankfully, not the fate of all of Shakespeare's mother figures. Shakespeare's romance *The Winter's Tale* presents a maternal power that, while still decidedly transformative for the future, also results in personal flourishing for the mother figures Hermione and Paulina.

In the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale*, the outcome looks recognizably bleak: the primary maternal figure, Hermione, is reported dead by her best friend, Paulina. The scene is reminiscent of Act 4 Scene 4 in *Hamlet* when Gertrude reports of Ophelia's death. Both scenes involve a woman sharing the news of another woman's death with the tyrant king; both scenes grant power to the messenger by allowing her to shape the narrative of the circumstances surrounding the other woman's death. Essentially, the messenger is able to engage in "a selective type of storytelling" that allows for "the possibility that the information granted…is incomplete" (Kolentsis 38). This "selective storytelling" is exactly what Gertrude and Paulina engage in, but while Gertrude may have altered the details of Ophelia's death in order to preserve Ophelia's honor, Paulina completely fabricates Hermione's death, because Hermione is, in fact, *not dead*.

The behind-the-scenes pact between Hermione and Paulina is revealed in the final scene, but before jumping to it, one must ask: *why* carry out this fake death plot in the first place? And why let this false narrative permeate the kingdom for 16 years? In the context of Leontes' tyrannical rule, Kolentsis argues that it has to do with "the sense of powerlessness rooted in female reproduction" and escaping "masculine control" embodied by Leontes (39).

By the end of Act 3, Shakespeare portrays Leontes as one of the most paranoid, cruel, and isolated tyrants of his creation, especially in Leontes' actions toward women. Unlike the other kings, though, Leontes eventually feels remorse for his oppressive leadership and questions whether his deeds were justified. The women's orchestration of Hermione's false death is a primary factor in this transformation. Leontes believes that his actions have led to the death of his wife, and King Leontes is left to spend over a decade doing penance, without a wife and without his two children: his son, Mamillius, who died from grief after losing his mother; and his daughter, Perdita, whom Leontes had abandoned at birth in a neighboring kingdom. For 16 years he deals with the outcome of his tyrannical action, and in a way, "he himself dies as the sacrificial representative of tragedy" that he has inflicted on his family and his kingdom (Adelman 228). He pays for his actions with regret, loneliness, and isolation. He becomes paralyzed, and enters into a life of complete passivity. At the opening of Act 5, Leontes laments to his friends:

> Whilst I remember
> [Hermione] and her virtues, I cannot forget
> My blemishes in them, and so still think of
> The wrong I did myself, which was so much
> That heirless it hath made my kingdom and

Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man

Bred his hopes out of. (*WT* 5.1.6-12)

Surprisingly, one of the friends with whom he shares this self-reflection is Paulina. Over the 16 years following Hermione's reported death, Paulina has become one of Leontes' chief confidantes; in fact, later in Act 5 Scene 1, Leontes affectionately calls her "my true Paulina" and agrees to "never marry but by [Paulina's] free leave" (5.1.81, 70). Christina Alfar notes in "The Neurotic Subject of Tragedy: Fantasies of Female Evil in The Winter's Tale" (2005) that amazingly, "at his contrition," Paulina has become Leontes' "foremost advisor, keeper of his celibacy, and enforcer of his daily exercise of repentance" (335).

A stunning transformation has occurred: Leontes has willingly sacrificed some of his power and freedom to give one of his former victims power and freedom over herself, the kingdom, and even over *him personally*. While "initially Leontes could see in Paulina's management only the signs of her emasculating control," in the end "he can find himself as husband and father only by giving himself into her hands, rediscovering his masculine potency and authority through trust in her and in the female processes she speaks for" (Adelman 219). Paulina's feminine power is the opposite of tyrannical; it is transformative, promoting good beyond herself and bringing healing to even the most vile of men.

Leontes' transformation is remarkable, but it is also deeply compelling that Paulina remains as his advisor, despite their history. Of course, one could argue that she is simply interested in watching him pay the price for his cruelty, but the text suggests there is a deeper, maternal instinct driving Paulina's loyalty. At the close of Act 3, when Paulina delivers the false news of Hermione's death, she observes that Leontes "is touched / To the noble heart" by his heinous actions (*WT* 3.2.218-9). In this moment, Paulina's rage subsides and compassion

emerges for this man whom she has labeled “tyrant” on three separate occasions. She sees his grief, and she stops berating Leontes. The scene ends moments later with Leontes asking Paulina to “lead” him through the sorrows to come (3.2.239).

The power that Paulina exhibits at the end of Act 3 Scene 2 is deeply maternal, and presents a stark contrast to the masculine tyranny embodied by the kings in the earlier plays. Her decision to grant compassion, even to the most undeserving subject, promotes flourishing instead of destruction. Like a mother bringing a child into the world, Paulina “leads” Leontes and his kingdom from darkness into light. She is the vessel through which Leontes finds redemption, and the only way this happens is through his submission to her authority and his metaphorical rebirth into a new future, a future that is orchestrated by the maternal powers, Paulina and Hermione.

In all of Shakespeare’s work, one of the scenes where maternal power is most apparent is the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale*. Perdita, the lost daughter, has returned to Leontes, and the two go to see a supposed statue of Hermione, housed by Paulina. While gazing upon the incredibly lifelike statue, Paulina calls Hermione awake: “‘Tis time. Descend. Be stone no more. Approach / Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come, / I’ll fill your grave up” (*WT* 5.3.99-101). To the amazement of everyone, Hermione steps down, reinstated and freed from the confines of stone and death itself. She finally “exists on her own terms, beyond the sphere of [Leontes’] omnipotence” (Adelman 234). She hugs her husband, but her first words are to her daughter, Perdita:

> Tell me, mine own,
> Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found
> Thy father’s court? For thou shalt hear that I,
> Knowing by Paulina that the oracle

Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved

Myself to see the issue. (5.3.123-8)

In this moment, Hermione asserts her power; she does "answer [Leontes'] desire with her embrace," but she then "turns away from Leontes, turns toward Perdita, insisting on her own agency, her own version of her story" (Adelman 234). Hermione confirms that it was not for Leontes' sake that she stayed hidden for 16 years, but of her own desire to see her "issue," her child, again. Hermione affirms her womanhood and motherhood and the power that she holds in both roles. And Paulina? The final image of the play is of Paulina leading the reinstated family forward into healing and restoration.

In all of these plays, the traditionally vulnerable mother breaks free, and we see "the physical, moral, and emotional importance of maternity to the successful family...and a robust state" (Dunworth 206). Her maternal powers are what free her, her family, her country, and sometimes, even her oppressor, as we see in *The Winter's Tale*.

While I wholeheartedly believe this to be true, I would be remiss if I did not address the uncomfortable reality of female suicide as a way to assert maternal power, particularly in the case of Lady Macbeth. Her suicide *is* the action that reveals her power and subjects Macbeth to bondage, but it is a decision made in the most constrained of circumstances, and this is critical for readers to remember. The mothers in Shakespeare's plays operated with very limited choices, so their specific methods of achieving and exercising power need to be read metaphorically. I do not believe that maternal power advocates for suicide or, in the case of Hermione, pretending to be dead for over a decade; rather, these actions should be read as voluntary relinquishments of personal ego, and that is what makes them so impactful.

While maternity, especially in its historical context and when linked with tyrannical persecution, had its psychological and physical restraints, it is "a fantasy that maternal care is confinement" in all senses (Schwartz 148). Shakespeare writes his maternal characters as agents of power in the end, and by doing this he gives them a beautiful complexity; like most human states, "maternity consists of paradoxes" (Kolentsis 41). In that sense, maternity is much like tyranny. Tyranny does not win in these plays, but Shakespeare does not condemn all of his oppressors to the same fate; Leontes, for example, is able to move past his past actions and experience reformation and restoration. What *is* consistent in these plays, though, is that in order for the tyrant to undergo transformation, he needs to uplift the maternal powers around him and learn to exercise the tenets of maternal power himself: acting to produce change, fostering growth in others, and working toward future prosperity.

CONCLUSION

In *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare presents an alternative to tyrannical power: maternal power. In all four of these plays, the tyrants' stories end in submission and failure; their power fades, and they succumb to the imprisonment that they so desperately feared. Make no mistake, the power of the tyrant is on full display in these plays: he can sidestep law and order, look to his own self-interest, and subject others to pain and suffering, even to the point of murder. Shakespeare does not shy away from these realities. Richard, Old Hamlet, Claudius, Macbeth, and Leontes all exercise these power moves many times over, but like any narrative, where the author chooses to end his tale always carries a message. In all four plays, the king is overcome and cruelty suppressed, and in that we see a consistent and unmistakable message: tyranny does not endure. As an expression of power, domination is not sustainable nor desirable in any of these four plays. We are left with a question, then: if not tyranny, what *is* the appropriate expression of power?

I believe the answer to this question can be found in Shakespeare's maternal figures: Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, The Duchess of York, Lady Anne, Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, Hermione, Paulina. All of these mothers' stories end in triumphant action; the traditional power structure of patriarchy inverts, and women, but particularly mothers, wield their power to achieve freedom for themselves and others before the curtain closes, even if it is moments before or through their own demise. They use their power, their "ability to act," their *freedom* to exercise *agency*, to liberate others ("power, n1"). This inverted power dynamic promotes a radical shift in our understanding of effective power because the power that these women represent is entirely different from that of the kings. In the words of feminist scholar Sara Ruddick, maternal power is "seeing vulnerability and responding to it with care rather than abuse, indifference, or flight"

(qtd. in *Matricentric Feminism* ch. 1). It is transformative, promoting "preservation, growth, and training" for the future, and as a power model, it is rich in its regenerative focus (*Matricentric Feminism* ch. 1). Maternal power functions in stark contrast to authoritarian rule.

Unfortunately, tyrants are not people of the past or easily overcome. Real-world tyranny, outside of Shakespeare's plays, is rampant. Dictators like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein come to mind, all showing "the grandiosity, the underlying insecurity, the cruelty, and the ultimately flawed reality testing noted by observers of the tyrants of antiquity" (Glad 2). All three saved their cruelest acts of suppression for women and other marginalized populations, relying on the narcissistic belief that "the lives of others do not matter; what matters is only that [the oppressor] should somehow feel 'whole' and 'founded'" (Greenblatt 105). As I write this in 2023, I cannot help but think of recent decisions made by individuals in government or small circles of delegates—the majority being older, straight, white men—that strip women of healthcare services, deny LGBTQ+ individuals basic freedoms, turn a blind eye to violence against people of color, and perpetuate cycles of homelessness and poverty while offering tax breaks to the wealthy. I cannot help but see many of these decisions as the outpouring of a tyrannical belief system that takes "peculiar pleasure in making [others] tremble or totter or fall" in order for leaders to experience "absolute power" (Greenblatt 59). It is in these times where we can look to the mothers in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale* as models. If *their* power is what succeeds against tyranny, then perhaps we can use their actions to face and even overcome the tyranny of today.

Maternal power in these plays relies on confronting the tyrant, both directly, as seen in *Richard III* and *The Winter's Tale,* and indirectly, as is the case with Gertrude, in hopes of positive change. Regardless, all of the women act with their eyes on the future. Queen Elizabeth

from *Richard III*, in particular, embodies this. Mere hours before the final battle between Richard and Richmond's armies, she musters all of the leverage she has, and instead of succumbing to tyrannical action herself, she subverts Richard's power by collaborating with Richmond and orchestrating a future of "smooth-faced peace, / With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days" by promising her daughter to him in marriage (*R3* 5.5.33-4). In doing so, she establishes a future for herself, her daughter, and her entire family, while also metaphorically birthing a new era of British prosperity, free of Richard III. The tyrant is, as Greenblatt claims, "the enemy of hope" (89); he may look to the future, but only to "poison…generations to come, to extend [cruelty] forever" (106). By contrast, hope for a better future and the willingness to act—to "birth" that future—is indispensable to maternal power. Queen Elizabeth embodies this ideal by joining the host of mothers "who have creatively resisted the limitations [of the patriarchy] and have found ways to empower themselves and others…to ensure her children survive" (*Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 722). In Queen Elizabeth's case, she promotes the survival of her biological children and the children of her nation; she is the bringer of hope.

In the here and now, though, it can be difficult to see how everyday citizens have the power to confront tyranny or the tyrant himself. In these situations, we can be encouraged by the actions of Gertrude and Paulina and their defense of those marginalized by the tyrant. The women in these plays do make an impact by speaking directly to power, but their impact is arguably even more when they step in to humanize and care for targeted populations and individuals. Gertrude does this for Ophelia when she gives Ophelia's eulogy. Regardless of whether Ophelia's death was accidental or suicidal, Gertrude grants Ophelia funeral rites by reporting her death as an accident; she ensures that Ophelia's soul is free. Similarly, Paulina acts in defense of Hermione; unlike Ophelia, Hermione is not dead, so Paulina spends years caring

for Hermione in secret, literally feeding, sheltering, and protecting the woman most oppressed by Leontes. In both cases, we see women acting in defense of other women, which I do believe has important implications for us today, from situations of workplace harassment to the realities of living in a post-Roe America. There are broad international implications as well: while we cannot step into every act of tyranny committed against women around the globe, we must consider our responsibility in aiding where we can. Ultimately, though, I believe Gertrude and Paulina's actions move beyond the idea of women supporting women. Gertrude and Paulina defended the person who needed it in the moment, not necessarily because she was a woman, but because she needed someone to recognize her humanity. When we are frustrated with the tyranny of today and overwhelmed with how to address it, exercising a maternal ethic of care may be the most impactful thing we can do.

The reality of nurturing, though, is that it requires a commitment to the long game. Tyrants can enact power quickly through force and control. Maternal figures, on the other hand, adamantly "do not seek to control or constrain…for [their] own purposes" (*Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 722); therefore, achieving the desired result can be a lengthy process. In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione and Paulina's plan to overthrow tyranny takes 16 years. In those 16 years, though, Paulina gradually but continually works toward a robust future state by staying in contact with King Leontes and embedding herself into his closest social circles. It is a unique situation, because not all oppressors experience the transformation that Leontes does, but the only reason that he does experience it is because of the strong bonds that Paulina forms with him, just as a mother does with her child.

A world without maternal power is a world of tyranny and chaos. One cannot forget the destruction that befalls Macbeth and his kingdom when he excludes his only maternal influence,

Lady Macbeth, from his schemes. *The Winter's Tale,* additionally, presents the only reformed king and his transformation is at the hand of the maternal figures. All of this points to a few key moves for our organizations and governments to instill today in order to avoid tyranny. Ensuring representation is critical, and not only of women, but of the people groups most affected and traditionally targeted by the abuse of power. Additionally, it is important to create clear systems of checks and balances to avoid hierarchies where one person reigns at the top while wielding significant, unchecked power. This separation of powers allows individuals to do for each other what mothers do for their children: "endeavor to transform the child from a demanding baby into a responsible adult" (*Encyclopedia of Motherhood* 721). This is what philosopher and feminist Sara Ruddick defines as "motherwork," and is all about "preservation, growth, and training" (*Matricentric Feminism* ch. 1). Isn't preservation, growth, and training precisely what we want for well-functioning adults and institutions? The focus areas of "motherwork" emphasize the importance of training programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion practices and other policies that both prevent abuse of power from happening and support intervention when abuse of power does happen.

"Motherwork," then, is for far more than traditional mothers: it is for everyone who wishes to live in a world free of cruelty and oppression. The ethic of care that maternal power promotes is, ultimately, the antidote to tyranny. As Andrea O'Reilly argues, the experience of mothering needs to be held separate from the institution of motherhood and "performed by anyone who commits themselves to the demands of maternal practice" (*Matricentric Feminism* ch. 1). Mothering, therefore, is not limited to biological mothers or even women. This requires walking a fine but important line. In the introduction to their anthology *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering,* editors Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee

Pelletier argue that it is critical to both "combat gender essentialism" when it comes to "motherwork" *and* "honour the differences that define our lives," especially "considering the centuries that women and mothers have endured being written about by out-of-touch male 'experts'" on their supposed experience (Green and Pelletier Introduction). This is why it is so important to differentiate between the experience of mothering and the institution of motherhood, something Andrea O'Reilly emphasizes in her book *Matricentric Feminism*.

Even though scholars like Green and Pelletier aim "to disrupt the gender essentialism presupposed by certain discourses of mothering" and "theorize the gender flexibility of maternal practice," this itself is fraught with controversy, as some scholars argue that the use of maternal language to define a universal ethic of care is problematic in and of itself (Introduction). One of these individuals is the late feminist literary critic Joanne Frye. In her article "Parental Thinking: What Does Gender Have To Do With It?" Frye writes directly against Sara Ruddick's terminology of "motherwork" and "maternal thinking" and instead advocates for the term "transformed parental thinking" that emphasizes an ethic of care that isn't bound to gender (ch. 1). While Frye makes a strong point, the literature pertaining to maternal feminist thought broadly suggests that using generalized terms like "parent" instead of "mother" dilutes the rich history of maternal care; in other words, many affirm that "the maternal lens of motherhood studies [is] a helpful feminist tool" with which to contest gender-essentialized norms when it comes to developing an ethic of care (Green and Pelletier Introduction).

So let us *all* emulate the ethic of care revealed in the mothers of Shakespeare. Like Queen Margaret, The Duchess of York, and Lady Anne, we can speak truth to tyranny with confidence. Like Queen Elizabeth, we can strive to make decisions with future generations in the forefront of our minds. Like Gertrude, we can defend the cause of marginalized peoples, and like Lady

Macbeth, we can learn to recognize the power of our actions. We can even muster the courage to live into the maternal value of "fostering growth in others," and work toward the transformation of the very tyrant himself, as Hermione and Paulina do in *The Winter's Tale*. These maternal values are what make lasting, positive change in the lives of individuals and communities in *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*, triumphing over traditional power structures, patriarchy, and gender binaries, and promoting a future where power is expressed through transformation rather than domination. Domination confines by its nature, but transformation moves individuals from their "cabined, cribbed, confined" states to freedom (*Macbeth* 3.4.25). Ultimately, transformative power is what shifts Leontes' story in *The Winter's Tale* from tragedy to comedy; perhaps it has the potential to do the same for our world today.

WORKS CITED

Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1992, pp. 1-240.

Alfar, Cristina L. "The Neurotic Subject of Tragedy: Fantasies of Female Evil in The Winter's Tale." *Shakespearean Criticism*, edited by Michelle Lee, vol. 91, 2005, pp. 334-48. *Gale*.

Aravindakshan, V. "Shakespeare's Treatment of Tyranny." Social Scientist, vol. 4, no. 10, 1976, pp. 38–44. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3516420.

Baumeister, Roy F., et al. "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 66, no. 6, 4 Jan. 2002, pp. 1081-124. *Wiley Online Library*.

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1988, pp. 11-50.

The Bible: 1599 Geneva Bible (GNV). Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com/.

Cramer, Phebe. *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*, Guilford Publications, 2006, pp. 70-92.

Dunworth, Felicity. *Mothers and meaning on the early modern English stage*. Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 196-221. *JSTOR*.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, vol. 1, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 92-102, 3 vols.

Fox, Alice. "Obstetrics and Gynecology in 'Macbeth.'" *Shakespeare Studies*, vol. 12, 1979, pp. 127-141. *ProQuest*.

Frazer, Elizabeth. "Shakespeare's Politics." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2016, pp.

503-22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24890014.

Frye, Joanne S. "Parental Thinking: What Does Gender Have To Do With It?" *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, edited by Fiona J. Green and Gary L. Pelletier, Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2015.

Glad, Betty. "Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power." *Political Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1–37. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792241. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Green, Fiona J., and Gary L. Pelletier. Introduction. *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, edited by Fiona J. Green and Gary L. Pelletier, Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2015.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Gregor, Keith, editor. Introduction. *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 1-17.

Gutting, Gary and Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/foucault/.

Harting, James Edmund. *Project Gutenberg's The Ornithology of Shakespeare*. 2013, www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41860.

Kolentsis, Alysia. "Narrative Abbreviation and the Anxiety of Reproduction in 'The Tempest' and 'The Winter's Tale.'" CEA Critic, vol. 69, no. 3, 2007, pp. 28–43. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44377658.

Levy, Allison. “Good Grief: Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety in Early Modern England.” *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*, edited by Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003, pp. 147–64. *EBSCOhost*.

Maxwell, Baldwin. "Hamlet's Mother." *Oxford Journals*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1964, pp. 235-46. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2867894.

Montgomery, Abigail L. "QUEEN GERTRUDE Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 74, no. 3, 2009, pp. 99-117. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25681397.

Moulton, Ian Frederick. “‘A Monster Great Deformed’: The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1996, pp. 251–68. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2871377. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*. Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2016.

O'Reilly, Andrea, editor. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010. *SAGE Knowledge*, 24 Dec 2022, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979276.

"power, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/149167. Accessed 2 March 2023.

Reynolds, Paige M. "Sin, Sacredness, and Childbirth in Early Modern Drama." *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 28, 2015, pp. 30-48. *JSTOR*.

Rose, Mary Beth. “Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1991, pp. 291–314. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2870845. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Schwartz, Murray M. "'The Winter's Tale': Loss and Transformation." *American Imago*, vol. 32, no. 2, June 1975, pp. 145-99. *JSTOR*.

Scolnicov, Hanna. "Gertrude's Willow Speech: Word and Film Image." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2000, pp. 101-11. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43796972.

Shakespeare, William. "Hamlet." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 1751-1853.

—. "Macbeth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2709-73.

—. "King Lear." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2494-2570.

---. "Richard III." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 555-647.

---. "The Third Part of Henry the Sixth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen,Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 276-342.

---. "The Winter's Tale." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 3121-204.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1992, pp. 1-240.

Alfar, Cristina L. "The Neurotic Subject of Tragedy: Fantasies of Female Evil in The Winter's Tale." *Shakespearean Criticism*, edited by Michelle Lee, vol. 91, 2005, pp. 334-48. *Gale*.

Alizade, Alcira M., editor. *Motherhood in the Twenty-First Century*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 1-240.

Anderson, Thomas P. *Shakespeare's Fugitive Politics*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 139-92. *JSTOR*.

Anolink, Ruth B. "There Was a Man: Dangerous Husbands and Fathers in *The Winter's Tale, A Sicilian Romance,* and *Linden Hills*." *Shakespearean Criticism*, edited by Lawrence J Trudeau, vol. 176, 2017, pp. 163-75. *Gale.*

Aravindakshan, V. "Shakespeare's Treatment of Tyranny." Social Scientist, vol. 4, no. 10, 1976, pp. 38–44. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3516420.

Aristotle. *The politics / Aristotle; translated, and with an introduction, notes, and glossary by Carnes Lord*. University of Chicago Press Chicago, 1984.

Attie, Katherine Bootle. "Tragic Proportions: The Art of Tyranny and the Politics of the Soul in 'Hamlet.'" *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2014, pp. 78–107. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43607765. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Baumeister, Roy F., et al. "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 66, no. 6, 4 Jan. 2002, pp. 1081-124. *Wiley Online Library*.

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1988, pp. 11-50.

The Bible: 1599 Geneva Bible (GNV). Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com/.

Breitenberg, Mark. *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Casey, Jim. "Manhood Fresh Bleeding: Shakespeare's Men and the Construction of Masculine Identity." *Gender Forum*, no. 49, Sept. 2014, pp. 7–13. *EBSCOhost*, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,sso&db=qth&AN=98593509&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Chamberlain, Stephanie. "Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England." College Literature, vol. 32, no. 3, 2005, pp. 72–91. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25115288.

Charney, Maurice. *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 127-40. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/char14230.15.

Coldiron, A. E. B. "'Tis Rigor and Not Law': Trials of Women as Trials of Patriarchy in The Winter's Tale." Renaissance Papers 2004, edited by Christopher Cobb and M. Thomas Hester, Boydell & Brewer, Rochester, NY; Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2004, pp. 29–68. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81nbd.5.

Cramer, Phebe. *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*, Guilford Publications, 2006, pp. 70-92.

Dunworth, Felicity. *Mothers and meaning on the early modern English stage*. Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 196-221. *JSTOR*.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, vol. 1, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 92-102, 3 vols.

Fox, Alice. "Obstetrics and Gynecology in 'Macbeth.'" *Shakespeare Studies*, vol. 12, 1979, pp. 127-141. *ProQuest*.

Frazer, Elizabeth. "Shakespeare's Politics." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2016, pp. 503-22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24890014.

Frye, Joanne S. "Parental Thinking: What Does Gender Have To Do With It?" *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, edited by Fiona J. Green and Gary L. Pelletier, Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2015.

Glad, Betty. "Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power." *Political Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1–37. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792241. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Green, Fiona J., and Gary L. Pelletier. Introduction. *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, edited by Fiona J. Green and Gary L. Pelletier, Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2015.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Gregor, Keith, editor. Introduction. *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 1-17.

Gutting, Gary and Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/foucault/.

Harting, James Edmund. *Project Gutenberg's The Ornithology of Shakespeare*. 2013, www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41860.

Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Hamlet's Mother & Other Women*. Ballantine Books, 1991, pp. 1-340.

Horney, Karen. *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*. 1 ed., Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-316.

Kawash, Samira. "New Directions in Motherhood Studies." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2011, pp. 969-1003, doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/658637.

Kolentsis, Alysia. "Narrative Abbreviation and the Anxiety of Reproduction in 'The Tempest' and 'The Winter's Tale.'" CEA Critic, vol. 69, no. 3, 2007, pp. 28–43. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44377658.

Levy, Allison. "Good Grief: Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety in Early Modern England." *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*, edited by Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003, pp. 147–64. *EBSCOhost*.

Maxwell, Baldwin. "Hamlet's Mother." *Oxford Journals*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1964, pp. 235-46. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2867894.

Montgomery, Abigail L. "QUEEN GERTRUDE Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 74, no. 3, 2009, pp. 99-117. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25681397.

Moulton, Ian Frederick. "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1996, pp. 251–68. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2871377. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

O'Reilly, Andrea, editor. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010. *SAGE Knowledge*, 24 Dec 2022, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979276.

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*. Hoopla ed., Demeter Press, 2016.

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Desomond Lee, 2nd ed., Penguin, 2007.

"power, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/149167. Accessed 2 March 2023.

Reynolds, Paige M. "Sin, Sacredness, and Childbirth in Early Modern Drama." *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 28, 2015, pp. 30-48. *JSTOR*.

Rose, Mary Beth. "Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1991, pp. 291–314. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2870845. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Rosenfield, Kirstie G. "Nursing Nothing: Witchcraft and Female Sexuality in "The Winter's Tale"." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, Mar. 2002, pp. 95-112. *JSTOR*.

Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Schwartz, Murrary M. "'The Winter's Tale': Loss and Transformation." *American Imago*, vol. 32, no. 2, June 1975, pp. 145-99. *JSTOR*.

Scolnicov, Hanna. "Gertrude's Willow Speech: Word and Film Image." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2000, pp. 101-11. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43796972.

Shakespeare, William. "Hamlet." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 1751-1853.

—. "Macbeth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed.,

New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2709-73.

—. “King Lear." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 2494-2570.

---. "Richard III." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 555-647.

---. “The Third Part of Henry the Sixth." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen,Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 276-342.

---. “The Winter's Tale." *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine E. Maus, Third ed., New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, pp. 3121-204.